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The Stance of Personal Public Apology

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Abstract: This paper investigates personal public apologies through the sociolinguistic concept of *stance*—the ways in which a speaker orients herself to sociocultural values, persons, actions, etc. A definition of *apologetic stance* is proposed by focusing on alignments between speaker and audience with regard to the objects of stance: the transgression, the speaker's prior self, and the victim. In the apologies studied, these alignments are informed by linguistic moves such as meta-discourse, modality, representations, and evaluations

Keywords: Apology, Brian Williams, evaluation, image repair theory, modality, Paula Deen, positioning, Tiger Woods, representation, stance

1. Introduction

Apologies have become standard fare in our increasingly media-saturated environments, from governments issuing apologies for national wrongs to celebrities saying sorry for inappropriate behavior. Recognizing its roots in the ancient Greeks' *apologia*, scholars have understood apology as a defense of character—a response to an actual, implied, or anticipated accusation against one's character, the *kategoria* (Ryan, 1982). Within argumentation studies, scholars have investigated how public apologies are constructed to repair a speaker's image and/or repair the speaker's relationship with others through specific strategies. This paper broadens the study of apology by employing the sociolinguistic concept of stance, understood as the ways in which a speaker orients herself in relation to sociocultural values, other persons, actions, events (Du Bois, 2007), and in the case of apology, a prior tainted version of herself. According to John W. Du Bois's "stance triangle," which will be discussed shortly, stance involves three factors: the speaker (subject 1), the object of stance, and the audience (subject 2). When subjects 1 and 2 share the same evaluations and positionings with regard to the stance object, then their stances are aligned.

As an initial investigation into apologetic stance, I focus on the linguistic signals of stance, while recognizing that other communicative cues such as tone and gesture also demonstrate stance. Linguistically, in addition to explicit claims, stance can also be interpreted through subtle moves such as meta-discourse, modality, representations, evaluations, and signals of dialogicality. Looking at these characteristics in concert with Du Bois's theory of the stance, and William Benoit's theory of image repair, this paper investigates three personal public apologies by U.S. celebrities: golfer Tiger Woods, chef and TV personality Paul Deen, and newscaster and journalist Brian Williams. While these celebrities share a cultural context, the rhetorical situations of their apologies differ, as did the apologies' length, style, and perceived success. I discuss these differences in relation to their linguistic characteristics and suggest that those characteristics support alignments of stance that helped determine their apologies' perceived effectiveness. Further, the analysis offers a definition of *apologetic stance* in relation

to the stance triangle. Finally, I discuss how a stance analysis can shed light on bias in the apologies studied and how such biases impacted public acceptance of the apologies.

In this paper, I will first provide an overview of apology and stance. Then I will discuss U.S. celebrity apology, followed by a specific discussion of the situations and apologies of Woods, Deen, and Williams. In the third section, I look at stance within each apology and break down the dynamics leading to audience acceptability.

2. Apology and stance

Traditional treatments of apology build on its classical Greek characterization as a self-defense against an accusation in order to correct one's image (Ryan, 1982). Ware and Linkugel's (1973) influential work has helped define the genre and determine typical subgenres, or strategies within it, such as denial, bolstering, and transcendence. Their work was further refined by Benoit's (1997; 2014) well-known Image Repair Theory which details several more strategies. He groups the many strategies into five categories: denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness of event, corrective action, and mortification (Benoit, 1997, p. 253). Goffman's (1971) work points out that overall, apology is a type of "remedial work…to change the meaning that otherwise might be given to an act" (p. 109).

Other scholars have taken a more social-cultural approach, noting that apology practices are deeply tied to cultural norms. In the United States, for example, the performance of public apologies has been influenced by the country's Protestant roots, specifically the Protestant Christian testimonial (Jackson, 2004). It has been similarly described as a type of metanoic rhetoric, referring to Greek term *metanoia*, meaning repentance or conversion of heart, often with religious connotations (Ellwanger, 2012). Ellwanger (2012) argues this type of rhetoric goes beyond an image-repairing speech act to fulfill a public desire for ritualistic punishment. Outside the Western tradition of apology, with its focus on image repair and the Protestant tradition, scholars have noted different styles, such as the less-defensive style of Japanese apology (Suzuki & van Eemeren, 2004), and the use of different rhetorical resources, such as reliance on the Zionist narrative in Israel (Liebersohn, Neuman, & Bekerman, 2004).

Apology is commonly referred to as a stance, much like a "hostile stance" or a "positive stance," meaning a person's attitude or view toward an interaction. The "apologetic stance" typically refers to someone expressing sorrow or regret. Used thus, the term stance is metaphoric, derived from the term's original meaning of a person's physical standing position. It is also closely related to argumentation's understanding of "standpoint" or a particular opinion or point of view. Differences among standpoints can lead to argumentation (van Eemeren, Grootendorst, & Snoeck Henkemans, 1996, p. 3). The standpoint in an argument can be interpreted as an appropriate bias, one's attitude toward a proposition (Walton, 1991, p. 17). Inappropriate bias arises when an arguer lacks enough critical doubt of her standpoint, rejecting good evidence or counterarguments that may weaken her position (Walton, 1991, p. 4). Fallacious bias is also present if an arguer purports to be involved in one kind of dialogue, such as critical open discussion, but is rather really engaging in another, such as advocacy for one side (Walton, 1991, p. 3).

The vernacular use of stance, and its meaning as standpoint, has been further developed and theorized by discourse scholars who understand stance as a ubiquitous, dynamic social act infused with value. Work in sociolinguistics, rhetoric, and critical discourse analysis has

investigated stance through its many instantiations: style, modality, metadiscourse, appraisal, evaluation, and positioning.[1]

For the purposes of this study, I rely on Du Bois's (2007) theory of the stance triangle that not only recognizes the many aspects of stance, but also their interrelatedness. He provides a comprehensive definition:

> Stance is a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means, of simultaneously evaluating objects, positioning subjects (self and others), and aligning with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field. (Du Bois, 2007, p. 163)

From this understanding, three relevant dimensions emerge to form *the stance triangle*: "Who is the stancetaker? What is the object of stance? And what stance is the stancetaker responding to?" (Du Bois, 2007, p. 146). Guided by these questions, Du Bois (2007) provides a more informal definition of stance, adopting a first-person point of view: "I evaluate something, and thereby position myself, and thereby align with you" (p. 163). Thus, when taking a stance, a person evaluates an object according to a sociocultural value (e.g., "That's terrible."), and in so doing positions herself in relation to that object (e.g., "I'm so sorry."), and that evaluation and positioning may or may not align with her interlocutors (e.g., "I agree."). Du Bois (2007) represents the stance triangle visually (p. 163):
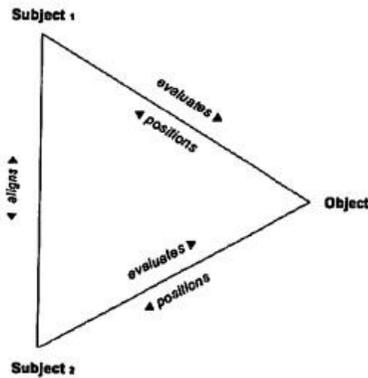

Figure 1. The stance triangle

In an apology, the speaker must of course, adequately recognize and evaluate her transgression (the object of stance) as wrong. But also, as Goffman (1971) points out, "An apology is a gesture through which an individual splits himself into two parts, the part that is guilty of an offense and the part that dissociates itself from the delict and affirms belief in the offended rule" (p. 113). Thus, in the case of apologies, in addition to the transgression, another stance object is the self who committed the transgression. Additionally, a third stance object can be identified as the one offended, the victim of the transgression. By committing a wrong against someone, one implicitly evaluates the offended as one whom it is acceptable to mistreat (Helmreich, 2015). Thus, an apologetic stance involves at least three stance objects: the transgression, the speaker's prior self, and the victim.

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[1] For overviews of stance see Biber and Finegan (1989), Du Bois (2007), Englebretson (2007), and Jaffe (2009).

The speaker's stance toward an object can be indexed through various linguistic means: evaluative words and those expressing affect such as adjectives, adverbs, predicates; modality or modalized phrases that either convey the speaker's certainty of her statement (epistemic modality), or her sense of social obligation with regard to a statement (deontic modality); metadiscourse; and recognition of prior or other stances, what Fairclough (2003) calls "orientation to difference" (pp. 41-42).

In the following analysis, I first investigate how the three celebrities represent the transgression (their first stance object) and discuss how those representations are infused with evaluative and positioning markers that may or may not align with the audience's understanding of the transgression. Next, I discuss the second stance object, the speaker's prior self who committed the transgression. Again, I focus on the extent to which the speaker's evaluations and positionings of the prior self align with the audience's. Finally, the speaker's third stance object is the victim, the one offended by the transgression. The speaker's stance toward the victim must adequately recognize the victim as wronged and deserving of respect and compensation. In actual apologetic discourse, these representations and evaluations of stance objects are interrelated, but for the purposes of analysis, they will be discussed in turn. First, an introduction to the apologies studied is needed.

3. US celebrity apologies: Woods, Deen, and Williams

Public figures such as politicians, corporate and religious leaders, sports figures, and entertainment celebrities carry the burden of public moral scrutiny even for their private actions. Everything that is known about them—whether good or bad—informs their public personae. Thus, when a public figure's transgression becomes known, a public reckoning is required. Most people are condemned for offenses like lying, cheating, physically or emotionally hurting others, stealing, etc. Others may be condemned for typically acceptable actions that violate some aspect of their public roles, such as a celibate religious leader having sexual relations. The strategies for a successful apology can differ depending on the kind of public figure and the specifics of the figure's professional persona. For example, corporations and politicians can harm the public good in ways that celebrities cannot (Benoit, 2015), affecting the evaluation of their transgressions' severity and the expectations for the apology.

For this study, I selected three U.S. celebrity apologies that garnered heavy media attention: golfer Tiger Woods's apology in February 2010 for several extra-marital affairs, chef and TV personality Paula Deen's apologies in June 2013 for past use of a racial epithet, and news anchor Brian Williams's apology in February 2015 for repeatedly telling a false story about an experience he had while traveling with U.S. troops in Iraq in 2003. These celebrities and their offenses varied quite a bit, as did their handling of their crises.

Woods, like many sports stars, was considered a role model, a person of integrity and a family man. The public, especially golf fans, had watched him grow up from a child prodigy to a champion, husband, and father. His sordid affairs with numerous women were disappointing to say the least. News of his affairs was reported by the *National Enquirer* in November 2009.[2] After an initial denial, he posted a brief message on Facebook apologizing. But as the story grew, he needed to take more action. On February 19, 2010 he held an invitation-only press conference that was televised. The audience was hand-selected friends and colleagues and a few press people. In a 14-minute statement he admitted his affairs and apologized. Overall the public

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[2] For an overview of the scandal and its aftermath, see Starn (2011).

reception of his apology was positive (Thomas, 2011) even though many in the press were critical of the tightly controlled nature of the event, and the prepared script that they felt was vetted through a public relations team (Montgomery, 2010).

Paul Deen's trouble began when a former employee sued her for harassment and discrimination. In her deposition, which was later leaked, Deen admitted that she used the "N-word" in the past and that she also had entertained the idea of a wedding with a Southern plantation-style theme, including a serving staff of black males in white jackets, harkening back to the pre-Civil War era (Alan, 2013). Deen was not a role model in the same way Woods was, but her brand invokes and celebrates Southern culture and her admission was a reminder of the South's history of racism, made all the worse by Deen's family lineage of slave holders.

Her company issued a statement, explaining her admission should be understood in the context of when and where she grew up—60 years ago in the American South, but that she does not condone the use of the word or any discrimination (Fallon, 2013). A couple of days after her lawyer's statement, Deen posted three videos, in succession, on her YouTube channel apologizing for her wrong and for not showing up for her scheduled interview on the *Today* show with host Matt Lauer. Although some people came to her defense citing, like her lawyer, her age and the culture in which she grew up (Dreher, 2013), the three videos were roundly ridiculed as strange and unsuccessful apologies. Five days after her no-show, she finally appeared on the *Today* show, giving an emotional, apologetic interview.

On February 4, 2015 Brian Williams, then anchor of *NBC Nightly News* issued a brief apology at the end of the evening broadcast. He had, on several occasions, stated incorrectly that he had been in a helicopter that was shot down in the Iraq desert in 2003, while he was traveling with the US military. He had, in fact, been in the helicopter following the one shot down. Military personnel who had been with him had been repeatedly pointing out his error on social media and he finally corrected the story in his apology. Many thought of him as embellishing the story to feed his ego—of lying. But even the lesser charge of misremembering, which he claimed, was quite damaging given his profession. As a journalist, and no less an anchor of a major broadcast news network, his professional reputation was based on his telling the truth, on getting the facts right. Given his professional position and that he had repeated the wrong story many times, the scandal was quite damaging to his reputation. His very brief statement of apology was, like Deen, almost universally rejected as inadequate. He later posted on the NBC News Facebook page a lengthier apology in response to accusatory posts. And then, after being suspended from NBC for several months, he too ended up in the interview seat with Matt Lauer.

In the wake of these scandals, all three of these celebrities lost sponsorship deals and contracts. Williams also ultimately lost his anchor post, though he retained a position with NBC news. Although they all apologized in more than one instance, for purposes of comparison, I focus on the televised statements they made—Woods's press conference, Deen's three YouTube videos, and Williams's on-air statement. Woods's statement is the longest—1547 words, compared to Deen's 366 total words in the videos, and Williams's, the briefest at 150 words. As noted, Woods's apology was fairly well received while the other two were not. The following analysis explains their relative success and failures in terms of stance alignments.

4. Analysis: Apologetic stance

As stated earlier, Du Bois's (2007) simplified stance triangle states:

I evaluate something, and thereby position myself, and thereby align with you (p. 163).

The "something" refers to the stance object. As noted, in apology, three stance objects exist: the transgression, the speaker's prior self, and the victim. The speaker can implicitly and/or explicitly represent these objects. By doing so, she necessarily interprets and gives meaning to and evaluates them.[3] Those evaluations position the speaker in relation to the object, and thus align or not with the audience's stance toward the object. Consider the following exchange:

Speaker 1: I'm sorry about losing track of time.
Speaker 2: You always inconvenience others.

Speaker 1 expresses remorse for the transgression of "losing track of time," a euphemized way of saying she was late. The second speaker, however, characterizes speaker 1's action as "inconvenienc[ing] others," a much more critical representation. Thus, differing evaluative representations indicate a misalignment of stances.

Evaluation and positioning can be marked in various ways: metadiscourse, modality, adjectives, adverbs, etc. Since Woods's apology is four times as long as Deen's and ten times as long as Williams's, it is no surprise that his apology expresses stance more often. But even accounting for length differences, Woods's apology has far more stance markers per word, than either Deen's or Williams's. For example, Woods has 17 instances of metadiscourse that act as attitude markers, such as, "*I want* to say to them, I am truly sorry." Thus, one such attitude marker is present for every 91 words in his apology. Deen has two such markers, one for every 183 words, and Williams has 1. While attitude markers are the most common stance indicator Woods employs, he also uses validity markers ("I know…") and modal words and phrases expressing epistemic ("I know…"), deontic ("I owe…"), and predictive modality ("I will continue to receive help…") to a much greater extent than either Deen or Williams. Thus, his stances, overall, toward the three stance objects are stronger, which most likely contributes to the success of his apology. In the following analysis, I compare the three stance objects within the celebrity apologies: the transgression, the prior self, and the victim, and I discuss how the speakers' stances toward these objects are expressed through the ways in which they represent the objects and through evaluative language, including image repair efforts.

4.1. Representation of the transgression

Social events, according to Fairclough (2003), can be represented at different levels of abstraction and generalization (p. 137). Concrete representations give specifics about the events while more abstract ones rely on broader "classification schemes" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 138), which interpret the event. The representations of the transgressions in these apologies vary in the degree of concreteness and abstraction.

Woods represents his transgression in several ways such as, "irresponsible and selfish behavior," "let[ting] you down," and "my failures" (Woods, 2010). And while he does not give specifics about his affairs, such as who, when, how, etc., he does say, "I was unfaithful. I had affairs. I cheated" (Woods, 2010). These categorical subjective statements with an evaluative

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[3] See Fairclough (2003) on the representation of events and van Leeuwen (1996) on the representation of social actors.

adjective, noun, and predicate, respectively, provide concrete and strongly negative representations of his transgression, which align with the common representations of his transgressions. Thus, he and his audience share a stance toward the stance object of the transgression.

Deen addresses two transgressions in her videos—her racist language and her not showing up to her scheduled interview on the *Today* show. The first video addresses the first transgression. The second video addresses both, and the third only addresses her absence from the show. In the first two videos, Deen describes her transgression only in abstract terms such as "the wrong I've done," "I've made mistakes," and "a subject that has been very hurtful for a lot of people" (Matthew Keys, 2013a; 2013b). But the general public knows the specifics of her transgression—that she used racist language and therefore might be racist. Yet, the closest she comes to a more concrete description is when she says, "Inappropriate and hurtful language is totally, totally unacceptable" (Matthew Keys, 2013a; 2013b). But as a declarative statement, rather than a subjective one, she merely implies the nature of her transgression, but does not explicitly admit to using such language. Given the general public's knowledge of her transgression, her representation only very weakly aligns with theirs.

With regard to missing her interview, both second and third interviews are similar: she narrativizes her invitation to interview, "I was invited this morning to speak with Matt Lauer" (Matthew Keys, 2013b) and then addresses Matt Lauer directly, vaguely saying, she was "physically not able this morning..." (Matthew Keys, 2013b). In the final video she explicitly apologizes, "Matt, I am so sorry" and states, "I was physically in no shape to come in and talk with you" (Matthew Keys, 2013c). However, she never explicitly represents her transgression, such as saying she missed her interview or did not show up. She assumes her audience knows the situation or leaves it up to them to infer that she did not show up.

Deen's video series was roundly ridiculed for its vagueness with regard to her primary transgression and for its lack of professionalism—the first video was heavily edited despite being so short and people questioned why she chose to apologize to Lauer via YouTube video.[4] In their detailed study of Deen's entire image repair campaign, Len-Rios et al. (2015) note that the videos "demonstrate a lack of cultural understanding and sensitivity…an unawareness of White privilege, or the advantages that society affords to being White in the United States…" (p. 155). Without adequate representation of either transgression, Deen cannot align herself with her audiences, in terms of understanding, sociocultural values, or affect.

Williams's representation of his transgression also misaligns with his audience, but because of a conflict in representation, rather than vagueness. He calls his transgression a "mistake in recalling" and a "bungled attempt to thank one special veteran…" (Williams, 2015). "Mistake" connotes an unintentional error, as does "bungled attempt" (Williams, 2015). Thus, these representations do not align with many of those in his audience who see his transgression as purposeful lying.

However, he does provide a concrete accounting of the mistake describing the details of the event: "I said I was traveling in an aircraft that was hit by RPG fire. I was instead in a following aircraft" (Williams, 2015). Here he states the incorrect story and then the correct one, but he does so in very neutral language—the only evaluative marker is "instead," an adverb emphasizing contrast. The lack of more evaluation or positioning, the very neutral tone, seems out of step with the public perception of his transgression, as was clear from the reaction to his

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[4] For reactions to Deen's videos, see Phillips, (2013); Len-Rios, Finneman, Han, Bhandari, & Perry (2015); and Voorhees (2013).

apology. After his apology, several military personnel and pundits publicly ridiculed his "misremembering" (Somaiya, Ravi, & Steel, 2015).

4.2. Transgressions and the prior self

The representation of the transgression with its inherent evaluation, necessarily impacts the representation of the 2nd stance object: the prior self who committed the transgression. The represented transgression reflects the degree to which the speaker sees herself as responsible and at fault. Image repair strategies can also affect this stance object. For example, if a speaker tries to shift blame, then she can readjust the negative view of her prior self as one who is not guilty. Since the three speakers have different ways of representing their transgressions, with different levels of negative evaluation, so too do they have varying portrayals and judgments of their prior selves.

Woods's relatively concrete and negative representation of his transgression, presented subjectively ("*I* cheated."), evaluate him as responsible for cheating and having affairs, His other evaluative language judges himself as selfish and irresponsible and he states, "I am the only one to blame" (Woods, 2010) These choices indicate a full acceptance of the accusation against his character. He does not evade responsibility or recharacterize what he has done in less severe ways. Even when he engages in explanatory discourse, which Ware and Linkugel (1973) see as a combination of bolstering and differentiations (p. 283), he does so in highly critical terms: "…I convinced myself that normal rules didn't apply…I never thought about who I was hurting…I thought only about myself…I felt I was entitled." Thus, Woods's representation of his prior self seems to align with the public accusations against him.

Woods does engage in bolstering through speaking about his continued commitment to his foundation's work, defending his family's privacy, defending his wife against accusations of violence, discussing his religion (Buddhism), and making references to corrective action he will take (Woods, 2010). But the bolstering and explanatory discourse do not lessen his responsibility for his actions or the severity of his actions and thus, do not take away from the alignment with his audience with regard to the stance objects.

Deen's more abstract and vague representations of her transgression, even though negative, make an evaluation of her prior self more difficult. And calling her transgression a "mistake" seems to minimize the offense. Also, she engages denial strategies (Benoit) through shifting the blame and simple denial:

- "…my family and I are not the kind of people that the press is wanting to say we are" and
- "…it's what is in the heart [that matters] and my family and I try to live by that…" (Matthew Keys, 2013a; 2013b; 2013c)

She also does quite a bit of bolstering through self-praise:

- "I've spent the best of 24 years to help myself and others."
- "Yes, I've worked hard."
- "I will continue to work and continue to do good things for good people."
- "And you know I am a strong woman." (Matthew Keys, 2013a; 2013b; 2013c)

Finally, she appeals to sympathy to the general public and to Matt Lauer:

- " I was physically in no shape to come in."
- "…the pain has been tremendous that I have caused myself…"
- "The last 48 hours have been very, very hard."
  (Matthew Keys, 2013a; 2013b; 2013c)

In the public arena, Deen's character is being seriously critiqued for her admitted use of a racial slur, as well as other racist behavior. But without an adequate representation of the transgression and with her heavy bolstering through direct self-praise, she presents an image of prior self that does not align with her audience's. Also, though she may have been truthful about her reason for not showing up to her interview, appealing for sympathy and commenting on her own hardship, seems tone-deaf and self-involved. In fact, her apology, revealing her ignorance of racial matters and her blindness to her own privilege, might even reinforce the audience's understanding of her prior self as racist and point to her unchanged character.

Williams has similar problems. Through repeating a false story, he at best is accused of being a very bad journalist and at worst of outright lying to glorify his own image. Yet he too rejects these images of himself, claiming instead to have made a "mistake"—an inadvertent error. Also, he heavily invokes his good intentions—that his mistake was "an effort to thank." Benoit places the use of good intentions within the category of Evasion of Responsibility. Thus, like Deen, despite his apology, he does not accept the blame placed on him by the public and thereby he and his audience are misaligned.

4.3. The victim

Finally, the third stance object is the victim. When offending someone, the perpetrator characterizes that person as one whom she can mistreat, thereby positioning herself as superior and negatively evaluating the worth of that individual. A successful apology needs to repair this image, in addition the image of the speaker. To investigate this stance object, I looked at when and how a speaker directly addressed the audience, or part of the audience, a type of metadiscourse Vande Kopple (1985) describes as commentary (p. 85).

Woods, by far, had the most instances of commentary. He seems to directly address the questions and concerns of every possible audience—his family, friends, business partners, competitors, fans, parents, the press, and the general public. Thus, his commentary acknowledges their feelings and thoughts:

- "Many of you are my friends…"
- "I am also aware of the pain my behavior has caused to those of you in this room."
- "To everyone involved in foundation…our work is more important than ever."
- "I know I have severely disappointed all of you."
- "To everyone who has reached out to me…thank you."
- "I want to ask for your help. I ask you to find room in your hearts to one day believe again." (Woods, 2010)

Through such commentary Woods recognizes his offense to these specific groups. Through his strong stance language (metadiscourse, modality, affect markers, etc.) discussed earlier and his clear representations, he explicitly acknowledges their sense of betrayal, shock, and disappointment and does so in ways that reflect those sentiments are warranted. Thus, he signals his prior treatment of them was wrong and aligns himself with his audiences' sense of themselves as wronged.

Deen uses commentary twice generally and twice to address Lauer:

- "…I beg you, my children, my team, my fans, my partners, I beg your forgiveness."
- "Matt, I have to say…."
- "Thank you for listening."
- "Matt, I am so sorry." (Matthew Keys, 2013a; 2013b; 2013c)

But, unlike Woods, these commentaries do not reflect an understanding of the victim's sense of being wronged—they are simple mortification. Thus, Deen's recognition of their being wronged is implied through the mortification, but is not articulated. This vagueness, again, makes difficult the alignment between her and her audience, with regard to their sense of being wronged.

Finally, Williams has no commentary. He does not address his victims directly nor acknowledge how and why they feel wronged, except that after his incorrect account on air, he states "It didn't take long to hear from some brave men and women in the air crews who where also in the desert" (Williams, 2015). But this statement elides *what* he heard from them and how they felt about it—that he was appropriating their experience for his own aggrandizement. As one soldier stated, "It [being shot at] felt like a personal experience that someone else wanted to participate in and didn't deserve to participate in" (Tritten, 2015). Thus, his apology does not articulate a wrong *done to the audience* and therefore does not align at all with the audience's sense of themselves as wronged. Also, he limits his audience to "our brave military men and women," overlooking the fact that as a journalist and news anchor and a public figure, he had severely failed in the realm of professional competence and/or ethics. Thus, he completely disregards other victims of his transgression: his network, his colleagues, his news-watching audience, interviewers to whom he told the falsehood, and the general public. Thus, Williams is not able to align with several audiences with regard to the third stance object.

5. Conclusion

In the conclusion of *Accounts, Excuses, And Apologies: Image Repair Theory And Research*, Benoit (2014) emphasizes the importance of perceptions that will determine the effectiveness of the imager repair strategies (p. 123), including perceptions of the guilty with regard to the audience's attitudes and those of the audience toward the accused and the offensive act. He states, "When there is a disconnect between the audience's attitudes and the accused's perceptions of those attitudes, image repair attempts are more likely to go awry" (Benoit, 2014, p. 123). These perceptions are brought to the foreground through stance analysis. The alignment of evaluation and positioning toward the three stance objects: the prior self, the transgression, and the victim, should be sought in apologies. Therefore, I suggest an initial definition of a successful *public apologetic stance* as:

A public act by a guilty social actor [5], achieved dialogically through overt communicative means by which the accused aligns with the victims with regard to three stance objects: the transgression, the accused's prior self, and the victims.

The analysis and comparison of the apologies of Woods, Deen, and Williams illustrate the importance of alignment with regard to stance objects. Woods most clearly reflected the general perception of his transgression with concrete language and forcefully condemned it with strong evaluation. Deen and Williams, on the other hand, both inadequately aligned with audience perceptions of their transgressions. With her vague language, Deen did not demonstrate an understanding of her transgression, and certainly not the transgression of racism. Williams offered the representation of a mistake, contrary to the audience's perception of the transgression as a deliberate lie. Deen and Williams also fail to adequately evaluate and position themselves toward their prior selves who committed the transgressions, while Woods was sufficiently critical of himself. Finally, Woods most recognized the third stance object, his victims, as wronged and deserving of apology. Deen and Williams were both vague with regard to their victims, with Williams eliding some victims entirely. Thus, Deen and Williams fail in a necessary aspect of image repair "understand[ing] the nature of that unfavorable attitude [towards them]: the beliefs and values that constitute it" (Benoit, 2015 p. 125), while Woods seemed to have a more complete understanding.

The stance analysis also sheds light on the issue of bias in apology. We expect speakers to be favorably disposed toward themselves in an apology. Their standpoint is one of self-defense. But, they must also display critical doubt, accepting the evidence against them. This acceptance, I suggest, is shown through a representation of their transgression that aligns with their audience's. Evading responsibility, denial, and reducing offensiveness can be interpreted as inappropriate bias. Also, if they appear to be engaging in one type of dialogue, an apology, but are actually participating in another, such as self-promotion through excessive bolstering, the apology can be rejected. Although the apology seeks to repair his image, Woods appears appropriately biased in that he fully accepts the accusations against him without trying to reduce the offensiveness of his actions or evade responsibility. Deen and Williams, on the other hand, seem too self-interested with their direct self-defense and self-praise (Deen) and their evasion of responsibility through claiming good intention (Williams) and are thus inappropriately biased.

In conclusion, the sociolinguistic concept of stance complements previous work on apology, helping to foreground the dynamics of alignment among interlocutors through shared evaluation and positioning with respect to stance objects. Such alignments are informed by image repair strategies, metadiscourse, evaluative markers, modality, and representations. Apology can be understood as a stance with specific stance objects: the transgression, the speaker's prior self, and the victim. However, as noted earlier, stance involves non-verbal signals, such as tone, gesture, and facial expression that have not been studied here. Also, further study is needed of stance in non-North American apology practices.

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[5] While an accused public figure could be innocent, most are driven to public apology only when evidence of wrongdoing is compelling enough that guilt is no longer questioned.

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