

Assessing the Impact of Communications Strategy and Ethical Positioning on the Resilience of a Political Career Facing Scandal: Critical Analysis of Sexual Scandals within American Politics

Marta Fisiak

University of Lodz
Faculty of Economics and Sociology
e-mail: marta_fisiak@wp.pl

Abstract

Throughout the evolution of public political discourse we have repeatedly seen the effects of scandals on the careers of many politicians. Although the cultural and societal norms that have traditionally dictated the results of such scandals have changed dramatically within the last two centuries, I believe that the aftermath of these scandals may be better understood by analyzing and comparing the politician's previously established public image to the scandal at hand. I will argue that a negative impact only occurs if and when there is a clear contradiction of character that presents the politician as a deceitful or hypocritical person in the media sphere and therefore the eyes of the public

Keywords: scandal, sex, politics, media, power

Introduction

Throughout the USA's political tradition, scandals have been rather commonplace, although both the circumstances and consequences of scandals in the world of American politics appear to have changed significantly in recent times. As a general trend, morality itself and the cultural norms that delineate them seem to have shifted throughout the last two centuries, and as a result, so have the judgments that are made towards politicians who may find themselves being scrutinized in the midst of a public scandal (Thompson 2000).

In these scenarios it is imperative to consider intricate situations and details surrounding the scandal, but often and more importantly, we see that assessing the results of such an event in relation to the politician's message, cultural-political platform, and intended audience or constituent base can provide a more complete insight into the public reaction and overall consequences of the event. Therefore, the implications of a scandal are more important for the outcome of a politician's career than the egregious act that has been perpetrated. Furthermore, we find that in recent history there have been cases of similar scandals that now appear to be more tolerable to a politician's career, seemingly because of developments or changes in societal norms. Although this socio-cultural dimension has importance and ultimately cannot be denied, I will also argue that another relevant factor that makes scandals more endurable to a political career is when the scandal does not inherently oppose the public ethos of the politician within the relevant pre-established context. I will present examples of such situations and argue that indeed the most important factor pertaining to the subsequent aftermath of a political scandal is whether or not the politician's public image or political platform was expressly betrayed or clearly contradicted as a result of the transgression (Williams 1998).

Brief Overview of Pertinent Factors

Changes in societal norms, political climate, and technological advancement have all played their parts in the evolution of the scandal as a public discourse phenomenon. Societies and cultures are constantly shifting and evolving, redefining and recreating limits and delineations of what could be considered acceptable to a political career. The sphere of politics increasingly demands of a politician to not only be a legislator and statesman, but also a media personality, a character, or a set of ideologies. Today it is clear that the evolution of communications media has allowed for information to spread instantly and has the capacity to tarnish a politician's reputation within a matter of hours, if not minutes. However, whether that, in turn, will eliminate their entire career prospects is a separate

point altogether. Ultimately, if the nature and details of the scandal affect the integrity of the politician's previously established moral character by exposing them as contradictory or hypocritical, this will negatively affect the public's perception and the politician's career (Williams 1998).

It seems sexual political scandals have the power to completely terminate politicians' careers but mostly only do so when there is a severe breach of previously implied expectations. The perceived public persona of the politician will have a definite negative impact if and when this occurs. Political scandals of a sexual nature are as intricate and complex as human sexuality itself – and the real life results of a sexual political scandal may be seen as a reflection of this fact. Society's true judgment and indication of a politician's sound moral character is not whether they have been found guilty of committing adultery or sexual promiscuity, but rather whether such a scandal ultimately displays an underlying contradiction of character, which in turn has a detrimental effect on the trustworthiness of their public persona within its relevant political context and cultural climate.

Early Examples of Sexual Scandals

The history of this type of scandal in the United States dates back to the end of the 18th century, which marks the beginning of the republic (Schudson 1976; Hagood 1998). Alexander Hamilton, the first secretary of the treasury, a member of the Continental Congress and Constitutional Convention, and a co-author of the newspaper "Publius", known as the "Federalist Papers," became entangled in a scandal that broke out as a result of his affair with Maria Reynolds. The news about this affair was spread by the journalist and author James Thomson Callender, who published it in his pamphlet, "The History of the United States for the Year 1796". Hamilton acknowledged that he was obliged to respond to this and other accusations, to which he did in 1797 by publishing his own pamphlet, in which he admitted to a loving relationship with Mrs Reynolds, but rejected the charge of defrauding the state treasury assets (Hamilton 1979). It is unclear whether the charges against Hamilton and his partial admission of guilt significantly harmed his political career. Undoubtedly, however, they did not help in its further development.

Callender also played a key role in fueling scandals that exploded around Thomas Jefferson, who was the president of the United States in the years 1801–1809. The most serious of these was Jefferson's affair with a young slave called Sally Hemings (Brodie 1974). It probably began in 1788 in Paris, where Jefferson spent four years as a deputy to France. Sally, then fourteen, was sent to Paris to accompany Thomas' eight-year-old daughter Polly. When Hemings returned

to Virginia, she was expecting a child, who was born at the end of 1789 or early 1790. Allegedly she had five children with Jefferson, four of whom grew up and were formally liberated. Rumors about this affair circulated around the world for over a decade, however, the official news on it was published just after Jefferson had been elected president of the United States. One of his first moves was to pardon Callender in prison for his subversive activities but despite this polite gesture, Callender soon broke up his friendship with Jefferson, and on September 1, 1802, he published an article in the *Richmond Recorder*, in which he revealed a long-lasting affair between the president and Sally Hemings. "It is well-known that a man whose admirers worship, has and for many years had one of his slaves for a concubine" – this is how this article opened (*Richmond Recorder* 1 IX 1802).

Other newspapers quickly picked up this story. Many of them called on Jefferson to deny the accusations, but he remained silent. Two years later, after having been scandalized, he was re-elected as the president of the United States. As opposed to Hamilton's admission, Jackson's example is perhaps the first clear historical case where the absence of public denial and refutation proved successful in mitigating retribution and maintaining the politician's career prospects stabilized.

Jefferson was not the only American president or candidate for this office who became the subject of gossips and accusations of hidden sexual relationships. During the presidential election of 1884, a Democratic candidate Grover Cleveland became the "hero" of a scandal that had previously threatened to derail his campaign. On July 21, 1884, ten days after being nominated by the Democratic Party, an article appeared on the front page of the *Buffalo Evening Telegraph* accusing him of having illegally taken his son away from his former partner ten years earlier. Due to the fact that Cleveland had partially built his reputation on the criticism of corruption among Republicans, such personal allegations towards him were very inconvenient. He decided to speak openly about his affair. He admitted that as a bachelor he was romantically involved with a young widow called Maria Crofts Halpin, who shortly gave birth to a baby boy in September 1874. Although Cleveland was not certain whether he was the biological father of this child, he decided to pay his maintenance and secure the adoption. The Republicans tried to exploit this scandal as much as they could, but Cleveland's sincere admission weakened the wind beneath their wings and the Democratic candidate eventually won the presidential election. This is a clear-cut case where the politician's previously established moral character was further substantiated by his public disclosure. The fact that he acknowledged the accusations, and provided a reasoned public response that maintained his image on the moral high ground, proved successful in quelling the negative effects from the scandal (Corgilano 2006).

More Recent Examples and the Framing of Character Politics

For nearly two centuries, sexual scandals have been sporadically happening in American political life. Yet, some presidents and other international political figures repeatedly implicated in illicit relationships and sexual misconduct have been lucky enough that their actions did not eventually develop into any serious public scandals. Although many presidents and other political figures maintained extramarital relations with various keepers that never turned out to be scandalous, none of them can ever match the actual number or shamelessness of John Fitzgerald Kennedy's.

It was widely known in political circles that during his political career JFK had numerous sexual affairs. Some of them are said to have lasted for several years, such as his relationship with Joan Lundberg, Pamela Turnure, or Judy Campbell, while others were fleeting and casual. Some of these affairs were so indiscrete that they were considered as reckless in retrospect. They were also the cause for concern for some Kennedy's advisers who were afraid of what might have happened in case they had been made public. JFK's private life could have triggered many scandals. Had all his sexual encounters come to light during the 1960 presidential campaign, they could have brought serious political consequences. Meanwhile, the scandals that might have exploded eventually never did. This, however, could be attributed to the fact that JFK was already known to be this way within the Washington political elite. Therefore, it can be said that although JFK's sex life never became a public spectacle during his career, it may be attributed to the fact that it was expected and in line with what was already known of his character. The rumors surrounding his many sexual escapades never became the matter of public outcry or used as a weapon against him because he never explicitly denied them and because it was known that this was his actual "nature". They were standing in no contradiction to his character.

The 1969 Chappaquiddick tragedy, which ended with the death of Mary Jo Kopechne and undoubtedly destroyed the political career of Edward Kennedy, serves as a key example of how the emergence of character politics could become a permanent topic of discussion in the public sphere. On the night of July 18, 1969, a thirty-seven-year-old Sen. Edward Kennedy left the Chappaquiddick Island on the Massachusetts coast and drove from a narrow bridge into the water. He himself managed to get out of the car, but his passenger, Mary Jo Kopechne, who had worked at the Robert Kennedy election squad before, got trapped inside and died.

Kennedy claimed he dived in and tried to save her, but had unfortunately failed. Then he returned to the party and found someone who drove him to the ferry crossing. When it turned out that the shuttle was not running at night, Kennedy jumped

into the water and swam to the other shore, then returned to his hotel in Edgartown. It was only the following day that he reported the accident to the police, but by that time the car with the body had already been found.

In a number of reports of the events in the media, there were speculations about the reasons why Kennedy had not raised the alarm earlier, that he had been drunk when the accident happened, and that he had been trying to conceal his connection to Kopechne. Kennedy denied the allegations that he had been under the influence of alcohol and that he had had an affair with his passenger. He explained that his behavior was a direct result of embarrassment, grief, exhaustion and shock. This response proved insufficient to deter the negative impact of the incident and the aftermath of attacks that would ensue to his character.

He eventually pleaded guilty to less serious charges of escaping from the accident scene and not having reported on it, for which he was sentenced to two months in suspended custody. Kennedy eventually became a senator and an influential figure in the Democratic Party. However, the Chappaquiddick incident returned again and again during his political career and completely destroyed his presidential prospects because it painted him as an unreliable person within the eyes of the public, given the dubious nature of the details and circumstances surrounding that night, and his inadequate response thereafter. His reaction to the accident would in turn always allow any political aggressor to easily discredit him as a liar or a dishonorable, undependable person at the very least (Dagnes 2011).

Since the late sixties, it has become increasingly popular within the media and politicians to focus on character issues as a strategy and less on the intricacies of international or domestic policy during their campaigns. It is also often assumed that the sixties were a period of sexual liberation and experimentation. However, after this decade, a different kind of socio-cultural trend manifested itself, which happened to be much less tolerant of sexual misconduct. This view may be justified because this point in American society, which was largely driven by the women's movement, had become more sensitive to certain behaviors of men that were previously considered normal or acceptable. In a country where the issue of gender inequality is actively discussed in the public sphere, the double standards of extramarital sex can be generally treated with less acceptance. Unwanted sexual propositions effectively became more of a sensitive issue. Such behavior had been tolerated in the past, and by some people it is still considered a completely normal way of expressing male sexuality, but nowadays such individuals are increasingly in the center of critical attention and open conflict. This is why a single blunder or misstep that shows a politician as conniving, untrustworthy or hypocritical can have permanent and devastating effects. As we will see, however, such open misogyny and sexism can leave a politician unscathed if his response is in line with his pre-established ethos and perceived public persona (Long 2008).

The Fight for Ethical Superiority

Throughout the next decades, there were other examples of negatively impacted politicians like Gary Hart, a Senator from Colorado, whose Democratic presidential nomination in 1988 was plagued by controversy surrounding his alleged romance with a model Donna Rice. Bob Packwood, a Republican Senator from Oregon, who was accused of harassing many of the women working for him, did not have much luck either. Numerous politicians became engulfed in sexual scandals that all but ruined their careers. The story of Bill Clinton, for instance, exemplified this fact and became a great reminder to everyone that sexual scandal had become a career risk factor associated with public life.

Although today it seems to be a great resource for governmental PR agencies, politicians and other public figures who are well aware of the fact that the media are actively exploring their activities, scandal has lost nothing of its ability to disrupt the course of events, oftentimes – to destroy both the reputation as well as the careers of those involved. Public character scrutiny is constantly threatening those who have risked their careers to gain power and strived to succeed in public life. Richard Nixon, Edward Kennedy, Gary Hart and Bill Clinton are just a few American examples from a long list of contemporary public figures whose lives and careers have been marked by character defamation in an immense way.

Emphasizing the importance of sexual promiscuity as a reflection of character strength helped to create the conditions in which political parties and other organizations were tempted to use sexual scandals as a weapon to harm or destroy their opponents. When the spotlight is focused on the character, it is nearly impossible to maintain that the behavior of political leaders in their private lives is irrelevant to their public roles. Hence the disclosure of their improper sexual behavior in the private sphere can have devastating effects on their public careers. With this emphasis on character issues, politics can very easily slip into a dirty game where personal behavior is used as a weapon in the fight for political gain.

Bill Clinton Scandal in Detail

As a result of the Watergate affair there were some legal regulations introduced that were designed to establish different ethical standards in politics and to set up a new and powerful public prosecutor's office. It was also important to enact state and federal laws regarding sexual harassment and improper behavior, as well as to define the rules and procedures for filing formal complaints about such misconduct in government institutions. All of these factors shaped the context in which Bill Clinton's political career was to be affected because of his secret sexual relationships. Taking into account the changes that had taken place since the 1960s,

Clinton's extramarital affair brought a certain political risk with it, but also led to several violations including but not limited to perjury, obstruction of justice and persuasion of a false testimony. Clinton was painfully aware of the fact that when a scandal of this sort ascended onto a political career, denial of charges would have been an unsecured choice (McConahey 2015, 93–110).

His troubles began at the turn of the nineteen seventies and eighties when he was the Attorney General and then Governor of Arkansas. At the end of the seventies he met Gennifer Flowers, a reporter working for a local television station. Soon after, their long-term affair began. Clinton is also believed to have had several other casual relationships when he was governor. There were countless telltales about his supposed lovers, which circulated during the eighties in the shape of rumors, similar to those of JFK. In October 1990 Clinton dissatisfied a former employee, Larry Nichols, who filed a lawsuit, accusing him of unjustified dismissal and misconduct while serving as governor. Nichols claimed that Clinton had used the state funds to facilitate out-of-wedlock relationships with six women. The local press reported on the case, but it did not go far beyond that. However, in October 1991, once Clinton announced he would be running for the presidency of the United States, the issue of his extramarital relationships became a hot topic for some nationwide news coverage.

On January 13, 1992, a tabloid magazine published an article titled *Nichols* on their front page. The editorial staff also contacted Gennifer Flowers, who agreed to confirm the story in exchange for a significant amount of money. Clinton was in the middle of a fierce campaign before the primaries and suddenly realized he was on the brink of failure. He had to deal with the detrimental accusations of running away from military service and also with the prospect of further harmful information regarding his alleged affair with Gennifer Flowers.

Bearing in mind the fact that Gary Hart's campaign for the Democratic Party nomination was wiped out from the undesirable discoveries of the same nature, Clinton went to the offensive. Together with his wife, Hillary Clinton, they agreed to interview Steven Kroft during a 60 Minutes CBS broadcast. The Clintons' strategy was carefully thought out; Bill Clinton did not confess to anything openly, but he did not deny the issue's existence either. He knew very well that had he publicly denied his affair, it would have only fueled the scandal that had been threatening his campaign. His strategy was to refuse to denounce the accusations, while avoiding open admission to them. Bill Clinton responded only to some general-level charges referring to the harm he had caused to his marriage as a result. Hillary stood by her husband and showed that she both loved and respected him despite the difficulties that they had been going through. They both did everything they possibly could in order for everyone to believe they had "been framed" by the media. They reminded the audience and the viewers that not only Bill Clinton's character would have been tested in the forthcoming campaign, but also the character of

the press, thereby shifting some of the blame. In general, Clinton's strategy worked (Cawthorne 1999).

Bill Clinton's opponents could have accused him of flirting and giving evasive answers, but they were deprived of the opportunity to prove that such public denial of allegations had been false. All of this ultimately did not stop Clinton from winning the presidential election in November. The news about his alleged affair with Gennifer Flowers did not enhance his reputation, but with his wife Hillary by his side, he managed to survive the impact. Again, this is an example of a clever communications strategy and the lack of a clear contradiction of character that proved to dilute the punch of the looming scandal. Nevertheless, the worst was yet to come.

Clinton's first-term tenure was stigmatized by further accusations of improper conduct while he was the governor of Arkansas. In January 1994, a conservative magazine *The American Spectator* published an article entitled "His Betraying Heart: Living with Clinton". This article disclosed the story of two Arkansas state police officers that were supposed to have been covering up Clinton's affair and his sexual adventures. Among other things, they described an incident that occurred at the Excelsior Hotel in Little Rock on May 8, 1991. Clinton is said to have noticed an attractive woman working at the front desk and allegedly asked one of the officers to approach her and say that he had liked her, and then ordered the officer to bring her to the hotel room where he was supposed to have been waiting (Markovits, Silverstein 1988).

This became known as the infamous "Trooper Gate" incident and Paula Jones case. In February 1994, Jones appeared at a press conference in Washington to file a lawsuit against then President Clinton, she accused him of having caused her emotional distress, deprivation of civil rights, and the destruction of her reputation as a result of the incident at Excelsior. Jones claimed to have been taken to Clinton's room where he made sexually aggressive proposals and exposed himself to her. Her attorneys announced that they would summon witnesses regarding similar Clinton cases involving at least nine other women with whom Bill had had alleged affairs or sexual encounters. Their aim was to prove that Clinton had entered into similar relationships with subordinate officials several times before. One of the women they chose to call witness was Monica Lewinsky (Newell 2006).

Lewinsky's affair with Clinton is said to have lasted for eighteen months during her time as a trainee at the White House. In April 1996 she was transferred to the Pentagon where she met Linda Tripp. She quickly befriended Tripp and opened up about her intimate relationship with the President. She did not realize that Tripp had her own agenda that disliked Clinton and his administration. At the end of 1997 both Lewinsky and Tripp were called as witnesses during Paula Jones' trial, and on January 7, 1998 Lewinsky signed a sworn statement in which she denied having ever had any sexual relationship with the president. Clinton also

testified that he had seen Miss Lewinsky once or twice during the fall of 1995 but could not remember whether he was alone with her. He categorically denied that he had ever had sexual encounters with her.

Until then, the allegations against Mr. Clinton about Monica's affair had not yet been made public. However, the next day, "The Drudge Report" described the history of Clinton's relationship with an intern and mentioned Lewinsky by name. On Wednesday, January 21, all the newspapers nationwide were also covering the story. In an article entitled "Clinton Accused of Persuading a Trainee to Lie," the *Washington Post* wrote about the investigation to clarify whether the president had exerted pressure on the former trainee to lie about the romance (*Washington Post* 21 I 1998, 1, 6).

Later that same day, Clinton appeared on national television to deny the accusations publicly. That is when Clinton-Lewinsky began. The day after this information appeared, the alleged U.S. Presidential affair, which contained details from tapes secretly recorded by Tripp, dominated the press and television not only in the United States, but also worldwide. High-ranking politicians, advisers and commentators began speculating on Clinton's possible appeal. Facing increasing pressure, the President and his wife Hillary appeared publicly at a press conference on January 26th. Clinton made a televised statement in which he again categorically and publicly denied having an affair with Lewinsky. "I want you to listen to me, I will say it again," Clinton argued, with indignation waving his fingers together. "I did not authorize contacts with this woman, Miss Lewinsky. Never, never once, lied to anyone. These accusations are false. I must go back to work for the benefit of the American people" (*Washington Post* 27 I 1998, 1).

The next morning Hillary gave a television interview in which she defended her husband and claimed that the charges made against him were part of a "huge conspiracy against my husband, which had lasted since the day he was declared president" (*Washington Post* 28 I 1998, 21). However, the scandal did not go away and instead gained more traction. By this time, the same argument of a "conspiracy" by the media to frame her husband seemed tired and far-fetched given that this was now the only one of many stories of Clinton's sexual misconduct going public. Not only so, but it showed Clinton as someone who would be capable of lying repeatedly to lawyers, the media and the general public. On April 1, Paula Jones's case was dismissed, but the investigation into the affair with Monica Lewinsky lasted all summer. It now focused on whether Clinton committed perjury when he testified in the Paula Jones case, whether he obstructed justice and manipulated the potential witnesses. As the amount of proof of his affair grew, Clinton acknowledged that he could no longer hold on to the strategy of open denial. He agreed to testify before the Grand Jury in August. He admitted that he had in fact been one to one with Lewinsky on numerous occasions and that during some of these meetings they had behaved inappropriately. On the same day, he delivered a televised speech in which

he publicly admitted to unsuitable relations with Miss Lewinsky (*Washington Post* 18 VIII 1998, 5).

Despite clear signs that the majority of Americans were tired of this prolonged public spectacle, the overwhelming response was dismay at the deception that Clinton had perpetrated continuously throughout the repeated transgressions. Time and time again, he flatly denied the accusations and lied to everyone about the facts. This exposed his true nature, as trying to protect his public image from political fallout, however the damage had been done and his lies now inevitably labeled him as a duplicitous and deceitful person. This in itself was more damaging than the actual promiscuous acts he committed. Like in the case of most political-sexual scandals, what actually destroyed the President were the implications of the violation to his declared public ethos, not his illicit relations with a former trainee.

It is likely that if the president had not tried to hide his relationship with Lewinsky while giving testimony in the Paula Jones's case, the scandal would not have provided enough evidence to justify further investigations. The disclosure of Lewinsky's relationship would have certainly undermined his career, just like in other cases involving sexual incidents and affairs (Posner 1999, 133–169). However, attempting to conceal this relationship and repeatedly lying about it would have been a sheer catastrophe as it led to violations of standards in connection with the Paula Jones case, and it proved the contradiction necessary to destroy any of the public's trust that was left. As it was first with Flowers, then Jones, and eventually Lewinsky, Clinton's repeated denials positioned him in a more difficult situation to get out of. Every president has his enemies, but Clinton did not help himself, providing his opponents with a powerful weapon to debase his political image by criticizing his truthfulness (Conason, Lyons 1999).

Contemporary Examples

Another, more recent scandal involving sexual inappropriateness can be observed in the downfall of Congressman Anthony Weiner. Once viewed as a fearless and respected Democrat, Weiner found himself in the midst of a sexual scandal after accidentally tweeting a photo of what appeared to be an erect penis. Similarly, Weiner's initial response was that it was a conspiracy against him, that he had been framed or "hacked". However, it was eventually revealed that in fact he had committed the indecent act and was forced to resign from his position as Congressman and to make a public apology. Eventually, Weiner would attempt to redeem himself by enrolling in rehabilitation, persuading the public that he had changed his ways, and that he would be running for Mayor of New York City as a newly formed man. Unfortunately, Weiner found himself in another, more serious, sexting scandal halfway through his campaign. This time accused of exchanging inappropriate

sexual photos with an underage girl. This would not only cost Weiner his political career, but also his marriage, and freedom once we had found guilty. It is safe to say that the public's memory was almost willing to move past his first transgression. It was such a difficult and embarrassing scandal to go through, and his initial denial could have potentially been rationalized to have been caused by overwhelming fear of shame and humiliation – something completely relatable and understandable to the general public. It was his betrayal of his second chance, however, that proved he in fact had not changed, and from this point on his redemption was impossible (Bash).

An almost perfect antithesis of this scenario can be seen more recently in the repeated sexual harassment accusations and sexism of Donald Trump. Before and during his political career, Trump has been accused of widespread sexual misconduct. From rape accusations, general sexual harassment and mistreatment of women, his misogyny has a long and detailed record. However, the key difference here is that, aside from denying such things, Trump has never formally expressed shame or regret for these accusations, which include calling women “pigs”, “disgusting animals”, and remarks about incest with his daughter, among other things.

Trump seems to be almost impervious to these events that would normally cause a full-blown scandal to any other politician's career. I believe this is because he is in fact totally indifferent towards them since they do not contradict his pre-established ethos and are expected. He was never afraid of any repercussion for such comments and instead it probably helped him build the public persona he wished to portray to his base. I believe these events did not spark a massive scandal because his public image was never contradicted. He never framed himself to be a highly ethical, moral or eloquent politician, but instead quite the opposite. This fact can be validated by the fact that Roger Stone, the notorious political strategist known for his dirty tricks and quotes like, “It is better to be infamous than not be famous at all” was actually one of Trump's main campaign advisors. Being aggressive, arrogant and offensive has been his key strategy from the beginning of his political career. So it is without surprise that when a videotape emerged on October 7th, 2016 of Trump saying he could “grab ‘em by the pussy”, there was no significant impact upon his political trajectory. Other than some outcry from the media and civil rights organizations, everything continued as normal. Trump dismissed his comments as “locker room banter” and acted as if none of this mattered to his seeking public office. He was, in fact, correct in that these instances did not betray any previously held image about him, so they did not represent any contradiction or hypocrisy of character and there was no real threat to his political career. Eventually he would go on to win the presidency and some supporters would go as far as praising his comments (Mindock).

These are some examples of how the outcome of a political scandal is actually more dependent on the politician's established public character than the scandalous

act itself. Many times we see that navigating with a careful communications strategy and swift countermeasures diminishes the negative impacts. In other instances, namely those where there is a clear and definite denial, it is almost certain that if a politician is found to have been misleading, conniving or untruthful, the outcome will be a certain political death sentence. However, there are instances where what could normally be perceived as a scandalous activity simply fails to have any meaningful effect, and I would attribute this phenomenon to the fact that the politician's ostensible ethos and public persona were not contradicted as a result of the misdeeds. It is almost as if any wrongdoing could be dismissed because no one really expected any better from them to begin with—there was no expectation for them to be ethical in the first place (Thompson 1995).

Conclusions

In conclusion, what these trends actually show within the larger scope of American politics is that in fact the ethical expectations usually assigned to politicians have been gradually reduced and diminished to the state where they are now. Whereas in the past American politicians were expected to be of statesmanlike conduct, superior intellect and excellent moral standard, now that expectation has all but disappeared, leaving behind a political climate where spectacle dominates over all else – paving the way for distorted character politics that ruthlessly play on the base's emotions and fears, as opposed to reasoned logical arguments, ideologies, or legislative proposals. Indeed the media-political apparatus looks rather grim as the blurring of politics and media entertainment continues, at least until the facade of virtue returns to the main stage of American politics.

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