

COMPLAINING ABOUT THE ALLIANCE: EXTENDING KOWALSKI'S THEORY OF COMPLAINING THROUGH A HERMENEUTICAL ANALYSIS OF ONLINE COMPLAINING DATA

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ABSTRACT

In this article a complaining model recently proposed by Kowalski (1996) is reviewed, applied to a data set, and expanded to incorporate grudgeholding and retaliation. The data used in the discussion were taken from Cougar-Net, an online discussion group devoted to BYU sports. Comments in the data focus on a perceived snub of the BYU football team in the selection of bowl game participants following the 1996 college football season.

We Three Kings, Alliance by name
Get to pick who'll play in our games
Though we own it, we have blown it
Picking the wrong sixth name
Ohhhhhh. TV's luster made us skewed.
Brigham Young's the team we screwed.
Thirteen wins makes it a sin,
And in the end we may be sued.
(Sung to the tune of "We Three Kings,"
Lopresti 1996)

INTRODUCTION

Kowalski (1996) has broken new ground in her theoretical treatise on dissatisfaction and complaining behavior. Her examination of these phenomena moves beyond the traditional expectancy/disconfirmation model of dissatisfaction (Oliver 1980) and provides new insights into why people complain. This paper will examine and apply her model using naturally occurring data from an online discussion group whose members were incensed by the decision not to invite the number 5 ranked Brigham Young University football team to play in a 1996 football Alliance bowl game.

KOWALSKI'S MODEL OF COMPLAINTS AND COMPLAINING

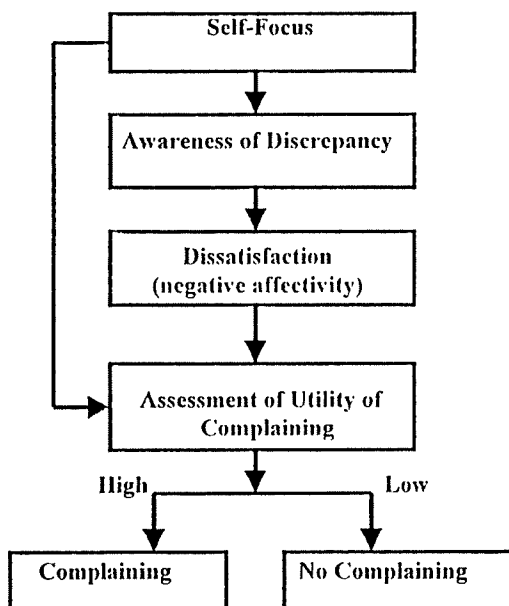
Kowalski (1996) has comprehensively

examined the functions, antecedents, and consequences of complaining behavior. Based on this research, she has developed a theoretical model of complaining (see Exhibit A). In her analysis, Kowalski rejects the conceptualization of complaining as an attitude of dissatisfaction resulting from disconfirmation of expectancies and as a behavior that expresses that attitude. While expectations and their disconfirmation sometimes play a role in complaining, Kowalski defines complaining more broadly as "an expression of dissatisfaction, whether subjectively experienced or not, for the purpose of venting emotions or achieving intrapsychic goals, interpersonal goals, or both" (p. 180). Dissatisfaction is a frequent but not a necessary prerequisite for complaining, for some people complain to achieve social and psychic goals even though they are not dissatisfied. For example, consumers may complain about a product with which they are completely satisfied if they believe the complaint will allow them to benefit in some way, e.g., to bond with other complainers or gain some concession from a retailer or manufacturer. In these cases, while the consumers' dissatisfaction threshold is high and dissatisfaction does not, therefore, precipitate a complaint, their complaining threshold is low, so they may complain even though they are not dissatisfied. It is apparent, then, that complaining may be the result of a breached dissatisfaction threshold, but only if a complaining threshold is also breached.

In Kowalski's model (Exhibit A), people engage in self-focused reflection, evaluating current events or behaviors against a standard they set for those behaviors or events. When the events or behaviors meet or exceed their standard, they experience positive affect (satisfaction). When events or behaviors do not meet their standards, they may experience negative affect (dissatisfaction). One strategy for reducing this negative affect is to complain. So far, this model is consistent with the expectancy/disconfirmation model of CS/D. However, Kowalski adds another

necessary step. Before alleviating the negative affect by complaining, people evaluate the perceived utility of complaining. How will they benefit by complaining? Might they actually be harmed? If they judge the utility of complaining to be negative, they may not complain. Thus, in addition to breaching the dissatisfaction threshold, a circumstance must also breach the complaining threshold if it is to result in a complaint. The importance of the complaining threshold is apparent from the model's alternative path to complaining. As previously mentioned, even when self-focused reflection produces no negative affect directed at some person, product, or organization, people may complain, if their complaining threshold is very low because they judge the social, psychic, or material utility of complaining to be positive.

Exhibit A
Kowalski's (1996) Model of Complaining



The remainder of this paper applies Kowalski's model to a particular set of complaining phenomena, responses to the college football Alliance's selection of teams for the 1996 Nokia Sugar, Fed-Ex Orange, and Tostitos Fiesta bowls. In making its selection, the Alliance chose not to

invite Brigham Young University (BYU) to participate despite its 13-1 record and number 5 national ranking in both major polls. Fans and media around the country reacted negatively to this "snub," complaining loudly and even boycotting Tostitos corn chips since the Tostitos Fiesta Bowl was the most likely destination for the BYU team. Along with applying Kowalski's model to these particular complaining phenomena, we show in this paper how the model can be extended to account for behaviors Kowalski did not take into account.

THE ALLIANCE SNUB

The Alliance Bowl Coalition was created to produce a consensus college football National Champion in the absence of a playoff. The National Champion has traditionally been determined by final standings in the CNN/USA Today Coaches' and the AP sportswriters' polls. These standings and the consequent championships have always been controversial if the number 1 and number 2 teams both end the season undefeated or with identical records. The Alliance Coalition was created to eliminate the controversy by producing a January 2nd bowl game pitting number 1 against number 2. The Alliance games include the Nokia Sugar, Fed-Ex Orange, and Tostitos Fiesta bowls. The Alliance bowl games are played on December 31, January 1, and January 2, and the championship game is rotated between the three participating bowls (Arnold 1996). In the January 2nd, 1997 contest, Florida defeated Florida State to win the national crown.

While the designated bowl game, the Sugar, did produce a national champion as expected, there was, nevertheless, great controversy surrounding the bowl games at the end of the 1996 football season. The Alliance has agreed to guarantee four of its spots to the champions of the Atlantic Coast, Big East, Big 12, and Southeastern conferences. The remaining two at-large berths were putatively open to all eligible I-A teams if they met the following requirements: at least eight wins (excluding victories in the Pigskin or Kickoff Classics), a top 12 or higher ranking in either of the major polls, and a ranking no lower than the lowest ranked conference champion which received an automatic bid (Arnold 1996). The Sugar Bowl,

which hosted the national championship game, selected top-ranked Florida State (ACC champion) and third ranked Florida (Southeastern champion) for the title game. The second and fourth ranked teams, Arizona State and Ohio State, were unavailable for the Alliance because, as the champions respectively of the Big 10 and Pac 10, they were obligated to participate in the Rose Bowl. With the two at-large spots still open, the Alliance selection committee generated considerable controversy when it skipped over fifth ranked, 13-1 BYU, taking instead sixth ranked, 10-2 Nebraska (which had lost its conference championship game the day before to unranked Texas) for the Fed-Ex Orange Bowl and seventh ranked, 9-2 Penn State for the Tostitos Fiesta Bowl. BYU fans and coaches were especially unhappy, but a number of sportswriters also criticized the decision. The Alliance's action led directly to a boycott of Frito Lay's Tostitos brand corn chips and to bonfire burning of Tostitos chips that made national headlines.

METHODOLOGY

Data

The data for this study come from the Cougar-Net discussion group. Cougar-Net is an e-mail discussion group devoted to BYU sports run by David Kenison and Newell Wright (Kenison and Wright 1997). Cougar-Net consists of several hundred fans of BYU sports from around the world who use the discussion list as a discussion venue and source of information. Any member of the list can post messages to the majordomo listserv, which then echoes a copy of the post to each member of the discussion list. Posts are archived for future reference and are open to public inspection from the Cougar-Net home page on the World Wide Web <<http://www.zilker.net/~ender/c-net.html>>. The data for this study were several thousand messages submitted to Cougar-Net between the dates of November 25, 1996 and January 6, 1997 and during the week of March 3-7, 1997. These messages ranged in length from a few lines to several pages. Many of them referred to, summarized, and/or posted the electronic addresses of online news focused on the BYU snub and the resulting complaints from fans

and sportswriters alike. These articles published in other media were also used as data in this study.

Both authors were and are participants on Cougar-Net, one actively and one passively. In mid-December, the first author recognized that the whole scenario would make an interesting study in consumer complaining behavior. Several list members had mentioned that they had written letters of protest to bowl sponsors. The first author asked them to send him copies of their protest letters (Wright 1996). In March, 1997 he again solicited comment from list members on their feelings about the snub (Wright 1997). These two messages represent the only attempts by the authors to influence the discussion.

The use of textual data generated by an online community has several methodological and epistemological advantages. First, the data represent a first-hand, contemporaneous record of list participants' complaints. In this respect, these data differ from most other data used in complaining research. Alicke et al. (1992) have pointed out that most of the limited empirical work on complaining behavior has relied on people's retrospective reports of dissatisfaction. These studies, they suggest, are therefore suspect because retrospective accounts of complaining generally do not accurately reflect what people actually do when they complain. The data used in this study are not subject to this criticism because the messages preserved in the Cougar-Net archives are the actual complaints voiced by Cougar-Net participants. Second, unlike interview data that must be transcribed--a textualization process that inevitably results in some loss of meaning--these data are available in an entirely unmediated form. The authors themselves expressed their feelings in a text, presumably, to the limits of their abilities, capitalizing on the strengths and compensating for the weaknesses of textual communication. The researchers had no occasion to make the usual judgment calls that are involved in a textualization process. Finally, the data used in this study are canonical, i.e., open to public inspection (Larsen and Wright, 1997). Thus, the conclusions proposed in this research can be assessed, verified, and/or challenged by anyone with computer access to the World Wide Web. Readers need not rely upon the authority of the authors. To make access to these messages easier, all messages and online

articles referenced in this article are hyperlinked on a World Wide Web page located at <<http://cob.jmu.edu/wrightnd/complain.htm>>. All messages, cited and uncited, are preserved in the Cougar-Net archives, located at <gopher://zilker.net:70/11/pub/ender> and <http://cob.jmu.edu/wrightnd/c-net_archives.htm>.

Data Analysis

The method of analysis in this study was interpretive (Hudson and Ozanne 1988) and hermeneutical. Hermeneutical analysis views society as a "text" (Ricoeur 1981; Scholes 1982) and analyzes cultural artifacts, in this case online messages and articles, as an embodiment of cultural values and beliefs (see Hirschman [1990] for an application). The conclusions in this study were formulated through iterative readings of the text. These readings produced evolving categories that expanded and contracted, were solidified and modified as the research progressed. Several readings were necessary to adequately identify and extensively exemplify specific themes, weaving from those themes a coherent composite interpretation.

RESULTS

Expectations

The expectations of Cougar-Net participants that BYU might receive a berth in an Alliance bowl surfaced on November 30, 1996 when Notre Dame lost to the University of Southern California 27-20 in overtime. Shortly thereafter, speculation began that BYU would land a berth in the Fiesta Bowl to play Penn State if they beat Wyoming in the Western Athletic Conference (WAC) championship game on December 7. A *New York Daily News* writer, Dick Weiss, predicted that BYU would get a "surprise invite after Irish loss" (Weiss 1996). The MSNBC web site also projected BYU as a front runner for one of the Alliance bowls (MSNBC 1996) as did *USA Today* (*USA Today* 1996). These and other comments in the press following the Notre Dame loss were consistent with sentiments already expressed on Cougar-Net and reinforced expectations of an

Alliance bid. Cougar-Net participants began to closely and optimistically analyze BYU's chances of receiving a bid.

BYU still has the big game against Wyoming next week that they must win on national television, but their chances for an Alliance bowl bid are improving. With Notre Dame's loss to lowly USC and Tennessee's lackluster 14-7 win over Vanderbilt, an impressive BYU win over Wyoming would really improve their chances at playing in the Fiesta Bowl. The WAC Championship game will be nationally televised and was heavily advertised along with ABC's entire championship lineup next week during all the ABC games today. I think there will be lots of attention on the game and an impressive BYU team could really make a name for themselves and seriously boost their shot at the Fiesta Bowl. I also agree with an earlier post that BYU is probably better off if Florida and Nebraska win their respective championship games as expected since, if they lose a close one, they will get the at-large berth rather than BYU since Texas and Alabama would not get an Alliance berth without winning the championship. An upset of Florida or Nebraska simply means more competition with BYU for the at-large berths. (Marx 1996a)

This initial optimism notwithstanding, it soon became clear that even if BYU beat Wyoming in the WAC championship game, the Alliance selection committee did not want them to participate in an Alliance bowl. Rumors started circulating on Cougar-Net, often reinforced by media speculation, that the Alliance at-large bids would go to other schools. One participant to Cougar-Net wrote:

Today's *Arizona Republic* ran a front page story in the sports section by staff writer Jeff Metcalfe captioned "Fiesta may feature Penn St., Colorado."

The article suggests that the Notre Dame loss "opens the door for Colorado, coached by Tempe native Rick Neuheisel, to play in the Fiesta for the third time in five years." It

continued with several quotes from Neuheisel lobbying for an invitation: "Is there a better at-large team than Colorado? We're going to play exciting for somebody and I'm not sure we can't beat any team we play."

Little mention was made of BYU, other than the observation that it is the "other strong Fiesta candidate" but that it is a team "still fighting for respect against teams from the Big Ten (Penn State) and Big 12 (Colorado)." The article also briefly notes BYU's loss was to "No. 12 Washington" and adds that "no wins were over teams now in the top 25." (Platt 1996)

The Fiesta Bowl itself was trying to downplay BYU's chances of getting a berth:

The Des[eret] News quoted a Fiesta Bowl director who said: "As we've said all along, there isn't much difference in the quality of #5 and #10"—seemingly to justify taking a lower ranked team. (G. Sanders 1996)

As the week wore on, it became increasingly clear to Cougar-Net participants that even if BYU were to beat Wyoming in the championship game, the Fiesta bowl would not select them. Hence, some participants tried to soften the blow by suggesting that the alternative, a berth in the Cotton Bowl, would not be so bad.

As has been eluded to the last few months and has become more apparent thanks to some upsets (Notre Dame) is that the Fiesta Bowl just doesn't want BYU. To them, BYU would not help the future marketability of the bowl [sponsors].

If we don't get the deserved invite to the Fiesta Bowl, let's root for a good matchup between us and KSU [Kansas State University] in the Cotton. The Cotton Bowl is a little less snobbish and I think would welcome us. (Maxwell 1996)

While not all participants agreed (e.g., Thornton 1996a; Thornton 1996b; Thornton 1996c), many participants realized they were

being set up for a big disappointment.

Let's not get our hopes up too high for an alliance bowl... For me, I am figuring on BYU not making the alliance so that the letdown isn't so bad. (Denny 1996)

In anticipation of being denied a slot should they win the WAC championship, the 16 WAC university presidents and Karl Benson, WAC commissioner, got together for a conference call on December 6 to discuss all options, including going to court, to insure a spot in the alliance bowl for the teams (EPtisen 1996). A Cougar-Net participant posted the following message on this topic:

This article is in today's *San Diego Union Tribune*...

"The Kansas City Star is reporting in today's editions that the [Colorado] Buffaloes now seem to be in line for a Fiesta Bowl invitation unless Florida or Nebraska stumbles tomorrow in conference championship games.

"A second big twelve team in the alliance would almost certainly infuriate the Western Athletic Conference, whose officials have complained bitterly and threatened suit over their lack of an automatic bid.

"Should Brigham Young, 12-1 and ranked sixth, win the WAC title game tomorrow against Wyoming and not be invited, the howls would be deafening." (RonE10 1996)

Nebraska muddied the Alliance selection process (Rosetta 1996) when it lost to Texas in the Big 12 championship game. BYU, in turn, defeated Wyoming to win the WAC championship in a very close contest that went into overtime. In the wake of these developments, most recognized that BYU should be chosen for an Alliance slot, but probably would not be. As one sportswriter put it, BYU played for "the right, however slim but damn well deserved, to play one more time for \$8.5 million [the Alliance bowl payout]" (Rosetta 1996). Even though BYU was 13-1 at this point and a contender for the national championship, most expected the team to be passed over by the

Alliance. A few hours before the actual Alliance selection, Dustin Marx, a regular Cougar-Net contributor, posted a correct prediction of the picks the Alliance selection committee would actually make:

The *Rocky Mountain News* features several articles today on BYU, the Cougars' bowl hopes, and the bowl outlook...

The *Rocky Mountain News* predicts that BYU (13-1) will play Kansas State (9-2) in the Cotton Bowl. They predict the Sugar to feature Florida State (11-0) against Florida (11-1) again and the Orange to feature Nebraska (10-2) versus Virginia Tech (10-1). Their prediction for the Fiesta Bowl is Penn State (10-2) against Texas (8-4). (Marx 1996b)

What was widely expected happened: the Alliance snubbed BYU. Cougar-Net participants were torn between frustration and anticipation of the bid BYU did receive, to the Cotton Bowl.

We have been snubbed. I think I am more frustrated than angry at this point. I tried not to get my hopes up along with many of you. It is a let down, but BRING ON THE COTTON!

If you didn't see the announcement the bowls stack up like this:

Sugar Bowl:	#1 Florida State #3 Florida
Fiesta Bowl:	#7 Penn State #20 Texas
Orange Bowl:	#6 Nebraska #12 Virginia Tech (Campbell 1996)

Equity, Fairness and Justice

The expectancy/disconfirmation model predicts that dissatisfaction occurs when expectations exceed actual performance (Oliver 1980). In the case of the Alliance decision not to invite BYU to a bowl game, most Cougar-Net participants

expected that the team would be snubbed. Their expectations were met. Yet, as we shall see, there was, nevertheless, an ensuing chorus of complaints from the disgruntled fans and media. This disgruntlement occurred, in part, because the fans' and media's expectations about what *should* happen were not consistent with their expectations about what *would* happen. While their expectations about what would happen were not violated, their expectations about what should happen were. The fans and media were, therefore, dismayed and disgusted because they believed basic canons of fairness, equity, and justice had been violated in the decision not to select BYU as one of the two at-large Alliance teams. Even sportswriters who doubted the ability of the BYU team believed they had a just claim to an Alliance invitation.

Writer Bob Kravitz [of the *Rocky Mountain News*] writes that *the Alliance will have to accept BYU if they want anyone in the nation to think that they have even an iota of integrity*. He says that although he likes to see neighbor Wyoming win, he was glad to see BYU cause a serious problem for the Alliance. He thinks that BYU would get badly beaten in an Alliance game, but feels they still have earned the right to play in one. (emphasis added; Marx 1996b)

Several fans expressed sentiments after the Alliance decision that were similar to those expressed by Kravitz before it had been made.

Is it fair? I just don't get it. What do we have to do to get some respect? (JGowen9756 1996)

Well, the Alliance obviously didn't care about fairness and integrity, as we all expected. BYU was hardly discussed on the announcement show. I'm sure CBS said to keep it down.

And you wonder why the "rich get richer"?? Two Big 12 teams?? So, is that \$17 million for ONE CONFERENCE???

I hope the WAC suit causes havoc within the

NCAA!!! And I will NEVER eat Tostitos again! <grin> Time to call the Fiesta Bowl number to inform them I am canceling my visit, and to give them detailed instructions on where they can put their bowl!!! (Harris 1996)

This sense of injustice was reinforced by hints in the media of crass commercial calculation and religious bigotry. Fowler (1996) pointed out that though BYU fans would attend the game, they would not spend money on alcohol because it is proscribed by the Mormon faith. Adams (1996) suggested the snub was a clear case of religious bigotry:

BYU is a religious institution. Its preference is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which doesn't condone drinking alcohol. New Orleans would rather the Sugar Bowl invite third-world terrorists than Mormons... Speaking for the Orange Bowl, executive director Keith Tribble said this about Nebraska: "You can't do any better than that, 10 wins." Actually, as BYU's 13-1 record will attest, you can do a lot better than 10 wins. Perhaps Tribble should have said: "You can't do any better than that, 10 wins and no Mormons." (Adams 1996)

Boycott

Participants on Cougar-Net were outraged following the widely expected announcement of the snub. Many, pointing again to BYU's 13-1 record and number five national ranking, expressed disgust that teams with lesser records had been taken over by BYU (e.g., 8-4, 20th ranked Texas). They also focused upon an ESPN fan poll taken before the decision was made in which 73% of 14,274 fans agreed that BYU deserved an Alliance spot (ESPN 1996; see also Thornton 1996c). They posted articles and the URL's for articles from newspapers around the country that criticized the Alliance for the snub (e.g., Cleveland 1996, Holtz 1996, Poole 1996) and most participants began referring to the Alliance as the a-lie-ance, after a *Houston Chronicle* news story by John Lopez (Nicholas 1996). Gradually, many Cougar-Net participants began to coalesce around a

proposal to write letters of protest to the bowl sponsors. (Several of these protest letters are contained in Exhibit B.) They also began to echo Allen Harris' (1996) proposal that Tostitos corn chips should be boycotted since the Tostitos Fiesta Bowl was, in the participants' view, especially culpable in the snub. Some urged that the broadcast of the Alliance bowls also be boycotted.

I suggest that everyone call Frito Lay. I just did and they say that they had nothing to do with the selection process. They are the sponsor and it is their money on the line. A boycott by BYU fans of Frito Lay products will get their attention. I pointed out to the operator that if a business sponsors an event, then they better be concerned about the decisions of those operating the event. (Haddow 1996)

The support of the boycott was not universal. In particular, one PepsiCo employee, who had a small vested interest in raising the complaining and retaliation thresholds of consumers, argued that the boycott was both illogical and sure to be ineffectual:

I am a diehard BYU fan and a PepsiCo, Inc. [owner of Frito Lay] employee and believe me, PepsiCo could care less about LDS football fans boycotting Frito Lay products. Pepsi had no control over the selection. If you're going to boycott Frito-Lay, why stop there? You might as well also boycott all PepsiCo beverage products (Mug Root Beer, Slice, All Sport, Mountain Dew, etc.) and all of the restaurants they own - Pizza Hut, KFC, Taco Bell, etc. (Billyjack 1997)

However illogical and ineffectual the boycott and other protests were likely to be, they seemed to have psychic utility for Cougar-Net participants and other BYU sports fans. So, to facilitate complaining, Thornton (1996b) posted the addresses, e-mail addresses, and phone numbers of the sponsors and the CBS television network on which the Fiesta Bowl would be broadcast. And off the net, other fans organized another protest.

Exhibit B (cont.)

Shame on you guys for being a part of the Alliance bowl fiasco. The Alliance is a joke, or should I say a conspiracy. How the Fiesta Bowl could choose Penn St. over BYU who was ranked higher in both polls is totally unjustifiable. It is clear, the Unholy Alliance isn't about pitting the best teams against one another, it's just the pits. It's about the haves keeping the have nots out of their exclusive domain. It's about insuring that the big bucks stay within an elite little group. It's about restraining trade and unfair competition. 73% of those responding to an ESPN Sportszone poll said that BYU deserved to be in an Alliance bowl. What does that tell you about the integrity of the bowl selection process used by the Alliance.

I hope the NCAA steps in and fixes this bowl fiasco. You certainly have asked for it. I also hope BYU and the WAC conference have the guts to file an antitrust suit against the Alliance Bowl Committees and the conferences involved. They deserve it.

But most of all, I hope in the future your company shows some integrity and exerts some pressure on these bowl committees to do what they are supposed to be doing -- choosing the highest ranked teams available to play one another.

In the meantime, all I can do is stop buying Tostitos to voice my outrage, which I intend to do (Dayton 1996).

Some students are sponsoring a bonfire to roast Tostitos and Frito-Lay chips. The "bowl burning" will be tonight at 7:00 p.m. at 3950 N. Canyon Rd. In Provo. All are encouraged to bring their chips to chuck in the fire. (This was announced on the front page of the *Daily Universe* [BYU student newspaper]). (Ahlander 1996a)

Cougar-Net participants noted that the chip burning might, ironically, increase Tostitos sales and, as one noted retrospectively, provide PepsiCo/Frito-Lay with free advertising.

Ironically, that much publicized tortilla chip burning party in Provo last December only served to provide PepsiCo/Frito-Lay with FREE media coverage and thus, FREE advertising. Thank-you BYU students. (Billyjack 1997)

In fact, however, the chip burning did not directly increase Tostitos sales because chips for the burning were solicited door to door from those who had already purchased them before the Alliance announcement. Whether the news coverage was positive or negative for Tostitos sales remains unclear. But the outrage of the BYU fans was mirrored to some degree in the national press which covered the chip burning when it occurred, despite a mediocre fan turnout (Ahlander 1996b). Along with the local paper and the *Salt Lake Tribune* (Miller 1996), the Associated Press (1996) and *USA Today* (Marx 1996c) covered the chip burning story.

The proselytizing that was apparent in the

solicitation of Tostitos to burn was also apparent in discussions of the TV boycott.

Why don't we just all do the obvious thing? I know it may be hard for some of you (like me, who could spend the entire Saturday watching college football), but let's just NOT WATCH the Fiesta Bowl AT ALL. Tell everyone, friends, neighbors, and that huge audience we had for the BYU-Wyoming game to just turn it off. Let's get the Fiesta Bowl t.v. audience at an all time low. Try not to watch the Orange or Sugar Bowl much either. Maybe we can really disappoint them. I know with just our small cougar group here, we won't be able to do it, so encourage EVERYONE you know to not watch the Fiesta Bowl. Also, call ABC (aren't they the ones showing it?), the Fiesta Bowl, Frito-Lay, etc. And tell them you're not going to watch the game. I say we make these guys feel as guilty as possible. (Chandler 1996)

But though some with missionary zeal proselytized friends and neighbors to join the boycotts in hopes that they would have a negative short-term impact on the business of the offending organizations, others merely took pleasure from the prospect that, because disgust was so widespread, there might be negative long term consequences for the Alliance. And they seemed to experience some catharsis (Kowalski 1996) as they vented their frustrations to others of like mind:

Is it me being stuck in Britain and (somewhat)

Exhibit B

Dear Frito-Lay,

Some years ago, I worked for Ford Aerospace, a wholly owned subsidiary of Ford Motor Company. On one occasion, a senior executive told a meeting which I was attending that his marching orders from the parent company were simple and straightforward: Don't do anything that besmirches the company name and impacts Ford's ability to sell cars. I suspect that most companies have similar concerns about their image and the general public.

Unfortunately, I believe that Frito-Lay has run afoul of that axiom, based on the recent conduct of the Tostitos Fiesta Bowl Committee and the way in which it and the other Bowl Alliance committees have mishandled the selection process for teams to compete therein. Although I am an alumnus of BYU, I would like to think that I would be equally dismayed by recent events, regardless of the team involved. I find it most distasteful to see the Fiesta bowl committee profess concern for selecting the highest ranked teams possible, only to change the "rules" when the team involved is not a member of an athletic conference associated with the Alliance. The fact that the BYU/Wyoming WAC Championship game had higher TV ratings than the Big-12 and SEC games only adds a surreal touch to the entire farcical situation.

Having said that, I must emphasize that Frito-Lay had, to my knowledge, no direct input in the Fiesta Bowl committee's decision. However, by sponsoring it, you provide the vital financial backing that makes it possible. Consequently, I regret to inform you that the existing Tostitos in our house will be the last that we purchase for the foreseeable future. The same applies to other Frito-Lay products.

This entire affair brings to mind the expression "the way for bad men to triumph is for good men to do nothing." In my case, I am replacing "bad men" with "morally bankrupt bowl committees" and "good men" with "consumers of products made by the sponsoring corporations," respectively (McKeen 1996b).

I just wanted to let you know that as a BYU fan, I was disappointed that the Fiesta Bowl decided not to choose the highest ranked teams but instead chose teams based on other factors. The actions by the Fiesta Bowl Committee are viewed as unfair not only by BYU fans, but what appears to be a majority of sports writers, and fans across the nation. I like and use your products but feel that the actions of the Fiesta Bowl taint your otherwise fine company. (Guest 1996)

Here is my letter to Fed Ex. (Note, I sent a very similar letter to the Orange bowl, Frito Lay, CBS sports and whoever else's email address I could find.)

Dear Fed Ex,

Previously, I was under the impression that #5 BYU was passed over for a Fed Ex, Orange Bowl bid because #6 Nebraska might bring higher Television Ratings. However, the following data does indicate this is true.

USA Today reports the overnight ratings as follows:

Texas-Nebraska	6.2
BYU-Wyoming	7.3
Florida-Alabama (Prime-time game)	6.9
Army - Navy	5.9

If BYU brings the highest TV ratings and if BYU(13-1) has a better record than Nebraska (10-2) and if BYU (#5) is ranked higher than Nebraska (#6) by both the press and the coaches, why then did BYU get passed over by the Fed Ex's Orange Bowl???

I don't understand Fed Ex Orange Bowl's logic at all. I feel the only reason Nebraska got invited to the Orange bowl was old fashion politics. (Obviously, television ratings and college football rankings had nothing to do with it.)

The Orange Bowl and the Bowl Alliance seem to have nothing to do with fairness. Instead it seems to include Big 12 teams at the expense of all other football conferences in the country. (The rich get richer the poor get poorer.)

My friends and I will not be watching the Fed Ex Orange Bowl this year because I feel the Fed Ex Orange Bowl made a bad decision in selecting Nebraska as one of its at large bids. Nebraska lost its last game of the season to unranked Texas team. Nebraska makes this year's Fed Ex Orange Bowl boring.

My friends and I will not be watching Nebraska and the Fed Ex Orange Bowl this year. And we seriously question Fed Ex's poor judgment in this matter.

Sincerely, Anonymous [The writer of this letter wishes to remain anonymous. The first author has a copy of this letter.]

out of touch, or is there a sense of disgust with this entire morass that is building and approaching critical mass? Between what everyone is sharing here and the ground swell on r.s.f.c. [a sports net with fans from many schools], that appears to be the case. Or am I seeing the world through excessively blue glasses?

Having said that, I don't think for a moment that it will change the bowl setup for this year. What's done is done. It will, however, exert added pressure to change things . . . not to mention provide a bit of schadenfreude as bowl officials stammer, get defensive and reach for one flimsy excuse after another.

For me, the most satisfying thing is knowing that, unlike 1984 [the year in which BYU won the national football championship], we're not facing the world quite so alone. Thanks to all of you for sharing the quotes, newspaper articles, ratings numbers and corporate addresses. (McKeen 1996a)

In any event, some of the anticipated long-term consequences of the snub seem to have been more negative for the Alliance than the short term effects of the proposed boycott. Along with engaging in personal acts of retaliation, many fans urged an institutional response to the perceived injustice of the snub. They argued that BYU and the WAC should carry out their threat to initiate legal action against the Alliance if it did not select BYU.

At 13-1 and #5 they deserved to be in the Alliance. I'm throwing out my Tostitos... Leaving BYU out is an absolute crime. Sue them BYU! (Elliott 1996; see also Deter 1996; Holtz 1996)

Fan complaints were ultimately reflected in the actions of several U.S. senators (from Utah, Wyoming, and Kentucky) who called for the Justice Department and the Federal Trade Commission to initiate an anti-trust action against the alliance.

Citing Brigham Young's exclusion from a

major bowl game last season, Kentucky Republican Mitch McConnell is asking the Justice Department and the Federal Trade Commission to investigate whether the College Bowl Alliance violates antitrust laws.

"The opportunity to compete in top postseason bowls should be based on merit instead of membership in some exclusive club," McConnell said. "There could be a pretty clear antitrust violation here, with exclusive teams in collusion with the bowls to shut out everybody else."

McConnell has raised this issue before, in 1993 when his home state Louisville team was 7-1 and had no chance of playing in a major bowl. He was satisfied when the bowl coalition later streamlined itself and became the Bowl Alliance, and included a rule that any team with eight victories or a ranking above an Alliance conference champion could be invited to an Alliance bowl.

But McConnell feels that Brigham Young's plight is evidence that *de facto* exclusion still goes on (White 1997).

DISCUSSION

Kowalski's theory of complaining provides a conceptual structure with which to analyze the Cougar-Net messages regarding the Alliance snub. It explains how social motives or negative affect not associated with the specific situation may result in complaining even when expectations are met. It also explains why some dissatisfied fans decided not to complain: while their dissatisfaction threshold was sufficiently low that they were frustrated, their complaining threshold was high because they didn't expect the complaints to do any good. These are the fans who seem to be most motivated to engage in retaliation and grudgeholding, behaviors on which Kowalski's model is silent. Thus, while it addresses phenomena that cannot be accounted for by expectancy/dissatisfaction models, Kowalski's model is also unable to account for important behaviors that are closely linked with complaining, behaviors that may often be of even greater concern to organizations than complaining.

An example of these more destructive behaviors was exemplified in the Cougar-Net data.

One frustrated participant discovered a web site devoted to causing PepsiCo pain because of their corporate presence in Burma. He recommended that Cougar-Net participants damage PepsiCo by engaging in tactics recommended on this website.

Pepsi boycotters across America are starting to call Pepsi's 800 number after 7:00 p.m. eastern time. They just walk up to a pay phone, dial 1-800-433-COLA and walk away, leaving the phone off the hook. No Pepsi operators are on line, so Pepsi pays for several minutes of a phone call... This is something happening spontaneously across the country. While boycott organizers are not telling people to do this, it is beneficial to get the word out far and wide that this is happening so Pepsi will find out why its phone bills have gone up. (J. Sanders 1996)

This is a clear example of consumer retaliation (Huefner and Hunt 1994). As Huefner and Hunt (1994) have pointed out, consumers often take matters into their own hands if they believe they have been unjustly treated and have not received adequate redress of grievances when they complained or have not bothered to complain because they believed it would be ineffective (high complaining threshold). They may retaliate, "get even," "settle the score." The anti-Tostitos proselytizing, the boycotts, law suits, and anti-trust actions mentioned above would all be examples of retaliation (Huefner and Hunt 1994).

As Kowalski correctly observes, when the dissatisfaction threshold is low but the complaining threshold is high, the consumer does not complain. But as Huefner and Hunt (1992) have argued, the story does not end there. Consumers may go beyond traditional voice and exit strategies (Hirschman 1970) and engage in grudgeholding, a form of "extreme exit." Grudgeholding "carries a heavy emotional loading, and it persists over long periods of time" (Huefner and Hunt, 1992, p. 228). And while three months may not qualify as a long period of time, there is evidence that many Cougar-Net participants may have experienced an enduring behavior change and may hold a grudge against the Alliance and its sponsors. Several Cougar-Net participants indicated that they will continue to boycott PepsiCo products until the

bowl situation is resolved to their satisfaction.

I have no interest in who wins the Snub Bowl. I am boycotting it. No Frito Lay in my house!!! (Humphreys 1996)

Two months later, the same participant wrote:

In answer to your questions:

- 1) did I watch any of the a-lie-ance bowls—no
- 2) if PepsiCo doesn't care if I boycott, fine. I feel better for doing it and I am getting used to Coke and Dr. Pepper.
- 3) if PepsiCo provides the money, they also accept responsibility. It's their name on the product. (Humphreys 1997)

Other participants were equally determined to boycott various subsidiaries of PepsiCo.

My wife buys them (she could care less about sports and quit listening to my ramblings a few years back) but I won't eat them. Something like you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink. Probably a silly snub, but I do what I can. I promise to eat bags full if they repent! (STAKERJL 1997)

We also have not eaten any Tostitos. I suspect that we may slip up someday but for now I still have strong feelings for the a-lie-ance and their ilk. Maybe the NCAA will finally take things in hand and correct... who am I kidding? Let's hope that they have learned their lesson. (Whitmer 1997)

In response to a query by the first author, one participant wrote:

> Now that it is two months after the Cotton Bowl, I am curious to know how you all still feel about being snubbed by the A-lie-ance.

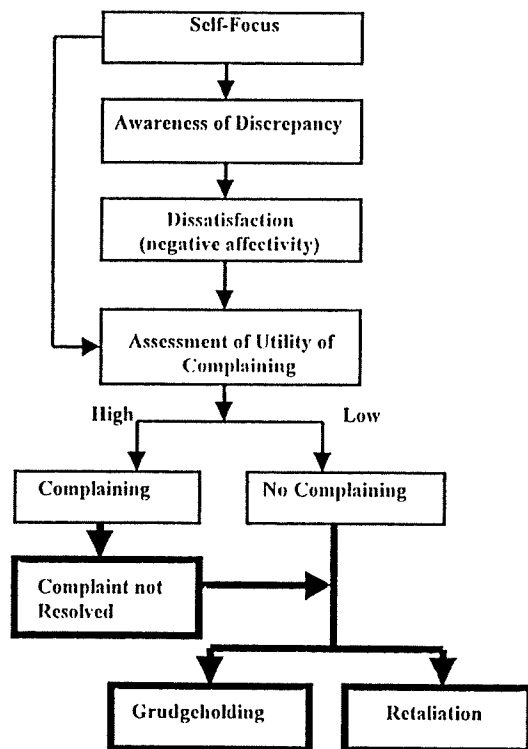
Still basking in the afterglow of the win, no longer concerned about the A-lie-ance's shaft, only their continuing attempts at mischief.

> Are any of you eating Tostitos yet?

Only the packages we already had purchased before the snub. Otherwise, the McKeen house is a Frito-Lay free zone — and will remain so for the foreseeable future.

BTW, when my wife picked out her Christmas present (a cellular phone), I gently told her that I was also creating a Nokia free zone [Nokia, sponsor of the Sugar Bowl, manufactures cellular phones]. Their loss was Philips' gain. (McKeen 1997)

Exhibit C
Extension of Kowalski's (1996) Model of
Complaining Behavior
(Extensions marked by darker lines)



The Cougar-Net data suggest that Kowalski's model needs to be expanded to incorporate grudgeholding and retaliation. When the dissatisfaction threshold is low and the complaining threshold is high, consumers will not complain (as Kowalski's model indicates). But as Hunt and Hunt (1990) and Hunt et al. (1988) have

demonstrated, the lack of complaining is often associated with grudgeholding and/or as Huefner and Hunt (1994) have shown, with retaliation. Even consumers who *do* complain often engage in grudgeholding and retaliation behaviors, as the data have shown. In Exhibit C, the Kowalski model is revised to incorporate the additional outcomes.

LIMITATIONS

While the data used in this research are not retrospective, are textualized by the informants themselves, and are a kind of natural canon (thus obviating data weaknesses cited by Alicke et al. [1992] and by Larsen and Wright [1997]), they do have certain limitations. They may not represent the beliefs and opinions of all Cougar-Net participants, as there are many "lurkers" who, like the second author, read the messages but do not actively participate in the discussions. The data also reflect the opinions of a fairly small subset of BYU fans, a subset which is probably more involved and, given their use of the Internet, more male, educated, and wealthy than other fans (Vassos 1996).

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