

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: MONICA AND STORMY – AN ANALYSIS OF MEDIA PORTRAYALS OF THE LEADING WOMEN IN THE TRUMP AND CLINTON SEX SCANDALS

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Women played key roles in the scandals of William J. Clinton and Donald J. Trump, especially Monica Lewinsky and Stormy Daniels. In the cases of both men, their reputations as womanizers preceded their presidencies and lasted throughout. Clinton was impeached as an outgrowth of lying about sex; Trump's extramarital affairs dogged him during his presidency, became the subject of ongoing lawsuits against him, but never made it into his impeachment proceedings. The news media played a significant role in bringing the stories of the presidents and their women to the public and shaping how the two presidents were perceived by voters. Those portrayals varied greatly, with the women of the Clinton era facing media derision over their bodies, psychological makeup and motives while the Trump women's bodies were mostly left undescribed, and their stories taken as truth. This thesis argues that the differing press treatment of those women was influenced by the presidents' reactions to the allegations, a mob mentality, more women in media and media management, changes in sexual norms that

culminated in the “#MeToo”¹ movement, and the explosion of the internet and social media.

Comparing how the media behaved during the two scandals is an instructive tale for journalists in reporting on future political sex scandals.

¹ Felsenthal, Edward, “The Silence Breakers -- Persons of the Year,” *Time*, <https://time.com/time-person-of-the-year-2017-silence-breakers-choice/>

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LEADING WOMEN IN THE TRUMP AND CLINTON SEX SCANDALS

“I’m not bad, I’m just drawn that way.” --

Jessica Rabbit in “Who Framed Roger Rabbit”

By

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INTRODUCTION

Who were the two leading women in the sex scandals involving former Presidents William J. Clinton and Donald J. Trump? What were the women like? What were their motives? Were they schemers? Pawns? Vixens? Innocents? Were they slutty or savvy?

Answering those questions was the job of the media in both scandals.

Media coverage of the two scandals differed not just in tone but in quantity: there was less coverage of Trump's sex scandals than Clinton's. The reasons were numerous. For one, Clinton's reaction was to hide, obfuscate and deny, forcing the media to dig more deeply for information. Trump bragged and boisterously divulged details (though many proved untrue). Clinton's aides also denied the charges and disparaged the women, painting them as hussies or worse. Trump's associates basically shrugged and let Trump answer the questions. Trump played up their professional sides. Clinton aide James Carville was more outspoken than other Clinton aides, but the sentiment was the same. Carville painted the women as trailer trash, trolling for money. Trump, on the other hand, suggested that one of the women, Jean Carroll, was "not my type," implying she was too plain to be attractive to him. But he painted Carroll as a professional when he accused her of "trying to get publicity for a book." As for Stormy Daniels, the porn movie producer and star who alleged sex with Trump, Trump let it be known that when the two met they discussed the business of pornographic movies and a possible appearance on his show "The Apprentice," again playing to her professional side.

The "#MeToo" movement of women coming forward about their experiences with inappropriate actions by men, which came between the two scandals, also influenced coverage

of the Trump and Clinton women. The Clinton coverage belittled White House intern Monica Lewinsky as crazy and infatuated, in part reflecting the Clinton White House staff portrayals of her. The Trump women like Stormy Daniels, on the other hand, were shown to be more successful and savvy.

In addition, Trump's other scandals, including alleged financial misconduct, his numerous bankruptcies, his two splashy divorces, his repeated exaggerations and lying about his businesses, his attempts to obstruct a federal investigation of his campaign's ties to Russia, the alleged attempt at extortion of Ukrainian leaders, and his other public offensiveness, diluted press and public outrage at his philandering.

Clinton's other alleged misconduct, including the Whitewater land deal that ultimately led prosecutors to accuse Paula Jones and Lewinsky but never led to proof of wrongdoing, paled in comparison. The media had less to work with. That made the revelations about Lewinsky more outrageous by comparison.

This paper evaluates how the women were portrayed by the mainstream U.S. news media, and to the extent possible, why those portrayals were drawn as they were.

BACKGROUND

Allegations of womanizing, sexual harassment and even sexual assault dogged Bill Clinton during the entirety of his public life.

Among the splashiest of the alleged sexual affairs was Gennifer Flowers' allegation during the 1992 Clinton presidential campaign that the two had had a 12-year consensual affair, from 1977-1989, mostly during the time when Clinton was governor of Arkansas. At a chaotic press conference while Clinton was campaigning in New Hampshire, Flowers publicly brought to the fore the whispers about Clinton and affairs that reporters had heard for years.²

Another allegation came from an old high school friend of Clinton's, Dolly Kyle Browning, who declared in a sworn statement in 1998 that she had had a 22-year on-and-off affair with Clinton.³ That statement came as part of the long legal battle over accusations by Paula Jones, an Arkansas state employee, that Clinton had made unwanted sexual advances to her in 1991. The Jones case was eventually settled.⁴

Juanita Broaddrick, a nursing home administrator, accused Clinton of raping her in a *Dateline NBC* interview with her in 1999.⁵ No charges were filed.

² Von Drehle, David, "CLINTON ACCUSER DEFENDS STORY, PLAYS TAPES," *Washington Post*, Jan. 28, 1992 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1992/01/28/clinton-accuser-defends-story-plays-tapes/cae8bfd9-88dd-404b-8616-089bb1477dab/>

³ Declaration of Dolly Kyle Browning, *Washington Post*, March 13, 1998 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/special/pjones/docs/browning031398.htm>

⁴ Baker, Peter, "Clinton Settles Paula Jones Lawsuit for \$850,000," *Washington Post*, Nov. 14, 1998 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/special/clinton/stories/jones111498.htm>

⁵ Myers, Lisa, NBC, "Dateline NBC," Feb. 24, 1999, <https://www.mrctv.org/videos/full-dateline-nbc-juanita-broaddrick-bill-clinton-rape-her>

And Kathleen Willey, a former White House aide, said Clinton groped her in his office in 1993, on the same day when her husband, facing embezzlement charges, died in an apparent suicide. An independent prosecutor said there was “insufficient evidence” to pursue the Willey alleged groping case.⁶

All but the Willey incident occurred before 1995, when Monica Lewinsky, then 21, came to the White House as an unpaid intern. According to Lewinsky, her sexual relationship with Clinton began in November of that year. By 1997, Lewinsky had been transferred out of the White House to the Pentagon, where she was befriended by Linda Tripp, a fellow Defense Department employee. Tripp recorded Lewinsky’s purported confessions of the affair. In December 1997, Lewinsky was subpoenaed by lawyers for Paula Jones’ sexual assault case, tying the two scandals together.

The press began to get hold of the story by January 1998.

The first traditional journalist to unearth the story was Michael Isikoff, then a reporter for *Newsweek*. In a way that seems so dated in today’s era of instant internet news, Isikoff was beaten on his own scoop, as *Newsweek* editors hesitated over whether he had enough information about Lewinsky and Bill Clinton’s affair to go to print. Meanwhile, the internet publication *The Drudge Report*, founded by Matt Drudge, had no such inhibitions, and reported that *Newsweek*’s Isikoff had the story, but the editors had killed it.⁷

The *Drudge Report* provides an early example of the power of the internet that would be far more influential in the Trump scandals years later. But here, Drudge – whose website looked

⁶ Final Report of the Independent Counsel on Monica Lewinsky, *Government Accountability Office*
<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/GPO-ICREPORT-LEWINSKY/pdf/GPO-ICREPORT-LEWINSKY-12.pdf>

⁷ Original Drudge Reports of Monica Lewinsky Scandal, Jan 17, 1998, *Australian Politics*,
<https://australianpolitics.com/1998/01/17/original-drudge-reports-lewinsky-scandal.html>

like a news site and included aggregation of traditional news media webpages – took pains to explain that he was not a news reporter, nor was his site a journalism site, and that provided an excuse not to adhere to journalistic principles. The stance that they were not journalism would pervade many independent internet sites in later years.

“What the internet lets you do is, anyone can participate,” Drudge said. “And if you’ve got the hottest scoop, you can compete with the big boys.”⁸

Other news organizations reported on the alleged sexual relationship, and the story exploded from there.

Trump’s reputation as a womanizer prior to his seeking the presidency, unlike Clinton’s, was very, very public. Part of his carefully cultivated public image was that he was attractive to women, including, but not limited to, his three wives — Ivana, Marla, and Melania.

He made it a practice to appear at beauty pageants and trendy New York bars, clubs and restaurants, usually accompanied by at least one woman. He boasted of his sexual prowess on Howard Stern’s raunchy radio talk show. And he cultivated the outrageous: saying at one time that his daughter was “voluptuous,” and agreeing with Stern in 2006 that she was “a piece of ass.”⁹

*Business Insider*¹⁰ compiled a list of 26 women who said Trump harassed or assaulted them, beginning in the 1970s.

⁸ Entertainment Tonight “Matt Drudge Flashback Rare Interviews on Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky. Sept. 25, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dW9lQRTF-7E>

⁹ Kaczynski, Andrew, Chris Massie, Nate McDermott, “Donald Trump to Howard Stern: It’s okay to call my daughter a ‘piece of ass,’” CNN, Oct. 9, 2016, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/10/08/politics/trump-on-howard-stern/index.html>

¹⁰ Reiman, Eliza, “The 26 Women Who Have Accused Trump of Misconduct, *Business Insider*, Sept. 17, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/women-accused-trump-sexual-misconduct-list-2017-12?IR=C>
<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/list-trumps-accusers-allegations-sexual-misconduct/story?id=51956410>

Jessica Leeds told the *New York Times* in 2016, while Trump was running for president, that Trump reached up her skirt and groped her breasts on an airplane in the 1970s. She recalled that Trump used his hands “like an octopus,” leading her to change her seat to one in the back of the plane to escape.¹¹

Rachel Crooks said in 2016, when Trump was running for president, that in 2005 he kissed her directly on the mouth when she introduced herself to him in New York’s Trump Tower when she worked there as a receptionist. She didn’t tell anyone but her sister, and said she believed she would lose her job if she told anyone else at the company.¹²

E. Jean Carroll, a former advice columnist for *Elle* magazine, told perhaps one of the most lurid stories about Trump, alleging that he pushed her up against the wall of a dressing room in New York’s Bergdorf Goodman department store in the mid-1990s and put his mouth up against her lips. Then, she said, even though he was fully clothed, he opened his zipper and accosted her under her skirt with his fingers and penis. She called it “a colossal struggle,” in her book *What Do We Need Men For? A Modest Proposal*.¹³

And *Playboy* centerfold model Karen McDougal, the 1998 Playmate of the Year, was paid \$150,000 by the company that owns the *National Enquirer* for her story of an affair that she said she had with Trump in 2006, after she and other *Playboy* models appeared on Trump’s TV show, *The Apprentice*. But the *Enquirer*, edited by backers of Trump, didn’t publish it.¹⁴

¹¹ Twohey, Megan and Michael Barbaro, “Two Women Say Donald Trump Touched Them Inappropriately,” *New York Times*, Oct. 12, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/13/us/politics/donald-trump-women.html>

¹² Ibid

¹³ Carroll, E. Jean, “What Do We Need Men For? A Modest Proposal,” 2019, St. Martin’s Publishing Group. Excerpted in “The Cut,” June 21, 2019. <https://www.thecut.com/2019/06/donald-trump-assault-e-jean-carroll-other-hideous-men.html>

¹⁴ Palazzolo, Joe, Michael Rothfeld and Lukas I. Alpert, “National Enquirer Shielded Donald Trump From Playboy Model’s Affair Allegation,” *Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 4, 2016, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/national-enquirer-shielded-donald-trump-from-playboy-models-affair-allegation-1478309380>

In the most notorious of the encounters, Trump and pornographic film star Stormy Daniels (real name Stephanie Clifford) were alleged to have had a sexual affair at a celebrity golf tournament in 2006 near Lake Tahoe, while he was married to Melania Trump. In 2016, when Trump was contemplating running for president, a lawyer arranged for a \$130,000 payment to Daniels for her silence about the alleged sexual tryst,¹⁵ which set off a firestorm of investigations and legal maneuvers.

While Trump denied some of the affairs, particularly after he started running for president, he flaunted his reputation as a womanizer, including the headline “Best Sex I Ever Had” attributed to his second wife, Marla Maples, on the cover of the New York Post in the 1990. Like so many of his stories, that was most likely a fabrication.¹⁶

The famous “*Access Hollywood*” videotape surfaced in October 2016, when the *Washington Post* reported that in 2005, Trump had had a lewd conversation with television personality Billy Bush on their way to film an episode of “Access Hollywood,” a popular TV show about the movie industry and its stars. The taped conversation recorded Trump talking about his advance toward a married woman. He talked about how he would do such a thing. “I don't even wait. And when you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything. ... Grab 'em by the pussy. You can do anything.”¹⁷ The story broke before the second presidential debate between Trump and Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton.

In general, women in the Clinton scandals were portrayed negatively--as sluts or “trailer trash” to paraphrase Clinton advisor Carville, or, in the case of White House intern Lewinsky, as

¹⁵ Rothfeld, Michael and Joe Palazzolo, “Trump Lawyer Arranged \$130,000 Payment for Adult-Film Star's Silence,” *Wall St. Journal*, Jan. 12, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/trump-lawyer-arranged-130-000-payment-for-adult-film-stars-silence-1515787678>

¹⁶ Brooke, Jill, “The Real Story Behind Donald Trump's Infamous “Best Sex I've Ever Had” Headline (Guest Column, *Hollywood Reporter*, April 12, 2018 <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-features/i-wrote-donald-trumps-infamous-best-sex-i-ever-had-story-guest-column-1101246/>

¹⁷ “Transcript: Donald Trump's Taped Comments About Women”. *New York Times*. October 8, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/08/us/donald-trump-tape-transcript.html>

something of a batty, insecure neophyte. Not so the Trump women. Even Stormy Daniels, whose job as a porn film star could be seen as the definition of “slutty,” comes off as wiser and cannier, notably getting Trump to pay her off to avoid having her talk about their tryst or take legal action. Mostly, she was given the benefit of the doubt; her veracity and her story believed by the press.

The duality in the portrayals was not solely the province of the media; society had changed as well between the late 1990s and the mid-to-late-2010s. The “#MeToo” movement, which exploded after Hollywood film producer Harvey Weinstein was convicted of sexual assault and other sex charges in 2017, sparked an outpouring of women who reported being harassed and assaulted by men, sometimes years after the fact, and resulted in a notable change in how sexual harassment was perceived. Before the movement, much of the harassment was laughed off, even by women. After the movement, such accusations were taken far more seriously. Clinton’s alleged harassment of women fell before the #MeToo era; Trump’s came afterward.

During the same period, women began to rise in mainstream media. During the time of the Clinton scandals, women made up less than a quarter of top management positions in the news media, and only a third of those were in any sort of leadership role, according to the 1997-1998 Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media by the International Women’s Media Foundation.¹⁸ By 2018, at about the time of the Trump women’s revelations, women made up more than a third of newsroom employees (41.2 percent) while among newsroom managers, 41.8 percent were women, according to the News Leaders Association (formerly ASNE).¹⁹ That fact may have influenced the media’s treatment of the women more as professionals and less as unsubstantial bimbos.

¹⁸ “Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media,” International Women’s Media Foundation, <https://www.iwmf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/IWMF-Global-Report.pdf>

¹⁹ 2018 Newsroom Diversity Study, News Leaders Association <https://members.newsleaders.org/diversity-survey-2018>

The explosion of social media also made a difference in coverage. Social media platforms allowed information to be disseminated quickly and widely without conventional research and vetting by legacy media outlets. The portraits of the women that emerged on social media were often caricatures. There was no “first, get it right” edict on social media, and that allowed lies and disinformation to flourish long ahead of the truth, which sometimes never caught up.

The mainstream media was far more restrained than the ungoverned social media in the coverage of Trump’s women. While mainstream media held back in shaming of the Trump women, Trump himself put no restraint on his social media, particularly Twitter, in calling out women for their appearances, including labeling Stormy Daniels “horseface.” That description, and many others, rocketed around the social media universe and onto late night television.²⁰

The social media platforms posts drove the conversation about Trump’s sex scandals as much or more than the mainstream media. They also allowed the principals -- Trump more than anyone -- to reach over the heads of the media directly to his supporters to make his (often inaccurate and demeaning) points.

It’s fair to say that the news media amplified and reaffirmed the social mores of the two scandals. And to some extent journalists set the tone, while reflecting the tone of their times. Broadly, the news media’s portrayal of those women influenced the public’s view of them, as well as what the public thought about the two presidents who were involved with them. (Even the word “involved” is fraught, as the presidents both denied relationships -- right up until the point when they admitted to at least some of them). It is difficult to portray “the news media” as a monolith, so this thesis evaluates varying journalistic portrayals of the Trump and Clinton

²⁰ “The Late, Late Show with James Corden,” CBS, Oct. 17, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=de1aK3zx4Ws>

women. That portrayal has morphed over time, but this thesis looks for the most part at real time portraits, drawn as the scandals were unfolding, as well as a bit of retrospective.

METHODOLOGY

A search of *Washington Post* and *New York Times* stories focusing on the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal turned up several thousand from 1998 to 2019. Because the demeaning of the women involved in that scandal was often subtle, not overt, searches for “Monica Lewinsky” and “slut,” or “Monica Lewinsky” and “tease” or “boy crazy” or “dizzy” or similarly disparaging words proved largely fruitless. The same held true for Jones, Willey and Flowers, for the most part, although *Newsweek* cited a poll in 1997 which showed many Americans believed Jones to be a “floozy.”²¹ Databases included Nexis/Lexis, the “Newspapers and Magazines” database at the University of Maryland Library system and the archives of the newspapers. Often the UMD database would have the title and author of the story, but not the full article, necessitating a second search for PDF copies of a newspaper page. Broadening the search to simply “Monica Lewinsky” and the date range of January, 1998 through December 2000 revealed about 1,200 hits. From that list, research revealed dozens of “personality” stories about Lewinsky, the most fruitful pieces for demeaning descriptions of her body, sex life and childhood. But the list was not confined to profiles. Columns were the second most likely source of criticism of Monica’s body, hair, makeup, demeanor and sex history. But news stories were not exempt.

A somewhat lesser number of *Washington Post* and *New York Times* stories were searched for the Trump scandal during the years 2016-2018, though the total was still in the thousands, of which hundreds were read for deeper detail. Most of those stories were searched

²¹ Klaidman, Daniel, “Clinton V. Paula Jones,” *Newsweek*, Jan. 12, 1997, <https://www.newsweek.com/clinton-v-paula-jones-171796>

by the names of the women involved and “Donald Trump.” Many of the stories came out long after the incidents took place. Stories from other “print” sources, particularly the *Wall Street Journal*, were included, since they broke news about Trump scandals or gave graphic descriptions of the women involved. Some sources stood out for their outrageousness or uniqueness, including some in the broadcast media.

In addition, social media, especially Twitter, was scanned. Trump’s own account was deleted by the time of this thesis’ research, but his tweets were often referenced or preserved by other media, making it possible to include at least some of them in the search.

The research also included secondary source material: peer-reviewed journal articles and books, some written contemporaneously, others written after the fact for perspective. Both Lewinsky’s and Daniels’ books were included; and were more forthcoming than either of their alleged lovers’, which were also included. Journalists’ books also were included in the research, and not a few “mea culpas” were contained therein, suggesting the realization that the reporters had treated Lewinsky unfairly.

The research was not confined to Lewinsky and Daniels, though they were the most prominent of the women involved in the scandals. Other women researched included, in the Clinton scandal: Jones, Willey, and Broaddrick, who alleged Clinton raped her while Arkansas attorney general in 1978.²² In the Trump episodes, the women included the list of 26 women compiled by Business Insider,²³ Leeds, Crooks, and Carroll.

²² “Bill Clinton sexual assault and misconduct allegations,” Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bill_Clinton_sexual_assault_and_misconduct_allegations

²³ Relman, Eliza, “The 26 Women Who Have Accused Trump of Misconduct,” *Business Insider*, Sept. 17, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/women-accused-trump-sexual-misconduct-list-2017-12?IR=C>
<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/list-trumps-accusers-allegations-sexual-misconduct/story?id=51956410>

The author also interviewed reporters who were present during the coverage of both the Lewinsky and Daniels' scandals, as well as media analysts and critics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The existing academic and journalistic literature evaluating the Clinton and Trump sex stories and how the women were portrayed by the media shows journalists grappling with their coverage, and the changing social attitudes that played into each. While there has been some scholarly work on how the media handled each of the presidents and their attendant sexual issues with women, there is very little comparing the portrayal of the women themselves in each scandal.

Presidential sex scandals since George Washington have been the focus of earlier studies. In her book, "Scorpion Tongues: Gossip, Celebrity and American Politics," Gail Collins shows that press rumors, gossip and speculation about political characters have been part of the American landscape since its beginning. But she concludes that while press interest has ebbed and flowed over the centuries, the public generally doesn't base electoral choices on gossip:

The American people had spent the last two centuries talking about 'character' in their political leaders. But when it came to those same leaders' private behavior they actually seemed, more often than not, to be stone cold indifferent. For all their willingness to be shocked, and titillated by gossip over who was doing what in the bars and bedrooms and closets of after-hours Washington, their real bottom-line requirements for keeping someone in office were minimal: Their elected officials should do what they were hired to do.²⁴

Reporting on presidential sex was never a comfortable position for the modern press, to the extent that in previous years, it simply refused, as in the case of former President John

²⁴ Collins, Gail, "Scorpion Tongues: Gossip, Celebrity and American Politics," Harper-Collins, New York 2011, pp. 36

Kennedy's well-known penchant for young women. Former CBS correspondent Marvin Kalb, writing in his book "One Scandalous Story: Clinton, Lewinsky, and Thirteen Days That Tarnished American Journalism," described an incident in 1963 in which he witnessed Kennedy's Secret Service agents escort a young woman up to the president's room. He didn't report it. "It was my judgment at the time that such an incident was simply not 'news,'" Kalb wrote. "In those days, the possibility of a presidential affair, while titillating, was not considered "news" by the mainstream press...."²⁵

The reporting on presidential candidate Gary Hart's extramarital affair with model Donna Rice in 1987 broke that dam. But criticism of the media for staking out Hart's house to catch Rice in a compromising position threatened to overwhelm the coverage of the story itself.²⁶ So, while the media by the 1990s, when Clinton was president, knew how to report a sex scandal, it was still a little leery. The political press in particular, accustomed to dissecting policy positions and covering legislative brawls, was particularly unsuited to the task. "It was a drag," said *Washington Post* reporter John Harris, who was covering the Clinton campaign. "We weren't getting into journalism to cover fellatio."²⁷

In her book, Collins argues that a rumor that reinforces a politician's public persona adds fuel to the gossip and any rumor that runs counter to public perception doesn't get the same traction. In the case of Presidents Andrew Johnson and Ulysses Grant and liquor, Johnson was perceived as a drunk, so any slight tipsy look fueled that rumor. Grant, on the other hand, was perceived as solid and staid, so his actual drinking was overlooked.²⁸ Both Clinton and Trump

²⁵ Kalb, Marvin, "One Scandalous Story: Clinton, Lewinsky, and Thirteen Days That Tarnished American Journalism," Free Press/Simon and Schuster, Inc., New York, 2001, pp. 4

²⁶ McGee, Jim and Tom Fiedler "Miami Woman Linked to Hart: Candidate Denies Any Impropriety," May 3, 1987, p. 1 <https://www.miamiherald.com/latest-news/article2155016.html>

²⁷ McLeary, Paul, John Harris on Which Politicians the Press Likes, Clinton's Legacy and Why the Lewinsky Scandal Was a Drag," *Columbia Journalism Review*, June 24, 2005. <https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2011/20-years-ago-today-bill-clinton-announced-presidential-run-as-two-local-arkansas-papers-became-one/>

²⁸ Collins, Gail, "Scorpion Tongues: Gossip, Celebrity and American Politics," Harper-Collins, New York 2011,

were known as womanizers, so their reputation played into the coverage of their sex scandals. But their handling of it was different: Clinton hid it; Trump flaunted it and that was one of the factors that influenced media coverage of the women involved.

Clinton studies

The media have a very short attention span when it comes to sex scandals, according to Leonard Kaplan and Beverly Moran in “Aftermath: The Clinton Impeachment and the Presidency in the Age of Political Spectacle.” In particular, they wrote, once the Lewinsky scandal came to light, the other Clinton women were pushed into the background. “Whatever happened to Paula Jones? How did she lose her centrality to these affairs?” They further state that the only time Clinton was accused of rape (by Juanita Broaddrick) was equally buried in the media onslaught over Lewinsky.²⁹

Even before his affair with Lewinsky became public, Clinton’s reputation as a ladies’ man received sympathetic media coverage. “I don’t know about anybody else,” *Washington Post* reporter Judy Mann wrote, “but I’m getting tired of these women crawling out from under rocks, claiming they’ve had affairs with politicians, and then going on to cash in on their newly minted notoriety, leaving the politician and his family underneath a pile of rubble.”³⁰

There’s no doubt that cartoonists and late-night comedians had a field day with Lewinsky. She really couldn’t defend herself and precious few thought twice about mocking her. In “Partisan Sex: Bodies, Politics, and the Law in the Clinton Era,” Fedwa Malti-Douglas references a *George Magazine*’s cartoon of Lewinsky eating a hot dog (double entendre

location 125 ebook)

²⁹ Kaplan, Leonard V, editor, and Beverly I. Moran “Aftermath: The Clinton Impeachment and the Presidency in the Age of Political Spectacle.” New York University Press, 2001, pp301-309

³⁰ Mann, Judy, “The Incredible Gennifer Flowers,” *Washington Post*, Jan. 31, 1992.

intended) as an example of how Americans reveled in the titillation of sex as brought to them by the media even as they professed not to like delving into the personal lives of politicians.³¹

Lewinsky “went from being a completely private figure to a publicly humiliated one worldwide,” scholar Larry McDonald notes, “and was branded a “‘tramp,’ ‘tart,’ and ‘slut’ in the media.”³² Journalist Allison Yarrow says the “mainstream media” abused Lewinsky by framing her as “a perpetrator. She was called a “ditsy, predatory White House intern,” a “thong-snapper,” “a stalker and seductress,” and a “caged dog with her 24-year-old libido.” Jokes at her expense appeared on T-shirts, bumper stickers, and late-night television. “Those “jokes” turned a young woman into a slutty punching bag while sometimes also celebrating what journalists who covered Clinton called his “horn dog persona.”³³

Lewinsky was never able to sustain work successfully, as her reputation killed her attempts at job hunting. She never got past the first interview. And her attempts to use her “reputation” to promote merchandise failed as well.

Michael Isikoff, the journalist who uncovered Clinton’s affair with Lewinsky, denies that he shamed her. But in 1998, he wrote in *Newsweek* that she “had something of a history of hurling herself emotionally into the affairs of others, then getting herself tangled in efforts to clean them up.” He told the story of Lewinsky as “the product of a troubled upbringing” who “fresh out of high school” had “begun a sexual relationship with Andrew Bleiler, a married, pony-tailed theater technician at Beverly Hills High School.” When Bleiler moved to Portland, Ore., Lewinsky arranged to attend Lewis and Clark College there, and got Bleiler’s uncle to arrange a job for her as the Bleiler family’s nanny. When the Bleilers divorced, Bleiler, by then out of a

³¹ Malti-Douglas, Fedwa “Partisan Sex: Bodies, Politics, and the Law in the Clinton Era,” Peter Lang, New York, 2009 pp. 109-128

³² McDonald, L. (2020). Shaming, Blaming, and Responsibility, *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, 1-25.: <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455243-BJA10064>

³³ Allison Yarrow, “The Media’s Nasty Treatment of Monica Lewinsky Shaped a Generation of Women,” *Daily Beast*, Aug. 6, 2018. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-medias-nasty-treatment-of-lewinsky-shaped-a-generation-of-women>

job, had to prove employment to get partial custody of a child. Lewinsky, Isikoff wrote, forged a letter from the Lewis and Clark theater department offering Bleiler a job. When her plot was discovered, she almost got kicked out of college.³⁴

Although Isikoff may not have been overtly attempting to shame Lewinsky, the tenor of his writings nonetheless conveyed that sentiment. Isikoff didn't "cover" the Clinton/ Lewinsky story, his fellow journalist Marvin Kalb wrote, "so much as he prowled through its underbrush, a Dostoevskian figure undisturbed by the need, which frequently arose in his research, to cozy up to felons and other disreputable sources to get another quote, another fact, another insight. He didn't mind dirtying his hands."³⁵

Author Jeffrey Toobin, in his 2000 book, "A Vast Conspiracy: The Real Story of the Sex Scandal That Nearly Brought Down a President," talks about how Lewinsky thought so little of herself, that in maneuvering to be available to Clinton, she was "not only a determined partner, but one who didn't mind awkward and degrading circumstances (like sliding into his personal bathroom or hallway off the Oval Office). Monica Lewinsky fit the bill."³⁶

Toobin disparages not only Lewinsky's looks, but also her intellect, her interests, and her self-esteem: "Lewinsky had spent most of her brief life obsessed with her weight. She drifted from one high school to another, from a mediocre junior college to a modestly regarded

³⁴ Isikoff, Michael. "Uncovering Clinton: A Reporter's Story" March 30, 1999, Three Rivers Press, New York, pp174-175

³⁵ Kalb ignored the sexist and demeaning portrayals of Lewinsky and saved special disdain for Drudge: "Drudge's reports contributed to the media's preoccupation with sex and sensationalism. They encouraged the publishing and broadcasting of poorly sourced information. [and] an "Open Sesame" to a world of speeding and colliding fragments of unchecked data fired into cyberspace without any assurance of accuracy or reliability." Kalb, Marvin. "One Scandalous Story: Clinton, Lewinsky, and Thirteen Days That Tarnished American Journalism." *Free Press*, 2001, p.23-24, 78.

³⁶ Toobin, Jeffrey, "A Vast Conspiracy: The Real Story of the Sex Scandal That Nearly Brought Down a President," Random House, 2000, pp. 93 (ebook). Lewinsky didn't see it that way at the time. Rather than degrading herself, she told author Andrew Morton in "Monica's Story" that all the "chance" encounters – bringing him pizza during a government shutdown, idling outside the Oval Office, "bumping" into him during his talk with some visitors – were simply ways that they could see each other, however briefly, and steal a few moments together. She bought him a tie, and when he signed a picture of himself wearing it for her, she thought it was endearing. They sneaked off to a private nook for kissing and caressing. "For Monica, their meeting that afternoon was a very human encounter," Morton wrote. "They went into his back study, where he fetched her a Diet Coke; they kissed and then began to talk."
Morton, Andrew, "Monica's Story," St. Martin's Press, New York, 1999, pp.70 (ebook)

university and made little impact anywhere she went. ... Before she became obsessed with the president of the United States, her only other serious interest in life was dieting." ³⁷ Toobin also suggests that "An actual conversation with Lewinsky may have been the thing that cured the president of his infatuation" with her."³⁸

Toobin later had regrets. In a new introduction to an update of the Lewinsky book – written before his own sex scandal involving exposing himself during a company Zoom call in 2020³⁹ -- he takes himself to task a bit, having apparently noticed that things had changed. "The story looks different now," Toobin wrote, noting that he failed to take serious note of the power imbalance between Lewinsky, the intern, and Clinton, the President of the United States. "Do the lessons of the #MeToo movement change our understanding of what happened between them and how we, as a society, responded to their affair? In a word, yes," he writes. Yet he does not change the text of his original book "A Vast Conspiracy," because, he says, it was the product of its time. Toobin also notes that "The right decried her as an immoral vixen, and the left disowned her as the vehicle of their president's political destruction. Columnists and comedians mocked her relentlessly and cruelly, and the experience with the president haunted her post scandal life."⁴⁰

In a direct Twitter message to the author June 14, 2021, in response to a litany of questions on why he portrayed Stormy and Monica so differently, he said: "These are really

³⁷ Toobin, Jeffrey, "A Vast Conspiracy: The Real Story of the Sex Scandal That Nearly Brought Down a President," Random House, 2000, pp. 92 (ebook)

³⁸ Ibid, pp. 99

³⁹ Rosman, Katherine and Jacob Bernstein, "The Undoing of Jeffrey Toobin: How a leading man of legal journalism lost his sweetest gig," *New York Times*, Dec. 15, 2020 <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/15/style/jeffrey-toobin-zoom.html>

⁴⁰ Toobin, Jeffrey, "A Vast Conspiracy: The Real Story of the Sex Scandal That Nearly Brought Down a President," Random House, 2000, introduction to the e-book version.

good questions, but I'm afraid I don't have clear answers to them. Part of it, as lame as it sounds, is that times have changed, but I can't offer much more than that.”

By recognizing that “times have changed,” Toobin went halfway toward accountability, but failed to acknowledge the part he and other journalists played in contributing to the times before #MeToo, in which women were routinely dismissed and disregarded.

Recently, Lewinsky is thought of more as a victim, which is a switch from the contemporaneous portrayals of her as ditzzy, slutty, and naïve, but also manipulative and seductive. Alice Jones, writing in the *Independent* of London in 2014, noted that the first line of Lewinsky’s obituary will always include the words “Bill Clinton,” while Clinton’s probably will not include hers, at least in the first paragraph. And even if it does, she will probably be referred to as “an intern.” Jones said that for men who get caught in a political scandal, “life goes on,” while the woman “is forever stuck in a time.”⁴¹

John Oliver, the television comedian/commentator, in a broadcast April 15, 2022, took himself and comedians to task for shaming Lewinsky. In the broadcast, he said that 10 years after the initial Clinton scandal, he participated in a “Daily Show” piece titled “10 Suckin’ Years” about Lewinsky, which contributed to her ongoing shaming. He particularly excoriated late-night comedian Jay Leno, whom, he said, was the harshest on Lewinsky and never apologized. Oliver played video of Leno’s “jokes,” including something about “one million samples of DNA,” which, Leno said, is “the largest collection of DNA in the world, not counting Monica Lewinsky’s closet,” and, commenting on the weather, said the humidity is “stickier than Monica Lewinsky’s”

⁴¹ Jones, Alice, Life goes on for the man caught in a political sex scandal - while the woman is forever stuck in time,” *Independent*, May 13, 2014

clothes. Both of those jokes played off Clinton's DNA that was found on a dress of Monica's that was stained with his semen.⁴²

Jennifer Wright, writing in *Harper's Bazaar*, in "We All Owe Monica Lewinsky an Apology" argues that journalists, late-night comedians, and others need to own up to unfairly making fun of her. According to Wright, Good Morning America hosts wondered, regarding Bill Clinton, whether there's something "almost sexy about a man who can get away with things over and over again?"⁴³ "I hope today it feels mystifying that numerous people heard the President had an affair and decided that the best possible way to respond was to make fun of the woman he had it with for being fat," Wright wrote.

Ultimately, Lewinsky turned her escapade as a young intern into a money-making enterprise, doing TED talks and speaking engagements. She portrays her experience as the victim, not the protagonist, bolstered by the more recent #MeToo movement, in which large numbers of women report being sexualized by older, more powerful, men.

Her change from being ashamed to asserting she was a "#MeToo" woman who was taken advantage of due to a power imbalance, reflects how much had changed since Clinton's presidency.

Although there have been some journalistic mea culpas about Lewinsky was treated in the press, a writer in *The Guardian* postulates that "slut shaming" overall has increased since the Clinton days, due to the rise of social media:

That shaming at least often involves an audience could explain why interest in shaming has increased since the 1990s. This is the same decade the masses gained access to the Internet, which has enabled us to communicate with thousands of people quickly, easily, and freely. We have always been able to engage in shaming, but the

⁴² "Public Shaming," *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver (HBO)*, April 15, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yq7Eh6JTKIq>

⁴³ Wright, Jennifer, "We All Owe Lewinsky an Apology" *Harper's Bazaar*, July 9, 2018

advent of the Internet has made (at least certain forms of) shaming much easier, by giving us immediate access to massive audiences.⁴⁴

This is due to the “politics of humiliation” according to Nicolaus Mills, a professor at Sarah Lawrence College. Mills points to competitive shows like “American Idol” and (ironically) “The Apprentice” with host Donald Trump, where the purpose was not only to showcase the winners but also to humiliate the losers. This shaming in entertainment media can often spill over into “news” media, Mills wrote.⁴⁵

Robert Busby, in “Defending the American Presidency: Clinton and the Lewinsky Scandal” concludes that Clinton’s efforts to downplay his sex scandals were initially aided by the mainstream media, which was wary of reporting on sex, thinking the topic was more suited to tabloids than the “mainstream media.” Media discomfort played at least some role in the coverage, or lack thereof, he says.⁴⁶

There was much the media could have done to bolster the case that Clinton abused his power with Lewinsky. At the very least, directly emphasizing the power imbalance would have been instructive.

The growth of women among the ranks of editors and management at media outlets also was a key change, as noted above. Almost half of newsroom managers were women during the Trump scandals⁴⁷ while women made up only a quarter of the news managers during the Clinton era.⁴⁸ According to a 2018 study in *Nature*, “when the number of women on a

⁴⁴ Ronson, Jon, *The Guardian*, “Interview: Lewinsky: ‘The shame sticks to you like tar,’” April, 22, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/apr/16/Lewinsky-lewinsky-shame-sticks-like-tar-ion-ronson>

⁴⁵ Mills, Nicolaus, Dissent, “Television and the Politics of Humiliation,” Fall, 2020 <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/television-and-the-politics-of-humiliation>

⁴⁶ Busby, Robert “Defending the American Presidency: Clinton and the Lewinsky Scandal” Palgrave, New York, 2001. Pp 170-186

⁴⁷ 2018 Newsroom Diversity Study, News Leaders Association <https://members.newsleaders.org/diversity-survey-2018>

⁴⁸ “Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media,” International Women’s Media Foundation, <https://www.iwmf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/IWMF-Global-Report.pdf>

newspaper's editorial board increases, their news coverage of women becomes somewhat more positive."⁴⁹

Trump studies

Academic analysis of how the news media covered Trump's female accusers has been rather limited. Linda Blumell's content analysis of television, newspaper and online media found, unsurprisingly, that male sources generally defended Trump while female sources mostly defended only his targets. According to Blumell, conservative print sources, as well as a mix of television sources, defended Trump more than the women involved, while liberal, online, and newspaper sources defended the women more than they did Trump.⁵⁰

Another study co-authored by Blumell found a "lack of news articles from the women's points of view," which "ultimately silenced most survivors. More severely, at least one of the women feared not just isolation but also threats to her life and thus canceled a press conference wherein she was going to accuse Trump of attacking her."⁵¹

As for Trump's coarse videotaped comments about grabbing women by their private parts, studies differ on its political impact. One study found that the recording "had a modest, but

⁴⁹ Shor, E., van de Rijt, A. & Miltsov, A. Do Women in the Newsroom Make a Difference? Coverage Sentiment toward Women and Men as a Function of Newsroom Composition. *Sex Roles* 81, 44–58 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-018-0975-8>

⁵⁰ Blumell, Lindsey E. "SHE PERSISTED...AND SO DID HE: Gendered source use during the Trump Access Hollywood scandal" *Journalism Studies*. February, 2019, Vol. 20 Issue 2, p267-286. 20p.

⁵¹ Blumell, Lindsey and Jennifer Huemmer, "Silencing survivors: how news coverage neglects the women accusing Donald Trump of sexual misconduct," *Feminist Media Studies*, 17:3, 506-509, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2017.1304714>

significant, negative impact on support for Trump in 2016,” to the tune of about 2 percentage points.⁵²

Another study found that although sexual assault “would come to dominate coverage” of the 2016 presidential election, it appeared to have little effect on the election results.⁵³ This analysis found that media coverage made little or no reference to the “impact of sexual misconduct” on the victims, but instead focused on whether Trump’s actions were as bad as Bill Clinton’s. The trauma of the victims was not part of the discussion.⁵⁴

And still another study found that Trump used “gendered language” to disparage even women who hadn’t accused him of sexual misconduct.⁵⁵ Hillary Clinton didn’t have the “stamina,” to be president, he said. Massachusetts Democratic Sen. Elizabeth Warren had a “nasty mouth.” And, thinking it was probably the worst insult he could level, he said Jean Carroll was “not my type.” The inference was that she wasn’t young or pretty enough to peak his sexual interest.⁵⁶

⁵² Rhodes, Jesse H, Elizabeth A. Sharrow, Jill S. Greenlee & Tatishe M. Nteta (2020) Just Locker Room Talk? Explicit Sexism and the Impact of the Access Hollywood Tape on Electoral Support for Donald Trump in 2016, *Political Communication*, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10584609.2020.1753867?scroll=top&needAccess=true>

⁵³ Schneider, C.J., Hannem, S. Politicization of Sexual Misconduct as Symbolic Annihilation: An Analysis of News Media Coverage of the 2016 “Rape Election”. *Sexuality & Culture* 23, 737–759 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-019-09587-6>

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Prasad, Ritu, “How Trump talks about women - and does it matter?” *BBC News*, Nov. 29, 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-50563106>

⁵⁶ Ibid

FINDINGS

The Clinton Story

The media were more tolerant of Bill Clinton's behavior than Donald Trump's, perhaps due to an innate liking of Clinton, or the different era in which it happened. Newsweek wrote that the White House press corps "swooned" over Clinton, at least initially. He was seen as a "fellow baby boomer who was going to rejuvenate and make more realistic and relevant the liberalism of the 1960s."⁵⁷ Newsweek even seemed to tolerate the sexual dalliances of what it called "Saturday Night Bill."

Reporter Nina Burleigh, a former *Time* magazine reporter who had covered the White House off and on, reinforced the narrative that journalists were pro-Clinton when she wrote a magazine story in which she talked about Clinton ogling her legs and staring at her seductively. She wrote that she thought about what it would be like to take the relationship to a more intimate level.⁵⁸ When the journalistic community raged, Burleigh threw gasoline on the fire, telling the *Washington Post* that "I would be happy to give him a blow job just to thank him for

⁵⁷ "The Clintons' Press Opera," *Newsweek*, Feb. 16, 2008

⁵⁸Burleigh, Nina, "King of Hearts," *Mirabella*, July 1, 1998 <https://www.ninaburleigh.com/journalism/king-of-hearts>

keeping abortion legal. I think American women should be lining up with their Presidential knee pads on to show their gratitude for keeping the theocracy off our backs,” she said.⁵⁹ The right-wing press had a field day, maintaining that this proved that the press was “in the tank” for Clinton.

But press sentiment about Clinton was more nuanced. After the Whitewater scandal broke, the narrative that reporters were “in the tank” for Clinton was more of a storyline pushed by right wing operatives than demonstrated by the reporters themselves. Some journalists were openly skeptical of Clinton even before he became involved with Lewinsky, particularly Arkansas reporters who knew how evasive he could be when forced to answer tough questions. Pulitzer Prize winner Paul Greenberg had coined the term “Slick Willy” in the *Pine Bluff Commercial*.⁶⁰

Clinton’s affair with Flowers was the first opportunity for much of the press outside of Arkansas to deal with a public accusation of his womanizing. She called a press conference in New York in 1992, played tapes of her conversations with Clinton and subjected herself to reporters’ questions. Some were openly skeptical, indicating that they thought the tapes could have been doctored and questioning her veracity because a tabloid newspaper had paid her for the story. Some reporters were visibly uncomfortable with the graphic discussion of Clinton’s sex life, but others asked graphic questions, including: “Did Clinton use a condom?” (Flowers did not answer.) Some asked whether the Republican Party pressured her; she denied it. The press conference was chaotic and jumbled and from viewing the tapes on *C-SPAN*, it appears she was not getting a lot of respect from reporters. Many wanted to know how much she had

⁵⁹ Burleigh, Nina, “My Spin Through the Cycle,” *Observer*, July 20, 1998. <https://observer.com/1998/07/my-spin-through-the-cycle/>

⁶⁰ Parker, Suzi “20 years ago, Bill Clinton announced presidential run as two local Arkansas papers became one,” Poynter.org, <https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2011/20-years-ago-today-bill-clinton-announced-presidential-run-as-two-local-arkansas-papers-became-one/>

been paid for her story, whether she held a grudge against Clinton and whether this was payback.⁶¹

According to *Washington Post* reporter Susan Schmidt, Flowers was blown off by the press “as a floozy” and because of Clinton’s associates’ denigration of her. Mark Feldstein, who was a correspondent at *CNN* in 1992, recalled one of Clinton’s aides disparaging Flowers by telling him that she was known in Arkansas as “Genital Flowers.”⁶²

The Clinton White House also trashed the “other” women in Clinton’s orbit. His long-time staffer Betsey Wright told the *Washington Post* that she tracked and squashed “bimbo eruptions.”⁶³ In 1994, Clinton operative James Carville said that the women who were accusing Clinton of coming onto them were chasing money. “You drag \$100 bills through trailer parks -- there's no tellin' what you'll find,” Carville said. “I know these people (female accusers). I went to school with 'em. I necked with 'em in back seats. I spent nights with 'em.”⁶⁴

Knight-Ridder columnist Joanne Jacobs put the Carville quote together with a “trailer trash” comment from Clinton’s lawyer, Robert Bennett, and the fact that “feminists who’d made Anita Hill [sexual harassment accuser of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas] into a hero, let Paula Jones be portrayed as a tramp. They publicly questioned her motives and blamed her for going to the governor’s hotel room. They quietly sat by while her dress, her manner and her

⁶¹ C-Span archives, “Allegations of Clinton Marital Infidelity,” Jan. 27, 1992. Waldorf-Astoria, New York, NY <https://www.c-span.org/video/?23995-1/allegations-clinton-marital-infidelity>

⁶² Comment to author in email, June 4, 2022

⁶³ Baker, Peter and Lorraine Adams, “Clinton Team Picks Apart Jones’s Life,” *Washington Post*, Feb. 23, 1998. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/special/clinton/stories/bennett022398.htm>

⁶⁴ Harris, John, “The Survivor: Bill Clinton in the White House,” Random House, May 31, 2005, pp408

sexual history were used to imply that if anything had happened, she was 'asking for it.'" And the media, she wrote, "got spun."⁶⁵

According to *Newsweek*, the reason Jones was not taken seriously by the public was that the "mainstream media have been skillfully spun by the White House and Clinton's lawyers. By playing on the class and partisan prejudices of reporters, as well as their squeamishness and ambivalence about printing stories about the sex lives of politicians, Clinton's operatives have done a brilliant job of discrediting Paula Jones and her case." *Newsweek* even called out its own journalist/editor Evan Thomas, who went on a talk show and said that Jones was just "some sleazy woman with big hair coming out of the trailer parks."⁶⁶ Thomas later admitted to an "elitist attitude."⁶⁷

There was also very little written about Broaddrick's charge in 1998 that Clinton raped her when he was Arkansas attorney general, allegedly biting her lip so hard it bruised and swelled up. The press had heard Broaddrick's allegations for a few years, but didn't take them seriously at first, partially because Broaddrick, herself, had denied them under oath in a deposition in the Jones case. But later, as the impeachment of Clinton proceeded in 1999, Broaddrick had second thoughts and described to *NBC News* correspondent Lisa Myers, in tearful detail, her encounter with Clinton in a Little Rock hotel room. Myers thought she had the information cold. It checked out with friends Broaddrick confided in at the time. But *NBC* executives held the story, questioning whether Broaddrick was telling the truth this time. In

⁶⁵ Jacobs, Joanne, "A Case of Classism, Double Standards," *Spokesman-Review*, Jan. 23, 1997 <https://www.spokesman.com/stories/1997/jan/23/a-case-of-classism-double-standards/>

⁶⁶ Klaidman, Daniel, "Clinton V. Paula Jones," *Newsweek*. Jan. 12, 1997. <https://www.newsweek.com/clinton-v-paula-jones-171796>

⁶⁷ Kelly, Michael, "His class, and hers," *Baltimore Sun*, May 30, 1997, <https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-1997-05-30-1997150123-story.html>

addition, it was in the middle of the impeachment proceedings and editors were reluctant to throw such an incendiary bomb into that procedure without being absolutely sure.⁶⁸

Internet gossip columnist Matt Drudge revealed what happened: “Network executives at *NBC* had come under enormous pressure from the White House not to air” the Broadrick interview. Drudge quoted a “network insider” who said, “There is a civil war developing between those pushing for the interview to air and those who think it is completely reckless.” Broadrick then gave an interview to a *Wall Street Journal* columnist and spoke to a reporter at the *Washington Post*. Myers’ interview finally saw air on *NBC*’s “Dateline” at the end of February.⁶⁹ But by then, Clinton’s impeachment trial had failed to remove him from office.

Howard Kurtz, in his book “Spin Cycle,” summed up the effort nicely. The Clinton spin machine, he wrote, always unleashed every weapon in its arsenal to blunt accusations, and to blacken the reputation of women who had accused Clinton. Out of that effort came Hillary Clinton’s statement that the attempts to portray her husband as a womanizer were part of a “vast, right-wing conspiracy.”

The right-wing media had a field day with Monica Lewinsky, portraying her as either a slut or a conniver, even as they called Clinton out on the affair. Right-wing radio star Rush Limbaugh referred to the whole affair as “Tailgate.”

Most mainstream coverage was also deeply unflattering to Lewinsky. The *Baltimore Sun* called her “a starry-eyed naïf and an attention-seeking drama queen. She is -- depending on the source -- a vamp, an ingenue, a stalker, an innocent.”⁷⁰ *Time* reported that in the White House,

⁶⁸ Neyfakh, Leon, “Slow Burn: Move On,” *Slate*, Season 2, Episode 8, Oct. 17, 2018, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2018/10/slow-burn-season-2-episode-8-transcript.html>

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ Gamerman, Ellen, “A case of Beverly Hills meets D.C. Intern: Is Lewinsky a naïf, an attention-seeker or a vamp? It depends on whom you ask,” *Baltimore Sun*, Jan. 28, 1998, <https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-1998-01-28-1998028079-story.html>

Lewinsky was nicknamed Elvira, “after TV's vampy Mistress of the Dark -- a snickering reference to Lewinsky's long and big black hair, her fondness for tight, chest-hugging outfits and her coquettish demeanor.”⁷¹

A *New York Daily News* profile, “Lewinsky, the Making of a Temptress,” reported that she “oozes sex” and “has waged a battle of the bulge her entire life.” According to the article:

IF THE WORST THINGS being said about Lewinsky are true, she's a promiscuous liar, a predator, a home wrecker, a forger and an unstable opportunist starved for attention and gratification.

But none of that means she didn't have sex with President Clinton...

In the 11 days since the White House sex scandal erupted, the Lewinsky story has developed into a psychodrama of obsession and betrayal, complete with a cast of supporting characters worthy of a tawdry B movie.

There's a former boyfriend in California who says she liked to handcuff him to the bedpost during sex.

There's a former boyfriend in Oregon who says she stalked him, befriended his wife and baby-sat their kids.

There's a supposed best friend in Washington, D.C., who secretly recorded intimate conversations of Lewinsky talking about oral-sex sessions with the President.⁷²

The detailed descriptions of Lewinsky's body began with the very first stories about her. *Newsweek* led the barrage, largely because Isikoff had pent-up material from his investigations. Its cover-story profile of Lewinsky, filled with armchair psychoanalysis, was scathing:

AT THE HEART OF THE STORY IS A YOUNG woman's craving for recognition and attention. Monica Lewinsky grew up pampered but possibly emotionally neglected in Beverly Hills, Calif. Her father was a cancer doctor with a busy practice; her mother was a socialite who loved to drop celebrity names. She lived in a million-dollar house; Dad drove a Cadillac, Mom drove a Mercedes; the housekeeper took Lewinsky and her brother, Michael, to tennis lessons, Hebrew school and the orthodontist. When Lewinsky was 15, her parents went through a nasty divorce. ... Last week, Lewinsky's classmates at Beverly Hills High remembered her unkindly as a girl who had “gone to a fat farm” and strived to be popular.

⁷¹ Ratnesar, Romesh, “The Days of her Life,” *Time*, Feb. 2, 1998, <https://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/1998/01/26/time/ratnesar.html>

⁷² Yglesias, Linda and Richard T. Pienciak, “LEWINSKY: MAKING OF A TEMPTRESS,” *Daily News (New York)*, February 1, 1998. [advance-lexis-com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3RXW-SWT0-0093-D1T7-00000-00&context=1516831](https://advance.lexis-com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3RXW-SWT0-0093-D1T7-00000-00&context=1516831).

An indifferent student, she went for two years to a local community college and then to Lewis & Clark, a small liberal-arts bastion in Portland, Ore. The real-estate agent who showed the house Lewinsky was renting described her as "cold" and her house as "filthy." Lewinsky "kept a container with about a dozen new condoms by her bed on a table," said the agent, Bob Elston. She was "very flirtatious, also a bit emotional, young and somewhat immature, and she talked a lot," said classmate Steve Enghouse, who spoke to reporters because of his suspicion that Lewinsky had concocted an imaginary romance with President Clinton in order to attract attention. At the White House, female interns tend to be willowy and well bred. With her heavy makeup, revealing blouses and occasionally ribald comments, Lewinsky did not really fit in.⁷³

A few weeks later, *Newsweek* weighed in again, this time sweeping Lewinsky up in her mother's perceived neuroses and angst after her divorce from Monica's father:

Lewinsky was at the time an insecure teenager struggling with her weight. At the age of 8, Lewinsky had joined her mother on a diet, according to the babysitter. By 12 or 13, Lewinsky was wearing adult makeup, neighbors say. While Lewinsky hurried to grow up, Marcia, just turning 40, tried to be young again. Like many mothers and daughters seeking mutual comfort in the wake of a divorce, the pair became as much peers as parent and child, sharing confidences and consolation about boyfriends.⁷⁴

Isikoff says he doesn't remember going out of his way to be catty about Lewinsky. He, as other reporters who were on the Lewinsky beat at the time, chalk the phrases up to an attempt to paint a full portrait of the White House intern. Reporters who have written countless profiles can attest to the pressure to find previously unreported details of the subject's life and to having blinders on regarding how some of those details might appear in retrospect.

"I have no particular recollection of the inclusion of some of those details," Isikoff told me two decades later:

⁷³ Clinton and the intern. By: Isikoff, Michael, Thomas, Evan, Klaidman, Daniel, Breslau, Karen, Hosenball, Mark, Shackelford, Lucy, Wingert, Pat, Barry, John, Vistica, Gregory L., Murr, Andrew, *Newsweek*, Feb. 2, 1998, Vol. 131, Issue 5

⁷⁴ "A Daughter's Secrets. (Cover Story)." *Newsweek*, Isikoff, Michael et al, vol. 131, no. 8, Feb. 1998, p. 22.

I was focused on a lot of other things during those hectic days-- but they strike me as the kind of details that would get thrown into newsmag cover stories/profiles especially when a new personage pops onto the scene in the middle of a major American political scandal. You scoop up as many details as you can to flesh out a portrait of who this person is. And given that this was a sex scandal, including something about the condoms certainly seems more relevant than other details-- although I'm fairly certain I didn't include any of that in my book.⁷⁵

Isikoff did not include the condom story in his book, "Uncovering Clinton: A Reporter's Story," indicating that while some details were included in the "heat of the moment" reporting for immediate publication, he may have thought better of it later. "In any case," he added, "I can understand how -- from today's perspective -- you can argue that some of this was unnecessary but remember these sorts of details -- and a lot worse that we didn't include -- were being aggressively pushed by the Clinton folks at the time."⁷⁶ He also argues that even worse things were being said (but not by him) about Paula Jones, the former Arkansas state employee who, in 1991, sued Clinton for sexual harassment.

The *Washington Post* was more cautious in its reporting about Clinton's sex life. Isikoff had quit the *Post* after several high-profile disagreements over the Paula Jones story and at least one shouting match with editors that got him suspended for a couple of weeks. His *Newsweek* gig followed.⁷⁷ The *Post*'s hesitancy over the Clinton scandal may have stemmed from its desire to uphold its reputation as the sober-minded investigator of the Watergate scandal in the 1970s, which led to the resignation of former President Richard Nixon. In addition, the sex stuff seemed to make *Post* editors queasy, as Harris pointed out in his interview with *CJR*. But at the same time, they were eager to be first with the most accurate

⁷⁵ Isikoff, Michael, email to author, April 27, 2021

⁷⁶ Ibid

⁷⁷ Kurtz, Howard, "Cleaning Up on the Dirt Beat," *Washington Post*, Jan. 26, 1998 pp. C1 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/special/clinton/stories/kurtz012698.htm>

Clinton/Lewinsky news. The *Post* reported White House spin denigrating Linda Tripp, the supposed “friend” of Lewinsky who secretly recorded her talking about her relationship with Clinton: “some White House officials have characterized Tripp as an indiscreet gossip whose loyalty they came to doubt.”⁷⁸

Washington Post profiles of Lewinsky were a lot like *Newsweek*'s. This *Post* portrayal relied on anonymous “friends” to characterize Lewinsky’s motivations and methods:

Lewinsky's...acquaintances paint an image of a young woman who spoke freely of her fantasies with a variety of older men in positions of influence, who read sexual meaning into the merest chance encounter....And months before she had been given a badge that allowed her into the White House's restricted West Wing, one friend said, she'd told him that she longed to have sex with the president on his Oval Office desk.⁷⁹

Deep in a January 1998 *Post* story about Lewinsky’s relationship with Tripp when they both worked at the Pentagon, reporters Dana Priest and Rene Sanchez referred to a possible affair Lewinsky might have had with an unnamed Pentagon employee:

One co-worker recalled an incident in a Pentagon hallway in which Lewinsky stopped her and confided that on an overseas trip she had had a liaison with a high-ranking Pentagon official, whom she named, and then asked for advice because she liked him but he had stopped calling her. That official, contacted at home yesterday by The Washington Post, said that ‘under the circumstances’ he could not discuss the matter.⁸⁰

Twenty-three years later, Priest recalled having been recently assigned to the Pentagon beat at the time and being asked to work on the story because she knew Lewinsky slightly from

⁷⁸ Priest, Dana and Rene Sanchez, “ONCE-TRUSTED CIVIL SERVANT AT HEART OF SCANDAL,” *Washington Post*, Jan. 23, 1998.

⁷⁹ Goldstein, A., & Claiborne, W. Jan. 29, 1998, “Aide's interest in president was known to friends,” *Washington Post* Retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com/newspapers/aides-interest-president-was-known-friends/docview/408348659/se-2?accountid=14696>

⁸⁰ Priest, Dana; Rene Sanchez,. “Kindred spirits:’ White House Exiles Shared Lively Chat, Confidences. *Washington Post*, Jan. 29,1998

one overseas trip with Defense Secretary William Cohen that they both took. “When the scandal breaks, I am the only person in the newsroom who knows anything about her. My editors are, ‘ooh, you gotta do a story,’” she said.

That was the prevailing mindset among the mainstream media at the time -- find out everything you possibly can about this young woman, her background, her psychology, her education, her jobs, her infatuation, her affairs. That’s still the mindset. But the difference between then and 20 years later was that the press’ attitude had changed. The stories about Lewinsky emphasized her sex life and fantasies more than her resume.

“We were trying to figure out if she was lying or possibly not, because it was so outlandish,” Priest said, and “if it was at all possible to see if she had had relationships with [powerful] older men.” Priest did track down the man and determined that he was an assistant secretary of defense, unmarried, and that he and Lewinsky had had a consensual relationship. “I said, ‘I’m not going to put your name in the paper, but I have to ask.’” Priest said she didn’t want to be involved in the scandal coverage, as she was learning a new beat at the Pentagon and wanted to cover that. But the scandal sucked everyone in – at least a little. Priest did two stories and refused to do more. In retrospect, Priest said, she questioned “why in the hell the Clintons were allowed to make Lewinsky the villain. That was crazy and I was a part of it. I never said, ‘Why are we doing that.’” Priest said she eventually, many years later, apologized to Lewinsky on Twitter.⁸¹

Post reporter Susan Schmidt is credited with writing the first print newspaper story about Lewinsky, and with numerous other scoops throughout the scandal. One of the most noticed

⁸¹ Interview with author, April 19, 2021

was a discussion of Lewinsky's encounters with Tripp, which Tripp recorded. Those recordings were supposed to be private, but Schmidt, and a few others, managed to get pieces of them.

Schmidt's most detailed tapes story, published Jan. 25, 1998, portrayed Lewinsky's moods as "ranging from excitement to school-girlish petulance and jealousy, from whining to bitterness and emotional devastation, but such judgments based on an audio tape are open to debate."⁸² According to Schmidt, at one point in the tapes, Lewinsky says she has been "brought up to tell lies in order to get along in life." And at another point, Lewinsky "grows emotionally distraught, crying audibly during talks with Tripp through the fall of 1997, as the president begins to distance himself from her. Lewinsky is crushed when she begins to suspect that Clinton is turning his attentions to other women. This change in their relationship has been triggered by published reports of his possible harassment of another employee, Kathleen Willey."⁸³

When the tapes came out, Schmidt told me in an interview, it showed how "unstable she [Lewinsky] was, fragile. That made what he did even worse because she was really rattled by it." However, Schmidt did acknowledge that Lewinsky "did behave badly (like flashing her thong at the president)." The effort of the White House to "treat her like a trollop" which was echoed by some in the media, had the effect of "infantilizing" her, Schmidt said. "I think the people hardest on her were Clinton's defenders and supporters. She was bringing him down, just like Gennifer Flowers."⁸⁴

⁸²Sawyer, Kathy and Susan Schmidt, "On Tapes, Lewinsky Describes Alleged Trysts With Clinton," *Washington Post*, Jan. 25, 1998, pp: A8

⁸³ Ibid

⁸⁴ Schmidt, interview with author, April 27, 2021.

The *New York Times* also denigrated Lewinsky and other Clinton women. In January of 1998, *Times* columnist Bob Herbert said Lewinsky “may be delusional. She certainly has trouble keeping a story straight.”⁸⁵ The *Times*’ Alessandra Stanley, in February 1998, reported that colleagues of Lewinsky described her as “bouncy and flirtatious.”⁸⁶ The *Times* also published a letter to the editor in which a reader wrote that a “Monica Lewinsky paper doll should be wearing thong underwear.”⁸⁷

The *New York Times Magazine* ran a snarky story quoting “experts” about how to remake Lewinsky’s image:

Unless she always wants to be known as 'that woman,' Lewinsky must literally disappear for five years -- maybe to Europe -- demand total privacy, then re-emerge seriously," says the attorney Alan Dershowitz.

Susan Morem, a consultant on workplace etiquette, [said] "Lewinsky will have to refrain from flirting."⁸⁸

Lisa Johnson, the author of "How to Snare a Millionaire,'...urges Lewinsky to slim down at a Palm Springs spa, where she could "learn the rich man's sports of tennis and golf under the tutelage of gorgeous foreign pros."....

Geraldo Rivera predicts that Lewinsky will track down Mr. Right in the "Ivana Trump Eurotrash crowd."⁸⁹

But no writer in the *Times* was more in Lewinsky’s face (or body) than Pulitzer-Prize winner Maureen Dowd. Week after week, she portrayed the young woman in unflattering

⁸⁵ Herbert, Bob, “In America; Suspension of Belief,” *New York Times*, Jan. 25, 1998. <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/01/25/opinion/in-america-suspension-of-belief.html>

⁸⁶ Stanley, Alessandra, “TESTING OF A PRESIDENT: THE INTERN; How Intern Reached Corridors of Power,” *New York Times*, Feb. 8, 1998, <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/02/08/us/testing-of-a-president-the-intern-how-intern-reached-corridors-of-power.html>

⁸⁷ Lois Barber *New York Times*, Oct 4, 1998.

⁸⁸ SCANDALS; “Miss Lewinsky: Are You Ready for Your Makeover Now?” *New York Times*, Sept. 13, 1998.

⁸⁹ Ibid. The irony of that prediction would only become obvious decades later.

terms.⁹⁰ In February of 1998, Dowd called Lewinsky a “ditsy, predatory” intern.⁹¹ A May column imagined Lewinsky penning her name twinned with Clinton’s, the way girls did in junior high: “Monica Clinton, Monica Lewinsky Clinton.” It was all by way of imagining the things she might write as a handwriting sample, required by the FBI. The column imagined Lewinsky fantasizing about a dinner seated between Leonardo DiCaprio and John Travolta, and listing the fatty foods she’d eat: “Steak, steak, steak. Creamed spinach. Cottage cheese. Onion ring loaf.”⁹²

Later that spring, Lewinsky posed for a *Vanity Fair* photo shoot. Whether that was a wise decision or not, she appeared to enjoy it, posing with a boa and sexy clothes. Dowd, rather than calling the spread sexy, thought it was creepy in a toddler’s beauty pageant way. She said Lewinsky’s short, red fingernails made her look like she had “borrowed her mother’s nail polish.” And she suggested that Lewinsky’s thought process was not up to the task of working at the White House, let alone having a relationship with Clinton: “It appears that there’s one thing Lewinsky has immunity from: brains.”⁹³

And then there was this Dowd takedown: “The 24-year-old from Beverly Hills has been painted as more mall rat than policy wonk, a Valley Girl more absorbed by the expansion of her waist than by the expansion of NATO, more concerned with waxing eyebrows than with waning hopes for peace in the Mideast.”⁹⁴

⁹⁰ To be sure, Dowd was pretty tough on the Clintons too, so much so that many in the administration stopped talking to her, she said in an email to the author.

⁹¹ Dowd, Maureen, “Liberties; The Price Of His Pleasure,” *New York Times* Feb 8, 1998.

⁹² Dowd, Maureen, “Liberties; Lewinsky’s Frowny Face,” *New York Times*, May 31, 1998.

⁹³ Dowd, Maureen, “Liberties; Feathered and Tarred.” *ProQuest*, Jun 10, 1998, <https://www.proquest.com/blogs-podcasts-websites/liberties-feathered-tarred/docview/2235961882/se-2?accountid=14696>.

⁹⁴ Dowd, Maureen, “Liberties: Undercover Adviser, Feb. 4, 1998, <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/02/04/opinion/liberties-undercover-adviser.html?searchResultPosition=5>

Even in a column about Lewinsky confronting Dowd at Washington's Bombay Club restaurant near the White House and asking why she was so "mean," Dowd couldn't resist a dig: "I was happy to see that...Lewinsky was eating less red meat -- veggie appetizers and chicken tandoori. And yet, her presence at the Bombay Club suggested the former intern was still trying to grab the President's attention, like some love-struck teen-ager, loitering outside Billy Clinton's biology class."⁹⁵

In an email to the author, Dowd defended her comments, saying it was a "different style then. It was the '90s; I was trying to convey exactly what it felt like for an immature affair -- wrapped in deception -- to overturn the White House and rock the Democratic party and the country."⁹⁶ Dowd won the Pulitzer Prize for her "fresh and insightful columns on the impact of President Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky."⁹⁷

The *Wall Street Journal's* coverage mirrored that of other elite newspapers. One editorial advised independent counsel Kenneth Starr to "indict the little tart and get the show on the road."⁹⁸

Broadcast media were at first reluctant to air details of Monica's relationship with the president, but those walls gradually fell away, particularly when Independent Counsel Kenneth

⁹⁵ Dowd, Maureen, "Liberties; Lewinsky And Me," *New York Times*, June 17, 1998
<https://www.nytimes.com/1998/06/17/opinion/liberties-Lewinsky-and-me.html?searchResultPosition=21>

⁹⁶ Email to author, May 4, 2021. Dowd also said that she revealed a plan by "Hillary Clinton's henchmen, to paint Lewinsky as a "malicious stalker" or crazy "fantasist," "making them "unable to proceed with that smear. I was disgusted about this attitude, and with their blatant class bias. James Carville would smear Gennifer Flowers and Paula Jones as trailer trash, and they would sic private investigators on those earlier girlfriends to intimidate and silence them, and then Hillary and Madeleine Albright and other accomplished women in his administration would be brought out to the cameras to back up Bill's lies." Dowd also noted she tagged Clinton as abusing his position of power, long before others. The result, she said, was that when Hillary Clinton ran for president, and she was assigned to write about it, she was shut out of the Clinton campaign's inner circle, making it hard to do her job.

⁹⁷ The Pulitzer Prizes: "For distinguished commentary, Maureen Dowd of *The New York Times*,"
<https://www.pulitzer.org/winners/maureen-dowd>

⁹⁸ "Victimhood." *Wall Street Journal*, July 9, 1998, pp. 1-A18. *ProQuest*,
<https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/victimhood/docview/398659256/se-2?accountid=14696>

Starr's report came with graphic descriptions of oral sex in the Oval Office. In a cringe-worthy 90-minute prime time television interview, ABC's Barbara Walters coaxed Lewinsky to talk graphically about her affair with Clinton, including explicit sexual details, such as how he refrained from ejaculating until very late in the relationship. Walters also used the interview to splash tabloid headlines about Lewinsky such as "Tubby Temptress" and "Portly Pepper Pot."⁹⁹ Walters asked leading questions about Lewinsky's low self-esteem and fretting over being fat, and about her betrayal by Clinton and thoughts of suicide. But it made great television.¹⁰⁰

The mean and mocking coverage was criticized at the time in some circles. The *Washington Post's* media critic, Howard Kurtz, pointed out that not only were the sexist descriptions being attached to Lewinsky, they were often done anonymously. "Should The Washington Post be quoting an unnamed 'co-worker' as saying that in 1995 Lewinsky would 'talk about how she wanted to have sex in the Oval Office, on the desk'?" Kurtz asked. "U.S. News & World Report columnist Gloria Barger said she was troubled by "the anonymous quotes about what a slut she is ... I think it's unfair. You've got to get it on the record." "What do we need to know about Monica Lewinsky to evaluate her credibility?" asked Tom Rosenstiel, director of the Project for Excellence in Journalism. "Do we need to know her sexual history? I'm not sure we do. Curiosity is not enough."¹⁰¹

But the anonymous sources and sly critiques of Lewinsky's body, demeanor and outlook continued throughout the scandal. Clinton mostly avoided paying a price for his indiscretion --

⁹⁹ Walters asked Lewinsky if she ever expected Clinton would leave his wife for her. Walters' inflection and facial expression left no doubt that she thought Lewinsky's "maybe" answer was seriously naïve. Walters, Barbara, ABC "20/20" interview with Monica Lewinsky, March 3, 1999, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vUUATD_pfYE

¹⁰⁰ The program netted ABC the second highest ratings of any program that year, trailing only the Superbowl, with 74 million viewers; just under half of the nation's running television sets were tuned in. Lewinsky Interview Snares Viewers," *Associated Press*, March 4, 1999, https://greensboro.com/lewin-sky-interview-snares-viewers/article_72dccb4-8490-5e45-8260-51d556292488.html

¹⁰¹ Kurtz, Howard, "Too Much Background?" *Washington Post*, January 30, 1998; Page D1

he was impeached by the House but not convicted by the Senate. He dismissed the whole thing as political and went about being president again. Other Clinton women, described by the press at the time in many of the same unflattering terms, faded from the spotlight.

But Lewinsky was labeled for life. Her attempts at a career failed, her subsequent attempts at love appeared short-lived. She was a punchline far beyond her time. Only after the #MeToo movement took hold some 20 years later did she try -- with some success -- to resurrect herself. She began to give speeches and present herself as a victim of a man in power.¹⁰² And she was listed as a producer on a cable TV movie about the whole affair, "Impeachment, American Crime Story," her part played by Beanie Feldstein.¹⁰³ In all of the endeavors, she still played on her experience as "that woman," as Clinton once referred to her. And the news media played a large part in creating that woman's public persona.

The Trump Story

Few journalists thought New York real estate developer and businessman -- and non-stop self-promoter -- Donald J. Trump was anything but a womanizer when he burst into the presidential race of 2016. But unlike the whispering campaign about Clinton and his women, Trump's affairs were shouted. Thrice married, one of his ex-wives, Marla Maples, was quoted on the cover of the *New York Post*, Feb. 16, 1990, saying that Trump gave her "the best sex I ever had." It was reportedly planted by Trump himself.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Lewinsky, "The Price of Shame," Ted Talk, March 2015, https://www.ted.com/talks/Lewinsky_lewinsky_the_price_of_shame?language=en

¹⁰³ Impeachment, "American Crime Story", FX, <https://www.fxnetworks.com/shows/american-crime-story/cast-crew/beanie-feldstein-Lewinsky-lewinsky>

¹⁰⁴ Brooke, Jill, "The Real Story Behind Donald Trump's Infamous 'Best Sex I've Ever Had' Headline (Guest Column, The Hollywood Reporter, April 12, 2018) <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-features/i-wrote-donald-trumps-infamous-best-sex-i-ever-had-story-guest-column-1101246/>

In October of 2016, the *Washington Post* made public the “Access Hollywood” tape in which Trump talked about grabbing women “by the pussy” and how, if one is famous, one could simply kiss women without their permission: “If you’re a star, they just let you do it.”¹⁰⁵ Although Trump dismissed the statements as “locker room talk” and claimed he was kidding around and had never done those kinds of things, mainstream news coverage all but wrote his political obituary.¹⁰⁶ “There are some things that even the most skilled politicians can’t spin,” *The Hill’s* Brad Bannon predicted, “and Trump’s abuse of women is one of them ...“Donald Trump will lose.”¹⁰⁷ But he was wrong. “No precedent existed for a modern presidential candidate making such offensive comments regarding women,” a political scientist noted. “Again, commenters assumed women voters would defect from Trump en masse. This did not happen. Many commentators also assumed that many evangelical Christians would not be able to bring themselves to vote for Trump. With respect to both assumptions, Trump proved the pundits wrong.”¹⁰⁸

After the “Access Hollywood” video, more than a dozen women went public with sexual misconduct allegations against Trump. Conservative media questioned some of the accusations. *Washington Times* online opinion editor Monica Crowley said that they came

¹⁰⁵ According to the *Hollywood Reporter*. after *New York Post* editor Jerry Nachman explained how to get on the next day’s cover. Trump “relayed” the alleged quote from Maples. She later denied saying it. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYqKx1GuZGg>

¹⁰⁶ Twohey, Megan and Michael Barbaro, “Two Women Say Trump Made Unwanted Advances Long Ago,” *New York Times*, Oct. 13, 2016, P. 1, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/13/us/politics/donald-trump-women>.

¹⁰⁷ The Bannon, Brad, “The Trump tape and the final debate,” *The Hill*, Oct. 19, 2016, <https://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/presidential-campaign/301762-the-trump-tape-and-the-final-debate/>

¹⁰⁸ Roberts, Robert, “The Death of Public Integrity,” Routledge, New York, NY 2020, pp.151.

across as a "classical political hit job."¹⁰⁹ Kurtz, by then a *Fox News* media analyst, suggested on Twitter that the timing was suspect.¹¹⁰

But mostly, the allegations were taken at face value in the reporting. In contrast to Clinton, there was little speculation in the media that some of the women might just be trying to cash in. Most of the stories reviewed for this thesis showed that they were largely given the benefit of the doubt. The *New York Times* was industrious in trying to track down contemporaneous confirmation of the stories, ferreting out companions and relatives of some of the women who said they had heard the stories in real time.¹¹¹

Many of the women with whom Trump was said to have had extramarital affairs were referred to in the press as his "mistresses," only sometimes carrying the qualifier "alleged." If one puts "alleged mistress" and "Trump" into the Newspapers database at UMD libraries, between the years 2015 and 2020, only 29 perfect hits come up. If one takes out "alleged," the total is 1,293. And that's only for the newspapers contained in that database. Blogs, webpages, and other less formal sites were even less likely to use the qualifier "alleged," revealing a belief that the women who said they had affairs with Trump were being truthful.

"Alleged" or not, Trump denied every one. The denials were duly reported, but the undertone of most of the reporting was that the denials were perfunctorily pro forma.

For example, Jessica Leeds, who was then a businesswoman representing a paper company, said in 2016 that Trump groped in the early 1980s. When she gave the interview to

¹⁰⁹ Media Matters, *Fox News*, Oct. 13, 2016, <https://www.mediamatters.org/donald-trump/fox-news-contributor-warns-sexual-assault-allegations-may-backfire-and-turn-trump>

¹¹⁰ Kludt, Tom, "At Fox News, Donald Trump allegations bring echoes of recent scandal," *Fox News*, Oct. 14, 2016, <https://money.cnn.com/2016/10/14/media/fox-news-donald-trump-roger-aites-allegations/index.html>

¹¹¹ Barbaro, Michael and Megan Twohey, "Crossing the Line: How Donald Trump Behaved With Women in Private," *New York Times*, May 14, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/15/us/politics/donald-trump-women.html>

the *New York Times*, she was 74; the event had happened when she was 38. But other than that fact, the Times story revealed no details about her physical attributes. While the story said Trump grabbed her breasts, there was no description of whether she was voluptuous or skinny. Nothing like the descriptions of Lewinsky's body.¹¹² Indeed, almost every story about her mentions that she worked herself up in the financial world to become a stockbroker (i.e., a success that requires brains).¹¹³

Rachel Crooks also told her story to the *New York Times*. Crooks, the *Times* said, made the first move at the elevator by offering her hand to Trump for a handshake. But Trump "would not let go, she said. Instead, he began kissing her cheeks. Then, she said, he 'kissed me directly on the mouth.'"¹¹⁴ According to Crooks, Trump asked for her phone number, saying that he would pass it along to a modeling agency. Crooks says she gave it to him because she was afraid of Trump's influence over her company, a tenant in Trump's building.¹¹⁵ In the Lewinsky era, those overtures could have been interpreted as coming on to him. But that's not how it was reported in the Trump era.¹¹⁶

¹¹² *Times*' photos of Leeds were tasteful and her clothing conservative. She had revealed she was divorced at the time, but no interview with her ex-husband was evidenced in the *Times*, nor was there speculation about why she was divorced, nor was there reporting on anyone else she might have told at the time. Twohey, Megan and Michael Barbaro, "Two Women Say Trump Made Unwanted Advances Long Ago," *New York Times*, Oct. 13, 2016, P. 1, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/13/us/politics/donald-trump-women.html>

¹¹³ Carroll, E. Jean, "Donald Trump is waiting for you in First Class," *Atlantic*, Sept. 11, 2020. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/09/i-moved-on-her-very-heavily-part-3/616201/>

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*

¹¹⁵ There's no evidence that the number was given to any agency, she recalled.

¹¹⁶ Crooks ran for the Ohio Legislature in 2018, despite having never been involved in politics before. She won the Democratic nomination in an overwhelmingly Republican district -- a race more experienced Democrats gave up on. She was beaten 2-1 by Republican Rep. Bill Reineke. She credited the #MeToo movement with catalyzing her run, and said she wanted to "empathize with others, [so] you can possibly reach common ground." Nelson, Rebecca, "Trump Accuser Rachel Crooks is Running for the Ohio State Legislature," *Cosmopolitan*, Feb. 5, 2018. <https://www.cosmopolitan.com/politics/a16566742/rachel-crooks-trump-accuser-running-for-office/>

In 2016, the *Huffington Post* reported that Lisa Boyne, a “health food business entrepreneur,” described sitting in a restaurant’s semi-circular booth with Trump and half a dozen other women. When one of the women wanted to get up, the men at the table refused to move to let them out, and Trump insisted they walk across the table instead. When they did, he looked up their skirts to check out their underwear. Boyne was quoted as saying she “wanted to get the heck out of there.” But nowhere in the piece was the question asked, “Well, why the heck did you stay?”¹¹⁷

Jean Carroll, a former advice columnist for *Elle* magazine, alleged that Trump “accosted” her in a department store by tugging under her clothing and pressing his body parts up against her.¹¹⁸ Carroll was no stranger to publicity. Her advice column “Ask E. Jean,” was published by *Elle* magazine for 25 years and she frequently appeared on television to dispense advice.¹¹⁹ She is one of the few Trump accusers who sued him, accusing him of slander when he denied the assault allegation and declared she was “not my type.”¹²⁰ But there was no description of what “type” she was. Contrast that with the descriptions of Lewinsky as a “flirtatious” type.

In 2018, American Media Inc., the company that owned the pro-Trump tabloid *National Enquirer*, settled a lawsuit with former *Playboy* model Karen McDougal, who said she had a year-long affair with Trump, while he was married to his third wife, Melania. In 2016, AMI bought

¹¹⁷ Reilly, Mollie and Sam Stein, “Trump Faces Another accusation -- This Time, He Looked Up Models’ Skirts,” *Huffington Post*, Oct. 13, 2016. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/donald-trump-models-skirts-underwear_n_57ffd172e4b0162c043ac07f

¹¹⁸ Carroll, E. Jean, “What Do We Need Men For? A Modest Proposal,” 2019, St. Martin’s Publishing Group. Excerpted in *The Cut*, June 21, 2019. <https://www.thecut.com/2019/06/donald-trump-assault-e-jean-carroll-other-hideous-men.html>

¹¹⁹ She was an author who wrote a biography of Hunter S. Thompson, and a comedy writer who had written for Saturday Night Live. Mangan, Dan, “Judge denies Trump request to pause rape defamation lawsuit by E. Jean Carroll pending appeal,” CNBC, Sept. 15, 2021 <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/09/15/judge-denies-trump-bid-to-pause-rape-defame-case-by-e-jean-carroll.html>

¹²⁰ The suit was ongoing as of February 2023. Scannell, Kara, “E. Jean Carroll no longer seeks Trump’s deposition in defamation lawsuit,” *CNN.com*, Feb. 22, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/22/politics/e-jean-carroll-trump/index.html>

the rights to McDougal’s story about her relationship with Trump for \$150,000, but the story never ran – a tactic known as “catch and kill.” The *Wall Street Journal* first reported on the contract.¹²¹ Searching for stories about McDougal and Trump produced none in which the model’s physical attributes were described.

By the time he was president, at least 26 women had publicly accused Trump of some kind of sexual misconduct. News coverage of these allegations painted a picture of a dandy, a “man about town”, and a ladies’ man – an image Trump cultivated.¹²² At the same time, he branded all of them “liars” and threatened to sue all of them; most of the promised suits never materialized.

The Trump White House was also dismissive of the charges, essentially arguing that Americans didn’t care.¹²³ “Look, the president has addressed these accusations directly and denied all of these allegations,” White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders said in 2017. “And this took place long before he was elected to be President. And the people of this country, at a decisive election, supported President Trump, and we feel like these allegations have been answered through that process.”¹²⁴ She would reiterate those arguments many times thereafter.

¹²¹ Palazzolo, Joe, *Michael Rothfeld Lukas I. Alpert* “National Enquirer Shielded Donald Trump From Playboy Model’s Affair Allegation,” *Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 4, 2016 <https://www.wsj.com/articles/national-enquirer-shielded-donald-trump-from-playboy-models-affair-allegation-1478309380>

¹²²On the Howard Stern radio show, Trump bragged about his sex life — both in the past and with third wife Melania. And he eagerly joined Stern in raunchy discussions about women’s bodies and sex acts, and sat by as Stern quizzed his daughter Ivanka — then 25 — about her own sex life.

¹²³ Relman, Eliza, “The 26 Women Who Have Accused Trump of Misconduct,” *Business Insider*, Sept. 17, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/women-accused-trump-sexual-misconduct-list-2017-12?IR=C>

¹²⁴ CBS News, “White House rebuffs sexual harassment allegations against Trump,” WBTW, December 14, 2017, <https://www.wbtw.com/news/white-house-rebuffs-sexual-harassment-allegations-against-trump/amp/>

Stormy Daniels, a pornographic film star, producer and entrepreneur, alleged that she had a consensual affair with Trump after meeting at a celebrity golf tournament in 2006 near Lake Tahoe. The affair might have remained a secret, and did for almost a decade, until Trump started running for president and Daniels threatened to tell the story to ABC's "Good Morning America" or to the *National Enquirer*.

The very first story on Daniels and Trump apparently appeared on "*The Smoking Gun*" website in October 2016, a month before the election. It explicitly talked about the two of them having sex at the celebrity golf event. "In fact, [Daniels] confided to friends that she engaged in a sexual affair with Trump, whom she claimed had promised to help her get cast on 'The Apprentice' or another TV show," the story said. The article described her as a "porn superstar," and the piece was dotted with semi-revealing pictures of Daniels accentuating her breasts, which she freely admitted were surgically augmented. But the story seems to have been ignored by the rest of the media, perhaps because the publication was not taken seriously and perhaps because the story fit an already-accepted image of Trump and was considered to be less than newsworthy.¹²⁵

In January 2018, *The Wall Street Journal* broke the story that Daniels was paid \$130,000 for her silence about the affair. (Trump attorney Michael Cohen later pleaded guilty to paying the hush money to Daniels.) The *Journal* -- the paper that had labeled Lewinsky a "little tart" a couple of decades earlier -- now described Daniels in professional terms, with no mention

¹²⁵ Bastone, William "Donald Trump And The Porn Superstar: GOP nominee was pals with XXX actress," *The Smoking Gun*, Oct. 18, 2016, <http://www.thesmokinggun.com/documents/celebrity/donald-trump-and-stormy-daniels-738920>

of her physical attributes. The paper said Daniels is “among the industry’s biggest stars” and noted she has appeared in about 150 adult films, nothing further.¹²⁶

As the story broke, other news organizations began profiling Daniels. The *Washington Post*, which had mercilessly tracked Lewinsky’s family life, glossed over Daniels’, which was inarguably more dysfunctional. One had to read Daniels’ autobiography to discover that her divorced mother dated a string of men and disappeared for days at a time; there was often nothing to eat in the house, which was so messy and unclean she didn’t want to have friends over after school. She dated “bad boys,” the kind that used her and didn’t acknowledge her at school afterward.¹²⁷ None of that was readily available in the news media.

The *Washington Post* called Daniels one of “the last movie stars of porn.” There was nothing about her background or what drove her into the porn business, just a depiction of her as a savvy movie star and producer. The story ended on how she wanted to produce movies – showing her entrepreneurial bent -- and how she “doesn’t fold under pressure from anyone,” again quoting a friend on how tough she is.¹²⁸

A piece in *Vogue* underlined Daniels’ poor background and the magnet high school she got into, indicating she was smart. Her high school classmates had no idea that as a senior she was stripping to make money; she didn’t tell them. According to *Vogue*, she got high scores on her SATs and won scholarships to a couple of universities, but college was beyond the financial

¹²⁶ Rothfeld, Michael and Joe Palazzolo, “Trump Lawyer Arranged \$130,000 Payment for Adult-Film Star’s Silence,” *Wall Street Journal*, Jan 12, 2018. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/trump-lawyer-arranged-130-000-payment-for-adult-film-stars-silence-1515787678>

¹²⁷ “Daniels, Stormy and Kevin Carr O’Leary, “Full Disclosure,” St. Martin’s Press, New York, 2018

¹²⁸ The piece went on to mention that she thought of running for the U.S. Senate against Louisiana Sen. David Vitter, who had been caught up in a porn scandal. It also quoted another porn actress as saying Daniels was “a little stuck up.” “April 20, 2018 (Page C3 EZ RE).” *Washington Post* (2008-), Apr 20, 2018, pp. 1. *ProQuest*, <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/april-20-2018-page-c3-ez-re/docview/2082094930/se-2?accountid=14696>.

capabilities of her family. And she was making money, working hard, and gaining a reputation for her strip dancing at the Gold Club in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where she grew up.¹²⁹

Washington Post columnist Karen Tumulty asserted that Daniels had “outmaneuvered” not only Trump, but his lawyer Michael Cohen as well: “They apparently believed they had bought her silence about the year-long extramarital affair she claims to have had with the future president a decade ago. But it turns out they had only rented it.”¹³⁰

And as if being smart and funny and savvy wasn’t enough, *Rolling Stone*, in a “day in the life of a stripper” story, branded her “The Hero America Needs.” The magazine observed her striptease act, finding her “in full command of the crowd, titillating strangers for cash and flirting with her fans like a pro.” She had been called “the hero America deserves,” but, according to *Rolling Stone*: “Maybe what America needs most in 2018, as we stew in rage, simultaneously enthralled, bewildered and revolted by ourselves, is a porn star to help us take a long, uncompromising, compassionate look at our country and culture, gross parts and all.”¹³¹

In *Vanity Fair*, writer Jim Warren mocked the journalists who flocked to “cover” Daniels’ appearance at a South Carolina strip club as the scandal unfolded. Reporters went to the Trophy Club, he wrote, only to see the slogan “Making America Horny Again” on the marquee. The Charleston *City Paper* helpfully told readers that “you’ll need to stop by and get some \$2 bills. It’s kind of a strip-club tipping etiquette thing.”¹³²

¹²⁹ Chozick, Amy, “Stormy Daniels Isn’t Backing Down,” *Vogue*, Aug. 28, 2018, <https://www.vogue.com/article/stormy-daniels-interview-michael-cohen-donald-trump>

¹³⁰ Tumulty, Karen. “All the President’s Accusers.” *The Washington Post*, Mar 25, 2018. *ProQuest*, <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/all-presidents-accusers/docview/2017566765/se-2?accountid=14696>.

¹³¹ Nicks, Denver, “One Night with Stormy Daniels, the Hero America Needs” *Rolling Stone*, March 8, 2018. <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/one-night-with-stormy-daniels-the-hero-america-needs-201680/>

¹³² Warren, Jim, “STORMY DANIELS SURFACES AT A SOUTH CAROLINA STRIP CLUB—AND THE PRESS FOLLOWS,” *Vanity Fair*, Jan. 22, 2018

As the number of women allegedly accosted by Trump continued to build in 2018, questions began to be raised by media critics as to why it took so long for the “Stormy Story,” as it was dubbed, to come out. Two years after the 2016 election, *Washington Post* media critic Paul Farhi reported that several media outlets, including ABC, Fox News, the *Daily Beast* and *Slate.com* had pursued leads on the Stormy story. But none came to fruition before the *Wall Street Journal* reported on the hush money. The news outlets told Farhi that they didn’t have enough evidence to corroborate Daniels’s tale of how the married Trump brought her to a hotel room to have sex.¹³³

In all, the *New York Times* interviewed dozens of women who had encounters with Trump -- both in business and as his “dates.” It painted a complex picture of a man who denigrated and shamed women in public--Trump called Daniels “horseface”—but also promoted women in his business (much as Clinton appointed women to high government posts): “He [Trump] had celebrity. He had wealth. He had connections. Even after he had behaved crudely toward them, some of the women sought his assistance with their careers or remained by his side.”¹³⁴ But the *Times* also pointed out that in every case with women, the power dynamic was decidedly in Trump’s favor. The Clinton era produced little of that notice in the press, despite the fact that Clinton was the most powerful man in the world.

The change in coverage was illustrated by *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd. She pointed out that Daniels pumped Trump not for sex tips but for business advice about the

¹³³ Farhi, Paul. "Why this Story was Hushed Up Until Now." *Washington Post*, Jan 18, 2018. *ProQuest*, <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/why-this-story-was-hushed-up-until-now/docview/1988366036/se-2?accountid=14696>.

¹³⁴Barbaro, Michael and Megan Twohey, “Crossing the Line: How Trump Behaved with Women in Public,” *New York Times*, May 14, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/15/us/politics/donald-trump-women.html>

porn industry. Dowd suggested that people might want to dismiss Daniels, “but times have changed, post-Weinstein.”¹³⁵ So, clearly, had Dowd—and the news media.

CONCLUSION

If you do a search for “buxom” or “busty” or “zaftig” and “Monica Lewinsky,” there are dozens of hits on legitimate news sites. The Morning Call of Pennsylvania talked about Lewinsky attorney William Ginsburg “with buxom client in tow.”¹³⁶ CNN anchor Jake Tapper, writing in the *Washington City Paper*, confessed he went on one date with Lewinsky, whom he

¹³⁵ Dowd, Maureen, “Trump, the First Porn President,” *New York Times*, March 10, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/10/opinion/sunday/trump-the-porn-president.html> “Post-Weinstein,” refers to Harvey Weinstein, the Hollywood film producer who was convicted of sexual assault and other sex charges in 2017 and gave rise to the “#MeToo” movement in which scores of women came forward to report sexual harassment and assault charges, sometimes many years after the acts. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harvey_Weinstein

¹³⁶ *Morning Call Knight Ridder/Tribune Information Services*, April 3, 1998, <https://www.mcall.com/news/mc-xpm-1998-04-03-3205710-story.html>

Grady, Sandy, *Philadelphia Daily News (Orlando Sentinel)*, March 10, 1999, “MONICA, STEPHANOPOULOS HAVE PLENTY IN COMMON.”

described as “cute, if a little zaftig [Yiddish for plump].”¹³⁷ Even a few years later, the description hadn’t gone away. *The New York Post*, in a story describing her later job as a game show host, reported that when asked if she’d had a makeover for the show, “the 29-year-old, buxom brunette bristled, “Oh, come on now, I’ve never had a makeover.”¹³⁸

If you do the same type of search for “Stormy Daniels,” there are virtually none on legitimate news sites (though a lot on pornographic ones). The same holds true for “slutty,” “bimbo” and other demeaning words used to describe Lewinsky’s body.¹³⁹ Maybe describing her as a “porn star,” is enough, but juxtaposed against the portrayals of her as a wily entrepreneur, the omissions of bodily descriptions are striking.

Despite her enviable post as a White House intern, journalists often portrayed Lewinsky as a love-struck and body conscious, the product-of-divorce, flighty if not deranged. Daniels by contrast, was seen as a savvy, wily, professional woman, despite her job as a stripper and porn star. Lewinsky’s body was discussed incessantly in the media; not so Daniels’, though arguably, it was more relevant to her career. Lewinsky and her sisters were floozies, attention-seekers, and temptresses--loose, unsuccessful and addled. Daniels and her compatriots were savvy, smart and clever. The Daniels stories never put her down for her chosen profession. The other Trump women were almost always described as successful businesswomen, models, actresses – even if they weren’t.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Tapper, Jake, “I dated Monica Lewinsky,” *Washington City Paper* Jan. 30, 1998, <https://washingtoncitypaper.com/article/279465/i-dated-monica-lewinsky/>

¹³⁸ Fagen, Cynthia R., “MAKEOVER? MOI ?” *New York Post*, April 14, 2003 <https://nypost.com/2003/04/14/makeover-moi/>

¹³⁹ “Monica Lewinsky” or variations of that name show up on porn sites as well, but the actresses are not the real Lewinsky.

¹⁴⁰ Jones alleged that Clinton’s penis had a “distinguishing mark” on it. But that got little attention and a discussion of Bill Clinton’s body rarely entered into the media discussion. However, Trump’s penis was mocked by Daniels on a late night TV talk show, with comparisons to various types of mushrooms. Matthews, Dyllan, *Vox*, “The sexual harassment allegations against Bill Clinton, explained,” Oct. 9, 2016

By mocking Lewinsky's body while leaving Clinton's mostly alone, the press at the time took the position that Lewinsky's attributes were open to criticism, and by inference, her actions. The same was true for other Clinton women. By not mocking Daniels' body, or those of other Trump women, their personas and actions were treated as serious and legitimate.

While the differing treatment reflects a change in times – especially the intercession of the #MeToo movement bringing to light the extent and breadth of sexual harassment and assault -- the media's different approach was notable. The research shows a mainstream media grappling with its historical place in describing the sexual actions of a president or candidate—and his women.

There was a pack mentality that surrounded the coverage of both scandals. That was particularly true in the Lewinsky maelstrom, but it also applies to many of the others in both scandals. The Stormy Daniels story was irresistible -- lots of sex, titillation, and fun -- a lot of sound and fury with, in the end, little impact on the presidency. The Monica Lewinsky story was also irresistible; but its impact on Clinton's presidency was far more profound.

In interviews and retrospective pieces on the Lewinsky/ Clinton scandal, reporters have expressed regrets about how they handled the story. In 2001, *ABC* correspondent Lisa Ling had joked on the air about Lewinsky “being on their knees.” Twenty years later, Ling confessed on television that she was ashamed of herself: “it was a horrible, horrible moment where I sacrificed my own character right for that laugh.”¹⁴¹ In 2016, when reporter Hanna Rosin caught herself giggling about the scandal on a podcast, she stopped herself: “Oh, it's not funny. It's

<https://www.vox.com/2016/10/9/13221670/paula-jones-kathleen-willey-bill-clinton-sexual-harassment-accusations>
Reed, Ryan, Stormy Daniels Identifies Trump's Penis From Mushroom Lineup on 'Kimmel', *Rolling Stone*, Oct. 3, 2018,
<https://www.rollingstone.com/tv/tv-news/stormy-daniels-trump-penis-mushroom-kimmel-732426/>

¹⁴¹ Rosa, Joanne, “Lisa Ling regrets making comment about Monica Lewinsky on 'The View': 'My heart sunk.'” *ABCNews.Go.com*, Sept. 28, 2021, <https://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/lisa-ling-regrets-making-comment-monica-lewinsky-view/story?id=80270018>

really not funny. God, we think of this so differently now... the Monica Lewinsky scandal really does mark a moment in feminist shame. It is genuinely the thing I look back on and think, God, the way — I mean, everyone says this — but the way we talked about her, the way we treated her, how blind we were to the power dynamics.”¹⁴² This was from the reporter who blithely reported in 1998 on “unofficial” White House sources saying that Lewinsky was a “flirt” and a little “unstable,” and how Clinton risked his presidency over “a blow job.”¹⁴³

The #MeToo movement and recent sex scandals have provided ample room for those who covered the Lewinsky saga to reflect.¹⁴⁴

All of the journalistic angst in 1998 about whether to publish the details of Lewinsky’s relationship with Clinton broke new ground on what was acceptable to report. No such agonizing took place reporting on Trump’s women. The Lewinsky revelations paved the way for reporting the salacious details of Daniels’ relationship with Trump. At the very least, reflecting on the coverage of Lewinsky provided journalists the opportunity to take into account their past behavior while reporting Trump’s alleged sexual transgressions.

Collins’ book shows that press rumors, gossip and speculation about political officials have been part of the American landscape since its beginning, ebbing and flowing along with press coverage.¹⁴⁵ But she concludes that while the American people have been titillated by such scandals, voters rarely decided elections based on their leaders’ sex lives. That proved

¹⁴² Grady, Constance, “Every version of the Monica Lewinsky story reveals America’s failure of empathy Twenty-three years later, the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal is a tale of cultural sadism,” *Vox* Oct 5, 2021, <https://www.vox.com/culture/22672346/monica-lewinsky-bill-clinton-impeachment-american-crime-story>

¹⁴³ Rosin, Hanna, “Starr Struck,” *New York Magazine*, Feb. 2, 1998, <https://nymag.com/nymetro/news/politics/columns/nationalinterest/2150/>

¹⁴⁴ Toobin, Jeffrey, “A Vast Conspiracy,” Introduction to the e-book edition, Random House, 2000, location 455

¹⁴⁵ Collins, Gail, “Scorpion Tongues: Gossip, Celebrity and American Politics,” Harper-Collins, New York 2011

true in the Clinton and Trump imbroglios, as Clinton retained his job as president and Trump was elected president—and lost his re-election bid for other reasons.

As far back as the founders, Collins wrote, the sexual practices of historical figures were considered gossip-worthy, but not disqualifying. She pointed to Benjamin Franklin's common-law wife and an illegitimate child by another woman, as well as Alexander Hamilton's effort to head off a financial scandal by admitting an affair with another man's wife.

The media in the Trump and Clinton sex scandals may not have recognized at the time that they were mimicking history, but they were.

Appendix I

Selected Timeline of the Clinton/Lewinsky affair and associated women

May 8, 1991: Arkansas state employee Paula Jones goes to then-Gov. Bill Clinton's hotel room where he allegedly propositioned her.

May 6, 1994: Jones files a sexual harassment suit against Clinton, seeking \$750,000 in damages.

October 3, 1991: Bill Clinton announces his candidacy for President of the United States.

January 27, 1992: At a press conference, former Arkansas state employee Gennifer Flowers alleges that she had a twelve-year affair with Clinton.

June 1995: Monica Lewinsky, 21, comes to the White House as an unpaid intern in the office of Chief of Staff Leon Panetta.

November 1995: Lewinsky and President Bill Clinton begin a sexual relationship, according to audiotapes of Lewinsky secretly recorded later by Linda Tripp.

Summer 1996: Lewinsky begins to tell fellow Pentagon employee Tripp of her alleged relationship with Clinton.

August 1997: Tripp encountered Kathleen Willey coming out of Oval Office "disheveled. Her face red and her lipstick was off." Willey later alleged that Clinton groped her. Clinton's lawyer, Bill Bennett said that Linda Tripp is not to be believed.

Fall 1997: Tripp to begin taping conversations in which Lewinsky details her alleged affair with the president.

October 1997: Tripp meets with Newsweek's Michael Isikoff, Lucianne & Jonah Goldberg at Jonah's apartment in Washington, according to a Newsweek report. The Goldberg's listen to a tape of Tripp/Lewinsky conversations.

January 1998

Jan. 7, 1998: Lewinsky files an affidavit in the Jones case in which she denies ever having a sexual relationship with President Clinton.

Jan. 13, 1998: Tripp, wired by FBI agents working with Starr, meets with Lewinsky at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel bar in Pentagon City, Va., and records their conversation.

Jan. 17, 1998: Ginsburg flies to Washington to represent Lewinsky. Clinton gives his deposition in the Jones lawsuit, in which he denies having a sexual relationship with Lewinsky. Newsweek magazine decides not to run a story by investigative reporter Michael Isikoff on the Lewinsky tapes and the alleged affair.

Jan. 19, 1998: Lewinsky's name surfaces in the Drudge Report, which mentions rumors that Newsweek had decided to delay publishing a piece on Lewinsky and the alleged affair.

Jan. 21, 1998: Several news organizations report the alleged sexual relationship between Lewinsky and Clinton. Clinton denies the allegations as the scandal erupts.

Jan. 26, 1998: Clinton forcefully repeats his denial, saying, "I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky." Ginsburg offers Starr a summary of what Lewinsky is prepared to say to the grand jury in exchange for a grant of immunity from the prosecution.

Jan. 27, 1998: Jones' attorney, John Whitehead, answers Starr's subpoena with several documents.

Feb. 6, 1998: At a news conference, President Bill Clinton says he would never consider resigning because of the accusations against him. "I would never walk away from the people of this country and the trust they've placed in me," he says.

March 10, 1998: Kathleen Willey, a former White House volunteer who accused the president of fondling her, testifies before the grand jury for four hours.

March 20, 1998: President Clinton decides to formally invoke executive privilege.

April 1, 1998: Judge Susan Webber Wright dismisses the Paula Jones case.

May 5, 1998: Federal Judge Norma Holloway Johnson rules against President Clinton's claim of executive privilege. Clinton confidant Vernon Jordan testifies for a third time before the grand jury.

May 6, 1998: Clinton's personal attorney, David Kendall, accuses Starr's office of "flagrant leaks."

June 15, 1998: The publication of an article in the new magazine of media criticism, Brill's Content, alleging that Ken Starr leaked information to the media leads Judge Holloway to hold a private meeting with lawyers for both sides of the case to investigate the charges. The magazine's editor and creator, Steven Brill, said Starr admitted to the leaks in a 90-minute interview.

June 16, 1998: Ken Starr releases a 19-page attack on Brill's article, calling the editor "reckless" and "irresponsible" for printing what he called a misinterpretation of their interview.

July 25, 1998: Word emerges that Independent Counsel Ken Starr has served President Clinton with a subpoena that calls for his testimony before the Lewinsky grand jury.

July 28, 1998: In a dramatic breakthrough, lawyers for Lewinsky and Starr work out a full immunity agreement covering both Lewinsky and her parents, Marcia Lewis and Dr. Bernard Lewinsky.

July 29, 1998: President Bill Clinton agrees to testify voluntarily and Starr's office withdraws the subpoena. Clinton's testimony is set for Aug. 17 at the White House.

July 30, 1998: Sources say that as part of her immunity agreement, Lewinsky has handed over to prosecutors a dark blue dress that she alleges may contain physical evidence of a sexual relationship with President Bill Clinton. The dress is turned over to the FBI lab for testing.

Aug. 17, 1998: President Bill Clinton becomes the first sitting president to testify before a grand jury investigating his conduct. After the questioning at the White House is finished, Clinton goes on national TV to admit he had an inappropriate relationship with Monica Lewinsky.

September 21, 1998: The Judiciary Committee releases, and many television networks immediately broadcast more than four hours of President Clinton's videotaped grand jury testimony. Along with the videotape, the Judiciary Committee also releases the appendix to the Starr's report which includes 3,183 pages of testimony and other evidence, including a photograph of Lewinsky's semen-stained dress.

December 19, 1998: After 13 1/2 hours of debate over two days, the House of Representatives approves two articles of impeachment, charging President Clinton with lying under oath to a federal grand jury and obstructing justice.

January 7, 1999: With ceremonial flourishes, the perjury and obstruction of justice trial of President Bill Clinton begins in the Senate, with the swearing in of Chief Justice William Rehnquist to preside and the senators as jurors.

February 12, 1999: President Clinton is acquitted of the two articles of impeachment.

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Appendix II

Selected timeline of the Trump/Daniels affair, with additional women accusers included

January 2005 — Trump marries his current wife, Melania.

March 2006 — The couple's son, Barron, is born.

July 2006 — According to Stormy Daniels, she and Trump began an "intimate relationship" and it continued "well into the year 2007."

2011 — Daniels, whose legal name is Stephanie Clifford, says a man warned her to keep quiet about any encounters with Trump. Daniels said she and her daughter were approached in a Las Vegas parking lot by a man who said something along the lines of: "Oh it's a beautiful little girl, would be a shame if something happened to her mom. Forget about this story, leave Mr. Trump alone."

Days before the November 2016 election — Trump’s personal attorney, Michael Cohen, pays Daniels \$130,000 in exchange for her silence. Separately, the *Wall Street Journal* publishes a story stating that the National Enquirer — run by David Pecker, a Trump supporter — had paid \$150,000 to silence former Playboy Playmate Karen McDougal about a sexual relationship she allegedly had with Trump a decade ago. The story also mentions Daniels and says she had been in talks with ABC News to tell her story but cut off negotiations with the network.

Trump spokeswoman Hope Hicks says it is “absolutely, unequivocally” untrue that Daniels and Trump had a relationship.

June 16, 2017 — Trump’s personal financial disclosure form is certified, with no listed debt to Cohen.

Jan. 12, 2018 — The *Wall Street Journal* reports that Cohen had arranged the payment to Clifford in October 2016 to keep her from publicly discussing the alleged sexual encounter.

Feb. 13, 2018 — Cohen acknowledges he paid \$130,000 out of his own pocket to Daniels, saying he was not reimbursed by the Trump Organization or the Trump campaign. He notably does not say whether the president personally reimbursed him.

March 7, 2018 — Daniels files a lawsuit in Los Angeles County Superior Court seeking to invalidate the nondisclosure agreement. White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders says Trump has “made very well clear that none of these allegations are true.”

March 25, 2018 — In a highly anticipated interview with CBS’ “60 Minutes,” Daniels says she was threatened to keep silent. White House spokesman Raj Shah declines to say whether the president watched the interview but says Trump does not believe any of the claims she made.

April 5, 2018 — In his first public comments about Daniels, Trump tells reporters aboard Air Force One that he didn’t know about Cohen’s payment.

April 9, 2018 — Federal agents in New York raid Cohen’s office and a hotel room, seizing records on topics including the payment made to Daniels. Cohen is now facing a criminal investigation in New York.

April 18, 2018 — Trump responds to Daniels releasing an artist’s sketch of a man she says threatened her. “A sketch years later about a nonexistent man,” Trump tweets. “A total con job, playing the Fake News Media for Fools (but they know it)!”

April 26, 2018 — In a phone interview with “Fox & Friends,” Trump muddies his earlier comments that he didn’t know about the Cohen payments, saying Cohen represented him in the “crazy Stormy Daniels deal.”

May 2, 2018 — Former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, now representing Trump as one of his lawyers, tells Fox News host Sean Hannity that Trump reimbursed Cohen for the \$130,000 paid to Daniels. Giuliani says the money to repay Cohen had been “funneled ... through the law firm and the president repaid it.”

May 3, 2018 — On Twitter, Trump acknowledges he repaid Cohen after claiming previously he didn’t know about the payments. He said the money “had nothing to do with the campaign.”

Source: <https://apnews.com/article/f5b42620b4ec4d70a4675d8c83bf4892>

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