A Post-Hoc Analysis of the Clinton-Lewinsky Scandal: Application of Psychological Theories of Attitude to Elucidate the Responses of the Public, Media, and Political Parties

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A Post-Hoc Analysis of the Clinton-Lewinsky Scandal:

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A THESIS

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PROJECT TITLE: A Post-Hoc Analysis of the Clinton-Lewinsky Scandal: Applications of Psychological Theories of Attitude to Elucidate the Responses of the Public, Media, and Political Parties

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As the presidency of William Jefferson Clinton’s second term unfolded, and the never-ending parade of accusations and investigations accompanied, I began to wonder what I thought of the political/media feeding frenzy and the public’s overall sense of disgust. Or more importantly, I began to wonder what I should think of it all. Personally, I didn’t care. I was a college student wrapped up in the mid-term next week, the job interview I had in five days, the party going on this Saturday. We are notorious for our self-absorption, and I assumed my disinterest was simply due to the fact that I was thoroughly engaged in my undergraduate career and Erik Erikson’s psychosocial crisis of identity-versus-role confusion. However, as the months rolled by and coverage of Clinton’s alleged promiscuity began to dwarf the sensationalism of the O.J. Simpson trial, a curious thing became apparent to me. I wasn’t the only one not caring. There was a legitimate concern that our President had committed adultery with a twenty-some year old White House intern and then possibly lied about it and/or attempted to cover it up, and nobody seemed to mind except the Republican members of Congress, the far right zealots and, of course, the media. Investigation into the matter seemed imperative. Why couldn’t the Republicans let up on the mud-slinging, dirt-digging tactics? Why didn’t the media, just for once, listen to the public’s outcry against the incessant hype? Why didn’t the public even seem to care our President was being accused of unthinkably embarrassing, possibly illegal, actions?

The questions I was asking myself were distinctively different from other causal inquiries about life and the world because they addressed an issue central to the functioning of the United States government, and ultimately, our democracy. The public’s disgust and desensitization to critical events due to media hype doesn’t lend itself well to the critical examination of actions engaged in by those in power. It seemed to be the ultimate paradox: the most embarrassing allegations against our President were being met with the highest job approval ratings. As a psychology major, I was highly intrigued by the phenomenon, and motivated to explore it further. And so my senior thesis took shape.
Theories of social psychology seemed appropriate to apply in order to help explain the dynamics of the scandal and answer the questions I raised. I was, after all, attempting to understand and explain how the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of individuals were influenced by the presence of others. More importantly, I wanted to understand how the attitudes of the public, media, and political parties were influenced and shaped. Theories pertaining to the formation of beliefs and attitudes in social psychology were chosen for application. The first step in explaining why or how attitudes existed or came about was to define to some extent what those attitudes were. In order to accomplish this in the time frame available, I used evidence from three news magazines. Specifically, issues of *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report* from May 1998 through September 1998 were used as evidence for public opinion and political news. These three newsmagazines have the widest circulation, greatest diversity of consumers, and despite the fact that they carry unique, individual voices, the events are described factually. It is irrelevant as to who reports the survey, as long as the procedures for conducting the survey are valid and standardized. By using information from media itself I was able to provide direct evidence for print media's coverage of the scandal.

There are, of course, weaknesses to my method of gathering information. For one, the fact that the information was taken from a mediated source indicates its bias. The newsmagazines chosen as sources do carry a certain conservative reputation. This could be construed in two different ways: as a weakness confounding my analysis, or as a strength which can be used to illustrate various points. There are a number of places in my analysis where I use the media's coverage or lack thereof of certain statistics/topics as evidence for arguments I make. Since the only source for the American public to gain current information regarding the scandal was mediated, I thought it appropriate to analyze that same source. Second, the comments of partisan and special interest analysts such as Cokie Roberts, George F. Mills, and George Stephanopoulos are not directly considered. Their inclusion is incidentally incorporated, only to the extent that what such partisan influences say is influential to the public and
therefore appears in public polls or is picked up by one or all of the three magazines. No attempt is made
to include in analysis specific partisan and minority viewpoints. Third, due to the sheer amount of
information and its lengthy progression, there was by no way possible that I could include the scandal in
its entirety in my analysis. Although May and September are fairly arbitrary, they did provide somewhat
convenient and appropriate cut-off points. (See Appendix A)

My senior thesis, then, consists of a post-hoc analysis of attitudes during the 1998 year of
President Bill Clinton’s scandal involving Monica Lewinsky. Rather than anticipating and predicting the
unfolding of events and responses, this analysis will instead look backwards in time to understand events.
Specifically, various psychological theories of attitudes/persuasion and cognition are applied to provide
post hoc explanations of various participants such as the media, the public, and both political parties to
Clinton’s alleged inappropriate/illega1 actions. The opinions of each group are monitored and analyzed
according to Leon Festinger’s theory of cognitive dissonance, the Elaboration- Likelihood Model,
William Perry’s theory of cognitive development, Don Byrne’s theories on attitude and attraction, and
Irving Janis’s theory on the effects of fear arousal on attitude change. Lesser applications are made using
the theory of Groupthink by Irving Janis and Russell Fazio’s theory of attitude-behavior processes.
The Public

Throughout the graphic unfolding of Clinton’s sexual affairs and alleged illegal scandals, (Whitewater, Filegate, illegal funds) one group has continuously baffled and frustrated the media and political parties with its responses: the public. Its backlash against the media and indifference to partisan accusations has characterized the public’s reaction to what could be arguably called an embarrassing, publicly immoral presidency. Three observable patterns regarding public attitude can be gleaned from 1998 public opinion polls in news-magazines *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News & World Report*. First is the tendency for the public to resent the investigative actions by the special prosecutor Kenneth Starr. Second is the intolerance the public has shown for watch-dog journalism participated in by the media. Third, the public has differentiated between the presidency as an office and the President as a moral person with a private life. The tendencies have resulted in approval ratings and opinions not many experts could have predicted.

From the beginning it was fairly obvious the public held little interest in an investigation of Clinton’s questionable sexual activity. In an April 13th edition of *Newsweek*, polls reported that 67% of those surveyed said they agreed with the judge’s decision to dismiss Paula Jones’s lawsuit, with only 24% thinking she should have allowed the case to go to trial. The numbers were indicative of how the public would subsequently feel about Starr’s investigation into charges that Clinton committed perjury about his relationship with Lewinski, with 57% believing it should end, and 38% believing it should continue (Thomas & Klaidman, 1998). As the investigation continued, and the details of pictures, alleged gifts and sexual contact came to light, the public responded in a July 13th *Time/CNN* poll by rating Clinton as the individual with the most favorable impression (56%). Starr came in second, trailing with a 22% favorable and 51% unfavorable impression. Tripp and Lewinsky dragged in last with a measly 12% of those surveyed stating the women made a favorable
impression (Duffy & Weisskopf, 1998). As the scandal proceeded and Lewinsky struck an immunity deal in early August in exchange for grand jury testimony, the majority of citizens continued to oppose the investigations. In an August 10th poll in *Time*, 49% of those surveyed indicated they would want their Representative to oppose an investigation into whether to impeach Clinton, while 42% would want their Representative to support one (Carney & Dickerson, 1998). If Clinton were to admit he had sex with Lewinsky and lied about it, and then apologized, 69% thought Starr’s investigation should end, while only 27% believed it should continue. The persistent resentment towards Starr’s investigation may have been a direct result of Starr’s goal: impeachment of Bill Clinton. Based on what the public had read or heard, 70% did not believe Clinton should be impeached or removed from office according to the August 10th *Time/CNN* poll (Gibbs, 1998).

Reactions against the investigation by Starr may have also been a response to the incessant media coverage the scandal evoked. Although harder to provide evidence for, considering few newsmagazines polled citizens regarding their own unpopularity, some letters to the editor and remarks by journalists provided a window to this view. As the August 31st edition of *Newsweek* reports in their “Letters” column, not all readers were satisfied with the Clinton coverage (Smith, 1998).

“When our August 10th issue appeared three weeks ago with a cover story speculating on what President Clinton and Monica Lewinsky would say to the grand jury, a number of readers responded with a resounding: So what? ‘Spare us please,’ begged one. ‘Get on with the hurricane season or something...anything.’”

Other journalists expressed a similar opinion, believing the details were hardly necessary to Starr’s unattainable goal of impeachment. As Garrison Keillor writes:

“The precise delectable details—...what did the Leader of the Free World do with his pants and did they do it on the floor or use a desk or a sofa and was it one of those hard formal sofas...
This is not about government. There is not an impeachable offense here. You can’t even see impeachment from here” (Keillor, 1998).

In some rare cases, there are even examples of authors and columnists berating the media on the public’s behalf, as best-selling author and widely syndicated political columnist Molly Ivins does:

“One of the... habits of media mavens is presuming to speak for the American people, as in ‘The American people won’t stand for this.’ Far as I’m concerned, the American people are perfectly capable of speaking for themselves...We were more informed than we wanted to be about Mr. Clinton’s transgressions. In fact, we are so well informed, we were about to collectively puke, and we sure as hell don’t want to hear any more details” (Ivins, 1998).

The public overall simply hadn’t bought into the obsession as the national news media and Washington political establishment had, and the opinion polls, approval ratings, and letters to the editor reflect this.

Yet another tendency the public has shown in its response to Clinton and the scandal in general is to separate Bill Clinton as a President whose job is to lead the country and Bill Clinton as an individual person with a private life. “Do we want a President who lied under oath? No. But the lies- and the alleged obstruction and the alleged witness tampering-still stem from the President’s sex life, which is none of our business, thank you” (Ivins, 1998). Divorcing job performance from moral values and public from private life is one mental activity a majority of the public engaged in. In an August 10th Time poll, 61% of those surveyed believed Clinton’s sexual behavior during his term as President was not relevant to how he should be judged in office (Pooley, 1998). Job approval ratings consistently corroborate with such findings. The August 24th issue of Newsweek reported a 59% job approval (Alter, 1998), and U.S. News & World Report indicated on August 31st in a poll that 65% of those surveyed approved of Clinton’s job performance (Budiansky, 1998). A
CNN/ USA Today/ Gallup Poll found that after the air strikes on Afghanistan and Sudan, 61% approved of how Clinton does his job (Lavelle, Barnes, & Walsh, 1998). **In fact, Clinton’s approval rating before Starr’s 445 page report came out was lower (57%) than the day after (62%)** (Walsh, 1998). Although Clinton has enjoyed miraculous support from the citizens of the U.S. regarding his job performance, his moral reputation has not fared well. Only 40% approved of his moral values in an August 31st *U.S. News & World Report* poll (Budiansky, 1998), and by September 21st, 62% of respondents disapproved of the President as a person (Kelly, 1998). In an August 24th *Newsweek* poll, 55% didn’t think he had the honesty and integrity they expect in a President, and four out of ten people said Clinton’s ability to be an effective moral leader had been seriously hurt (Alter, 1998). An August 31st *Time/CNN* poll found that regardless of how they felt about his political views, 50% of the public did not respect Clinton (Gibbs & Duffy, 1998). Statistics as those shown above help reinforce the argument that the public has engaged in compartmentalization of the presidency from the President.

Though the public has shown no interest in impeaching Clinton for his actions, regardless of whether they were proven true or not, they have indicated belief that some kind of punishment is appropriate. According to an August 10th *Newsweek* poll, while 62% believe the President has done enough to apologize, 54% believe Congress should formally reprimand or censure him for his behavior (Gibbs, 1998). A September 28th poll by *Newsweek* confirms earlier opinion, showing that while 46% think the President should consider resigning over the Lewinsky matter, 64% would prefer censuring Clinton (Fineman & Hosenball, 1998). In the September 28th issue of *Time*, censuring was the most popular venue of punishment, with 29% of those surveyed believing Clinton should be impeached, 33% that he should resign, and 46% that Congress should censure him (Tumulty, 1998). Generally, the public agreed with Keillor when he said that there was no
impeachable offense to discuss.

In sum, the public has had a baffling reaction towards what the political establishments and the media assumed would be a national crisis. Their attitude has manifested itself into a resentment towards Starr’s investigation and the media, as well as a compartmentalization of the presidency as an office and the President as a person. Even though the public did seem to favor punishment in the form of Congressional censure, impeachment was not a popular public consequence for Clinton. The investigation into Lewinsky and Clinton was viewed as a dangerous side-show, impeding our president from doing his job. By a 53% to 21% margin, people said that a president’s effectiveness in carrying out policies beneficial to the country matters more than high personal character. An astounding 72% believe Clinton could have done a lot more as president if he had not had to deal with the Lewinsky matter, Whitewater, and questionable fund-raising (Alter, 1998). In answering the question “How could he have done it?” the public tends to espouse an attitude summarized well by Keillor: “People do such things. It has no relation to intellect or political talent. It has to do with being human, and there is a lot of human nature in everybody, including our Bill.”

Media

Since evidence for the attitudes of the public and political parties provides insight into media coverage, my analysis of the media focuses on examining the motives to continue coverage in spite of public opposition. Of all the key members participating in and reacting to the drama of the sex scandal involving Clinton and Lewinsky, the media are the most controversial. The flashy, headline coverage blanketing all media of communication without cessation has been a defining characteristic of this as well as other national scandals. As the public cried out in opposition to and for relief from the infiltration of the sex scandal into their lives, the question arose as to why the media continued to play the role it did. Upon scrutiny, the driving forces behind the media’s coverage were primarily
due to the economic reality that it is shaped by market forces.

In an economy driven market, one expects consumer dissatisfaction to result in significant change. A Pew Research Center Poll of 844 people taken from Jan. 30, 1998 to Feb. 2, 1998 illustrated the public apathy towards news. The poll found that "nearly 2/3 said the media had done only a fair or poor job of carefully checking the facts before reporting [Clinton-Lewinsky stories]; 60 percent said the media had done only a fair or poor job of being objective on the story and 54 percent thought the press put in another fair or poor performance in providing the right amount of coverage" (Witcover, 1998). Yet despite indications that the public was not pleased with the "media-tainment" coverage of the allegations against Clinton, significant change did not occur. The underlying reason is that what is profitable for media is not always compatible with its image as "a bulwark of democracy that depends on an accurately informed public" (Witcover, 1998). The vast difference between what the public wants as a consumer and what is important to them as citizens creates a paradox that contributes to the loss of respect towards the media. Sixty-four percent expressed in a national survey conducted by the Roper center in January, 1997 the belief that the news is too sensationalized, yet 95% want to know about crime and 88% want to know what the national government is doing. (Valente, 1997). The public unknowingly creates the paradox by consuming that which it hypocritically claims to detest, thereby making it profitable.

Robert McChesney effectively illustrates in the video *Robert McChesney Takes on Media Globalization* why mass media in our society has failed to fulfill public needs and interests (McChesney, 1997). In the video, McChesney argues that as a democratic society, there is an imperative need for a democratic press. Eighty percent of those surveyed in the Roper poll said "that the press- meaning newspapers, magazines, TV, and radio- was crucial to the functioning of a free society" (Valente, 1997). In order to check political power there needs to be a press that is able to
critique the government, and an informed participating constituency to democratically control the individuals that have access to positions of power. There are four major trends that McChesney and other critics identified as impeding the existence of such a democratic press: corporate control of the media, conglomeration, convergence of technologies, and deregulation.

Embedded within the questionable trends and criticisms lies the primary controversy, which is whether media should be regulated by the market or by the government. Both carry consequences regarding how media is structured, financed, and controlled. The trend towards corporate control of the media is due to the fact that as a commercially run business in a free market, the media needs to make a profit. This fact has caused a concentration and conglomeration of media ownership, so that more and more media venues are owned by fewer and fewer corporations. Commonly referred to as horizontal integration, whereby one owner buys and concentrates ownership across various kind of media, the process results in a synergy (in which total profits exceed the sum of individual sources of profit) that frightens many media and economic experts (Hickey 1997).

Since the technology of cable and satellite, the resource of a limited electromagnetic spectrum used for broadcasting no longer has been an issue requiring government regulation. The 1996 Telecommunications Act deregulated the media in an unprecedented way, inviting a year long “torrent of mergers, consolidation, buyouts, partnerships, and joint ventures that has changed the face of Big Media in America” (Hickey, 1997). Coupled with the convergence of technologies made possible by digital communication, such deregulation could result in the decline of competition, variety, and all the negative consequences anti-trust laws are made to prevent. Walt Disney Company, one of the best examples of horizontal integration and synergy, maintains that conglomeration does not necessarily equal a less democratic press. As its CEO, Michael Eisner stated, “Big is bad if it stifles competition…but big is good if it produces quality programs”
(Campbell, 1998). However, as McChesney, the public, and other critics might ask, if companies cannot make money on quality news aimed at informing citizens, should we then be satisfied by profitable but inferior media products that may not serve the public need or interest? One example illustrating the struggle between the bottom line and quality is the technology of twenty-four-hour news channels, which introduce the difficulty of having enough prominent news to cover. "The advent of twenty-four-hour, all-news cable channels...assured the story of non-stop reportage and rumor, augmented by repeated break-ins of normal network programming and late night rehashes" (Witcover, 1998). While the sensationalism blame can be placed more heavily on certain media outlets such as television, the damaging effects on credibility are not discriminated among journalists.

The issue of the paradox between the public as consumers versus citizens of a democratic society who need to be informed raises the central issue of what the media should cover in its news. The very word "media" is a reminder that the messages we receive through print or electromagnetic means are far from a reflection of reality. From the myriad of events and subjects a reporter or writer could cover, only a few are considered worthy of publication. As NBC news president Reuven Frank outlined the narrative strategies integral to all news in a 1963 staff memo: "Every news story should...display the attributes of fiction, of drama. It should have structure and conflict, problem and denouement, rising and falling action, a beginning, a middle, and an end" (Bleum, 1965). Virtually every opinion poll reported by weekly news magazines Time, Newsweek, and U.S. News & World Report indicates that the majority of the public is not interested in the investigations into Clinton for any alleged immoral or illegal acts, and express the opinion that the media should stop covering it. Yet every newspaper, weekly Time subscription and news program contains more and more reports, analyses and projections about what is and may be happening with Clinton and Lewinsky. This is
explained once again by the paradoxical difference between what the public wants to hear as a consumer and what is relevant and needed as a citizen. When money is the bottom line, the public’s role as a consumer becomes the overriding factor, and criteria for what is newsworthy then become what is relevant, appealing, and dramatic. Subtle subjective and enduring values frame the story told, and Clinton becomes the subject of criticism on the front page for months on end, regardless of opinion polls.

The patterns that are consistently made by editors, journalists, and producers regarding “what news is” drastically affect public attitudes by shaping their world-view. Most issues and events journalists select as news are timely or have recently occurred. Another criteria for news-worthiness is prominence. Media news stories reflect this by reporting stories on powerful and influential celebrities, politicians, business leaders, and journalists. “Reader and viewer surveys indicate that most people identify more closely with a person than an abstract issue” (Campbell, 1998). Stories of novelty and deviance are especially alluring, since “these occurrences...not only [deviate] from norms, but....meet other news-worthiness criteria- especially conflict” (Campbell, 1998). The Clinton and Lewinsky sex scandal meets the majority, if not all of the criteria of what makes a story worthy of headlines. As Marshal McLuhan suggests in Understanding Media (1964), “Real news is bad news- bad news about somebody, or bad news for somebody” (Campbell, 1998). In this particular case, it is both for the key players in the drama and the public who are force-fed it in daily coverage. Whether this matters is contingent upon which half of the paradox is emphasized: the media as entertainment to consumers or as information to citizens.

Political Parties

This particular section is a combination of a summary of events, an account of the prevailing attitudes within each party according to these events, and a description of the coverage by the three
newsmagazines. It would be appropriate to note that the print media was not the only source of mediation for the information found in the newsmagazines. The OIC and House members were especially important in the packaging of or putting "spin" on the information for public consumption. Democratic Party:

For better or for worse, the Democrats have been inextricably tied to the fate of Bill Clinton. As the Lewinsky matter continued to escalate into the summer and the mid-term elections of November loomed ahead, the Democratic Party nervously continued their partisan support. On July 28th Lewinsky and her mother agreed to testify in exchange for full immunity, with prosecutors expecting Lewinsky to say she and Clinton were intimate. On July 29th Clinton agreed to provide testimony on August 17th (Walsh, Garrett, Lavelle, & Barnes, 1998). As the inevitably details and facts became apparent, the Democratic Party adopted a strategy of every politician for himself. Led by Senator Joseph Lieberman and House Minority leader Dick Gephardt, Clinton's already shaky relationship with the Democrats in Congress turned into one of estrangement. The rest of the party, save a few loyalists, followed suit.

By early August the allegations against Clinton became a serious issue for Democrats around the country. Republicans controlled 55 Senate seats, and "early signs [pointed towards] the Republicans maintaining control" in the fall elections (Brownstein, 1998). Republicans also held governorships in thirty-two states overall, with few chances to upset the balance. As U.S. News & World Report stated, the considerations by the Democrats as to whether or not to back Clinton boiled down to the stakes in the next presidential election. Considering Senate and House statistics, "if Democrats lose the White House in 2000, they will lose not only the most effective platform for influencing the political debate, but, quite possibly, their platform for influencing the political debate" (Brownstein, 1998). While even in mid-August public opinion polls reported healthy job
approval ratings, Democrats and political analysts sensed the superficial ties between Clinton and his party.

Meanwhile, Clinton friends and Congressional Democrats were publicly urging him to more fully disclose his relationship with Lewinsky. Gephardt’s investment in the November elections due to his potential role as challenger for the 2000 Democratic presidential election led him to hire Abbe D. Lowell as the Democrats’ chief counsel for any impeachment related proceedings against the President, “what could be the highest profile legal defense job in a generation” (Carney, 1998). The appointment sent a message to Republicans that the Democrats were prepared and capable of fighting a partisan war, and that for the time being, they were all on the same side.

Clinton’s admission of his inappropriate relationship with Lewinsky drastically altered the mood of Democrats by September. Support began to fray as Republican Speaker Newt Gingrich and House Democratic leader Gephardt seemingly switched roles. Gingrich was the one “who cautioned against a rush of judgment on the case...Meanwhile [Gephardt] was fueling talk of impeachment simply by refusing to quash it” (Carney & Tumulty, 1998). Changing strategies stemmed from the fear that as the scandal dragged on, public opinion polls would catch up with the growing number of politicians calling for Clinton’s resignation. Republicans, following good form, were stepping back to let their opponent self-destruct, while the Democrats began to sense it may be time to get out of the way.

Very quickly, hesitation led to outright abandonment. Despite the private acts of contrition “Clinton was offering...by phone to dozens of angry, dispirited Democratic leaders,” increasing numbers of party members were publicly making known their disapproval towards Clinton and his actions (Carney & Tumulty, 1998). Gephardt was the first to attack Clinton for his reprehensible behavior and “[refused] to defend him against charges of perjury and obstruction of justice, and most
important, [declared] impeachment a live option” (Garrett, Barnes, & Lavelle, 1998). As the impeachment reports were being readied for delivery to Congress, long time Democratic friend of the President Senator Joseph Lieberman took to the Senate floor and “excoriated the president over the Lewinsky matter. ‘Such behavior is not only inappropriate,’ Lieberman said, ‘it is immoral, and it is harmful’” (Klaidman & Hosenball, 1998). Within minutes, Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Kerrey entered the chamber to echo Lieberman.” With this, the floodgates were opened, making party loyalty an oxymoron. Examples of Democratic candidates running for Congress divorcing themselves from Clinton abounded in the 30 to 40 districts in which Democrats and Republicans had a real contest. As Ken Lucas, “the Democrats’ best hope in 32 years to win back Kentucky’s Fourth Congressional District” stated, “If [Clinton is] guilty of perjury or obstruction of justice, he should resign” (Cole, 1998). The public reaction to the Clinton scandal may have, for Lucas and other Democratic candidates, forced them to withdraw any support for the president.

If the scandal destroyed party loyalty in Congress, it intensified the partisan tendencies of the House Judiciary Committee. Democrat Barney Frank charged that “Starr didn’t have ‘enough to get the President, so he’s seeking to discredit him’” (Cohen, 1998). Walters also defended the President by discrediting Starr with this barb: “[Ken Starr is] the poster boy for unethical prosecutors.” As an April 27th issue of U.S. News & World Report predicted, bipartisanship is dead when it comes to scandal (Brownstein, 1998). In the case of the Judiciary Committee, the statement rings true.

As Clinton faced the most damaging scandal of his presidency and issues of resignation and impeachment surfaced, partisan support seemed to be a crucial aspect to his survival. At first party loyalty remained, as key players such as House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt and longtime Democratic friend Senator Joseph Lieberman publicly defended the President. As mid-term elections approached, however, and prospective calculations regarding congressional victories began
to dwindle along with the President’s ability to cover the truth of his relationship with Lewinsky, strategical maneuvers were taken by Democrats to distance themselves from Clinton. Those Democratic allies in Congress such as Lieberman and Gephardt then turned against Clinton, initiating trends of departure from providing presidential support. House Judicial member Barney Frank became a pro-Clinton point man while others took bold steps to divorce themselves from the President and his drama, in hopes of capturing votes in November.

Republican Party:

The Republican party’s attitudes regarding the Clinton sex scandal were affected, in part, by three main factors. First was the issue of upcoming mid-term elections in November. Second was the activities of a handful of far right zealots whose money and/or legal actions were used to try to bring Clinton down. The third factor is special prosecutor Kenneth Starr and his extensive undertakings in investigating the President.

It was early May when political analysts caught wind of news that House Republican Leaders were confidentially discussing in Newt Gingrich’s office regarding upcoming mid-term elections. The message was simple: “The G.O.P. could lose its narrow 11- seat majority in the House if it didn’t find a way to galvanize its grass-roots activists, many of whom are Christian conservatives” (Carney, 1998). Considering that many powerful representatives of conservative Christianity, including psychologist and radio host James Dobson, had been dissatisfied with G.O.P. Congressional activity, the task would involve extensive catering to the “true believers.” By late May, Operation Far Right had begun, pushing an agenda that included “private school vouchers, a ban on late-term abortions, a crackdown on worldwide religious persecution...” (Borger, 1998). Such conservative Christian pressure coerced Republicans to draw distinctions between themselves and the Democrats, and the Lewinsky matter was an additional valuable opportunity to do just that.
Therefore, regardless of Clinton’s 60% job approval rating, the Republican Party strategically espoused a very conservative position. One of the most visible signs of the plan was Gingrich’s about-face regarding the scandal. In April, his comments “were cautious, reflecting anxiety among Republican lawmakers that a scandal focus would hurt them more than Clinton” (Garrett, 1998). By the second week of May, Gingrich was found “blasting Clinton so vehemently in a speech before the New Hampshire legislature that some Democratic members walked out.” Party faithful responded well to the change, and ties to the conservative right continued to influence Republican attitude and actions.

The next two factors influencing the Republican’s support of investigations into Clinton and Lewinsky and the alleged obstructions of justice and perjury are what Hillary Clinton labeled “a vast right-wing conspiracy.” The first of these are the zealots who invested substantial amounts of time, energy, and money into convicting Clinton for something – anything. One such prominent figure is right wing lawyer Larry Klayman, founder and operator of a non-profit organization called Judicial Watch, which “…filed 18 legal actions against the Clinton administration” (Lacayo, 1998). Often labeled as “off his rocker” and “out of control,” Klayman’s love for publicity and bizarre courtroom antics caused him to be “sanctioned by federal judges, including one in California who banished him from his courtroom forever” (Klaidman, 1998). Despite his tendency to believe in outlandish conspiracies, and not to be taken seriously by the White House, his lawsuits did considerable damage. The other extremist is a 65 year old multimillionaire named Richard Mellon Scaife, whose deep pockets “…paid for reporters and lawyers to try and dig up dirt on the Clintons and to cast a sinister light on the death of White House deputy counsel Vince Foster. Allegedly, Scaife even paid off an important witness in the Whitewater investigation” (Hosenball & Thomas, 1998). Scaife also financially backed more than seven organizations housing Clinton foes. The list includes Klayman’s
Judicial Watch, the Free Congress Research & Education Foundation, Southeastern Legal
Foundation, and the American Spectator Educational Foundation. While the two men, Klayman and
Scaife, have their own pasts and undetermined motives, one thing is absolutely clear: they both are
relentlessly anti-Clinton.

The second factor contributing to Hillary Clinton's conviction that a conspiracy existed is a
zealot in a class by himself: special prosecutor Kenneth Starr. Appointed in 1992, Starr "was seen as
a mild mannered former judge with traditional Republican, but not deeply partisan, conservative
credentials" (Lavelle & Barnes, 1998). Slowly Starr's aggressive tendencies towards Clinton gained
him the reputation as a rabid prosecutor in the public mind. The investigation of Whitewater, of
firings in the White House travel office (Travelgate), and of improper requests for FBI files
(Filegate) all preceded the Lewinsky scandal and were endeavors of Starr that never seriously
threatened Clinton. Starr's former Chief Washington deputy said of "Starr's growing conviction that
Clinton had done something ugly and impeachable on the job, 'When someone fights, resists, and
insults you, you become more aggressive in pursuit of the truth'" (Lavelle & Barnes, 1998). Many
criticized Starr for overstepping the boundaries of his position. As Mortimer Zuckerman wrote in
the June 29th issue of U.S. News & World Report, "The Founding Fathers imagined no role for a chief
inquisitor...They did not anticipate an independent counsel free from checks and balances. We do not
need one today." Others questioned Starr's motives and speculated about funding from Scaife.
Regardless of his reasons, on September 9th Starr submitted a 455 page report to Congress, and
Clinton faced the possibility of being the first President since Nixon to deal with the issue of
impeachment.

Overall, the Republican Party chose to follow party lines, attacking and condemning the
President and the Democrats who supported him. Regardless of the many suggestions of
incriminating facts amassed by Starr, however, the ultimate decisions makers were to be the voters. As *Time* acknowledged, “No matter how tempting it may be to pile on the President, the possibility of a public backlash...is...a risk” for the Republican Party (Carney & Dickerson, 1998). Pressures from a conservative Christian constituency, in an attempt to increase victory in the November midterm elections, activities of individual extremists such as Richard Scaife and Larry Klayman, and the investigative effort put out by special prosecutor Kenneth Starr all defined and characterized the role the Republican party would play within the drama of President Clinton and Monica Lewinsky.
Now having determined the issues, motives, and attitudes held within and between the public, media, and political parties, I will attempt to provide some explanation/analysis of the dynamic interplay between the three groups by applying five psychological theories of attitude.

**Cognitive Dissonance:**

The theory of cognitive dissonance states that dissonance (a sense of unease which is uncomfortable) occurs when an individual holds two cognitions or beliefs that the person realizes are directly opposed to each other, or are in some way psychologically inconsistent (Festinger, 1957). In an attempt to reduce the uncomfortable emotional state the individual experiences, the person either adds an additional “consonant” cognition or changes one or both cognitions in order to make them consistent with each other, or “fit” together.

In the case of the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal, the theory of cognitive dissonance may help account for the indifferent attitude of the public to the sexual allegations against Clinton. *Time* acknowledged the phenomenon in the article The “It Could Be Me” Factor. As the article states, “If you can imagine yourself doing what someone else has been caught doing, it’s hard to recommend the death penalty” (Wright, 1998). For many Americans, the baffling lack of an outraged response may simply be the public thinking, “There but for the Grace of God go I,” or, “There, without the Grace of God, have I gone.” One or both of the cognitions are changed so that the issue is not so negative.

Even though many individuals within the media and amongst political conservatives believe the president should exemplify high personal morals such as fidelity to a spouse, Clinton’s job approval remained at a healthy 65% during the most scandalous times of his Presidency. Inconsistent cognitions regarding cultural mores and a more encompassing cognition may explain this phenomenon. Although our culture considers fidelity to a spouse ideal behavior, statistics show
that a large percentage of Americans have committed adultery in their lifetime, and a healthy majority know someone who has. In a *Time/CNN* Poll, 86% of those surveyed felt that infidelity among married men was morally wrong, while 85% felt the same about infidelity among married women (Handy, 1998). Despite such moral convictions, according to “a 1994 University of Chicago study titled *The Social Organization of Sexuality*, which is considered an accurate report on Americans’ contemporary sexual practices... as many as a quarter of married men may have been unfaithful” (Handy, 1998). The numbers were slightly less for women, with about 15% of wives being unfaithful. Cognitive dissonance occurs, then, between the two inconsistent existing cognitions stating “I am a good person” or “my friends/relatives/acquaintances are good people” and “I have committed adultery” or “my friends/relatives/acquaintances have committed adultery.” As sociologist John H. Gagnon was quoted in the August 31st issue of *Time*, “Knowing someone who commits adultery puts flesh on a morally abstract situation.” The theory of cognitive dissonance proposes that, in order to reduce the dissonance caused by the opposing cognitions, individuals would either add a belief such as, “As long as nobody knows about it, my infidelity didn’t hurt anyone” or change the belief altogether. For example, the idea that adultery is immoral may be challenged. While most of the public indicated they still feel infidelity is morally wrong, the survey results could reflect the respondents’ desire to be seen in a socially favorable light. The fact that President Clinton committed adultery can be used as a cognition helping to reduce their dissonance.

An alternative strategy to reducing cognitive dissonance is to isolate the two cognitions or beliefs by psychologically compartmentalizing them. Thus, if no connection exists between the beliefs, no inconsistence or dissonance is experienced. The President’s job and the idea of his personal life, which as Molly Ivins contended, “is none of our business, thank you,” can be psychologically separated (Ivins, 1998). A split, then, between a person’s worth according to their
accomplishments and their worth as a moral person may be another tactic used to reduce dissonance.

Another phenomenon within the Clinton scandal that lends itself well to the application of the cognitive dissonance theory is the relentless actions of special prosecutor Kenneth Starr, as well as other conservative zealots such as Larry Klayman and Richard Mellon Scaife. For these individuals, the two cognitions that are inconsistent with each other are the fact that they have put a phenomenal amount of resources (time and money) into allegations and legal actions against the Clinton administration, yet have gained few results for their efforts. Richard Scaife, for example, has "quietly given $200 million over the past 30 years to an array of conservative causes" (Lacayo, 1998) including $550,000 in 1997 alone to Larry Klayman's Judicial Watch as well as to other Clinton bashers and Ken Starr boosters. Klayman, on his part, has filed 18 legal actions against the Clinton Administration over its six year reign thus far. Starr's siege had lasted over four years, beginning with Whitewater, and left a trail of 19 indictments, 7 indictments thrown out by court, 2 acquittals or mistrials, and 12 convictions. Starr's longest prison sentence was for three years to Jim McDougal, who died in prison after serving less than a year. Over 40 million dollars have been spent on investigations by Starr in those years. Despite all of the extraordinary effort these individuals have put into their endeavors, and the truth in the statement that "Clinton is forever on the verge of destruction" (Brooks, 1998), it is also just as true that he saves himself every time. The inconsistent cognitions that "I have invested a considerable amount of resources into trying to convict Clinton and his administration of illegal offenses" and "Clinton has not been found guilty of any illegal offense" results in cognitive dissonance for such individuals as Starr, Klayman, and Scaife. Such dissonance can be either relieved through changing the actions of the individual- a lessened investment into investigations, or changing the cognition- an increased conviction that Clinton is guilty of an impeachable offense. For these three men, backing down is equivalent to defeat, and has
resulted in a renewed and intensified zeal in nailing Bill Clinton.

**Elaboration-Likelihood Model:**

The elaboration-likelihood model, or E.L.M., is also useful in understanding the attitudes of such groups as the Republican Party and the public towards the Clinton sex scandal. The model focuses on the probability that a person receiving a persuasive message will carefully analyze the information contained in the message. When individuals are highly motivated to consider all the elaborations of an argument or message, the strength and quality of the argument is considered, and the person is said to have taken a central route of analysis. In Fazio’s deliberative processing model of the attitude-behavior relation, he contends that “deliberative processing is characterized by considerable cognitive work. It involves the scrutiny of available information and an analysis of positive and negative features, of costs and benefits” (Fazio, 1990). The central route to persuasion requires an amount of cognitive effort most are not inclined to invest unless there is compelling reason to concentrate on the relevant facts.

Fazio (1990) suggested in his spontaneous processing model of the attitude-behavior relation that often “the cues that are used to interpret an event also can stem from the activation of relevant constructs from memory.” These memorial constructs, influenced by the knowledge, values, and expectations that the individual hold, can have influence through a passive, automatic process. “That is, the individual need not consciously reflect upon the construct and its applicability to current information for the construct to affect interpretations” (Fazio, 1990). Thus, not all social behavior stemming from attitudes is deliberate or reasoned. In the Elaboration-Likelihood model, this is known as the peripheral route to persuasion. When individuals are unwilling or unable to analyze the content of the message, cues irrelevant to the strength and quality of the argument such as positive/negative affect, attractiveness/expertise of sources and number of arguments are considered
(Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Only when individuals taking the central route find the argument compelling or when individuals taking the irrelevant route find the peripheral cues compelling will attitude change occur.

This model is applicable to the Clinton scandal and the surrounding opinions when considering the disposition and willingness for various groups to critically examine the issues. The public’s attitude towards Bill Clinton, when analyzed by the Elaboration-Likelihood model, seems to have been the result of a peripheral route to persuasion. Citizens were unmotivated to critically examine the arguments set forth by media and the Republican party due to general public consensus of satisfaction with the president’s performance and the state of the nation. Evidence for such consensus of satisfaction includes a strong sense of job approval (60% on average) towards the President and his job performance. The nation was experiencing an exploding economy, low unemployment rate, secure foreign affairs, and a declining crime rate. Throughout the scandal, Clinton’s competence as a leader held intact and the public supported his actions regarding not only national but foreign affairs. Seventy-three percent of individuals surveyed in an August 24th issue of Newsweek supported Clinton’s decision to bomb terrorist targets overseas (Alter, 1998). The public confidence in the President and satisfaction overall is evident in the fact that in a September 11th issue, 59% believe that, despite the scandal, Clinton is still competently leading the nation at a time of market turmoil and foreign instabilities. “As motivation and or ability to process arguments is decreased, peripheral cues become relatively more important determinants of persuasion” (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In the case of the Clinton and Lewinsky scandal, the peripheral cues attended to became the credibility/ attractiveness of media, and the sheer amount of information (repetition).

Fazio contends that such cues used to interpret the event stem in part from previously formed constructs and result in an automatic, passive process of analyzing a message. The public’s negative
attitude towards the sources of Clinton/Lewinsky messages have been a dominating factor within the scandal. The emphasis given to the public’s vehement opposition to the manner of coverage of the scandal indicates clearly how influential this peripheral cue is. The inundation of media coverage with the scandal is inextricably tied to the negative attitude of the public. Molly Ivins’ biting political column in the September 21st issue of Time expresses in an impressively articulate piece the frustration with media coverage: “While the press was hopelessly mired in Monica, it missed two classic Clinton plays... the Middle East and... school funding- both areas of considerably more importance to the nation than what was once the man’s private life.” The public sentiment opposing the repetitious coverage of the scandal gained such strength that the negative affect it aroused outweighed a desire to critically analyze the message or argument made. “‘I’m so sick of this story,’ moans Becky Malone, 25, a juvenile probation officer. ‘You try to watch the news and you’re bombarded with it,’ adds Robert Penn, 41, a physician” (Cohen, 1998). Other journalists and writers share in the public’s sentiments. Garrison Keillor contended: “We are living in comfortable times, and the long run of L’Affaire Monica is testimony to that, a deluge of chaff. Never before has so much been said about so very little.”. Keillor’s quote accurately summarizes why the public has focused on such peripheral cues such as the attractiveness and credibility of the source and the sheer amount of information instead of analyzing the arguments those sources are making: a lack of motivation.

The Republican party, on the other hand, has had significant motivation to engage in a central route to persuasion and to elaborate on the argument or message promoted by media. The motivation for Republicans to process persuasive communication on Clinton’s alleged illegal or immoral behavior is high, considering the personal relevance and personal responsibility felt by most politicians. For many G.O.P. members of Congress, Clinton’s actions bear direct influence on their
own future political career and responsibility to their own constituency. As was made apparent to them early on, the President's actions created issues of party loyalty, making their response to the scandal crucial in November mid-term elections. In order to keep their majority in the House, the Republicans needed support from their grass roots activists, most of whom are Christian conservatives. The scandal was a pivotal issue and used to play to those in the far right. "G.O.P. leaders have moved away sharply from the do-little approach that has characterized Congress's deliberations since last summer in favor of an agenda aimed at 'drawing distinctions'—read, picking fights— with Democrats and the White House on everything from abortion to Monica" (Carney, 1998). In order to criticize the President, the arguments regarding his immoral activity needed to be closely scrutinized, facilitating a central route to persuasion. Another factor contributing heavily to the motivation of the Republican Party to engage in deliberative cognitive processing of the scandal is the fact that their future political career hung in the balance. This kind of motivation is not unlike the moderate reflective fear in Janis' theory about the effects of fear arousal on attitude change, in which moderate fear can cause vigilance and a motivation to look for a course of action to relieve the external threat (Janis, 1967). Suddenly attuned to the fact that they could lose their 11-seat majority, Republicans panicked. "No more laid back Republicans; now they're nervous wrecks." (Borger, 1998). Such personal involvement and responsibility influenced the Republican party to engage in the cognitive effort necessary to centrally process the arguments surrounding the Clinton/ Lewinsky scandal in a way not shared by the general public.

**Cognitive Growth:**

Another theory applicable to the various players in the Clinton sex scandal is William Perry's theory of cognitive and ethical growth (Perry, 1981). This particular scheme of development states that individuals potentially can move through a series of nine cognitive "positions" relating to
educational experiences and knowledge in general. Accompanying the positions are three attitudes that characterize the beliefs and actions of the individuals: dualism, multiplicity, and relativism.

Perry contends that the first stage, dualism, is characterized by “the division of meaning into two realms- Good versus Bad, Right versus Wrong, We versus They” (Perry, 1981). In dualism, right answers exist, and can be accessed via authorities. In the case of the far right and Christian Coalition, processing of information proceeds in a dualistic fashion. There is, in the far right’s opinion, a definitively right “moral stance” that Clinton violated in his affair with Lewinsky. Georgia Republican and member of the Judiciary Committee Bob Barr, who called for Clinton’s resignation even before grand jury testimony, “complains that government has been ‘cheapened’ and character ‘denigrated.’” (Gibbs, 1998). Other evidence of Republican dualistic thinking was Newt Gingrich’s comment “This is not about sex... This is about law breaking” (Carney, 1998). In the Christian coalition, dualistic thinking manifests itself by the belief that such authorities as the bible and the law hold absolute truths regarding what acceptable behavior entails. Bill Bennett, editor of bestselling Book of Virtues “crystallizes the conservative case against Clinton” by showing the characteristic either/or thinking of dualism. (Gerson, 1998)

“Judgement is not bigotry, and tolerance may just be another term for indifference. If to make judgements of better and worse, good and bad, fit and unfit, competent and incompetent is to be judgmental, then there is a need to be judgmental and no need to apologize for it.”

Newsweek columnist David Brooks further exemplifies the right’s view that “correct,” “moral” answers and guides can be gleaned from authorities such as the bible and the law. “[Clinton] has, in their “Book of Virtues” view, inured people to evasions, deceptions, and unfaithfulness. He has defined the presidency down and inverted morals to the point that sophisticates wink at adultery and
bearing false witness- [two] of the 10 Commandments- while smoking or taping Monica Lewinsky are reviled” (Brooks, 1998). The G.O.P. is “embedded in a world of We-Right-Good (Other-Wrong-Bad)” and has solicited support from the public on such a stance (Perry, 1981).

The second stage, multiplicity, is the stage of development in which diversity of opinions and values is recognized as legitimate in areas where there are no definitive, or “right” answers. However, no judgement can be made among the opinions and values because everyone has a right to his/her opinion. The public has primarily engaged in such a multiplistic fashion of thinking, challenging the world in which authority has access to right answers. “In this...realm, freedom is, or should be, complete: ‘Everyone has a right to his own opinion; they have no right to say we’re wrong!’” (Perry, 1981). Public polls indicated that the general population did not accept such insistence by the media and political figures on what the correct opinion of the Clinton scandal should be. Sixty-two percent of those surveyed believed Clinton’s sexual behavior during his term as President was not contrary to how he should be judged in office (Gibbs, 1998). As Morley Fogel, a retired salesman and Democrat from Tequesta, Florida said regarding President Clinton “He’s running the country well. He’s just not running his life very well” (Thomas & Isikoff, 1998). Such an opinion lies in stark contrast to the accusatory views of the Republican Party- especially the far right. The public also has differentiated itself from the media, expressing a vehement disinterest in learning of the allegation brought against the President. General public consensus is that “Media coverage of the Lewinsky scandal has ‘overdramatized it, as usual’” (Gerson, 1998). Getting on with other news seems a priority as the public feels “more informed than...wanted...about Mr. Clinton’s transgressions” (Gibbs, 1998). The media considers the break of the public opinion from authority one of the scandals most puzzling anomalies. As Dennis Briton, a reporter who covered Watergate contends: “We expect the best out of the political process, the highest levels of judgment, values, and
ethics” (Gerson, 1998). The public, engaging in multiplistic thinking, may agree with the view or not, but certainly recognizes its right to express a divergent opinion and resents judgement of that opinion.

The confusion of the media is fundamentally ironic upon analysis, for the presentation of news/entertainment intrinsically lends itself to an engagement in multiplistic thinking. Expectations of the media are that the public will, in regards to an issue of such gravity, engage in a thinking characteristic of Perry’s concept of relativism. In such a stage, “diversity of opinion, values, and judgment [are] derived from coherent sources, evidence, logics, systems, and patterns allowing for analysis and comparison” (Perry, 1981). Not all opinions are equal, and some depend on context. Journalists, engaging in such relativistic thinking, express opinions such as Dennis Briton, believing that holding politics and politicians to high moral standards is correct based on the view that some beliefs are more legitimately correct due to more credible evidence supporting them.

The presentation of news to the public, however, is based on financial considerations. In this case, the “dumming down” of news programs in order to appeal to a wider based audience and therefore a larger profit results in the trivialization of news issues and presenting them in a multiplistic fashion. Instead of information backed by evidence that can be analyzed and judged, information bits are presented, in which everyone is entitled to their own opinions. Instead of treating the public as citizens, they treat them as consumers, resulting in a “trend toward the personalizing and softening of news,” talking in “cadences of a manufactured populism that replaces the inspiring tones of leadership with a patois of service and infotainment” (Tucher, 1997). Therefore, the very way in which the media presents its product lends itself to multiplistic thinking.

By applying William Perry’s theory of cognitive development, then, the actions and attitudes of the public, media, and political parties are further understood. By engaging primarily in dualistic
thinking, the Republicans simplified the Clinton scandal into a right versus wrong issue in which the “Right” opinion can be found in authorities such as the law and bible. The public, on the other hand, has utilized multiplicitic thinking, and recognized the fact that authorities do not always have the correct answer, believing then that every opinion has merit and cannot be judged, including their own. The media, economically motivated to reach the most diverse audience possible, unknowingly contributed to the public’s opinions by trivializing news and presenting “information bits” that cannot be analyzed and judged while remaining baffled by the public’s lack of relativism.

**Attitude and Attraction:**

Theories of attitude and attraction also shed light on the group dynamics of the far right wing, the public, and journalists. Newcomb proposed “...that we acquire favorable or unfavorable attitudes toward persons as we are rewarded or punished by them’’ (Byrne, 1969). Byrne incorporated the element of similarity/dissimilarity into a reinforcement model of attraction, contending that attitude statements made by others are affect arousing. Similar attitudes reinforce our success in our learned drive to be logical and correctly interpret the world. “When another person agrees with us and hence offers consensual validation concerning the correctness of our position, our ‘correctness’ is supported.... Frustration of this motive to be logical and correct takes place when others disagree with our views, when they offer consensual invalidation.” (Byrne, 1969).

Such a theory of attitude and attraction may account for the homogeneity of the far right Christian coalition. “For these conviction conservatives, Clinton is the issue. They are intellectual activists, social conservatives and Rush Limbaugh adherents who believe the President has corroded America’s values” (Brooks, 1998). In May it became apparent the G.O.P. would need the far right constituency behind them in order to retain its majority in the House of Representatives, and in order to do this, the Republicans would have to espouse the far right’s beliefs. “The Christian
Conservatives ‘expect us to say that this kind of conduct is unacceptable,’ says Senator John Ashcroft” (Time, May 11th). Those Republicans who do not share similar attitudes and deviate from the central dogma are contributing to “consensual invalidation.” Those members are then weeded out, leaving a group of like-minded individuals. This is not unlike Irving Janis’s concept of Groupthink, in which deeply involved, cohesive in-groups put immense pressure on members to be uniform (Janis, 1972). Groupthink is not characteristic, however, of the spectrum of the Democratic or Republican members of Congress as a whole due to their diversity and many factions. Groupthink requires a homogeneous, cohesive group of policy makers with a strongly shared perspective - characteristic of the Christian coalition. Factions within the Republican party regarding Clinton attest to the homogeneity of the far right and the result of weeding out members who disagree. One faction is the professional politicians, the congressmen and the consultants. “They know [Clinton] lacks character, but they envy his inner feel for politics” (Brooks, 1998). Another group is the regular Republicans, the money makers from Wall street and Main Street. “They don’t admire Clinton, but they view him and the whole mess as if from a great distance.” Finally, there are the “true believers,” whose attitudes demand to be reinforced and validated. The result is a Christian coalition whose high expectations of conformity have left remaining Republicans two choices: join the coalition or be left out of the game.

The theory/model is appropriate not only when considering the Republican right in and of itself, but also when investigating the public’s response to the beliefs of the right. While the Christian Coalition sets strict standards on conforming to such extreme beliefs, the public recognizes that such views invalidate their own views about the privacy of the President’s sexual relationships. Seventy-one percent of those surveyed in a September 28th Time/CNN poll thought that Clinton’s sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky was a private matter between Clinton and his family, and
63% approved of the way President Clinton [was] handling his job (Gibbs & Duffy, 1998). As Molly Ivins so candidly puts it in a September 21st issue of Time, “You [news media, political establishment, and inside-the-Beltway players] shoved his sex life in our faces last January, and rubbed our noses in it for eight months more, so by now we’re more disgusted with you than with Bill Clinton” (Ivins, 1998). The issues the far right Christian Coalition purports are issues of what Festinger (1950) calls “’social realities,’ in which there is a much greater degree of unpredictability, lack of necessary knowledge, and the occurrence of seemingly illogical events” (Byrne & Clore, 1967). Arousal in persons regarding “social realities” versus other factual information (such as the issue of Clinton’s obstruction of justice and perjury charges) is much higher, and may explain why the negative reaction of the public is much greater regarding coverage of the affair between Lewinsky and Clinton than with ending the investigation into the more factual issues of perjury and obstruction of justice. Fifty-seven percent of those surveyed believed investigators should not have asked Clinton about the explicit details of his sexual relationship, and 69% expressed the opinion that if Clinton admitted to having sex with Lewinsky and [lying] about it, and then apologized, Starr’s investigation should end (Gibbs, 1998). The ambiguous issue of what is a socially correct stance on the issue of fidelity in regards to the office of the presidency caused a higher arousal as the public views and the media’s views conflicted. The result was a high amount of resentment between the groups.

Journalists are, by holding similar attitudes and engaging in the process of self validation, their own reference group. The lack of supportive response from the public serves to invalidate journalist’s interpretation of events, leading them to seek out other journalists for validation.

“Some journalists believe their hard line is rooted in idealism. ‘We hold politics and politicians in higher regard than the public does,’” says Cokie Roberts. “The public thinks
Washington is awash in sex and lies, that they all do it, that it isn’t a big deal. But we see it as a bigger deal” (Gerson, 1998).

Since the public, in this case, provides consensual invalidation for the press with a conflicting attitude towards Clinton, the press developed an attitude that as a group they had higher standards by which to measure Clinton. Such an attitude serves to reinforce their tendency to negatively view and thus ignore public opinion and use other media to provide consensual validation. As shown quite graphically in the August 31st issue of Newsweek, the press continually looks to itself for validation, even in the face of blatant public criticism. After quoting a number of readers dissatisfied with the coverage of Clinton (“Who really cares?”) in a previous issue, Newsweek responded by explaining: “But as the tremendous interest in the President’s admission last week of an improper relationship showed, the story, which seemed merely tawdry one day and history-making the next, is certain to be with us for a long time” (Smith, 1998). The media failed to realize, however, that the interest was not displayed by the public, but from other media.

**Fear Arousal and Attitude Change:**

Yet another theory applicable to the various players in the Clinton scandal is that of the effects of fear arousal on attitude change (persuasion). Janis (1967) proposed that attitude change was a result of many interplaying factors, including reflective fear and emotional arousal. The term “reflective fear” emphasizes “first, that the emotional state [fear] is based to some extent on thoughtful reflection and... that as a result of being mediated by higher mental processes, the intensity of the emotion tends to increase or decrease as the signs of external threat increase or decrease, reflecting... the presence or absence of environmental threat cues.” Attitude change is a function of the magnitude of the threat, causing three types of reactions: low threat causes mild reflective fear and results in an attitude of total invulnerability and seeking of blanket reassurances,
moderate threat causes moderate reflective fear and results in discriminate, valid vigilance and reassurance, and high threat causes strong reflective fear resulting in indiscriminate, invalid vigilance. Essentially, persuasive communication may be ineffective because mild reflective fear evokes insufficient vigilance and therefore insufficient motivation to seek a recommendation from the communicator. On the other extreme, communication may fail to evoke attitude change when strong reflective fear is elicited, for a temporary state of hyper vigilance causes a person to fail to attend to or comprehend the recommendations for averting the threat. An optimal degree of emotional arousal is the most conducive for facilitating attitude changes.

Janis’ theory is especially effective in accounting for right wing radical thought and their attempt to persuade the general public. The attacks against Clinton by the Republicans, while due in part to the President’s violation of their moral standards, were also a response to the public’s frightening indifference to this fact. The moderate threat to the G.O.P.’s own values caused an optimal degree of emotional arousal, facilitating an attitude change that conservative radicals put forward as the staunch view that Clinton should receive disciplinary action, if not impeachment. Bill Bennett, author of the conservative book *The Death of Outrage: Bill Clinton and the Assault on American Ideals*, ultimately points his finger “not only at Clinton but also at the nation. Even the book’s title is a statement about America- the indifference of millions- rather than an attack on the President” (Gerson, 1998). While some more mainstream Republicans believed many conservatives were too obsessed, “some G.O.P. leaders [decried] the moral decay represented by the tolerance of Clinton’s behavior. ‘Personal conduct and public life are not divisible’ thundered Senator John Ashcroft” (Fineman, 1998). The threat of public indifference caused some “conviction conservatives” to further their view that Clinton has “inured people to evasions, deceptions, and unfaithfulness. He has defined the presidency down and inverted morals” (Brooks, 1998).
The public, however, was enjoying a prosperous economy and was therefore experiencing mild or no reflective fear. Instead of being motivated to search for recommendations for action, they saw themselves as virtually invulnerable to any harm and engaged in blanket reassurances. In fact, the activities and views of the far right were more fear-evoking for the public as they considered the option of Clinton being forced out of office and the ensuing potential for instability in our country. An August 31st issue of *Newsweek* found that 73% of those surveyed thought that, if Congress went ahead with impeachment hearings, it would seriously distract Congress and Clinton from the nation’s business. The public was also convinced that the scandal was affecting the country’s political decisions and the President’s ability to run the country. Thirty-six percent of the public said they believed that the Lewinsky investigation influenced Clinton’s decision to order an attack on Sudan and Afghanistan. (Budiansky, 1998). Seventy-two percent believed Clinton could have done a lot more as president if he had not had to deal with the Lewinsky matter, Whitewater, and questionable fundraising (Alter, 1998). The vast amount of resources used for the sake of an unpopular investigation while the business of the country was placed as a second priority frightened the public more than Clinton’s alleged sexual encounters, therefore rendering ineffective the far right’s attempts at influencing the public’s position.

The theory of the effects of fear arousal on attitude change by Janis may also be helpful in understanding the gradual shift in Democratic loyalty. A low amount of reflective fear due to Clinton’s reputation as an evasive President may have caused the left wing to engage in blanket reassurances in the beginning of the scandal. “Democrats had tended to think that when the time came, the most gifted politician of his generation would find a way to put the Monica mess behind everyone” (Carney & Tumulty, 1998). That didn’t happen, however, and as one strategist said when it didn’t: “It tapped into the [Democrats] fears and eclipsed their faith in his political skills.”
(Carney & Tumulty, 1998). Democrats scrambled as the level of reflective fear rose, engaging in discriminate vigilance and displaying an attitude change. Senator Joseph Lieberman led the convergence, speaking to the Senate of “a reckoning of the damage that the President’s conduct has done...and, ultimately, an accounting of the impact his actions on our democracy and its moral foundation” (Duffy & Walsh, 1998). The increased threat of negative consequences eventually increased the level of reflective fear to a threshold at which attitude change was facilitated.

Another way in which the fear/arousal attitude theory can explain the indifferent views of the public may involve their own sexual practices. A significantly high portion of the public are acquainted with or are themselves adulterers. The suggested condemnation of such extra-marital affairs, as the Republican party suggests, may cause anxiety for this portion of the population. The anxiety of their own sexual behavior may cause them to experience strong reflective fear and enter a state of hyper-vigilance. This line of reasoning and the argument used for cognitive dissonance are not mutually exclusive. Due to their own shame and guilt, the public may not be open to receiving or attending to recommendations of Presidential punishment by the far right. As Ray Holderman, a 58 year old practitioner from Janeville, WI stated, “I don’t care about sexual peccadilloes, but it’s important if he lied under oath.” Perhaps the GOP would have been more effective in persuading such adulterers to consider disciplinary action against Clinton if they had focused on the issue of perjury or obstruction of justice, which would have reduced their anxiety and therefore hyper-vigilance.
Looking at the application of these psychological theories to the dynamics of the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal, the temptation is to say, “so what?” The incredible complexity involved in taking five theories in all of their intricacies and imperfections and using them in an attempt to accurately account for the actions of individuals and groups with a variety of equally complex motives seems to render the conclusions/interpretations as inaccurate or contrived. As all theories and laws attempting to pattern complex interactions must do, this analysis had to make broad generalizations and categorizations with groups of people, thereby ignoring some of the individual outliers or differences. Many times theories or laws about the interactions between innumerable, independent identities in more concrete sciences such as physics rely on averages. In order for the law or theory to provide insight into the phenomenon, the entire dynamic interplay, or group, must be taken into account. Looking at one or two identities interacting with one another would fail to display the observable pattern existing on the whole. Therefore generalization is imperative if there are to be any useful patterns to be gleaned from a complex situation, especially in the case of psychology, which deals with the variability of human nature.

The question then arises as to what purpose a post-hoc analysis has, if it cannot specifically predict actions of individuals or account for every interrelating factor. The answer to this can be found in the subject and purpose of social psychology itself. Events or phenomena that strike others as unusual rarely surprise the social psychologist, for those who study people’s feelings, thoughts and behaviors as they are influenced by the actual or implied presence of others come to realize the strength of external factors. Recognizing the fact that ordinary people are capable of engaging in what seems to be extraordinary actions is the hallmark of one who has studied society, knowing full well the weakness of engaging in the fundamental attribution error. Without post-hoc analyses, such seemingly inexplicable happenings as the Kitty Genovese murder would go unexamined. People
would shake their heads and ask themselves what kind of person would ignore cries for help from a
dying neighbor for over an hour. Yet it is the social psychologist who analyzes the event after the
fact, generalizing people by focusing on their response as a group rather than as an individual. The
power of social others needs to be recognized - that implied or actual presence of others. Given the
nature of society, social psychologists realize that it is inevitable for low probability events to occur,
and the importance in attempting to explicate their dynamics. The social psychologist looks at the
murder of Kitty Genovese and draws from it the Bystander Effect- the diffusion of responsibility felt
by those 38 neighbors. There is a responsibility for us as humans in society to try and make sense of
what's going on so that something can be done that is effective, or so that we can understand nothing
can be done.

In the case of the Lewinsky-Clinton scandal, the attitudes which eventually shaped the
outcome and fate of President Clinton have baffled and frustrated many journalists and politicians.
The concern has been over a set of interactions that have resulted in a general lack of criticism
towards the leader of our democratic country: the President of the United States. Some, of course,
have shaken their heads and walked away, wondering how society today could be accepting towards
the immoral actions that should be seen as vitally important to our country. I instead attempted to
understand the dynamics of what occurred by applying theories of human reactions to their
environment after the fact. Instead of assuming some internal, characteristic within the individuals
of society as the source of such inexplicable attitudes, I tried to explore what principles or theories
could account for the dynamics of these innumerable, independent identities as a whole.

Although the results of the application have been complex and multi-faceted, many further
issues stemming from my analysis could be studied. The specific issue of media coverage of
scandals in relation to its consumption by the public could be further examined. A more in-depth
analysis of cognitive dissonance and political strategy could be explored. Or, similar case studies could be conducted regarding other Presidential sex scandals or even tragic news stories such as the shootings in Littleton, Colorado in April of 1999. However my analysis of the Clinton- Lewinsky scandal is viewed or further pursued, its value in examining our social surroundings and influences is only as useful as we make it.
APPENDIX A

Time-Line of Clinton-Lewinsky Scandal

June 1995: Lewinsky starts work as an unpaid White House intern; six months later, she becomes a paid employee.

April 1996: Reprimanded for lingering around the Oval Office, Lewinsky is transferred to the Pentagon, where she meets Linda Tripp.

Fall 1997: Tripp begins secretly taping phone talks in which Lewinsky says she had an affair with President Clinton.

Dec. 5, 1997: Clinton learns that Lewinsky will be subpoenaed in Paula Jones’s sexual harassment case against him.


Jan. 12, 1998: Tripp tells Kenneth Starr’s office she has the Lewinsky tapes.

Jan. 16, 1998: Tripp lures Lewinsky to lunch. Prosecutors show up and seek her cooperation.


Jan. 22, 1998: Clinton tells press “the allegations are false” and promises new information—“more rather than less, sooner rather than later.”


April 1, 1998: A federal judge dismisses the Paula Jones suit.


July 28, 1998: Lewinsky and her mother agree to testify in exchange for full immunity. Prosecutors expect Lewinsky to say she and Clinton were intimate.

July 29, 1998: Clinton agrees to provide testimony on August 17 as Starr agrees to withdraw the subpoena.

Aug. 17, 1998: Clinton testifies before Starr and the grand jury in the White House Map Room, admitting to “an inappropriate” relationship with Lewinsky. Clinton addresses the nation in a four minute televised speech, admitting to the relationship and that his public comments and silence had given “a false impression.”

APPENDIX B

Starr’s September 9th Report Submitted to Congress: Eleven Possible Grounds for Impeachment

I. There is substantial and credible information that President Clinton lied under oath as a defendant in Jones v. Clinton regarding his sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky.

II. There is substantial and credible information that President Clinton lied under oath to the grand jury about his sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky.

III. There is substantial and credible information that President Clinton lied under oath during his civil deposition when he stated that he could not recall being alone with Monica Lewinsky and when he minimized the number of gifts they had exchanged.

IV. There is substantial and credible information that the President lied under oath during his civil deposition concerning conversations he had with Monica Lewinsky about her involvement in the Jones case.

V. There is substantial and credible information that President Clinton endeavored to obstruct justice by engaging in a pattern of activity to conceal evidence regarding his relationship with Monica Lewinsky from the judicial process in the Jones case. The pattern included concealment of gifts that the President had given Ms. Lewinsky and that were subpoenaed from Ms. Lewinsky in the Jones case; and concealment of a note sent by Ms. Lewinsky to the President on January 5, 1998.

VI. There is substantial and credible information that President Clinton endeavored to obstruct
justice by suggesting that Ms. Lewinsky file an affidavit so that she would not be deposed, she would not contradict his testimony, and he could attempt to avoid questions about Ms. Lewinsky at his deposition.

VII. There is substantial and credible information that President Clinton endeavored to obstruct justice by helping Ms. Lewinsky obtain a job in New York at a time when she would have been a witness against him were she to tell the truth during the Jones case.

VIII. There is substantial and credible information that the President lied under oath in describing his conversations with Vernon Jordan about Ms. Lewinsky.

IX. There is substantial and credible information that President Clinton endeavored to obstruct justice by attempting to influence the testimony of Betty Currie.

X. There is substantial and credible information that President Clinton endeavored to obstruct justice during the federal grand jury investigation. While refusing to testify for seven months, he simultaneously lied to potential grand jury witnesses knowing that they would relay the falsehoods to the grand jury.

XI. There is substantial and credible information that President Clinton’s actions since January 17, 1998, regarding his relationship with Monica Lewinsky have been inconsistent with the President’s constitutional duty to faithfully execute the laws.
REFERENCES


26.


