

THAT WOMAN

Media Portrayals, Public Discussions, and the Moralistic Shaming of Monica Lewinsky

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Monica Lewinsky and Bill Clinton outside the Oval Office in 1995.

## INTRODUCTION

In March of 2015, Monica Lewinsky took the main stage at a TED conference in Vancouver to deliver a speech about the lasting effects of public humiliation appropriately entitled, *The Price of Shame*. Bowing to the criticism that chastised her for “capitalizing” on her “notoriety,” Lewinsky had remained largely silent for over 10 years. In re-entering the public sphere, she hoped to take charge of her own narrative, call for a re-evaluation of her past, and encourage others who faced similar shaming, which, she argued, had only been exacerbated by the rise of the internet. “In 1998,” she said in her speech, “I lost my reputation and my dignity. I lost almost everything, and I almost lost my life.”<sup>1</sup>

Now, I admit I made mistakes...But the attention and judgment that I received, not the story, but that I personally received, was unprecedented. I was branded a tramp, tart, slut, whore, bimbo, and of course, that woman. I was seen by many but actually known by few...It was easy to forget that *that woman* was dimensional, had a soul, and was once unbroken.<sup>2</sup>

In January 1998, during independent council Kenneth Starr’s four year investigation into the Clinton White House, Pentagon employee Linda Tripp approached Starr with over 20 hours worth of taped conversations between her and her co-worker, Monica Lewinsky. Days earlier, Lewinsky had submitted a sworn affidavit in former Arkansas state employee Paula Jones’ sexual harassment civil suit against the now sitting president, Bill Clinton. In her statement, Lewinsky, listed as Jane Doe #6, formally denied participating in an affair with the president. Tripp’s tapes however, refuted this statement as Lewinsky, unaware she was being recorded, went into explicit detail over

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<sup>1</sup> Monica Lewinsky, “Monica Lewinsky: The Price of Shame,” filmed March 2015, TED video, 22:26, posted March 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

the course of several months as to her nearly two year relationship with Clinton, and implicated him and his advisors in encouraging Lewinsky to lie about the affair under oath.

Soon after Tripp's meeting, Starr arranged to have Tripp wear an FBI wire during a lunch with Lewinsky at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel near Washington DC. During this lunch, Lewinsky encouraged Tripp to lie if ever approached to testify about her affair with Clinton. Several days later, Attorney General Janet Reno approved Starr's request to expand his inquiry to include, among other things, Clinton's relationship with Lewinsky and involvement in the possible coercion of perjury and obstruction of justice in the Jones civil suit.<sup>3</sup> The next day, Starr, Tripp, and the FBI arranged a sting operation at the Pentagon City mall during which investigators interrogated Lewinsky for over nine hours, discouraged her from contacting her attorney, and threatened her with 27 years in jail for filing a false affidavit should she not cooperate with their requests.<sup>4</sup> As Lewinsky learned of Tripp's betrayal and began to understand the scope of her predicament, Clinton denied having a sexual relationship with Lewinsky under oath during his own deposition in the Jones case, ostensibly perjuring himself.<sup>5</sup> On January 19<sup>th</sup>, the *Drudge Report*, an online political gossip site, reported on *Newsweek Magazine's* decision to pull a story alleging an affair between President Clinton and a White House intern, marking the first major news story to be broken on the internet.<sup>6</sup> Within days, allegations regarding Clinton and Lewinsky spread around the world. While Clinton publicly denied the relationship –

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<sup>3</sup> *Monica in Black and White*. Directed by Fenton Bailey and Randy Barbato. New York, NY: HBO, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Monica Lewinsky. "Shame and Survival." *Vanity Fair*, June 2014.

<sup>5</sup> *Monica in Black and White*.

<sup>6</sup> Matt Drudge, "Newsweek Kills Story on White House Intern, Blockbuster Report: 23-Year-Old, Former White House Intern, Sex Relationship with the President." *Drudge Report*. January 18, 1998.; Monica Lewinsky, "Monica Lewinsky: The Price of Shame."

famously remarking in one press conference, “I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky” – 24-year-old Monica Lewinsky became America’s mistress.<sup>7</sup>

Aided in no small part by the relatively new 24-hour-news cycle and the world’s growing dependence on the internet, the affair became a non-stop media sensation. Rumors of the contents of Tripp’s tapes circulated, leading to months worth of speculation over Lewinsky’s personality, the details of the affair, and a blue dress supposedly stained with the president’s semen. Throughout this yearlong – to paraphrase Lewinsky – sexual, political, legal, and media maelstrom, during which he became only the second president to ever be impeached, Clinton maintained some of the most impressive public approval ratings of any modern president.<sup>8</sup> Public support for Clinton and his administration remained in the mid-to-high-60 percent range, occasionally breaking 70 percent even as the House of Representatives voted to impeach.<sup>9</sup> For Lewinsky however, 1998 marked the beginning of massive public discussions, analyses, critiques, and shaming experienced on global scale. Though Clinton had been accused of sexual misconduct by four different women, and was in the midst of a high profile sexual harassment suit brought by Jones, who alleged that he had propositioned and exposed himself to her while Governor of Arkansas, it was largely Lewinsky who captured the media’s scrutiny.<sup>10</sup>

Jacob Rowbottom, an academic and professor of law at the University of Oxford, argued public shaming serves three goals: to punish, inform, and criticize. In his noted

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<sup>7</sup> “Clinton’s Comments Denying an Affair,” *New York Times*, January 27, 1998.

<sup>8</sup> Monica Lewinsky, “Monica Lewinsky: The Price of Shame.”; Brian Newman, “Bill Clinton’s Approval Ratings: The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same,” *Political Research Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (December 2002): 785-786.

<sup>9</sup> Brian Newman, “Bill Clinton’s Approval Ratings.”

<sup>10</sup> Peter Barker and Lois Romano, “President Asks Court to Toss Out Paula Jones Case: No Distress or Career Harm Is Evident, Motion Argues,” *Washington Post*, February 18, 1998.

essay, *To Punish, Inform, and Criticize: The Goals of Naming and Shaming*, Rowbottom defined “naming and shaming” as disclosing “information about an identified person or body, which either seeks to induce shame in that person, or at least express judgment that the person ought to feel ashamed of themselves.”<sup>11</sup> Though the three goals overlap, and often work in conjunction with one another, each can be separated in the abstract to reveal the persistence and aims of public shaming. I’ve expanded on Rowbottom’s work to include theories on gender and sexual shaming.<sup>12</sup> In researching this project however, I’ve found a distinct lack of scholarship on the particular intersection of female sexual shaming. Michael Warner, for example, in his seminal work on shaming, *The Trouble With Normal*, argued the politics of sexual shame work as means of social control, utilized to identify and extinguish variant sexualities in favor of a universal acceptable form of sexual expression. Published in 2000, Warner’s examination of public shaming even used the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal as a crucial reference point, but notably focused on President Clinton’s experience, not Lewinsky’s, in highlighting the pervasiveness and power of sexual shame. While Clinton did face embarrassment, public exposal, and scrutiny of his sex life, much of the attention focused on him pertained to an arguably politically motivated and sensationalized framing of possible impeachable offenses. Lewinsky, on the other hand, was a private citizen. Warner’s subject choice then, added to a growing collection of works that ignore the ways in which sexual shaming is often

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<sup>11</sup> Jacob Rowbottom, “To Punish, Inform, and Criticize: The Goals of Naming and Shaming,” in *Media and Public Shaming*, ed. Julian Petley (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 1-2.

<sup>12</sup> Laina Y. Bay-Cheng, “The Agency Line: A Neoliberal Metric for Appraising Young Women’s Sexuality,” *Springer Science and Business Media*, (1993): 279-291.; Camille Nurka. “Feminine Shame/Masculine Desire: A Literary Excursion through Gender and Embodied Emotion.” *Cultural Studies Review*, 18 (2012): 310-333.; Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,” *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, (1993).; Michael Warner, “The Ethics of Sexual Shame.” In *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).



gendered, and women's bodies and sex lives more carefully policed. Lewinsky's experiences point not only to the power of sexual shame and the conservatism of the late-1990s, but also a collective effort to publicly and forcefully define the boundaries of acceptable forms of female sexual and bodily autonomy.

This project uses the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal to explore the dynamics of sexual shaming, and its gendered boundaries. It examines mainstream media reports throughout the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal, focusing on three key moments to demonstrate each of the goals of naming and shaming.<sup>13</sup> The first chapter centers on the informational goal to examine coverage during the first two weeks of the scandal, and reveals a dependence on un-named sources and female stereotypes in characterizing Lewinsky. The second chapter looks at the September 1998 release of Kenneth Starr's report to underline the critical goal and evince the specifically gendered means of publicly condemning women engaged in exposed sex. The final chapter focuses on the Tripp tapes' transcripts and audio releases in October and November collectively to emphasize these findings and reveal the punitive nature of naming and shaming. Each chapter also highlights a notable effort across journalistic platforms to defend Clinton for his actions while discrediting Lewinsky, and framing her as solely responsible for the affair and subsequent scandal.

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<sup>13</sup> NOTE: Maureen Dowd covered the Clinton-Lewinsky story for the *New York Times* in a series of columns that ultimately earned her a Pulitzer Prize. Dowd was also one of the most consistent and nasty slut-shamers throughout the scandal, building a satirical commentary to cast Lewinsky as "ditsy," "predatory," slutty, and stupid. Dowd's criticisms were so intense, Lewinsky confronted her in June of 1998 after spotting her at a restaurant, asking, "Why do you write such scathing articles about me?" Dowd mocked Lewinsky for the incident in a column published the next day. An entire thesis could easily be dedicated solely to Dowd's coverage, so in an effort to highlight the scope of Lewinsky's shaming in the mainstream media, Dowd's columns have been excluded from this project.

## CHAPTER ONE

### *Breaking Story*

During an episode of *Nightline* the week the news of the Clinton-Lewinsky affair broke host Ted Koppel interviewed Stephen Enghouse, a college acquaintance of Lewinsky's, who opined that "it's probably likely" Lewinsky was fabricating a sexual relationship with the President despite the fact he had not been in contact with her in years.<sup>14</sup> Assertions such as these, however critical, were framed, often explicitly, as necessary to the outlet's informational responsibility to the public. *Nightline* producer Tom Bettag later said Enghouse's comments did not necessarily reflect the views of the program nor did the show make its own decision as to whether the claims were credible. Instead, Bettag asserted, *Nightline* gave "the audience the tools with which to make their own decisions," as had Enghouse's comments turned out to be the "prevalent point of view" days later, he argued, the show would have been blamed for withholding "vital" information.<sup>15</sup> Implicit in these comments are a strategy embraced by many throughout the scandal, and particularly in the weeks following the breaking of the story: publish first and verify later, regardless of the consequences.

The first weeks of the scandal showed the mainstream media's attempts to inform the public while having little substantiated information themselves, and facing extreme pressures to publish as a result of the 24-hour-news cycle and the growing importance of the internet. If the media's intentions were solely to inform the public as to the details surrounding the affair however, it would have been unnecessary to describe Lewinsky as

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<sup>14</sup> Mark Jurkowitz, "As Spotlight Falls on Lewinsky, Questions About Relevance," *Boston Globe*, January 29, 1998.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

“sex-crazed,” “a temptress” and a “bimbo.”<sup>16</sup> As with the Enghouse interview, the press publicized and allowed descriptions of Lewinsky to be accepted wholesale, regardless of source or verification, and even when attributed to “unnamed White House officials” who have since been widely acknowledged as feeding information to the press in order to benefit Clinton and discredit Lewinsky. The sheer volume of the coverage of what became known as “Monicathon,” then allowed speculation and unsubstantiated comments to transform into accepted truths through mere repetition.<sup>17</sup> In the opening week of the scandal alone, the three major broadcast networks – CBS, NBC, and ABC – carried 124 stories about Lewinsky, compared to the 103 stories following the death of Princess Diana five months prior.<sup>18</sup> Bolstered by the 24-hour news cycle, pressure mounted for print media outlets to be the first to publish a new scoop, which could now be done instantly online. With these intense competitive pressures, journalistic commitments to fact checking weakened, sensationalism soared, and the intellectual line dividing the informational and critical goals central to naming and shaming further blurred.

As Rowbottom argued, one aim of naming and shaming is providing information to the public regarding the actions or conduct of a single or collective entity. The purpose of publicity is not necessarily to punish or criticize, but to allow readers to make informed choices in the face of a decision for which that knowledge may be relevant. For example, should a local newspaper print a story regarding a malpractice lawsuit against a

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<sup>16</sup> Michelle Caruso and Helen Kennedy with William Goldschlag, “Sex-Crazed, Ex-Lover Says Monica Planned Prez Seduction - Teacher,” *New York Daily News*, January 28, 1998.; Linda Yglesias and Richard T. Pienciak, “Monica: Making of a Temptress,” *New York Daily News*, February 1, 1998.; Margery Eagan, “Scandal Rocks Clinton: How Will Bill Spin Out of This Alleged Bimbo-Blunder?,” *Boston Herald*, January 22, 1998.

<sup>17</sup> Warner, *The Trouble with Normal*, 17.

<sup>18</sup> KC Baker and Helen Kennedy, “The Silent Treatment? Monica Nips Out, Press in Pursuit,” *New York Daily News*, January 30, 1998.

prominent doctor in the area, while the piece might also serve punitive or critical ends, its ostensive aim is to provide information to the public so that current and/or potential patients can decide for themselves whether or not they wish to visit the doctor's practice.<sup>19</sup> In the case of the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal, media outlets often framed their extensive coverage as informing the public about the president's supposed indiscretions so that individuals could form their own opinions as to Clinton's possible impeachment.

Informational output can play a crucial role in shaming, though it is often not readily apparent. Fostering of scandal and veiled moralism, particularly in US culture, not only add color to a story, but attract attention. Sensationalism engages readers, infiltrates the cultural zeitgeist, and can arguably add greater context to the story – though a context that the publication has purposefully presented. In this way, it is also important to consider the ways in which the media, when providing information, are not neutral regarding what information is presented or how, and attempt to illicit particular responses from their audiences. Rowbottom argued that even “the idea that a person has been shamed is itself a steer to the audience to react negatively” to both the person being shamed, and their actions.<sup>20</sup> This informational goal can thus easily overlap with a critical goal, which is aimed at criticizing a person or institution's conduct.<sup>21</sup> While the two can be separated in the abstract, in practice both work in tandem to publicly shame.

Though first published by the *Drudge Report*, an online political gossip column, on January 19, 1998, the Clinton-Lewinsky story didn't break in the mainstream press until January 21<sup>st</sup>. This chapter examines reporting during the first two weeks of the scandal, from January 21<sup>st</sup> through February 4<sup>th</sup>. As little verified information was

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<sup>19</sup> Rowbottom, “To Punish, Inform, and Criticise,” 8.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 9.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 12.

available at the start of the scandal, many outlets turned to unnamed sources and speculation that, in combination with the 24-hour-news cycle, turned gossip and guesswork into fact through repetition. A critical analysis of coverage during this time reveals an adherence to one-dimensional female stereotypes, a profound difference between mainstream assessments of Clinton and Lewinsky, and several specific ways in which the media's informational and critical goals overlapped.

*The Intern: Making Monica*

Mainstream characterizations of Lewinsky in the first two weeks of the scandal can largely be divided into two distinct categories: pre- and post- Andy Bleiler. On January 27<sup>th</sup>, days after the *Washington Post* brought the Clinton-Lewinsky relationship to national attention, 32-year-old Bleiler, a high-school teacher, held a press conference on his front lawn in Portland, Oregon.<sup>22</sup> With his wife and attorney by his side, Bleiler announced to dozens of reporters and TV crews that he had had an extra-marital affair with Lewinsky for five years. Before Bleiler's disclosure, the media tended to characterize Lewinsky as a spoiled ingénue, eager for drama and capable of fabricating a relationship with the President. After Bleiler's press conference however, any competing narratives filtered to describe a sex-obsessed, manipulative stalker eager to seduce Clinton into a sexual affair. She was the lying Madonna until she was the scheming whore.

Initially, media outlets relied heavily on publicly available information and accounts from unnamed sources in describing Lewinsky. Framed as providing

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<sup>22</sup> Susan Schmidt, Peter Baker, and Toni Locy, "Clinton Accused of Urging Aide to Lie; Starr Probes Whether President Told Woman to Deny Alleged Affair to Jones's Lawyers," *Washington Post*, January 21, 1998.; William Claiborne, "Lewinsky's Former Teacher Discloses Affair," *Washington Post*, January 28, 1998.

background information to a public eager to evaluate the credibility of a woman claiming to have had an affair with the president, many emphasized Lewinsky's wealthy upbringing while noting her "pudgy" body, and "notoriously slow" typing skills.<sup>23</sup> Relying on stereotypes of privileged women living in Beverly Hills, where Lewinsky grew up, most outlets offering an "in depth" view of Lewinsky in the first days of the scandal noted she was voted "Most Likely To See Her Name in Lights" in her high school yearbook, and that – again unnamed – childhood friends described her as "spoiled" and "arrogant."<sup>24</sup> Several outlets pulled quotations from her parents' publicly available divorce records, offering a picture, sometimes without context, of an unstable, and potentially volatile home life amidst the luxury of wealthy Los Angeles.<sup>25</sup> TV pundits posed that Lewinsky lived "in a fantasy world," and was "given to exaggeration."<sup>26</sup> Other unnamed "friends and associates" described her as an "ingénue," with a tendency to wear "revealing" clothing despite being "5 feet 6 inches tall, and [weighing] 135 pounds, according to driver's license records."<sup>27</sup> The press did not address the significance of her body type to concerns over her credibility.

If competing narratives did arise, the mainstream press was largely hesitant to complicate Lewinsky's gendered image, exemplifying a long-standing societal unwillingness to acknowledge women as having complex personalities, or combinations of traits that fall outside of stereotyped acceptable forms of femaleness. Jeff Leen of *The*

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<sup>23</sup> "Scandal Rocks Clinton: California intern led quiet life," *Boston Herald*, January 22, 1998.

<sup>24</sup> "White House Crisis," NBC Nightly News, NBC (New York, NY: January 23, 1998). Retrieved from the Vanderbilt Television News Archive.; Jeff Leen, "Lewinsky: Two Coasts, Two Lives, Many Images," *The Washington Post*, January 24, 1998.

<sup>25</sup> "Caught in the Middle of a Nightmare; After an affluent but rocky childhood, Monica Lewinsky went to Washington. Now, she finds herself facing public scrutiny over her private life," *Los Angeles Times*, February 1, 1998.

<sup>26</sup> *Monica in Black and White*.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.; "Scandal Rocks Clinton: Chatty 'ingénue' eager to please," *Boston Herald*, January 22, 1998.

*Washington Post*, for example, authored a piece entitled “Lewinsky: Two Coasts, Two Lives, Many Images,” lamenting the “problem of two Monicas.”<sup>28</sup> How could she, Leen posed, be both “an ebullient, vulnerable ‘child’ infatuated with the President” and a “despairing, ravaged woman?” He noted she was “a rich kid who alternated dresses with grunge wear,” who exhibited “sweetness and edge.”<sup>29</sup> Not only did both “images” offered present Lewinsky solely in terms neatly fitting into the Madonna/Whore framework, but also underline Rowbottom’s assertion that media outlets that name and shame through informative means are not neutral in the information they publicize. These descriptions, nearly all of which came from un-cited sources or speculation, played on gendered stereotypes that have historically worked to limit the potential and credibility of the women they target.<sup>30</sup> In presenting Lewinsky solely in terms of female stereotypes, and calling into question those descriptions that complicate an accepted image, Leen’s incredulity reflected a more widespread disapproval of portraying women in the public sphere as whole, complicated beings in the way society allowed men.

After Bleiler’s press conference on January 27<sup>th</sup>, descriptions of an ingénue with a penchant for fabrication were replaced by those of a home-wrecking stalker obsessed with seducing the president. Bleiler asserted his affair with Lewinsky began in 1992, when she was 19 and had already graduated from high school. They had met while she attended Beverly Hills High (she transferred to a smaller private school her junior year), where he worked as a drama teacher. In his account, he insisted he wanted to end the affair that same year, but was “unable to do so” until 1997 because Lewinsky “had insinuated herself” into his family, befriending his wife and sometimes babysitting his

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<sup>28</sup> Leen, “Lewinsky: Two Coasts, Two Lives, Many Images.”

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> April Kemick, “Stereotyping Has Lasting Negative Impact.” US News. August 12, 2010.

two children.<sup>31</sup> While she worked in Washington DC, he said, she bragged to him of an affair with a “high-ranking person in the White House,” who, she never named but often referred to as “the creep.”<sup>32</sup> His attorney, Terry Giles, soon elaborated, drawing a picture of a woman “obsessed with sex,” and who “terrorized Bleiler by threatening to reveal the affair.”<sup>33</sup> Giles appeared on several evening news programs, expressing concern over Lewinsky’s “pattern of twisting facts, especially to enhance her own version of her own self image,” and noting she had “represented to [Bleiler’s wife] Kathy that she was impregnated and had an abortion” while in Washington.<sup>34</sup>

Bleiler held his press conference moments before Clinton’s much anticipated State of the Union address, allowing him to capitalize on the massive publicity and ensuring his story would receive attention. He presented himself as a well-intentioned do-gooder in an impossible situation, who felt he “couldn’t in good conscience just sit on this and not tell the authorities what [he] knew,” an image the media universally accepted and regurgitated in their coverage.<sup>35</sup> The media acknowledged he was married with two children at the time of their affair, and had worked as Lewinsky’s high school teacher, but did not use these facts in their collective assessments of his character or agency. In an account of the relationship, the *Los Angeles Times* pointedly wrote, “Monica had started an affair,” firmly placing Lewinsky as the lone aggressor in the relationship, and

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<sup>31</sup> “Clinton Under Fire; Ex-intern Allegedly Boasted of Sex: Teacher who says he had 5-year affair with Lewinsky says she told of liaisons with unnamed ‘high-ranking’ White House official,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 28, 1998.

<sup>32</sup> NOTE: The Tripp Tapes revealed Lewinsky frequently referred to Clinton by a number of nicknames including, “the creep.” Though the tapes would not be made publicly available until the fall of 1998, rumors of the tapes’ contents had been widely publicized, including this detail. *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Caruso et al., “Sex-Crazed, Ex-Lover Says Monica Planned Prez Seduction – Teacher.”



highlighting her supposed attempts to “infiltrate” the Bleiler family.<sup>36</sup> No outlet acknowledged that every detail Bleiler gave as to Lewinsky’s affair with a White House official had already been released or speculated about publicly. Most instead capitalized on Kathy Bleiler’s comment that upon moving to Washington, Lewinsky said she was “going to the White House to get [her] presidential knee pads,” noting she had “made her intentions very clear,” and all but insisting that the public hold Lewinsky solely responsible for the scandal.<sup>37</sup>

Rowbottom’s assertion that media outlets are biased in the information they present and the way in which it is presented was especially clear in the aftermath of Bleiler’s press conference. Though the media continued to question her credibility, justifying speculation as a means of providing information, Lewinsky was no longer an ingénue. Adam Dave, who claimed to date Lewinsky in high school, came forward alleging Lewinsky “liked to handcuff him to the bed” during sex, with his younger brother claiming he was “well aware of her penchant for sex play with bondage.”<sup>38</sup> Fox News ran a public poll asking, “What better describes Monica Lewinsky? Young tramp looking for thrills, or average girl taken advantage of?”<sup>39</sup> In an in-depth review of the scandal entitled “Monica: Making of a Temptress,” the *New York Daily News* referred to her as a “stalker” and “promiscuous liar,” and quoted anonymous sources who said she “[oozed] sex,” while also noting she was a “size 12,” with a “big-boned form [and] had waged a battle of the bulge her entire life.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> “Caught in the Middle of a Nightmare.”

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, *Monica in Black and White*.

<sup>38</sup> Yglesias, “Monica: Making of a Temptress.”

<sup>39</sup> “February 1, 1998,” Fox News Sunday, FOX (New York, NY: February 1, 1998). Retrieved from LexusNexus.

<sup>40</sup> Yglesias, “Monica: Making of a Temptress.”

Female desire and sexuality is disproportionately condemned in American society, and, as gender theorist Camille Nurka wrote, “so laden with negativity and ambivalence that it feels the twist of shame to its core.”<sup>41</sup> In commenting so explicitly on Lewinsky’s sex life, and framing questions and information so as to lay blame exclusively with her, the mainstream media revealed some of the nuanced and discursive ways news outlets were able to shame through informational means. Further, traditional gendered expectations presupposed that female action and sexuality are passive and non-initiating, often working only in response to a male sex drive, which is assumed to be naturally incessant.<sup>42</sup> In depicting Lewinsky as the aggressor then, the media firmly placed her as acting outside the bounds of acceptable femaleness, and thus worthy of shame.<sup>43</sup>

As part of her first public interview, in 1999 with Barbara Walters, Lewinsky acknowledged that her affair with Bleiler had in fact started when she was 18, and still in high school, and continued off and on for five years even as she worked under him on several student productions.<sup>44</sup> In 2002, HBO aired a Q&A based documentary entitled, *Monica in Black and White*, which featured Lewinsky responding to audience questions. Part way through, a young woman stood to address Lewinsky before explaining that she too had attended Beverly Hills High and knew Andy Bleiler. Lewinsky remarked that the woman, “probably [had] some stories to tell too,” to which the audience member replied that, like Lewinsky, in high school she too “was subjected to [Bleiler’s] advances like

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<sup>41</sup> Nurka, "Feminine Shame/Masculine Desire," 318.

<sup>42</sup> Bay-Cheng, "The Agency Line."

<sup>43</sup> Warner, *The Trouble with Normal*.

<sup>44</sup> NOTE: Though Lewinsky transferred schools in her junior year, she continued to work as an assistant costume designer at Beverly Hills High, where Bleiler worked.; "Monica Lewinsky," *20/20*, ABC. (New York, NY: March 3, 1999).; "Caught in the Middle of a Nightmare."

many girls [their] age.” Lewinsky was hesitant in her response for fear she might be sued, but contended that Bleiler’s “statements were completely false and...lead people to believe that I had gone to the White House with an agenda.”<sup>45</sup> She noted what no mainstream outlet acknowledged or contextualized in January 1998: that her time with Bleiler had warped her opinion of affairs with married men, and convinced her she “wasn’t good enough [to be] anything better” than a mistress.<sup>46</sup> The affair had also arguably corrupted her relationship with power dynamics, which when combined with Clinton’s history of extra-martial affairs and workplace sexual harassment, became the perfect storm of circumstances.

*The Stud and the Slut: Assessments of Bill Clinton*

To compare assessments of Lewinsky and Clinton during the first two weeks of the scandal is to begin to understand the fundamental difference in how the American media and public treated men and women in the public sphere in the late 1990s. National polls taken throughout January showed the American public generally believed the President had committed adultery in the White House, and that despite this, most people approved of his job performance more strongly than ever.<sup>47</sup> While Lewinsky was characterized by any number of unnamed sources as a “predator,” “cuckoo bird,” and “an unstable opportunist starved for attention,” the press pointedly called attention to Clinton’s long-reported “appetites.”<sup>48</sup> The *New York Times* reported that several voters described him as a “bad boy,” and a “rogue,” language generally used in describing a

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<sup>45</sup> *Monica in Black and White*.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>47</sup> Carey Goldberg, “Nation through a Looking Glass, Smudges, Cracks, Distortions and All,” *New York Times*, February 3, 1998.

<sup>48</sup> Yglesias, “Monica: Making of a Temptress.”; William Goldschlag, Thomas Galvin, Michelle Caruso, “A Low-Level Aide Enmeshed in Some High Level Intrigue,” *New York Daily News*, January 22, 1998.; Daniel Jeffreys, “Sleaze, Shame and Clinton’s Culture of Corruption,” *Daily Mail*, January 26, 1998.

charming ladies' man, with one remarking, "when we elected him, we knew we were electing a philanderer."<sup>49</sup> In response to unfailingly high approval ratings following news of the affair, *Tonight Show* host Jay Leno – who famously featured a never-ending stream of Lewinsky-centered jokes throughout the scandal – surmised Clinton's indiscretions might have had a humanizing effect on his public persona, making the president "look like one of the people."<sup>50</sup>

In her 2012 work *Feminine Shame/Masculine Disgrace*, Camille Nurka argued for the gendered distinction between shame and disgrace, where shame is traditionally embodied and permanent while disgrace is external and thus temporal. Shame, she asserted, has an "intractable relationship" with the female body, born from a long history of policing female sexual behavior that cannot be applied in the same way to the male body, which is assumed to represent virility.<sup>51</sup> Following news of the affair, Clinton was criticized for disgracing the office of the President, but this evaluation did not leave an indelible mark on his person, guided by the near-universal view of male promiscuity as not only not inherently shameful, but valorized and expected. His conduct disgraced the public, but as these actions were also consistent with culturally accepted understandings of masculine virility and its assumed unfaithfulness, his being was not shamed and his actions often defended. *The Boston Herald*, for example, published an article theorizing

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<sup>49</sup> NOTE: It's telling to note here that while Bill Clinton was elected despite being accused of numerous affairs, today, as his wife Hillary Clinton currently runs for president in 2016, his indiscretions are frequently brought up as a means of discrediting her candidacy and qualifications. In April of last year, for example, Republican frontrunner Donald Trump re-tweeted a comment remarking, "If Hillary Clinton can't satisfy her husband what makes her think she can satisfy America?" The tweet was later deleted. More recently, in March 2016, an image of a large banner reading, "I ain't votin' 4 Monica Lewinsky's ex-boyfriend's wife!" went viral online.; Goldberg, "Nation through a Looking Glass, Smudges, Cracks, Distortions and All."

<sup>50</sup> Goldberg, "Nation through a Looking Glass, Smudges, Cracks, Distortions and All."

<sup>51</sup> Nurka, "Feminine Shame/Masculine Desire," 310-318.

“The Code” among men.<sup>52</sup> “The Code,” the piece explained, is “slang for the unwritten and unspoken rule giving married men permission to fool around” based on a “good-old boy system, justified by hard work and stress.”<sup>53</sup> The piece went on to cite psychologists and writers, framing the article as simply providing factual information to the public, meanwhile ignoring the ways in which it absolved Clinton of guilt and implied the fault lied solely with Lewinsky, who had already acted against acceptable forms of female expression. The article noted unnamed “experts” as estimating that 20-50% of married men have extra-marital affairs, with David M. Buss, a University of Texas psychology professor whose 1994 book *The Evolution of Desire* was widely denounced by feminists, lamenting that many men simply have stronger sex drives and are uniquely capable of simultaneous “short-term and long-term love” in ways, the article implied, women are not.<sup>54</sup>

### *Conclusion*

French literary detective Monsieur Jackal of writer Alexandre Dumas’ 1854 novel, *The Mohicans of Paris*, often remarked, “cherchez la femme:” look for the woman. Nurka borrowed this phrase to verbalize the “exceptionalism by which the inscrutable...actions of...men may in the final analysis be attributed to the irresistible allure of a woman.” This tendency is evident throughout reporting during these first weeks, and continued throughout the scandal. Though veiled, when the *Los Angeles Times* remarked, “She has endangered President Clinton politically and perhaps legally...She has embarrassed a former lover and his wife,” the newspaper was

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<sup>52</sup> “Scandal Rocks Clinton: ‘Code’ of dishonor? – Experts say many men feel entitled to sex affairs,” *Boston Herald*, January 25, 1998.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

specifically targeting Lewinsky as the solely responsible individual and removing blame from her married ex-boyfriends, both of whom held positions of power over her.<sup>55</sup> So too does the credibility given to unnamed or biased sources; the indifference shown toward the integrity and psychological implications of Andy Bleiler's claims; the near constant reiterations casting Lewinsky solely in terms of female stereotypes, and particularly those characterizing her as a sex-obsessed stalker. Though framed as providing information to an American public faced with the possible impeachment of the president, in reality Lewinsky's treatment during these first weeks underline a willingness to publicly shame and discredit a woman seen as challenging stringent sexual standards, and threatening the power of a respected man (Clinton), regardless of his own supposed moral failings.

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<sup>55</sup> "Caught in the Middle of a Nightmare."

## CHAPTER TWO

### *The Starr Report*

Kenneth Starr spent four years investigating Clinton and gathering evidence for what became the Starr Report. Originally focused on failed business dealings involving the Clintons in the 1970s and 1980s, Starr's inquiry was expanded several times to ultimately include alleged abuses surrounding the firing of White House travel agents, the death of Deputy White House council Vince Foster, and Clinton's conduct during Paula Jones' sexual harassment lawsuit.<sup>56</sup> In its final form, the report contained what the press characterized as "smut," and many jokingly considered '90s teenagers' introduction to pornography.<sup>57</sup> "Never before," wrote the *Washington Post*, "has a legal document provided so many people with a keyhole view of a young woman's hopes, dreams, and sexual proclivities, offering the public at large a chance to analyze, sympathize, and criticize."<sup>58</sup>

According to Rowbottom's framework, a second goal central to naming and shaming in the media aims to criticize a person's conduct. A given outlet acts as an individual expressing a point of view and seeking to convince others that this opinion is correct. The argument, Rowbottom asserted, is not that the public needs to know a particular piece of information, but rather that the outlet wants to disclose that information in order to convey a position. These views are then regulated and enforced through the "power of publicity," allowing the media a central role in shaping collective opinions, regulating behavior, and identifying "what types of activities are socially

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<sup>56</sup> Kenneth Starr. *The Starr Report: The Findings of Independent Counsel Kenneth W. Starr on President Clinton and the Lewinsky Affair*. New York: Public Affairs, 1998.

<sup>57</sup> Marc Fisher and David Montgomery, "Explicit Details Evoke jokes and revulsion; Public Reacts to Details with Anger, Amusement," *Washington Post*, September 12, 1998.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

harmful or wrong.”<sup>59</sup> This influence was particularly acute throughout the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal as the story saturated the media marketplace intensely for well over a year, elevating and normalizing condemnations of Lewinsky.

While Rowbottom’s theory grouped all deviation from “certain standards” as subject to critical publicity, he failed to acknowledge how some actions are more heavily policed and criticized than others. In *The Trouble with Normal*, theorist Michael Warner identified the specific strength and influence of sexual shame, and argued the politics of this specific shame work as means of social control, utilized to identify and extinguish variant sexualities in favor of a universal acceptable form of sexual expression. While publicity can work to shame any number of activities deemed unacceptable, sexual acts elicit a certain brand of forceful moralism. As a culture, Warner asserted, we adopt one identity or set of sexual preferences as “normal,” and convince ourselves that “controlling [via shame] the sex lives of others, far from being unethical, is where morality begins.”<sup>60</sup> Warner argued that though “the demand for shame” is often mistaken as morality, “when some sexual tastes or practices (or rather an idealized version of them) are mandated for everyone,” it is actually a brand of moralism, used as a tool to ensure the continued power and legacy of prescribed sexual norms.<sup>61</sup> As women are held to even harsher moralized sexual standards than men, when a woman’s sexual acts or preferences are made public, and particularly when those acts are deemed perverse, the critical aims of that publicity, work to define acceptable forms of female sexual expression.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Rowbottom, “To Punish, Inform, and Criticise,” 12.

<sup>60</sup> Warner, *The Trouble with Normal*, 1-2.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>62</sup> Bay-Cheng, “The Agency Line.” Nurka, “Feminine Shame/Masculine Desire.”



This chapter focuses on the September 1998 release of the Starr Report, the culmination of independent council Kenneth Starr's extensive investigation of President Clinton. Starr submitted his report along with 18 boxes of supporting documents to the House of Representatives on September 9<sup>th</sup>. The House voted to receive the report two days later, and immediately released the first 445 pages of the more than 3,000 page document to the public online. The report claimed Clinton took actions "inconsistent with the president's constitutional duty to faithfully execute laws," and outlined Starr's investigative findings and argument for 11 possible grounds for impeachment including perjury, obstruction of justice, and witness tampering.<sup>63</sup> It also gave an exceedingly detailed narrative of the Clinton-Lewinsky affair, informed through Lewinsky's testimony, unsent letters and deleted emails gathered from Lewinsky's home, and the Tripp Tapes. In defense of his decision to dedicate such a substantial portion of his report to explicit details of the president's sex-life, Starr offered the following explanation:

A large part of the Narrative is devoted to a description of the President's relationship with Monica Lewinsky. The nature of the relationship was the subject of many of the President's false statements, and his desire to keep the relationship secret provides a motive for many of his actions that apparently were designed to obstruct justice.

The Narrative is lengthy and detailed. It is the view of this Office that the details are crucial to an informed evaluation of the testimony, the credibility of witnesses, and the reliability of other evidence. Many of the details reveal highly personal information; many are sexually explicit. This is unfortunate, but it is essential.<sup>64</sup>

Starr's defense has been much debated, with many historians, journalists, and politicians alike in the years since the scandal arguing Starr, a Republican, was not only politically motivated, but after four years of investigation and massive scrutiny, felt pressure to release something attention-grabbing. Nonetheless, when the House published

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<sup>63</sup> Starr, *The Starr Report*.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

Starr's report online, it made public months worth of intimate testimony, much of which included Lewinsky's explicit account of her affair with Clinton. As part of her immunity agreement, Lewinsky promised to describe in detail her relationship with the president. Unsure of the information Starr had collected, she was forced to recount for the grand jury each of her 10 sexual encounters with the Clinton, which Starr argued was "indispensable" information, though "specific, explicit, and possibly offensive."<sup>65</sup> An analysis of media reactions to the report reveals the pervasiveness of sexual shaming, and a specifically gendered means of publicly condemning women engaged in exposed sex. "*A Naïve Little Ho: Monica Lewinsky and the Hierarchy of Sex*"<sup>66</sup>

Overwhelmingly, the mainstream media reacted to the contents of the Starr Report by highlighting the ways in which Lewinsky deviated from traditional notions of gender to confirm and forward previous characterizations. Though the preceding months had confirmed news of the infamous blue dress and brought Clinton's long awaited admission of guilt, little other substantiated information had been released. While the press cemented their collective, speculative assessments of her as an aggressive, sex-obsessed stalker, Lewinsky remained unable to speak publicly as a condition of her immunity agreement. The publication of the Starr Report then marked the much-anticipated release of new material which, given the graphic salaciousness of the report's content and Warner's assertion as to the inherent shamefulness of sex, only worked to confirm previously held sexist evaluations of Lewinsky's character.

After exploring a wide range of sexual practices, stigmas, and regulations, Gayle Rubin, a cultural anthropologist, argued in her 1993 essay *Thinking Sex* that "people sort

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<sup>65</sup> *Monica in Black and White*.; Starr, *The Starr Report*.

<sup>66</sup> Megan Rosenfeld, Michael Colton, "Portrait of Monica: In Ken Starr's Report, Clues to the Woman Who Makes Garbo Look Like a Chatterbox," *Washington Post*, September 14, 1998.

good sex from bad sex by a series of social hierarchies,” marking a person occupying too much of the “bad” column as in need of reform.<sup>67</sup> The hierarchy is listed as follows:

<u>GOOD</u>	<u>BAD</u>
Heterosexual	Homosexual
Married	Unmarried
Monogamous	Promiscuous
Procreative	Non-procreative
Noncommercial	Commercial
In pairs	Alone or in groups
In a relationship	Casual
Same generation	Cross-generational
In private	In public
No pornography	Pornography
Bodies only	With manufactured objects
Vanilla	Sadomasochistic <sup>68</sup>

The Starr Report revealed, in Lewinsky’s own words, the circumstances of her affair with Clinton, and the specific sex acts involved. Of the twelve groupings Rubin offered, the Clinton-Lewinsky affair occupied nine deviant sexual practices: unmarried, promiscuous, non-procreative, commercial (in that Clinton supposedly secured her a job), casual, cross-generational, in public (in that the affair took place at the White House, and the sex was exposed), with manufactured objects (the infamous cigar), and sadomasochistic (given the power dynamics and intense secrecy of the relationship). Though speculation had run rampant in the months preceding the Starr Report’s release, the report nonetheless confirmed several of these groups, and emphasized the salaciousness of them all.

In the days following the report’s release, the media focused namely on oral sex. “She [performed] oral sex on the president [six] times,” wrote the *Chicago Tribune*, “before she felt as though the president wanted to make efforts to get to know her.”<sup>69</sup> On

<sup>67</sup> Rubin, “Thinking Sex,” 11-13.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Michael Tackett, “Lewinsky Tells Torrid Story of Love, Hope, and Desire,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 13, 1998.

Fox's *Hannity and Colmes*, show host Sean Hannity expressed outrage at her willingness to "perform oral sex on the president [as] he's talking to congressmen and senators [on the phone]." <sup>70</sup> Many also emphasized the pair's numerous phone sex sessions, and an incident in which Lewinsky revealed her thong strap to Clinton, while calling into question Lewinsky's "remarkable" ability to recall the specifics of the affair, again implying she was an obsessive stalker. <sup>71</sup> Framing of this nature not only highlighted the non-procreative and casual aspects of their relationship, but also employed the moralism Warner argued is central to sexual shaming. As Warner asserted, society tends to collectively "[embrace] one identity or one set of tastes as through they were universally shared, or should be," and demand conformity to those supposed norms. That singular "set of tastes" is embodied in Rubin's "good" column, and thus in calling attention to deviations from those sexual norms, the media created a platform for criticism and shame. Those scandalized by the affair, Warner argued, were "moved by a more abstract sense of violated propriety, a crime not against any individual but against the imaginary rules of sex." <sup>72</sup> To extend this analysis to include Lewinsky would also mean acknowledging the ways in which her femaleness – and the gendered boundaries of acceptable sexual expression – amplified the stringency of these rules.

*Fatal Attraction: Yes, but It's Not His Fault*

The mainstream press, in reaction to Lewinsky's account included in the Starr Report, overwhelmingly relied on gendered sexual expectations to shame Lewinsky while exonerating and defending Clinton. Noting Lewinsky was "an unlikely object of

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<sup>70</sup> "September 13, 1998," Hannity and Colmes, FOX (New York, NY: September 13, 1998). Retrieved from LexusNexus.

<sup>71</sup> Tackett, "Lewinsky Tells Torrid Story of Love, Hope, and Desire."

<sup>72</sup> Warner, *The Trouble With Normal*, 26-27.

sympathy,” the *Boston Globe* opined, “the president doesn’t come across as a predator, [but] more like a...thoughtless adolescent undone by the sight of a thong.” The piece, entitled “At Last, a Sex Scandal Without a Gender Gap,” went on to rhetorically ask, “Who was the aggressor? Who wanted to trade sex for work?...Who ruined whose life?”<sup>73</sup> Several publications compared the affair to “Fatal Attraction,” a 1987 thriller film in which a man’s mistress becomes increasingly obsessive and ultimately savagely attacks him and his wife, while calling Clinton the “Great Empathizer and National Pain-Feeler,” who “clearly underestimated Lewinsky and misread the woman she was – aggressive... [and] slightly unstable.”<sup>74</sup>

In her 2015 work, *The Agency Line: A Neoliberal Metric for Appraising Young Women’s Sexuality*, Laina Bay-Cheng, a feminist theorist, argued that women’s sexuality continues to be viewed in terms of their responses to male sexual drive, which is presumed to be incessant and irrepressible. Women are expected to act as the non-initiating “gatekeeper” to sexual desire, she argued, and deviations from these norms lead to social sanctions.<sup>75</sup> Just as Camille Nurka theorized regarding popular culture’s near insistence on redirecting blame for male indiscretions to “the irresistible allure of a woman,” so too does Bay-Cheng acknowledge the discrepancies between reactions to male and female sexual autonomy.<sup>76</sup>

One phrase in particular, in various forms, appeared again and again throughout this period: ‘Yes, what the president did was wrong, *but...*’ The expression exemplifies this form of sexist redirection that was abundant throughout coverage of the Starr Report.

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<sup>73</sup> Ellen Goodman, “At last, a sex scandal without a gender gap,” *Boston Globe*, September 20, 1998.

<sup>74</sup> Rosenfeld, et al., “Portrait of Monica.”; “Starr-crossed lovers present adolescent saga,” *Boston Herald*, September 13, 1998.

<sup>75</sup> Bay-Cheng, “The Agency Line,” 281.

<sup>76</sup> Nurka, “Feminine Shame/Masculine Desire,” 317.

While Clinton “tried to resist,” Lewinsky “zealously pursued” him, and was the “initiator of their liaisons.”<sup>77</sup> She was a “cunning manipulator” and “aggressive, needy, besotted and demanding to the point of becoming extortionate.”<sup>78</sup> Lewinsky “[got] things underway by raising her jacket to show him the straps of her thong underwear,” meanwhile, “virtually everything Clinton allegedly did to, with and for Lewinsky... looks... like the actions of a person trying a variety of strategies...to get an increasingly problematic, irrational partner to take the hint and make a quiet exit.”<sup>79</sup> Outlets based their criticisms in the facts presented in Starr’s report and substantiated by Lewinsky, but then expropriated these details to make assessments of Lewinsky’s character dependent on deeply held and collectively moralized definitions of acceptable sex. These expectations though, as is evident in these reactions, were not equally applied, as it was Lewinsky who was expected to be the gatekeeper against naturally incessant male urge. Lewinsky has since actively acknowledged her hand in the consensual affair and publicly expressed regret. She is not, through her own admission, without fault.<sup>80</sup> However, framing her as overly interested, and the sole initiator of the relationship plays on sexist assumptions and ignores the striking power dynamics involved to instead call attention to a woman’s betrayal of sexual norms.

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<sup>77</sup> Walter Shapiro, “Loneliness, licentiousness in Oval Office,” *USA Today*, September 14, 1998. Tackett, “Lewinsky tells torrid story of love, hope, desire.”

<sup>78</sup> Melinda Henneberger, “Lewinsky’s Journey From a Lover to a Danger: The Intern,” *New York Times*, September 15, 1998.; Jill Abramson, “Furtive Encounters, Recalled in Detail by Lewinsky in Grand Jury Testimony,” *New York Times*, September 12, 1998.

<sup>79</sup> Eric Zorn, “In the book of love, Clinton, Lewinsky play familiar roles,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 14, 1998.

<sup>80</sup> NOTE: In Lewinsky’s 2014 essay for *Vanity Fair*, she emphasized the consensual nature of her relationship with the president: “Sure, my boss took advantage of me, but I will always remain firm on this point: it was a consensual relationship. Any “abuse” came in the aftermath, when I was made a scapegoat in order to protect his powerful position.”

Because Lewinsky acted against these prescribed sexual and gender norms, her shame was considered deserved, and, as Nurka argued, her body permanently tainted. Several media outlets alluded to the enduring quality of Lewinsky's shame, but did so in ways that condoned and legitimized this form of judgment. This appeared namely in several outlets' insistence in describing Lewinsky as damaged goods, as any form of image rehabilitation had been "hampered by all that the world [had] come to know about her sex life."<sup>81</sup> A widely circulated Time/CNN poll, for example, revealed, "85% of male respondents would not consider dating Lewinsky," with the *Los Angeles Times* concluding that "her prospects for marriage have been poisoned."<sup>82</sup> The question itself framed female worth as being determined solely by male pleasure, assumed marriage as the pinnacle of female success, and revealed the sexism filtered through mainstream character assessments. It also highlights the ways in which the media criticized so as to suppress variance via public shaming and the assumed social ramifications deemed necessary for women who act out beyond acceptable forms of female sexual expression.

These sentiments are also exemplified in a piece entitled, "Miss Lewinsky: Are You Ready For Your Makeover Now?," published in the *New York Times*, which offered the "three basic options" for "infamous women like Lewinsky:" they can disappear, marry well, or try to stay famous for as long as possible.<sup>83</sup> To accompany this assessment, the article included four cut out paper dolls (shown below) and descriptions of what each of these routes would entail. The first doll gave a look at "quiet respectability," and suggested she "must literally disappear for five years...and then re-emerge seriously." However, the article noted, "Lewinsky's loose lips" will worry potential employers, and

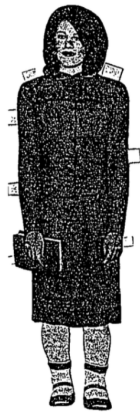
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<sup>81</sup> Geraldine Baum, "For Lewinsky, Silence Could Be Golden," *Los Angeles Times*, September 21, 1998.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> "Miss Lewinsky: Are You Ready For Your Makeover Now?," *New York Times*, September 13, 1998.

she would “have to refrain from flirting.” The second showed “marrying well,” with Lisa Johnson, author of *How to Snare a Millionaire* surmising, “wealthy men will think, ‘Here’s a woman who has Presidential experience, yet she’s willing to settle down with me.’” This option would require Lewinsky actively “husband hunt” at country clubs and charity benefits, but the article speculated, “Monica will make the perfect trophy wife for the next millennium.” The third doll, described “questing for fame,” with OJ Simpson’s former publicist suggesting she try to publish a tell-all book in time for Christmas. The fourth figure showed simply a cartooned Lewinsky in her underwear, exposed and ready for the nation’s shame.<sup>84</sup>



Quiet  
Respectability



Marrying Well



Questing for Fame



### *Conclusion*

“When little was know about [Lewinsky], it was easy to cast the White House intern as the wide-eyed ingénue with a crush,” wrote Ellen O’Brien of the *Boston Globe*,

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.



now however, she is “known for her thong underwear and aggressive sexual attitude.”<sup>85</sup> In other words, Lewinsky was defensible, though few actually came to her defense, until her sexual preferences were made public. Then, considering her “come-ons,” and willingness to perform “oral sex on a man who might not know [her] name,” the public had no choice but to condemn her and her actions.<sup>86</sup> The universality of these sentiments throughout coverage of the Starr Report highlight not only the moralized social consensus as to acceptable sexual acts, but given the ways in which the press sought – often actively – to excuse Clinton’s behavior while condemning Lewinsky, the extreme discrepancy between judgments of male and female sexual expression. Finally, the media’s willingness to portray Lewinsky as irrevocably damaged after having her sex life exposed underlines the ways in which the media simultaneously reflected and advanced the conservatism of the late 1990s, and worked to control the actions of others through the critical shaming of a highly public example.

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<sup>85</sup> Ellen O’Brien, “Women voice wide range of opinion on Lewinsky,” *Boston Globe*, September 17, 1998.

<sup>86</sup> Goodman, “At last, a sex scandal without a gender gap.”

## CHAPTER THREE

*The Tripp Tapes*

“What was left?” wrote Mary Schmich of the *Chicago Tribune*.<sup>87</sup> Almost a year into the sex scandal that gripped the country and ultimately impeached a , the American people had come to know nearly every intimate detail of the Clinton-Lewinsky affair and Lewinsky’s personal and professional lives. “What more could be said or shown to keep this peep show going? Nothing. Nothing but The Voice.”<sup>88</sup>

Days after Lewinsky submitted a sworn affidavit to Paula Jones’ lawyers formally denying ever having had a sexual relationship with Clinton, Pentagon employee Linda Tripp approached Starr with 22 hours worth of secretly taped phone conversations with Lewinsky.<sup>89</sup> Tripp began recording her friend and co-worker after being encouraged to do so by New York literary agent Lucianne Goldberg, whom Tripp had approached about writing a book on “the secrets and lies of the Clinton administration.”<sup>90</sup> Recorded throughout the fall of 1997, the tapes revealed Lewinsky discussing her affair with the president, and seemingly implicated him and close friend Vernon Jordan in subordination of perjury and obstruction of justice.<sup>91</sup> Not included in the Starr Report’s initial release, the audio from Linda Tripp’s secretly recorded conversations with Lewinsky marked the first time the world heard the voice of the president’s former mistress. The tapes’ transcripts were released six weeks prior to the audio, allowing for dual speculation that

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<sup>87</sup> Mary Schmich, “Monica Tape Reveals Much – About Ourselves,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 17, 1998.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Monica in Black and White*.

<sup>90</sup> Elaine Sciolino and Don Van Natta Jr, “Linda Tripp: The Keeper of Secrets,” *Washington Post*, March 15, 1998.; “Does Hearing Monica’s Voice Put a New Spin on the Impeachment Investigation?,” Larry King Live, CNN. (New York, NY: November 17, 1998). Retrieved from LexusNexus.

<sup>91</sup> *Monica in Black and White*.

aimed in practice to discredit Lewinsky and defend Clinton. The transcripts offered a chance to publish an assessment of an off-the-record Lewinsky, while the tapes' audio carried no substantive value and worked only to shame through exposure.

A third goal of naming and shaming according to Rowbottom's theory works toward punitive ends, aimed at punishing those who deviate from socially accepted standards. Publicity itself can work as an informal though incredibly effective and highly visible sanction. The resulting public shame can manifest in the loss of reputation, status, respect, or opportunities, as is certainly the case for Lewinsky, who continues to bear the proverbial scarlet letter and suffer its effects. In this way, publicity, especially that highlighting the moralized wrongdoing of a given individual, works to deter the rest of society from engaging in similar acts, and forms retribution for the 'wrongdoing.' The mere exposure of misconduct, especially on national or international platforms, works as a form of punishment.<sup>92</sup>

This chapter examines media reactions to the release of the Tripp Tapes' transcripts, on October 2, 1998, and audio, on November 17<sup>th</sup>. Both these moments highlight overlapping informative, critical, and punitive goals of naming and shaming, but the audiotapes' release in particular exemplifies exposing as a means of punishment. As the tapes' transcripts had already been released, the audio provided no additional information or any obvious platform for critique, but rather marked the first time Lewinsky's voice had been heard publicly. Reports then came to characterize Lewinsky through a constant replaying of these tapes on television and radio, and 'descriptions' of her voice in print media. An analysis of mainstream reports at this time reveal a particular

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<sup>92</sup> Rowbottom, "To Punish, Inform, and Criticise," 2-3.

emphasis on discrediting Lewinsky and defending Clinton, namely through baseless conjecture over the cadence and diction of “The Voice.”

*In Black and White: The Transcripts*

The partial transcripts from Tripp’s secret recordings of Lewinsky were made public on October 2, 1998, just a few days before the House of Representatives would approve an open-ended impeachment inquiry regarding the actions of President Clinton.<sup>93</sup> Their release marked one of the only times Lewinsky garnered sympathy, as Tripp, who openly disliked Clinton and resented being transferred from the White House to the Pentagon after his election, recorded Lewinsky without her knowledge, and the transcripts revealed the extent of her betrayal and goading.<sup>94</sup> She had helped Lewinsky draft letters and emails to the President that later became evidence, steered conversations toward Clinton and Lewinsky’s sexual relationship, and encouraged Lewinsky not to dry-clean her semen stained blue dress, advising her to instead lock it in a safe deposit box because, “it could be [Lewinsky’s] insurance policy down the road.”<sup>95</sup> Despite this uptick in sympathy however, most media reports continued in their attempts to discredit Lewinsky while defending Clinton.

Several reports focused particularly on the fact Lewinsky had divulged her affair to several close friends, while parsing the text to color easily palatable and entertaining caricatures of otherwise complex women. The *Washington Post*, for example, followed the release of the transcripts with a lengthy column by Tony Kornheiser, a sportswriter whose professional relevance to the story was not addressed. The piece, patronizingly

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<sup>93</sup> *Monica in Black and White*.

<sup>94</sup> Jeff Leen and Gene Weingarten, “Linda’s Trip,” *Washington Post*, March 15, 1998.

<sup>95</sup> “American Experience, Primary Sources: Lewinsky-Tripp Tapes.” PBS.  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/primary-resources/lewin-sky-tripp/>.

entitled “A Coupla Chicks Talking,” not only sensationalized the content – “It’s Monica as you’ve never dared dream” – but also trivialized the emotional range presented by a woman who did not know a confidant was recording her.<sup>96</sup> Kornheiser reduced Lewinsky’s varied reactions to parallel the hackneyed tropes used in popular entertainment: “Monica Lewinsky, biker chick...hopeless romantic...realist...minimalist...super sleuth,” and so on.<sup>97</sup> He paired each label with cherry-picked one-liners from the transcripts to evidence his claims and cast Lewinsky within the bounds of accepted, stereotyped forms of femaleness. “These tapes are what all the fuss is about?” he wrote, “a couple of fat babes yapping?”<sup>98</sup>

Kornheiser went on to question the truthfulness of Paula Jones’ case against Clinton, which I’ve included to underline the prevalence of sexual and gender shaming in public discourse surrounding the Clinton scandal. Relying on acknowledged and pervasive tools of silencing, Kornheiser expressed his “outrage at the notion that anyone would think the president’s...offer to pay [Jones] \$700,000 would in any way imply that he was guilty of any wrongdoing.”<sup>99</sup> Though Kornheiser was neither present at the time of the alleged harassment, nor did he have any personal connections to the case, he included his own interpretation of the events as consisting of “only a couple of words and a physical gesture indicating Mr. Clinton’s pants were constricting.”<sup>100</sup> It should be noted that Jones formally alleged then-Governor Clinton exposed himself to her, and those “couple of words” consisted of Clinton’s insistence that she “kiss it,” and, following her

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<sup>96</sup> Tony Kornheiser, “A Coupla Chicks Talking,” *Washington Post*, October 4, 1998.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

refusal, references to her then-boss.<sup>101</sup> “When Mr. Clinton referred to [my boss, head of Arkansas Industrial Development Commission,] Dave Harrington,” Jones wrote in an official declaration in March 1998, “I understood that he was telling me that he had control over Mr. Harrington and over my job, and that he was willing to use that power.”<sup>102</sup>

In 1992, in reaction to Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas’ confirmation in the aftermath of sexual harassment accusations and formal testimony by attorney and academic Anita Hill, Rebecca Walker, noted feminist writer and organizer, published in *Ms. Magazine* a now widely cited essay entitled, “Becoming the Third Wave.” Here she argued, “The [confirmation] hearings were not about determining whether or not Clarence Thomas did in fact harass Anita Hill. They were about checking and redefining the extent of women’s credibility and power.”<sup>103</sup> Kornheiser’s framing and assertions regarding both Lewinsky and Jones echo this sentiment. He exemplified Walker’s assertion that government and mass media, born from a social “structure predicated upon the subjugation of [the female] gender,” frame women as less trustworthy than men, their voices and experiences not as important, especially when they might infringe upon a man – in this case President Clinton – and his voice, experiences, and considerable power.<sup>104</sup>

By casting Lewinsky in gendered clichés and dismissing the substance of the arguably illegally recorded audiotapes, Kornheiser undermined Lewinsky’s credibility and maturity while reducing her experience to nothing more than “girl talk.” In terms of his reflection on Jones, not only would the version of events Kornheiser surmised fall

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<sup>101</sup> Paula Jones, "Declaration of Paula Jones." *Washington Post*. March 13, 1998.  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/special/pjones/docs/jonesdec031398.htm>.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> Rebecca Walker, "Becoming the Third Wave." *Ms. Magazine*, January 2, 1992.

<sup>104</sup> Walker, "Becoming the Third Wave."

well within the range of sexual harassment in the workplace, especially considering the power dynamics involved, but in dismissing Jones, or as he calls her, the “big-haired honey,” he proudly defends a man accused of harassment (by multiple women on multiple occasions] based on no tangible reasoning.<sup>105</sup> Walker wrote, “If Thomas had not been confirmed, every man in the United States would be at risk. For how many senators never told a sexist joke – How many men have not used their protected male privilege to thwart...the influence...of a woman colleague, friend, or relative?”<sup>106</sup> Kornheiser’s careful stereotyping of Lewinsky and baseless assessment of the Jones case, in consideration of Walker’s contention, worked to discursively restrict the boundaries of women’s public credibility. As Walker posed, it “sends a clear message to women: ‘Shut up! Even if you speak, we will not listen.’”<sup>107</sup>

CNN talk show *Larry King Live*, dedicated its entire October 2<sup>nd</sup> program to a discussion of the transcripts with a panel comprised of journalist Wolf Blitzer, who was filling in for host Larry King, Senate Judiciary Committee member and then-Senator Joe Biden, Republican strategist Ed Rollins, and writer Jonah Goldberg, son of Tripp’s encouraging literary agent Lucianne Goldberg, among others. The participants on the exclusively male panel each gave his take on the transcripts, while also noting on-going developments in the upcoming impeachment trial. Goldberg, whose personal connection to the tapes’ existence went largely unacknowledged, compared Lewinsky to an “unpopular high school girl,” reducing Lewinsky’s reflection of her affair with the president to nothing more than a “sophomore complaining that the captain of the football

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<sup>105</sup> Kornheiser, “A Coupla Chicks Talking.”

<sup>106</sup> “Becoming the Third Wave.”

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

team [emotionally] abused her.”<sup>108</sup> Again, this framing parallels both Walker’s reading of the Thomas confirmation hearings and Warner’s theorizing of moralist shame as a means of cultural control.

Firstly, in casting Lewinsky as a culturally stereotyped teen girl ‘obsessed’ over a man who is uninterested, with no basis for these critiques other than the gendered assumptions on which his opinions relied, Goldberg publicly infantilized Lewinsky’s image, undermining the validity of her experience and claims. Considering his comments more broadly, Goldberg moralized Lewinsky’s sexual exploits to make notes on her character and embraced Monica’s “identity” – based solely upon excerpts from the Tripp Tapes and Starr Report – as being universally disliked, necessitating aversion to these qualities. He then shamed and infantilized this identity, publicly discouraging variance from normative practices. This brand of pseudo-morality, Warner posed, is controlling and the “opposite of an ethical respect for the autonomy of others.”<sup>109</sup> It is moralism masked as morality that works to say, in effect, ‘This is what happens to women who like sex, enjoy specific demonized sex acts, or speak about their perverse sexual preferences in anyway; You will be shamed so that others may not be like you.’

Later in the episode, when asked about Clinton’s abilities to maintain such high poll numbers in the midst of the scandal, Rollins, a Republican, instead questioned the president’s judgment as, “this woman is clearly an idiot...[who] should not have had any business in the White House as [even] an intern...let alone be allowed in the Oval Office threatening the president in a sexual type thing.”<sup>110</sup> Rollins also noted Clinton must have

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<sup>108</sup>“Newly Released Starr Material Blurs Impeachment Picture.” Larry King Live, CNN. (New York, NY: October 2, 1998). Retrieved from LexisNexis.

<sup>109</sup> Warner, *The Trouble with Normal*, 4.

<sup>110</sup> “Newly Released Starr Material Blurs Impeachment Picture.”



realized “fairly quickly that [Lewinsky] wasn’t sane.”<sup>111</sup> This critique of the transcripts points to a number of salient details, including a republican initiative to portray Clinton in a particular light – in this case as unable to control himself against a stupid, sex obsessed intern. Rollins’ assessment relied on gendered ideology to frame the affair as Lewinsky’s fault.

Cultural anthropologist Gayle Rubin argued modern society collectively judges sex acts according to a “hierarchical system of sexual value,” which often serves no purpose other than to “prevent sexual variance,” and, as women are judged much more harshly according to this scale, to define and police the boundaries of acceptable forms of female sexual expression.<sup>112</sup> She theorized popular culture “is permeated with ideas that erotic variety is dangerous... and a menace to everything from small children to national security.”<sup>113</sup> Mass media then encourages these stringent attitudes with “relentless propaganda,” as was famously the case with the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal, which saturated all forms of media for over a year.<sup>114</sup>

As noted, of the twelve “damned” sexual behaviors and characteristics included in Rubin’s sexual value system, Lewinsky met nine: unmarried, promiscuous, non procreative, commercial, casual, cross-generational, in public, with manufactured objects, and sadomasochistic.<sup>115</sup> Because Lewinsky fell outside of the narrowly defined vision of acceptable sexual expression – and in these private conversations was unapologetic about her sexuality – she became a threatening figure. As a mistress she was threatening to the family structure, of which the first family represents the American ideal; as an

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Rubin, “Thinking Sex,” 11.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. 12.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. 13.

unapologetically and aggressively sexual woman, she tempted the president and thus endangered the country. Accordingly, Lewinsky was painted as idiotic, insane, and somehow still cunning enough to pressure the president into a “sexual type thing.”<sup>116</sup> While Lewinsky was exposed and shamed, however, Clinton was not disparaged for his sexuality or participation in these “bad sexual acts, but rather for his seeming inability to detect and resist the manipulation of a woman of debatable morals.

*The Voice That Launched A Thousand Jokes: The Audio*

The House Judiciary Committee released the 22 hours worth of audio to the public on November 17, 1998, almost exactly eleven months after the story broke in January.<sup>117</sup> The audio filled the airwaves, with several news stations including Fox, CNN, and MSNBC going virtually wall-to-wall in broadcasting the tapes, embracing the punitive goal of exposing a perceived wrong as a means of shaming.<sup>118</sup> As the *Washington Post* noted, “the substantive value [of the audio] was close to zero, while the entertainment value was off the charts.”<sup>119</sup> Because the tapes’ transcripts had already been released and thoroughly reported and debated, the audiotapes were only significant in that they marked the first time the public heard Lewinsky’s voice, and thus were able to note changes in inflection and emphasis in ways the printed transcripts did not allow. Characterizations of Lewinsky based on her voice tended to remain within the boundaries of the common Madonna/whore framework, painting her in broad strokes as both a “sex

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<sup>116</sup> “Newly Released Starr Material Blurs Impeachment Picture.”

<sup>117</sup> *Monica in Black and White*.

<sup>118</sup> Howard Kurtz, “Public Access Channels: The Tripp Tapes Aren’t News, But They Sure Are Juicy,” *Washington Post*, November 18, 1998.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

kitten,” as well as a pathetic “Mousketeer,” and reveal the trickle down effect of her sexual shaming.<sup>120</sup>

In the *Wall Street Journal*, reporter Dorothy Rabinowitz relied heavily on gendered assumptions to paint Lewinsky as not only obsessive, but naïve and pathetic. Drawing only from assumptions based on her voice, the piece referred to Lewinsky’s “anguished longing” for her “evasive lover,” and her “tortured ruminations” on their relationship.<sup>121</sup> Quotations were purposefully chosen and positioned to exemplify Lewinsky’s supposed naiveté and ignorance: she “can’t get a call because ‘he’s got crap with Iraq;” he “can’t even call the next night because he’s going to the Kennedy Center for ‘the opening of the new something.’”<sup>122</sup> In describing Lewinsky’s voice after hearing from Clinton, Rabinowitz wrote that she sounded “like a woman restored to life,” very clearly playing on sexist beliefs that women exist only in relation to the men with whom they are partnered.<sup>123</sup> She described Lewinsky’s alleged frustrations when conversation veered away from “the only subject that matters” and contended, “needless to say...[Lewinsky is disinterested] in broadening [her] knowledge base about the UN.”<sup>124</sup> The piece was deliberately condescending and – again in the vein of Walker’s essay on the Clarence-Hill accusations – reliant on gendered stereotypes to disparage Lewinsky, her credibility, and actions, while excusing both Clinton and Tripp, even calling Tripp’s betrayal “clearly [the result of being] caught up in Monica’s passion.”<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Timothy J Burger, “Monica Finally Gets Voice, Tripp Tape Audio Released Today,” *New York Daily News*, November 17, 1998.; John Kass, “A Presidential Temptress Who Sounds Anything But,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 18, 1998.

<sup>121</sup> Dorothy Rabinowitz, “The Phone Tapes,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 20, 1998.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

The audio, much of the press asserted, proved Lewinsky a “neurotic, babbling nitwit,” an “innane, immature, obsessive dope” whose “kinky fling with Clinton could cost him his job.”<sup>126</sup> Many described her “valley girl-isms,” with John Kass of the *Chicago Tribune* expressing his disappointment at her “childish...squeaky” voice.<sup>127</sup> “Listening to Monica talk was bothersome,...aggravating,... [and] depressing,” he wrote. “I expected something...that might help us understand. I expected...a young woman with maximum throaty charm...something that would justify at least the initial hungry impulse that led [Clinton] to danger.”<sup>128</sup> Kass’ framing of the “new celebrity seductress,” again casts blame on Lewinsky for seducing the President – not Clinton for engaging – while also discursively restricting acceptable expressions of sexuality.<sup>129</sup> The “pipes behind the pout” did not reflect a “real” woman.<sup>130</sup>

The tapes also help reveal the persistence of sexual shaming, and the ways in which that shame became justified to make broader assertions regarding personality and character. Discussions of the tapes’ audio focused not on content but the cadence, tone, and clarity of Lewinsky’s voice. Across platforms, specific references to her sexual relationship with the president were kept to a minimum; America had already read about it. To step back from the audiotapes then, and consider their release in relation to the overall dynamics of the media circus surrounding the affair and impeachment proceedings, is to understand the depth and scope of Lewinsky’s shaming. November marked eleven months since news of the scandal had broken, four months since

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<sup>126</sup> Steve Dunleavy, “I’m Fed Up With All These Scoundrels,” *New York Post*, November 18, 1998.; Vincent Morris and Brian Blomquist, “Hear At Last: The Monica Linda Tapes,” *New York Post*, November 18, 1998.

<sup>127</sup> Kass, “A Presidential Temptress Who Sounds Anything But.”

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

Lewinsky surrendered her semen-stained blue dress, and three months since Clinton's long awaited admission of guilt. Any civilian analyses of Lewinsky's personality and state of mind were established on the already accepted premise that Lewinsky was a slut, and thus deserving of further shame.

Though the formal definition of "slut" is temporal and subjective, in building off Rubin's categorizations of the hierarchy of sexual practices, and Warner's assertion that "sluts...and other lowlives" occupy the "bottom of the scale of respectability," the term largely targets women who have sex freely, often, outside of marriage, and/or beyond the acceptable forms of female expression, and particularly those women who make no apologies for their sex lives.<sup>131</sup> As a slut, under the guises of cultural moralist ethics as laid out by Warner, Lewinsky was considered beyond the scope of public respectability and thus her sexual shaming was validated, normalized, and overlooked. Sluts, this thinking goes, are deserving of shame. Thus any subsequent shaming of her character rested on an implicit acceptance of Lewinsky as a slut who was deserving of public criticism. While the reporting of the Tripp tapes' audio largely did not address her sexual exploits specifically, the public's willingness to instead focus on a denigration and stereotyping of her personal character evidences the sexual shame on which these critiques are predicated. In other words, Lewinsky's character could not have been scrutinized and shamed in this way had she not already been publicly categorized as a slut, and her shaming already accepted and normalized. This makes any large-scale shaming of her character a corollary of her sexual shaming, and thus another tool in defining the acceptable limits of female behavior and bodily autonomy.

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<sup>131</sup> Rubin, "Thinking Sex," 12-14.; Warner, *The Trouble with Normal*, ix.

### *Conclusion*

National reporting and discussions of the release of the Tripp tapes served as foundations for largely gender-based critiques of Lewinsky, in which several common themes appear. There emerged conflicting representations of Lewinsky as she was presented as both a pathetic victim of Linda Tripp's betrayal as well as a "sadistic" slut – an oversexed rebel, wild in her sexuality and hell bent on promiscuity.<sup>132</sup> The latter representation speaks to the cultural conservatism of the late-1990s that allowed for public slut shaming under the unspoken collective understanding of acceptable forms of sexual conduct as put forth by Rubin's "hierarchies of sex."<sup>133</sup> Taken together, these constructions point to a cultural history of monitoring women's self-actualization, and discrediting those women that threaten the power of respected men.

Another common theme is defined by the seemingly active refusal across journalistic platforms to contextualize the tapes. Few reports on the contents the Tripp tapes properly emphasized the fact that they were recorded – arguably illegally – without Lewinsky's knowledge and during conversations with a woman she considered a motherly figure. Quotations were cherry-picked to suit the needs of media outlets targeted at specific audiences, be it to sensationalize the content, to manipulate renderings of Lewinsky for comedic effect, or to be easily understood and ripened for slut-shaming. These portrayals depended on pure speculation over Lewinsky's word choice, conversational style, and cadence, and typically relied on longstanding sexist assumptions persistent in the mainstream culture of the late-1990s.

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<sup>132</sup> Lars-Erik Nelson, "Sad, Helpless Monica Shows Sadistic Streak," *New York Daily News*, October 3, 1998.

<sup>133</sup> Rubin, "Thinking Sex," 12-14.; Warner, *The Trouble with Normal*, 17-33.

## CONCLUSION

In 2015, British journalist Jon Ronson published a book about the manifestation of public shaming as a social media phenomenon, entitled *So You've Been Publicly Shamed*. In researching for the book, Ronson met with several individuals who had experienced internet shaming, including Lindsey Stone (who gained overnight notoriety in 2012 after posting a photo of herself mocking a sign at Arlington National Cemetery, and was later fired from her job) and Justine Sacco (a woman with 170 followers who tweeted a racially insensitive joke before boarding a plane to South Africa in late 2013, and landed 11 hours later to news that she'd lost her job and was the number one topic on twitter).<sup>134</sup> Though the book doesn't discuss sexual shaming specifically, Ronson underlined the prevalence of public shaming in the age of the internet. In April of 2016, Ronson sat down for *Vanity Fair* with Monica Lewinsky, who is now an activist against cyber bullying and online harassment, to discuss shaming on social media. During the interview, he noted "a weird sort of dissonance...that we want to destroy Monica Lewinsky, but not feel bad about it. So what we do is come up with some words to dehumanize the victim of the shaming."<sup>135</sup>

Over the course of 1998, Lewinsky was branded a slut and a stalker, and framed as any number of other female stereotypes. The media overwhelmingly attacked Lewinsky's character, while defending Clinton, and casted her as solely responsible for the consensual affair, despite the warped power dynamics of the relationship and the fact

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<sup>134</sup> Jon Ronson, "'Overnight, everything I loved was gone:' The Internet Shaming of Lindsey Stone," *The Guardian*, February 15, 2012; Choire Sicha, "Sunday Book Review: Jon Ronson's 'So You've Been Publicly Shamed,'" *New York Times*, April 17, 2015.

<sup>135</sup> "Monica Lewinsky and Jon Ronson on How Social-Media Shaming Turns Us All into Bullies." *Vanity Fair*. April 17, 2016. Accessed April 17, 2016. <http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2015/03/monica-lewinsky-jon-ronson-social-media-shaming>.

Clinton was a married father and President of the United States. The public's reactions reflect a long history of monitoring women's self-actualization and sexual autonomy, acknowledging women as only occupying one prescribed social function instead of allowing for the realities of nuanced individualism. Such strict discursive control was not applied to Clinton, who was allowed at any one time to be the president, a sexual being, an adulterer, a scholar, a loving father, and even a feminist, while still largely maintaining the respect and approval of the American people.

In Lewinsky's now-famous TED Talk, calling herself "patient zero of losing a personal reputation on a global scale almost instantaneously," she remarked, "there is a very personal price to public humiliation, and the growth of the internet has jacked up that price."<sup>136</sup> In 2016, writer Nancy Jo Sales published a book entitled *American Girls: Social Media and the Secret Lives of Teenagers*, wherein she interviewed young women from across the United States about the proliferation of sexism as it's filtered into social media and other online platforms. She argued social media has led to not only a hypersexualized culture, but normalized widespread slut-shaming and clouded the gravity of online harassment, the overwhelming majority of which continues to target young women. High schools now report "sexting rings," in which teens' nude photographs are circulated among the student body, with or without the subject's consent.<sup>137</sup> Even services that claim to be confidential, like Snapchat and Apple's iCloud, have come under attack

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<sup>136</sup> Monica Lewinsky, "Monica Lewinsky: The Price of Shame."

<sup>137</sup> Nancy Jo Sales, "How Social Media is Disrupting the Lives of Teenagers," *TIME Magazine*, February 13, 2016.; Nancy Jo Sales, *American Girls: Social Media and the Secret Lives of Teenagers*. (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Penguin Random House, 2016).



as groups continue to manage to hack the applications and leak hundreds of thousands of personal images, messages, and information to the world wide web forever.<sup>138</sup>

In some ways, public humiliation mirroring Lewinsky's continues on a daily basis at varying scales. In other ways, however, her shaming marks the particular convergence of a news culture struggling to adapt to the digital age, the conservatism of the late-1990s, a Republican initiative, a confidant's betrayal, and the specific personal histories of two very complex people. In 1998, few mainstream news sources actively acknowledged Clinton as a man accused of sexually harassing multiple women with a long history of extra-marital affairs in contextualizing assessments of the relationship and critiques of Lewinsky's personhood and sexuality. While Lewinsky was very often shamed for acting outside the bounds of accepted sexual expression, such critiques on Clinton's exposed sexual practices, though far more salient as he was an elected official and public figure, were ignored. These reactions evidence my claim that the widespread shaming of Monica Lewinsky was not just a tool in publicly defining acceptable sexual expression, but in policing and controlling the sexual and bodily autonomy of women. Her continued shaming, I believe, reflects the persistence of public sexual shaming and moralist judgments.

As online culture has evolved since the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal, more perspectives, voices, and opinions – shaming or supportive – have opportunity for attention. While Lewinsky's shaming persists, the internet has also created new spaces for feminist defense and perspective. Accordingly, her ability to simultaneously re-

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<sup>138</sup> Monica Lewinsky, "Monica Lewinsky: The Price of Shame."

emerge in recent years as a respected public speaker and activist indicates the growing flexibility in the way mainstream media has evolved as a result of the internet.

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