

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

THE CHARACTERIZATION OF A POLITICIAN'S PERSONAL BEHAVIOR:  
A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF THREE LOS ANGELES PUBLICATIONS AND THEIR  
DEPICTION OF MAYOR ANTONIO VILLARAIGOSA

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By

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## ABSTRACT

THE CHARACTERIZATION OF A POLITICIAN'S PERSONAL BEHAVIOR:  
A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF THREE LOS ANGELES PUBLICATIONS AND THEIR  
DEPICTION OF MAYOR ANTONIO VILLARAIGOSA

By

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This study examines how Los Angeles publications portray the city's mayor, Antonio Villaraigosa, from January 2006 to December 2009. This time frame is relevant because it contains articles prior to the summer of 2007 when there was a revelation that the mayor had an affair with a television news anchor. The time frame also contains articles that pertain to the aftermath and his re-election. Three publications were analyzed using narrative analysis. This study shows that the *Los Angeles Times* depicts Villaraigosa's personal behavior as casting a shadow over his mayoral duties. *The Daily News of Los Angeles* depicts him as a determined politician. *LA Weekly* depicts him as primarily lackluster in political performance and spotlight seeking. These findings led to the conclusion that coverage relating to local politics in Los Angeles is personalized because there is a focus on the private decisions, behavior, and characters associated with the mayor, thus overshadowing his political responsibilities.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa took office in July 2005 and enjoyed a quiet first two years in terms of media coverage. During this period, he had no difficulty attracting positive media attention and was rarely criticized by mainstream press. Media outlets tended to focus on his work-related mayoral goals to enhance education in the city's school district and increase safety in areas needing additional police protection.

Villaraigosa's quiet first term, however, ended after an act of personal misbehavior became public information. In mid-2007, the mayor revealed that he had cheated on his wife with Mirthala Salinas, who was at the time a Spanish-language news anchor at Telemundo. As a result, media outlets refocused their coverage to the mayor's and Salinas' personal life. Los Angeles publications detailed the evolution of Villaraigosa's relationship with Salinas by quoting former neighbors and other members in the city close to the situation.

Salinas was characterized as "the other woman" and as a journalist who had acted unethically. As a result of her relationship with the mayor, many considered that she lost her objectivity as a reporter because she had covered him at political events while being romantically involved. She was also scrutinized for acting unethically when anchoring Telemundo's segment on the mayor's divorce, making the announcement herself that the reason for the separation was because he had an affair. However, during the segment she did not disclose that she was the other woman involved. This generated more criticism about her breach of journalistic codes of ethics and values. The media were also critical because of her previous dating history, a history that included other politicians. The media focused heavily on Salinas, her personal life, and the negative implications of her actions. Eventually Telemundo removed her from the political beat.

In sharp contrast, Villaraigosa was able to withstand the negative media attention and sustain a successful political career. Although the coverage about him had changed from that of positive reporting on his professional duties to negative coverage on his personal life, he was able to overcome the negativity and be re-elected for a second term in 2009.

Political reporting has shifted since the days of President John F. Kennedy, whose affairs were not reported in the press. Modern political reporting focuses on the personal lives and actions of politicians over their professional careers (Castells, 2009). The affair between Villaraigosa and Salinas received a great deal of local media coverage that strayed from addressing political topics involving the mayor's civic responsibilities. Furthermore, the articles about the Villaraigosa/Salinas affair are examples of how modern media narrate a sex scandal. Such scandals tend to follow a common script: accusation or revelation, broadcast denial and/or confession—and frequently, a comeback or attempted comeback (Gamson, 2001). The mayor's affair and his actions were reported on in a manner that followed such a script.

Political news in the form of a script creates information meant more to entertain audience members instead of engage them in critical political debates (Castells, 2009). Moreover, those who create such news do so in a fashion that reflects their perception of objectively reporting to create an accurate picture of the nation and the political spectrum (Bowman, 2008). However, more often than not the news that results is made up of political scandal-narratives about candidates' personalities and behaviors, which obscure an accurate picture. Consequently, the entertaining political news that is generated is information that ultimately hinders ideal democratic participation. This is because such dialogue masks other pertinent conversations about the political and civic duties that individual represents. Although aspects of character are important, they hamper and obscure the truth about an individual as a

civic representative. As a result, politicians are being viewed as public trustees rather than as representatives within the democratic political process (Warren, 2006).

Politicians, in turn, strive to gain notoriety and media attention and do so by playing into scandal politics. This sort of politicking creates a crisis for political legitimacy because the political realm consists of candidates willing to leak demeaning information about each other to the media (Castells, 2009). The media then releases such information in the form of moral disorder stories. These stories of moral disorder and misconduct pollute the political arena. Therefore, the public's vision is complicated with stories about appearances and personal misbehaviors, thus altering the reality of the democratic political process.

Both politicians and the media strive to appeal to the public's prurient interest to know hidden aspects of a public figure's personal life (Bowman, 2008). Villaraigosa's personal scandal appeals to the media's desire to report in an entertaining manner about a politician's personal life as well as appeals to the public's desire to hear such news.

Furthermore, based on the imposed cultural norms at the time, behavior can be seen as appropriate to be conducted in public, however at another time it is seen as something that should remain behind-closed-doors (Gamson, 2001). Affairs and sex scandals in modern politics are increasingly commonplace, and thus, the negative effect they have on political careers are fleeting. This study will detail how the media's invasive reports about the Los Angeles mayor's sex scandal and the characters involved were extensive, yet had a short-lived political impact on his career and public opinion.

### *Research Questions*

This thesis focuses on the portrayal of Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's time in office between the years 2006-2009, both prior to and after the affair. Utilizing the research method of

narrative analysis, the author analyzed articles pertaining to Villaraigosa and his personal behavior. The publications analyzed were the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Daily News of Los Angeles*, and *LA Weekly*. The research questions used are:

1. What were the main narratives about Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's behavior in local Los Angeles press from 2006 to 2009?
2. What were the main narratives about Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's mayoral activities during that period?

### *Significance of Study*

In a democratic society, political conversations and media coverage are pertinent for the public to assess those governing. A free and watchful press should be able to guide society to accurately assess politicians based on what he or she will bring forth in their authoritative position. However, the free press, especially in the United States, has undergone a transformation in which coverage of politicians is written more for entertainment, which includes detailing their personal actions and behaviors (Thompson, 2000). Reporting in such a manner ultimately guides society to evaluate politicians based on their character, personality, and aspects of their private lives as opposed to their civic actions and political strategies.

Studies about national and statewide politicians have yielded results indicating that the media extensively cover the private lives of major political figures and focuses on personal aspects of their character. This research will study this assertion at a micro-level (city based), looking at local media outlets.

### *Summary of Chapters to Come*

The second chapter of this thesis is a literature review that explores the research of other scholars. The literature review outlines a transformation of journalism and politics, addresses the

influx of scandal within political media coverage, and shows how such reporting hinders ideal democratic communication and participation. The third chapter defines narrative analysis, which is the methodology used in this study. The fourth chapter assesses the findings that resulted from the research. Lastly, the fifth chapter explains the conclusions drawn from conducting the research for this study.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

This literature review seeks to define the transformation of public and private boundaries and the impact that these transformations have had on politics and public opinion. First, an introduction to Habermas' public sphere will address the significance of the realm in which public opinion can be formed and the degenerative transformation society has undergone to restrict the public from an ideal participatory democracy. Second, the concept of scandal will be presented and the important relationship between the media and scandal will be defined. Third, mediated forms of communication and the correlating decline of political culture will be explained. Fourth, the rise of mediated political scandal and the influx of scandal narratives in political news will be shown as heightened and consequently increasing the perceived importance of the *character-issue* for public authorities. Lastly, the transformation of politics based on the maintenance of communication will be addressed. It will be noted that politicians and journalists struggle to identify and maintain national values and truth in society in order to further a desired constructed reality.

#### *The Public Sphere*

Political scandals in modern society are symptomatic of the transformations of communication and the blurring of boundaries between what is thought to be public and/or private (Thompson, 2011). Habermas (1989) introduces the concept of the public sphere and analyzes the transformation that has taken place within to ultimately hinder democratic participation and true public opinion. Examining Habermas' theoretical conclusions about the transformation of the public sphere can help explain the correlation between the mass media's

coverage on politicians' appearances and private decisions and the influences that this reporting has on public opinion (Thompson, 2011).

The public sphere is described as “a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed” (Habermas, 1989, p. 73). In early modern Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, feudal authorities were sharply dividing public and private elements into respective bodies, for example the privatizing of churches and religious affiliations (Habermas, 1989). From this division emerged what is described as the bourgeois public sphere. Nobility and feudal authorities became the structures of public authority, yet they were theoretically separate from imposing state rule on those in professions and trades of private business (Habermas, 1989). The bourgeois public sphere can be conceived as the sphere of private people coming together as a public and claiming the public sphere to themselves over the rule of public authorities (Warner, 2005). This coming together of private individuals was done in order to engage in debate and critical arguments regarding general rules and governing relations in the basically private yet publicly relevant sphere of commodity and labor exchange (Warner, 2005). Public conversations between those engaging in the private exchanges of commodity and labor increased and became more concerned with the control and restrictions that could be imposed on such (Thompson, 2011). Therefore, those who were part of the bourgeois society with businesses and specific trades were in direct opposition to those in threatening positions of authoritative public standing.

The bourgeois public sphere was a space for conversation among those in private professions who carried out pertinent exchanges of dialogue in places such as coffee houses, assemblies, churches, and other sites of public oratory and debate (Kellner, 1997). These discussions soon began taking place in a print and pamphlet form as well. Newspapers and

journals started being disseminated on a vast scale, creating a *press* of mass communication that was independent from state ownership and control (Kellner, 1997). These intellectual newspapers were circulating conversations of information that went against the public authority. The dissemination of information continued to broaden in newspapers and pamphlets to further a representative public dialogue of criticisms against the state and existing society (Kellner, 1997).

These early forms of newspapers and mass press were a resource for *democratic* conversation among those who were serving the public with private businesses. The dialogues expressed the desire to keep public authority figures from imposing rules and regulations on those private businesses serving the public. In this era, capitalism and the activities of producing merchandises and other products were now outside of the family and home, thus creating and expanding the economy while also shifting the means of how information was transmitted among individuals (Habermas, 1989). Essentially the mass producing of conversations among citizens of a state—expressing inadequacies and negativities about the state—were serving the function of a media intending to be a free press, reporting honestly on the acts of public individuals who wish to be in positions of authority or politics. Public opinion was thus being formed by the oral and printed conversations among the people with privatize businesses who could openly voice their struggles with those in power. This was a democratic means of maintaining their own legitimacy over their businesses in the public realm and impacting decision making in society.

Journalism in the printed form continued to rise as a conversation among private individuals. Consequently, the easily spread form of dialogue became an increasingly profitable venture for those who were producing it and the boundaries of the public sphere began to undergo a transformation (Kellner, 1997). This derived from the influx of private interest that

was receiving special prominence on a mass mediated scale (Kellner, 1997). From the 16th and 17th centuries on, the expanding capitalist economy involved not just the growing trade in goods but it also involved this growing trade of information, triggered by the rise of newspapers and the periodical press in the bourgeois public sphere (Thompson, 2011). As noted, the public domain then had a new space in between the state authority on the one hand, and the private realm of the family and household on the other. This was an ideal public sphere. However, as the economic gain of mass mediated communication increased, the public sphere in the industrially advancing England, France, and United States during the 1830s changed printed journalism. Journalism went from a form of communication as a way to project conviction into one that was supported by commerce (Habermas, 1989). In this transition emerged mass communication for public services that, in turn, transformed the ideal model of the public sphere (Habermas, 1989).

#### *The Transformation of the Public Sphere*

Although the liberal model of the public sphere that was introduced by the bourgeois society and their newspapers is an instructive model, it is not used in today's mass democracy (Habermas, 1989). As countries became more industrially advanced, and with the diffusion of press and propaganda, the public body expanded beyond the bounds of the bourgeoisie, losing the exclusivity and coherence that had been created by the social institutions of private individuals serving the public interest (Habermas, 1989). Conflicts and conversations that were once limited to a privatized domain of the bourgeoisie people entered into the public sphere to serve those outside of individual trades and businesses.

As the realms between public and private continued to shift and overlap, political authorities began assuming social functions and public (social) powers began assuming political functions, thus re-feudalizing the public sphere (Habermas, 1989). The modernizing culture

became progressively infused with mass mediated communication, which consequently undermines the public sphere and the notion of a participatory democracy (Habermas, 1989). Society then becomes polarized by class struggle. The public fragments into a mass of competing interest groups, and subsequently emerges the welfare state democracy, where society and state have become mutually intertwined (Fraser, 1990).

Publicity, in the sense of critical scrutiny of the state, increasingly gave way to public relations, mass-mediated staged displays, and the manufacture and manipulation of public opinion (Fraser, 1990). In the past, making court proceedings available for the public to consume and interpret were thought to subject certain people and private affairs to appeal before a court of public opinion (Habermas, 1989). However, in today's mass democracy it is not so true (Habermas, 1989). The process of making information public through the mass dissemination of information to a large populous is now serving the policies of politicians and special interest groups in a form of publicity. This publicity ultimately achieves civic prestige worthy of acclaim, but it is constructed in a realm of nonpublic opinion (Habermas, 1989). 2005). Public opinion in this current form is now one contrived not to generate ideas and hold people in power positions accountable, but instead is more for the simple registration of public approval or disapproval in the form of opinion polls and occasional elections (Warner, 2005).

Diminished is the emancipatory power of an ideal public sphere, one of which could free itself from the restraint of those in authoritative positions (Habermas, 1989). Although there are critics to Habermas' explanations of an ideal public sphere, most notably his disregard to express that other groups outside of the bourgeois community (as well as women) were restricted from public conversations, the importance of his points can be stressed by the transformative conditions that caused the emancipatory potential of the public sphere to be abandoned rather

than radicalized (Warner, 2005). The disproportionate nature of mass culture, according to Habermas, has made it easier for those with capital or power to distribute their views on a vast scale, but hard for marginal voices to actually speak back (Warner, 2005). These tendencies amount to what Habermas defined as the re-feudalization of the public sphere, which produces a public that is appealed to not for criticism but for nonthreatening acclamation (Warner, 2005). In other words, a civil society is given information that has been constructed in a manner that appeals to them and achieves the look of a democratic forum, yet is problematic because simultaneously their public voices are being obscured. This is a hindrance to the publics of modern mass cultures because they are being manipulated by information in the form of publicity that pertains to those in power.

In modern democracies, especially in the conditions of the United States, groups of private and public individuals assume the role of decision maker and only relate to one another. This furthers an exclusion of the public's voice (Habermas, 1989). Neglecting to have conversations with the public allows individuals in authoritative positions to oblige society, yet unevenly serve them. This is because they solely relate and converse with others in power positions instead of the voting public they are intending to serve.

#### *Shifting Boundaries of Private and Public*

As the boundaries between private and public continued to shift in the public sphere, information about individuals that was once thought to be a private matter became a common feature of conversation in public society (Thompson, 2011). Modern political scandals about politicians' misbehaviors are symptomatic of the shifting and transforming boundaries between public and private (Thompson, 2011). This notion can be used to explain the phenomena revolving around the media's intense coverage of political scandals.

As noted, societies continued to economically advance and develop in the 1800s while newspapers and printed forms of communication did so as well (Thompson, 2011). Mass communication was transforming and gradually became part of large-scale commercial organizations that were oriented more towards entertainment and profit than in the direction of stimulating rational, critical debates among citizens (Thompson, 2011). These mass mediated industries were destroying the participatory potential for an ideal public sphere and lessening the democratic value of society's impact on political decisions (Habermas, 1989). This can help explain how political coverage pertaining to society has transformed into a profitable managed side show that is sensationalized and characterized by politicians' private lives and not for inciting critical public discussions (Thompson, 2011).

Sensationalism in political news coverage and the exposing of matters that were once considered to be private are important concepts to understanding what people believe should be accessible for public viewing (Thompson, 2011). Privacy can be described as consisting "of those territories of the self, which include the environment of the self and information about the self, over which the individual seeks to exercise control and to restrict access by others" (Thompson, 2011, p. 61). Privacy is thought to be a basic right that should be available and easily maintained by the individual. Thus it is information about actions conducted in private and behind closed doors that people wish to protect as their own (Thompson, 2011).

The concept of the private sphere pertaining to just the home or spaces once thought to be private is irrelevant in the world today because information and communication technologies have transformed how messages are disseminated, accessed, and controlled (Thompson, 2011). Critical debates among citizens that were once conversations spread among one another in coffee houses and public spaces have now been replaced with a "staged debate in a studio that

is carried out in their name” (Thompson 2011, p. 55). Individuals no longer have to be present at debates between politicians to hear the communication first hand and disseminate it to others. Mass mediated communication has taken on that role. The advancement in communication technology has subsequently elongated the public’s vision to include a space and time where one can witness an event occurring in a place distant from their home and private life (Thompson, 2011). Debates and information about politicians are then part of the privatized space of the home and family.

The space where aspects of one’s life are to be kept private has shifted within the public sphere. This shift has caused boundaries of visibility to be diminutive and easily pierced. With modern communication and media technology, individuals are able to deepen their gaze on a public figures’ private life without being present. Today a politician must give up his or her privacy in this complex space of information flows where “being public means being visible and capable of being seen and heard by others” (Thompson, 2011, p. 63). Therefore, when actions are done or words are said in secrecy, yet seep into the public gaze, there is no longer a space for privacy in which they can be controlled.

Mediated forms of communication minimize the space for privacy, which allows the public to enter that space of a public figure’s life that was once pronounced to be private and could, consequently, be controlled (Thompson, 2011). Modern channels of communication have provided the mass media with a way to disseminate information easily and extensively. With the advances in news diffusion technology, such as television, radio, and more recently, the Internet, the commercialization of news has developed into a means for journalists and their publications to sensationalize the private lives of politicians as racy, entertaining, and pertinent coverage for

public consumption. The shifting boundaries between public and private and the advances in news diffusion have contributed to the scandalizing of news and also the deterioration of privacy.

### *Mediated Public Scandal*

The shifting and blurred boundaries between public and private have impacted political coverage in particular (Thompson, 2000). In the realm of mass media and communication, the private acts of politicians have become a sought after phenomena to cover (Thompson, 2000). This can be traced to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century when the term *scandalous* was continually used to describe a new and distinctive type of event that involved the media disclosing information about morally discreditable activities that previously would have been kept hidden from the public (Thompson, 2000). This form of media event became increasingly sought after by journalists because they were striving to be investigative and write *facts* about political figures in a way that would be entertaining and appealing to readers. Over time, journalists thought of themselves as ombudsmen and overseers of what should be communicated to the public about those in authoritative positions (Calhoun, 1992). Journalists also increasingly thought their occupation allowed them to exercise power over those authority figures because they created and published information. Exercising power over the powerful has enabled journalists to continue investigating political leaders, generate news about their personal lives, and disseminate information about morally shameful acts (Bowman, 2008).

Castells (2009) explains that without the media there really is no scandal. Mediated scandals are not simply scandals reported by the media nor do not exist independently from them. They “are in varying ways and to some extent, constituted by mediated forms of communication” (Thompson, 2000, p. 31). This is because without the media the public would not know or react to the personal misconduct of politicians. These acts would not be

communicated to society and, consequently, would not be considered pertinent information needed to assess a politician. However, due to the blurred boundaries between private and public, along with the transformation of journalism, political reporting about scandals has become common and appealing. This commonness legitimizes and elevates a crisis for democracy (Castells, 2009). Gradually information has been obscured and constructed to reflect the interests of those in power, resulting in a more misinformed public (Castells, 2009). Although aspects of personal misconduct may be important when assessing a politician, they obscure pertinent civic and political information. Consequently, this construction of news by a media system that generates something only approximating democratic journalism is problematic and falls short of its intended purpose (McChesney, 2003).

Society needs journalism that is a rigorous watchdog of those in power, who can ferret out truth from lies and present a wide range of informed positions to a free public. However, when news is being constructed by a media system that is being investigative in order to maximize on entertainment and appeal to reader's emotions then true democratic journalism cannot be achieved (McChesney, 2003). Journalists also contribute to this problematic construction because of the idea that they are to be objective and stray from appearing partisan to any particular political position (McChesney, 2003). In abiding by the notions of objectivity and nonpartisanship, journalists are fulfilling "their calling as guardians of the public interest" (Thompson, 2000, p. 32). However, the dialogue that often results fails to address hard hitting topics and instead focuses on matters of personal misconduct and scandalous behavior (McChesney, 2003).

In addition to the idea of objectivity, journalism also became a more institutionalized occupation. As journalism became institutionalized, media companies became progressively

more concerned with selling stories for financial gain than producing relevant societal material (Thompson, 2000). The commercialism of journalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century fostered corruption, as newspapers transformed and turned to sensationalism and outright lying to generate sales (McChesney, 2003). This commercialism of journalism can explain why scandals represented, and continue to represent, a way for media outlets to increase their sales by publishing racy stories about the personal misconduct of public figures.

Scandals are narratives in the media that contain a specific event. The scandal is covered heavily and needs resolving, before finally coming to some sort of conclusion (Thompson, 2000). The sequential fashion in which scandals are covered creates a much desired plot line for public audience members. The outcome of a scandal created by the media is almost always unclear to the viewer. Hence, “they fuel speculation and, like a good novel, they constantly test the capacity of readers and viewers to assess the veracity of the protagonists, to figure out the plot and predict its resolution” (Thompson, 2000, p. 73).

Thompson (2000) describes four main phases in which a mediated scandal transpires: the pre-scandal phase, the phase of scandal proper, the culmination, and the aftermath. First, the pre-scandal phase involves investigation carried out by journalists, police, or other individuals actively searching for scandalous behavior. They may be carried out by some sort of routine investigation that ultimately leads to the discovery of misconduct (Thompson, 2000). Second, there is the phase of scandal proper that “begins with the public disclosure of an action or event that sets in motion the process of claim and counter-claim, which constitutes the mediated scandal” (Thompson, 2000, p. 74). This phase determines whether the information develops into a scandal by releasing the said inappropriate or scandalous behavior to the media for public disclosure. The media in this phase operate as the determinants of how the situation will be

covered and when it will ultimately stop receiving public media attention. Third, is the culmination phase when the individual(s) being scandalously publicized feels the most pressure to make a decision on how to handle the negative publicity. This phase may lead to an admission of guilt, a resignation, a sacking, and/or a criminal prosecution, but it can also result in a collapse of the case against the individual(s) (Thompson, 2000). The fourth and final phase of mediated scandal is the aftermath. This is the time in which the highly dramatized and publicized scandal has gone through the culmination period, and those involved in the scandal, the journalists, police, judges, and others take the time to reflect on the situation. Most of this reflection is done through the media (Thompson, 2000).

Mediated scandals are continuously narrated events, which are constantly being redefined and revised as information unfolds. It is to some extent that this plot-like narrative structure, “combined with the human interest character of scandal as a modern morality tale, which makes the following of scandals a source of pleasure for some and a topic of conversation of many” (Thompson, 2000, p. 77).

### *Mediated Communication and the Corruption of Political Culture*

#### *Media Politics and Scandal Politics*

Most prominently, the style of mediated scandal narration is used to report on politicians and reveal their morally degrading characteristics, lifestyles, and decisions. The uncovering of such acts by the media creates a political scandal and incites scandal politics to be played out for the public (Castells, 2009). Scandal politics is furthered by political opponents *leaking* demeaning information about each other and participating in a constant struggle for recognition in the public to obtain a following. The mass media have become the space for power-making (Castells, 2009). In this space, power relationships are decided between competing political and

social actors (Castells, 2009). Castells (2009) describes media politics as the conduct of politics in and by the media and scandal politics as inseparable from media politics because the characteristics of media politics makes the use of scandals the most effective tool in political contests and debates (Castells, 2009).

This extensive media coverage of a politician's private life, physical appearance, and personality in the political realm has caused corruption to transpire in American political culture (Bowman, 2008). Arrogance can be argued as the characteristic that drives media producers and journalists to seek out and scandalize news. This arrogance is explained by Bowman (2008) as:

Assuming that no other belief is possible without the assumption of the believer's lunacy, imbecility, viciousness, corruption, or some combination of all four to explain it; this assumption is the product of *media madness*, it is spread outside the media to other social elites, and especially to political and intellectual classes (p. 2).

This arrogance allows journalists and their media producers to decide what news will be communicated to the public to thus maintain power and supremacy over political authority (Bowman, 2008).

The decision making behind deciding what news will be produced and distributed to the public is an inescapable part of the journalism process (McChesney, 2003). Journalism evolved in the United States to incorporate certain key values into the professional codes. There was nothing naturally objective or professional about those values and, in core respects, they were responding to the commercial and political needs of the owners, even if it was believed the messages were not being conveyed to the public that way (McChesney, 2003). To the extent that journalists believe following professional codes enables neutrality and fairness, the journalists

will always be incapable of recognizing and addressing the inherent limitations of the process of objectively creating public news in the profession of journalism (McChesney, 2003).

The pretense to the notion of *objectively* reporting creates a sense of power for journalists when deciding what is news. Journalists are the creators of news stories based on what they have observed or whom they have interviewed, projecting a picture of the nation and society based on the outcome of their work which, nevertheless, can be viewed over time as an *accurate* picture of America to the public (Gans, 1980). Creating the news puts journalists in a powerful position because they are acting, seemingly, on behalf of the public to accurately define the nation and the political spectrum based on their perception of objectively reporting (Bowman, 2008). However, what results more often than not are political scandal-narratives about candidates' personalities and behavior that are meant more for entertainment than generating ideal societal information to inspire democratic participation.

Political scandal-narratives are also, in part, consequences of journalists striving to appear nonpartisan to any specific political candidate or party (Thompson, 2000). As long as “the media pretend to be nonpartisan their coverage will tend to avoid real political disagreements, which can often hardly be discussed without taking one side or the other” (Bowman, 2008, p. 24). Instead, they focus on such nonpolitical but still serious matters of alleged faults of character, morality, or judgment (Bowman, 2008). Furthermore, political journalism has often defaulted to simply covering what someone in one party says and then getting a reply from either a candidate or community representative on the other side that holds a dissenting position (McChesney, 2003). In doing so, the only voices represented are of official community or political sources, obscuring the voices of actual members of the public whom they are allegedly speaking for (McChesney, 2003). This reliance on official sources for reporting the

news gives the information a very conventional feel that does not lead to a rigorous examination of major issues of public concern (McChesney, 2003).

Journalists, under the assumption they are following codes that represent objective and nonpartisan reporting, believe that disseminating political information based on official sources is democratic. They can classify it as democratic because those official sources are the voices of individuals who were elected by the public (McChesney, 2003). However, this assumption of free press theory forgets that even leaders determined by elections need a rigorous monitoring. The range in determining how, and even if, a politician is serving society should not and cannot be determined solely by interviewing other politicians in opposition or focusing on political sensationalism (McChesney, 2003). This form of journalism undermines public participation and their voices. Furthered is Habermas' assumption that the transformative means of mass communication is inhibiting democratic involvement to slightly more than chatter between public elites who determine societal outcomes.

The media, as the space for power making, tends to convey a candidate based on certain attributes grounded very little on policies and/or government implications. This is due to the codes in professional journalism that imply reporting should be objective and nonpartisan. Mediated politics then becomes a, *personalization of politics*, and key factors of appearance, credibility, and morality become the forefront of political coverage, causing the outcome of campaigns to be based on a positive or negative projection of a candidate's personality in the minds of voters (Castells, 2009). The personalization of political news may be of interest to the reading and watching public, but it ultimately guides those who vote to do so in a manner surrounding a candidates' character instead of the more legitimate interests regarding public matters (Castells, 2009). The tendency to avoid the specificity of issues that could possibly

alienate some voters, leads the public to look for a general solicitation of trust in a candidate's ability to find solutions to the problems affecting society (Castells, 2009). In addition, journalists believing in the notion of reporting objectively feel they possess the power to decide and negotiate what political stories get communicated to the public (Bowman, 2008). More often than not, these political stories revolve around sensationalism and personal political misconduct and avoid real matters of public concern. The pretense that journalists of large media organizations are lifting a veil to show the hidden things a politician may not want the reader/viewer to know about is vital in maintaining that space for power making (Bowman, 2008).

*Constructing Reality: News Making, Politics, and Public Opinion*

Another important aspect to how the mass media reports on politicians has a great deal to do with promoting public opinion based on cultural implications through emotions and inciting feelings within the public. By focusing on coverage that incites the public's emotions, a journalist is compelled to report on politician's private matters and personality traits (Castells, 2009). This provokes the consequent view that the hidden aspects of individuals in the public gaze are more *real* and more important than legitimate public opinions and dealings. Bowman (2008) wrote:

Feelings have traditionally been private and therefore hidden away from the public gaze—as, of course, social convention demands that they still mostly are for those of us who live out of the public eye—the media's promise to reveal them appeals to a prurient impulse in the public (p. 29).

Appealing to the public is desired by the media in order to retain audience members. Revealing private acts of politicians prove to be a means to this retention. Culture is also

important in understanding why negative political coverage and a politician's personality have an entertaining and maintaining power over society. Assessing American's public opinion of politicians, pre or post scandal, has a great deal to do with cultural background and the extent to which a public has been exposed to the mediated coverage of politics (Schudson, 2002). There is and there can be no such thing as news, especially concerning politics, except in a community in which there is a body of cultural tradition and common understanding of the terms revolving around the events that are ordinarily interpreted and discussed (Glasser, Allen, & Blanks, 1989). Recognizing a culture's style of communicating on a mass scale and assessing those who produce the news and influence what is reported, conveyed, and then thought about, allows one to see how personality has become a prominent feature in America's political realm (Castells, 2009).

In addition, the human mind is the most important means of production and the most important product of the mind is a produced and sustained reality (Carey, 1992). Theorists have consistently argued that a society's mass media legitimize its status quo by acting as the cultural arm of the industrial order from which they arise (Tuchman, 1978). This legitimizing is then in all ways political, selling the existing social hierarchy to consumers as a product (Tuchman, 1978).

In the mass news culture of defining and interpreting messages, political ideology can be aligned with the way in which the mass media communicates information to the public (Gans, 1980). In American media production and culture, ideology can be defined as a "deliberately thought-out, consistent, integrated, and inflexible set of explicit political values, which is a determinant of political decision" (Gans, 1980, pp. 29-30). Ideological determinists believe that journalists align the news to the political ideology of those who hold power in the country,

leaving very little room for reporting an objective story about political authority (Gans, 1980). Thus, objectivity in reporting is also an ideological mechanism created to impose crafted views onto others, making it near impossible for objectivity to exist in the process of news making. As a result, news can neither picture reality nor provide correspondence to the truth (Carey, 1992). It can only give a signal that something is happening and more often than not it provides a degenerative and pseudo-reality (Carey, 1992). This leads to a belief that there is no truth to public opinion since public opinion has been formed through the distorted contexts of mass mediated communication. Public opinion, then, is merely the statistical aggregation of private opinions informed to the people by the news media (Carey, 1992).

Intellectual-political activity had to be professionalized in order for *truth* to be produced (Carey, 1992). Pseudo-realities and the scandalizing of communication have come to dominate the way politicians and campaigns are shaped and publicized in the mass media (Bowman, 2008). A change in the political landscape has resulted from such shaping and manufacturing (Bowman, 2008). Therefore, if the producing of news continues to commercialize and become a corporate business, then the political system will continue to be corrupted by scandal, sensation, and distorted realities.

Sensationalizing a political reality can then be broken down to nothing more than a politician's private life and staged political debates (Castells, 2009). This political reality is created by the mass media in an attempt to sustain the status quo through the willingness of the public to believe that journalists have dug up and investigated the private matters of politicians for the betterment of the voting public. To a majority of *sophisticated* readers in America, investigative journalism is seen as an appeal to the moral conscience of society (Klein 2010).

Yet, this investigative political coverage tends to be a barrage of facts and official statements and not necessarily anything of societal importance (McChesney, 2003).

It can then be understood that politicians are no longer sworn into office based on their policies. They are elected mainly because of the emotions drawn out of the voting public based on the personality, characteristics, and private decisions a candidate has made throughout the course of an election process (Castells, 2009). When the public “[buys] in to the psychodrama of feelings and hidden realities beneath political or other appearances, [the public] is biased too, and [their] access to reality is limited by [their] acceptance of the media’s model of it” (Bowman, 2008, p. 35). This *reality* is part of the commercial model of journalism that drives the force behind the scandalizing of celebrity-like politics (Bowman, 2008). Created is a socially constructed reality based on the culture of modern politics in American society (Carey, 1992). This *reality* is journalists, politicians, and the public interacting together in a social system. Over time, concepts or mental representations of each other’s actions eventually become habituated into the reciprocal roles played by all of the actors in relation to each other (Carey, 1992). The mass media then uses language to gain audience allegiance (Gans, 1980). In effect, sources, journalists, and audiences are all coexisting in such a system (Gans, 1980). Furthermore, this system better reflects not a space for shared power and information, but is instead a space of constant struggle and a tug-of-war for influence (Gans, 1980).

Language disseminated on a mass scale is used as a tool by newsmakers to sustain their power and desired reality. Defined as an instrument for manipulating individuals and not as a device to establish truth, *language* means to persuade others to believe what is wanted to be believed, thus *creating* public opinion and not actually forming it (Carey, 1992). However, the media have taken the role of resolving the tug-of-war struggle for the space of power making by

exercising control over the interpretation of reality and thus maintaining the messages that are disseminated to the audience (Gans, 1980). The media, by seeing their role as that of informer to the public, deserts their role as an agency for carrying on the conversation of the culture, to instead interpret and sustain the ideologically driven political reality (Carey, 1992).

Moreover, as noted in the opening argument of Bowman (2008), arrogance is a prominent characteristic of media producers, creating a “media-madness” that streamlines into a politicians’ motive to create a pseudo-reality for an elite reader. News is carried out in a way to flatter the reader and create a sense that he or she is being invited into the exclusive precincts of a reality inaccessible to those who are less intelligent (Bowman, 2008). Therefore, those who follow the news feel as if they possess some sort of higher intellect to make more informed political decisions.

Objectivity, nonpartisanship, and truth are expressed as means for journalists to negotiate the national conversation. The media are able to sustain an ideological political reality by their position as power holder in the maintenance of communication. Politicians then engage in debates and campaigns that are focused on negating their opponents to the point that their own intelligence is perceived to be heightened (Thompson, 2011). As a result, the tug-of-war for power, in the space in which public opinion can be formed, has morphed into a space where individuals, including politicians, no longer seek to be recognized for honor or virtue (Thompson, 2011). There is instead a mission to be recognized publicly as *intelligent* and commanding, and in doing so, there is a preference to expose, degrade, or denigrate the intelligence of others, thus furthering the corruption of our political culture (Bowman, 2008).

*The Rise of Political Scandal: Mass-Mediated Scandal Narratives*

*Power Scandals in Politics*

Several factors have contributed to the rise in the personalization of politics, political scandal, and the sensationalizing of political dialogue. However, it will be shown that the most noteworthy of these events and scandals cannot be separated from the influential role the media have played in elevating their prevalence in the public discourse by employing political-scandal narratives (Thompson, 2000).

Power scandals are defined as the misuse or abuse of political power, circumventing rules, laws, and established procedures that govern the exercise of political power (Thompson, 2000). These scandals are based on investigative reporting and take on the form of exposé to reveal the instances of legal or moral transgression, particularly by public officials who by reason are not expected to misbehave (Gans, 1980).

In the 1970s, an exposé that became infamously known as Watergate, involved immoral acts by the president and his staff. The Watergate scandal has significantly contributed to the public's and the media's fascination with political misconduct. Watergate refers to the political power scandal that caused U.S. President Richard Nixon to resign two years after the story broke in *The Washington Post* in 1972 (Schudson, 2004). It is the “mother of all modern political scandals, a scandal so rich and deep that it gave its *-gate* suffix to subsequent scandals” in America and around the world (Schudson, 2004, p. 1232).

A key feature of a power scandal such as Watergate is that it involves the unveiling of hidden forms of power. There is an exposition of actual or alleged abuses of power that had previously been concealed beneath settings in which that form of publicity and power had been kept from public display (Thompson, 2000). Nixon exercised his power by striving to keep hidden the unlawful acts taking place under his command.

Improper use of power by public authority prior to Watergate had generally been hidden from the public gaze behind closed doors. However, with the transformation of the public sphere and the development of mass communication, events that once took place in secrecy behind closed doors became of pertinent concern to the public (Thompson, 2011). New forms of invisible power, combined with the rise of the media, created the conditions for the emergence of Watergate as a power scandal (Thompson, 2000). The releasing of tapes and other materials that had been constructed in privacy exposed Nixon's and other governing official's immorality which opened up a world to ordinary citizens that had previously been hidden from view and beyond imaginable.

Investigative reporting in the 1970s then became the standard of excellence in the United States. Journalists were hoping to be "entrepreneurial reporters joining forces in their self-righteous crusade [to reap] the benefits of their power over the powerful" (Castells, 2009, p. 244). *Washington Post* reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein investigated and published the wrongdoings in many news articles. These reporters helped to further the transformation of journalism into commercial consumerism by subsequently publishing a book for public consumption, titled *All the President's Men*. Two years later, the book was made into a feature film that was nominated for an Academy Award for best picture.

A scandal such as Watergate has all the required entertainment values of a good plot line that are desired by the public to buy into and follow from beginning to end (Thompson, 2000). This 1970s scandal became a media frenzy that not only saturated the news, but also became dramatic, easily sold entertainment on a vast commercial scale. In the realm of political journalism, successfully reporting on politicians is being able to maximize on the elements of entertainment (Castells, 2009). This style is attractive to public consumers because they are

gaining information about authority figures in a manner of entertaining branded consumerism, which ultimately can boost audience, revenue, and professional achievement for journalists (Castells, 2009). Woodward and Bernstein were able to do just that by gaining investigative notoriety and successfully selling the president's misconduct to a mass culture.

Watergate fits into that perfect paradigm of officials covering up what then became the job of journalists to uncover (Bowman, 2008). Journalists and their media producers were shown as the heroes saving the country from criminally unjust acts, elevating the thought that they are somewhat intellectually and/or morally superior to government leaders due to it (Bowman 2008). The Watergate scandal "became the symbol of power of the press in the United States" (Schudson, 2004, p. 1234). Moreover, the scandal became the defining emblem of the vital role that the press and journalists play in democracy (Schudson, 2004).

News reporting at the time reached the highest status in American society, bringing in scores of young students enrolling in journalism schools and aspiring to have investigative careers such as Woodward and Bernstein (Klein, 2010). However with this mass recognition, political coverage began to transpire into a hunt to uncover scandal by journalists or political opponents feeling obliged to "(air) as much dirty linen in public as possible" (Bowman, 2008, p. 73). Pursuing investigations to expose the hidden decisions of public authorities like that of the uncovering of the Watergate scandal posed as a means to gain a following, notoriety, commercial interest, and/or heightened power in society.

The country, however, began to severely question the morality of people in political positions, which stirred up a distrust and lack of faith in politicians and the government itself (Klein, 2010). Acts and reforms were set up to investigate officials behaviors to avoid future demoralizing acts and to hinder the already declining trust in government authority (Schudson,

2004). Congress passed the Ethics in Government Act of 1978, which furthered the regulation of political life by putting procedures in place for the investigation of potentially unlawful practices by the executive branch (Castells, 2009). Such reformations are part of what has contributed to forcing the public's attention away from critical and substantive issues and instead guiding them to focus on the personal morality and character of public authorities (Castells, 2009).

### *Sex Scandals in Politics*

Another contributor to the media's fixation on the personal misconduct of public authorities is the rise in sex- and infidelity- related scandals involving politicians. Sex scandals have a long history in American culture (Gamson, 2001). They are considered to be transgressions of certain values, norms, or moral codes based on a particular society. Sex scandals involving public figures are typically broadcast widely and have an ensuing mass public discussion of the revealed activities. As the sexual deviation becomes a more prominent topic of public conversation, a common set of moments tend to ascend in the mediated narrative that proceeds (Gamson, 2001). That set of moments in a mass-mediated sex scandal narrative follow this common script: accusation or revelation, broadcast denial and/or confession— and frequently, a comeback or attempted comeback (Gamson, 2001). Thus, the fixation with narrated scandal politics that is now played out in the media is a personalized politics, or candidate-centered politics, instead of policy-centered politics (Castells, 2009).

Thompson (2000) describes four developments that have been particularly important in creating the conditions in which sex scandals narratives and the personalization of politics have become an increasingly prominent feature of American political life. First, the changing culture of journalism gradually eroded the informal norms and conventions that had previously discouraged journalists and editors from publishing the details of the private lives of political

figures (Thompson, 2000). Not until the late 1960s did the private lives of politicians become a focus of investigation by reporters, “who became increasingly assertive and intrusive in their attempts to acquire details about private lives” (Thompson, 2000, p. 147). For example, the 1961-1963 presidential term of John F. Kennedy was filled with actual or alleged extramarital affairs with women, yet none of them ever erupted into a mediated scandal (Thompson, 2000). However politicians in the late 1960s, following Kennedy’s term, began dealing with an investigative media who previously had a self-imposed restraint to avert their eyes from private matters such as sexual relations, friendships, and/or personal views of public authorities (Dobel, 1998).

The second development was the changing political culture of the 1960s and 1970s and the decline of class-based politics (Thompson, 2000). This gave the media more prominence as gatekeepers to officials and made politics more personality focused (Dobel, 1998). There was a growing significance in the politics of trust, which placed more emphasis on questions of character, the same emphasis that was reinforced by the events that led to Nixon’s downfall (Thompson, 2000). By emphasizing an individual’s character, scandal is then used as a weapon to damage or destroy the opponent. Furthermore, when focusing on character and morality, it is more difficult to maintain the idea that the private conduct of political leaders is irrelevant to public roles. Disclosures about misbehaviors in the private realm will then result in extensive and damaging political consequences (Thompson, 2000).

The third development is based on the changing norms and expectations of sexual conduct, liberation, and experimentation in the late 1960s (Thompson, 2000). A more important issue is the fact that, due largely to the women’s movement, “there was a growing sensitivity in American society to certain forms of male behavior which might have been regarded as normal

or acceptable in previous decades” (Thompson, 2000, pp. 147-148). Groups of feminists, and even some individuals from the Religious Right, began questioning the validity of the distinction between public and private lives, thereby weakening the claims of privacy that politicians may have exerted in the past (Dobel, 1998). For example, while Kennedy was in office his infidelity and misbehaviors with women were known by White House political elites, yet the secrets remained within their political circle and were not disclosed to the public (Thompson, 2000). This was due largely to the long-standing gentleman’s agreement among reporters and politicians obeying the unwritten rule that stated a leader’s private life was off limits (Wojdyski & Riffe, 2011). Kennedy’s private life was rich in scandal potential. Had his sexual liaisons been made public in the run-up to the 1960 presidential election, the political consequences could have been serious. However the scandal that might have happened never did, due to the kept secrecy by those who knew and the blind eye that others took (Thompson, 2000).

The fourth development can be attributed to the growing legalization of political life, which was “exemplified above all by the legislation enacted in the wake of Watergate” (Thompson, 2000, p. 148). Also important was the implementation of state and federal laws on sexual harassment and wrongdoings. This coincided with the “development of rules and formal complaints procedures for dealing with allegations about sexual harassment and misconduct in government offices” (Thompson, 2000, p. 148).

Another important contributor to the media’s fixation on political sexual misconduct came as a result of a public figure’s extramarital affair and his challenge to the media. This turning point in 1987 revolved around a flood of media reports alleging that Democratic presidential nominee, Gary Hart, was having an adulterous affair with model Donna Rice

(Stoker, 1993). Substantial coverage followed, contributing to the media's investigative quest to expose private sexual liaisons.

Prior to the 1988 presidential election, Hart had challenged reporters to follow him after the charges of infidelity and rumors began to circulate (Dobel, 1998). The media then shadowed him while he was running for the Democratic ticket. Hart continued to have an affair with Rice, thinking the media would not find out nor reveal it. However, acting on a tip, the *Miami Herald* uncovered the relationship between Hart and Rice, which caused several other media outlets to pick up the story as well (Stoker, 1993). Hart vehemently denied the charges of his affair and began to act petulant and erratic, ultimately destroying his campaign and public support (Dobel, 1998).

The media prior to publicly releasing the affair, "engaged in a self-conscious discussion of the propriety of exposing Hart's private activities and the relevance of this information on the political process" (Stoker, 1993, p. 195). Scholars have even coined the phrase "Hart Rule on Infidelity" to determine if a politician's sexual offense is fatal and current enough to be considered significant hard news to report to the public (Wojdyski & Riffe, 2011). However, the Hart case is but one in a series of incidents that followed in presidential campaigns and terms that have transformed the character issue to become commonplace in political media coverage and public opinion (Stoker, 1993).

The Hart/Rice affair was a precursor to the media attention that revolved around the presidency of Bill Clinton and his infidelity. On several occasions, Clinton's political career was nearly derailed due to his clandestine sexual affairs with women. The most notorious of his sexual ventures was that of "the White House exposé popularly known as 'Monicagate'" (Klein, 2010, p. 73). This scandal derived from the investigative work of *Newsweek* reporter, Michael

Isikoff, as well as attorney Kenneth Starr, and former White House employee Linda Tripp, each taking great interest in Clinton's scandalous behavior. The alleged affairs of Clinton were recounted by as many as 10 women who brought forth a case. Isikoff supplied much of the information that was then broken by an Internet columnist, Matt Drudge, following a series of events and revelations by Kenneth Starr. Drudge sent out the story to his 85,000 *Drudge Report* subscribers online to credit Isikoff with his investigative work in the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal and to reveal the findings of the president lying about his sexual relationship with an intern (Klein, 2010).

Monica Lewinsky, the former White House intern, revealed that she had sexual encounters with the former president in secrecy, contradictory to what Clinton was telling the public and saying under oath. Tripp, a former White House employee who disliked Clinton, had an agenda of her own and decided to use the conversations between Lewinsky and her as a means to tape the revelation of the affair and expose the lies Clinton was persuading the public to believe (Thompson, 2000). Starr, who had also spent several years investigating Clinton's misconduct, eventually released a report that presented a full account of the sexual encounters between the intern and the president in secluded parts of the White House including the Oval Office (Thompson, 2000). No details were spared.

Starr's report also "listed 11 possible grounds for impeachment, including perjury, witness tampering, obstruction of justice and abuse of power, and maintained there was substantial evidence to support them" (Thompson, 2000, p. 155). Ultimately, Clinton was impeached by the House of Representatives for grand jury perjury and obstruction of justice. However, he was acquitted in the Senate and not removed from office (Wojdyski & Riffe, 2011).

In a way the release of the transcripts in the report of the conversations between Tripp and Lewinsky were reminiscent of the release of the tapes documenting Nixon's private conversations during the Watergate crisis 25 years earlier (Thompson, 2000). A substantial difference, however, was the use of the Internet in relaying communications about Clinton's sex scandal (Klein, 2010). With the advances in media diffusion and technology, political scandal revelations have escalated even more since they can be ever-present and readily available to the public audience.

Clinton's term was engulfed in Internet conversations and media coverage surrounding Lewinsky and other women who had come forward accusing him of sexual acts. The scandal was "a blitzkrieg of journalism in a superb effort to cover every possible angle of the story" (Klein, 2010, p. 77). Consequently, these media revelations followed that common set of moments in a mass-mediated sex scandal narrative as expressed by Gamson (2001). There was an accusation, broadcast of a denial/broadcast of a confession, and then an attempted comeback. The attempted comeback was followed by the intense coverage of the scandal and presidential lying; Clinton confessed that he did indeed have a sexual relationship with Lewinsky in an attempt to salvage his already degraded public image (Klein, 2010).

However, despite the damage that had been done by the media, the public was not persuaded (Klein, 2010). In a "phenomenon at first curious and then truly remarkable, public support for Clinton's performance steadfastly held in the mid-60 percent range and occasionally surpassed 70 percent in some polls" (Lawrence & Bennett, 2001, p. 425). The heightened and extensively negative media coverage of Clinton's misconduct did lower his approval ratings, but only in the initial stages of media exposure. As the saga continued, however, the theatrical and constant coverage did not persuade the public to think differently of how Clinton was carrying

out his public duties. A Freedom Forum poll even found that American's described the coverage of the story as "excessive" and "embarrassing" (Klein, 2010). Describing the coverage as excessive and embarrassing can be attributed to the constant and invasive media attention that surrounded the events (Klein, 2010). This shows that intense, negative coverage about a politician does not necessarily indicate public disapproval of the person or their perceived misbehavior. Nor does it indicate that support for the said politician will be abandoned due to the revelations.

Moreover, Clinton's steadfast public support is contradictory to the way in which the public adversely responded to the Hart/Rice affair. In the end, the media's coverage of the affair and Hart's erratic behavior affected him to the point of withdrawing his name from the presidential nomination just 10 years prior (Dobel, 1998). The media's revelations of Hart's affair caused him to act unfavorably in the public's eye, which increased his already weak record. People then examined his personal life more extensively, turning up enough inconsistencies about his strength of character, honesty, and judgment to cause considerable unease even among his supporters (Dobel, 1998). The affair with Rice and Hart's handling of the media revelation was seen unfavorably by the public at the time and could not be overridden by the quality of his public service because it was already seen as weak (Dobel, 1998). Consequently, these actions of misconduct reinforced the public's concerns about the flaws of Hart's service which caused his political career to disintegrate (Dobel, 1998). When distrust is already engrained in people's consciousness, any additional revelation by the media simply reaffirms society's disaffection with the politician caught in a scandal (Castells, 2009).

However as noted, Clinton's public approval rating remained steady even in the wake of the media's fixation on his sexual misconduct. This can be aligned with the ability he had in

carrying out his public duties while in office and serving the people of the nation positively in that aspect. By maintaining the public's satisfaction in his policy making and demeanor as a president, the public continued to support him in office even if they did not necessarily support his behavior as a husband (Thompson, 2000). Although both Hart and Clinton were involved in a mass-mediated sex scandal, Clinton was able to sustain significant satisfaction as a political leader in the public's eye, while Hart was not.

Clinton, however extensive the media coverage was of his affair, did not experience a great amount of public dissatisfaction with him as a politician. Analyzing the public's reaction to media communications recognizes the importance that the levels of exposure have on individuals as well as the resistances there are to media messages (Stoker, 1993). Both concepts are important in assessing attitude changes in individuals and public opinion (Stoker, 1993). The degrees of exposure to change-inducing information affects attitude fluctuations by conditioning an individual's degree of resistance to the information that is being conveyed (Stoker, 1993). For Hart, the public's attitude was already weak by his feeble stance as a politician. After there was an immense distribution of information about his sexual infidelity the public's disapproval for his character was heightened (Dobel, 1998). Resistance to see the negative media messages conveyed about Clinton's character, on the other hand, show that conditioning people with degrading dialogue may not elevate public disapproval. If the act of personal immorality can be outweighed by the manner in which the politician can and will carry out political responsibilities, then disapproval may not result (Yioutas & Segvic, 2003).

Yioutas and Segvic (2003) examined print coverage of the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal by performing a content analysis of the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* during three time periods in 1998. The results supported the idea that a politician involved in a scandal can still be

successful and maintain public approval. The findings showed that sex scandal/adultery were commonly used words throughout the articles. Describing the scandal in such terms contributed to a large portion of the public to classify the act as a private matter, and thus, decreasing its public salience (Yioutas & Segvic, 2003, p. 575).

The results also showed that the stories compared Clinton's misconduct to that of the Watergate scandal. The authors noted that a poll conducted in late January 1998 revealed that 54 percent of respondents believed the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal was not as bad as Watergate (Yioutas & Segvic, 2003). The authors also showed how Isikoff's investigation of Clinton correlated to the investigation of Nixon done by Woodward and Bernstein.

Isikoff said he was inspired by Woodward and Bernstein in their efforts to uncover the crimes of Nixon (Klein, 2010). Actually having worked with Woodward, Isikoff felt that his journalistic duty was to devote himself to exposing the wrongdoings of public authorities who acted immoral in their private lives while serving their terms in office (Bowman, 2008). This notion once again shows how the media desires that perfect paradigm of officials covering up something personally degrading for the journalists to uncover. Thus, the media and/or journalists are the heroes exposing such acts, which make a profound and powerful statement that they are morally and intellectually superior to public authorities who act poorly in character while serving in office (Bowman, 2008). Again journalists were seeking out a political scandal during Monicagate, by pursuing investigations to expose what had once been considered a private matter devoid of public attention. In this instance, the Internet was also used as a tool of mass communication to further media presence and journalist recognition in order to gain notoriety, commercial interest, and/or heightened power in society.

It is clear that sexual misconduct can be shocking and immoral when disseminated to the public. Political infidelity can also be indicative to how the acts are judged based on the time frame and the people of the generation (Gamson, 2001). In one decade the acts can appear to have had the greatest public importance and then a few decades later they can appear as merely unsuitable and fleeting (Gamson, 2001). Based on the imposed cultural norms at the time, behavior can be seen as appropriate to be conducted in public, but another time it can be seen as something that should remain a behind-closed-doors activity (Gamson, 2001). The campaigns and presidential terms of Kennedy, Hart, and Clinton were all stained with similarities due to extramarital affairs. Yet Kennedy's presidency has only recently been making headlines for acting immorally and womanizing, while Clinton's presidency will always be tarnished with the Monicagate scandal (Thompson, 2000). Lastly, Hart's withdrawal from the 1988 presidential election will continue to be recognized as a turning point for how the media remains fixated on the sexual misconduct and the infidelity of politicians (Stoker, 1993).

### *Communicating Scandal Politics: The Transformation of Politics*

#### *Communicating Scandal Politics on the Internet in the Digital Age*

An important contribution to the fixation on a politician's sexual misconduct is due to the Internet's influence on the way in which the public now communicates. During the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal, a then-obscure Internet columnist, Matt Drudge, sent out a story online and began operating in a new media of cyberspace, which was not a morning newspaper or newscast (Klein, 2010). Monicagate marked the official arrival of the digital age in the news business (Klein, 2010). In addition to the new forum of communication, Americans were suddenly learning details about sexual acts such as oral sex and adultery on the nightly news and Internet that would have required a parental-warning label had they appeared in a prime-time

show or in the Kennedy era (Klein, 2010). In the evolving digital age of the Internet and television, communicating the character issue about politicians in an exploitive and invasive way is now commonplace, which increases public compliance to such reporting styles.

With the diffusion of new media technology that enhances public visibility, an invasive, staged, and theatrical form of political conversation is perpetuated (Thompson, 2011). Since the most effective messages in the media are negative messages, and because character assassination during a political debate or campaign is the most definitive form of negativity, the destruction of a political authority by leaking, fabricating, formatting, and propagating scandalous behavior to the press is the ultimate goal of scandal politics (Castells, 2009). In modern American society, media politics *is* the politics of the information and digital age and scandal politics is the instrument of choice to engage in political struggles (Castells, 2009). Since political debates and campaigns are now aired, rerun, and always available online, individuals can obtain a sense of intimacy and knowing of the person being publicized. However, because most of the messages are negative and degrading, a trust in politics has consequently declined (Castells, 2009).

#### *Impact of Scandal Politics: Societal Distrust and Voting Based on Visibility*

There are in no doubt many causes to the declining trust in American politics. Since the 1960s and 1970s, the instances of abusing public trust have increasingly come to light and heightened with the influx of media attention given to such matters. With the rise of media-driven politics, the societal expectations for accountability have changed and, therefore, diminished the government's political capacities in the public's mind (Warren, 2006). Leaders in the public's eyes must be accountable for their indiscretions, however unpleasant the details (Wojdyski & Riffe, 2011). Attempts to deceive or keep matters hidden from the public are attempts to avoid accountability, and those actions by public figures lead to a loss in political

trust (Wojdyski & Riffe, 2011). The national scandals of Nixon, Hart, and Clinton, in which attempts were made to keep their behavior hidden, are instances where politicians acted immorally and attempted to restrict public access to aspects of their character. This, in turn, increases the public need for a politician to be trustworthy and visible. Visibility and trust enhance the idea that intimacy should be and is desired by the public when determining support for a politician.

After the Watergate scandal, laws were implemented in order to uphold ethical standards of character in government officials and to maintain credibility among Americans. The House and Senate furthered this concept by obligating themselves to ensure that their actions did not and will not create appearances of impropriety (Warren, 2006). Heightened is the ideological notion that visibility and appearance are important for citizens in assessing those governing and if they are trustworthy (Warren, 2006). However, the key problem with appearance regulating the stage in which politics is played out is that it is dependent upon a model of trust that is really inappropriate for politics (Warren, 2006).

Voters are electing politicians into office based on their appearance, personality, and the honesty of their affiliated parties, more than the programs and statements they represent (Castells, 2009). The entry of media politics and scandal politics have been a contributor to this worldwide crisis of political legitimacy (Castells, 2009, p. 295). Modern democracies, like that of the United States, have developed this politics of trust, focused on personality and visibility, which is ultimately hampering the kinds of trust that are possible and desirable within democratic institutions (Warren, 2006). Political officials are being viewed as public trustees rather than as representatives within the democratic political processes (Warren, 2006). As disorder and misconduct stories by the media flood the political arena, they are complicating the

public's vision with appearances and personal misbehaviors, and thus altering the reality of the political process.

*The Struggle to Define Reality in Politics*

Distrust in politics and the complication of political reality can be attributed to the media and perceived cultural values that affect how information is communicated (Schudson, 2002). The news media assumes a consensus about what shared societal values are important and what individual characteristics are deemed to be corrupt (Gans, 1980). The frequent appearance of disorder stories of moral misconduct in politics suggests that order is an important value in the news, but order is a meaningless term unless one specifies what order and whose order is being valued (Gans, 1980). Focusing on values reminds the audience of what it is that is being violated and assumes that the audience members share these values too (Gans, 1980).

Structured largely by media organizational interests, scandals remind witnesses not of normative order but disorder, not of what they believe, but of what cannot be believed (Gamson, 2001). "When a story reports that a politician has been charged with corruption, it suggests, sotto voce, that corruption is bad and that politicians should be honest" (Gans, 1980, p. 40). Mediated scandal narratives move far past a chronicle of individual sinner, however, because they are communicating on a much larger scale about what is rotten in the nation and out of normative order in the world (Gamson, 2001). As such, they provide an unusual addition to understanding how norms circulate culturally in a given society based on shared values presented by the media (Gamson, 2001).

Gans (1980) suggests that American values are expressed by an employed media of maintenance. The mass media reports in line with maintaining national order and political honesty based on the ideological values of those governing (Gans, 1980). However, national

values only become important when they are threatened or violated, such as when a politician acts immorally and brings the values into question (Gans, 1980, p. 149). Journalists then report these political transgression stories extensively to reiterate and solidify the morals and values being depleted. Consequently, the reported news will also display the other public official characters who are abiding by laws to directly denigrate those who have been acting improperly or dishonestly (Gans, 1980). These moral disorder stories about public officials, like that of Nixon and Clinton, along with the use of attack-politics in political debates, make known the violation of laws in society.

The media is thus perpetuating the use of attack-politics, not only in the political arena of mass communication, but in critical debates among politicians as well. All political parties engage in the practice of attack-politics (Castells, 2009). They all have their intelligence units and their army of intermediaries trading threats and counter-threats, which induces a political world characterized by the possibility of mutually assured destruction (Castells, 2009). According to this political logic, once the body for damaging material is created, if there is not enough straightforward material for scandals, then insinuations or fabrications fill the cracks (Castells, 2009). The strategy in scandal politics, however, does not necessarily aim for a decisive blow by one scandal alone, but rather, “a continuing flow of scandals of different kinds, and with different levels of evidence that weave the thread with which political ambitions are fulfilled or doomed by image-making in the citizens’ minds” (Castells, 2009, p. 249). The public as subjects to this intense media and political strategy are conditioned and ruled by habit and superstition perpetuated by appearance which, again, is not a worthy intellectual for a social working democracy (Carey, 1992). Warren (2006) wrote:

A democracy that works, then, must have hedges, not against *distrust*—which is warranted within any domain structured by conflicts of interest—but against *deceit*, because deceit deprives citizens of not just their ability to make autonomous political judgments about issues or their political agents, but also their ability to judge when trust is warranted and when it is not (p. 166).

Lacking is not only an effective press, but also certain vital habits that should be made available to the public. For example, “The ability to follow an argument, grasp the point of view of another, expand the boundaries of understanding, [and] debate the alternative purposes that might be pursued” (Carey, 1992, p. 82). If the public is continually obscured and shaded by those who are creating and maintaining the reality, then democracy is impossible (Carey, 1992). If reality is what we will to believe in support of our shared assertions, then it is appropriate “to claim that reality is constituted by human action, particularly symbolic action and particularly associative action” (Carey, 1992, p. 81). Therefore, reality has no essence to be discovered but rather a character to be, within boundaries, constituted by those in power (Carey, 1992).

The fundamental form of power is the power to define, allocate, and display (Carey, 1992). The site where journalists create news and maintain power is simultaneously the site of social conflict over the real and the struggle to define reality (Carey, 1992). Reality is, above all else, a scarce resource and like any scarce resource it is there to be struggled over, allocated to various purposes, endowed with given meanings and potentials, spent, conserved, rationalized and distributed (Carey, 1992). Reality is then scarce because the access to maintain it is available to only a few who have the means and machinery for its determination (Carey, 1992). Journalists and the media are therefore maintaining a political pseudo-reality and a perceived moral power to expose the wrongdoings of those who govern.

Furthermore, as a result of the blurring boundaries between what is thought to be public and private in society, along with the transformation of the press in the public sphere, public figures have lost a right to keep hidden their private decisions from investigative journalists and societal disclosure. The constant struggle for the maintenance of reality based on shared national values between politicians and journalists render the public to a constant inadequacy of political truth in a seemingly democratic society. The literature suggests that the transformation of politics and the influx of scandal politics into the public realm have captured the mass media in a web of scandalizing the political arena and deflecting the public from understanding matters of pertinent societal interest.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

In this chapter the author will identify and illustrate the proposed method and necessary steps taken to search, collect, and analyze the data used for this research.

#### *Narrative Analysis*

The narrative analysis was used to examine the coverage of Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa in Los Angeles publications during the time frame of 2006 to 2009. The time frame encompasses the before and aftermath of the revelation of the mayor's affair with Salinas that occurred in mid-2007.

A narrative is generally recognized to be a way of ordering and presenting a view through a description of a situation, the characters involved, the actions, and the setting (Foss, 2004). This study will define the narratives used to depict the mayor, by looking at how Los Angeles media publications describe his personal behavior, his political sex scandal, and the characters involved.

The method of narrative analysis helps to emphasize and determine the complex presence of symbols and the multitude of beliefs in political speech (Cornfield, 1992). This is done by looking at the opinions, perspectives, and assumptions the news media has made about a particular politician (Cornfield, 1992). Therefore, a narrative analysis of the mayor's behavior by Los Angeles news outlets helps to emphasize and determine the complex beliefs within the text and the assumptions and attitudes presented.

Conducting a narrative analysis also allows a researcher of the literature to examine the journalistic choices about storytelling in the news and how aspects of the stories (such as genre, character, setting, and plot) bear civic importance (Cornfield, 1992). Through the vocabulary of

literary criticism, a narrative analysis also attempts “to specify the range of compositional options available to journalists covering a particular topic and the conventional meaning associated with each option” (Cornfield, 1992, p. 48). Analyzing narratives to determine the conventional meanings available to journalists allows one to see how stories are constructed and usually fit into a plot-like scheme with a beginning, middle, and end. It is said that journalists report in such a manner in order to comply with the journalistic codes for objective reporting (McChesney, 2003). However the objective storytelling that the news is based on (more importantly political news) is an inaccurate view of the world that has been constructed through voices of official sources and the obscuring of public dialogues (McChesney, 2003). When a narrative is analyzed, a researcher can begin to understand the manner in which political dialogue has been created as a story line for public consumption.

#### *Sampling and Data Collection Procedures*

The articles for this analysis were chosen from three Los Angeles-area print newspapers, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Daily News of Los Angeles*, and *LA Weekly*.

The *Los Angeles Times* was first published in 1881 and has since been a prominent and leading newspaper. This newspaper was chosen because the publication is widely known and has a large following. It is one of the leading metropolitan daily newspapers in the country and has won Pulitzer Prizes for its news coverage of Southern California. Currently, the *Los Angeles Times*' total average paid Sunday circulation is 1,019,388 and has a Monday through Friday circulation of 723,181 (obtained from *Los Angeles Times*' website, 2012).

The *Los Angeles Times* is part of the Los Angeles Times Media Group, which includes *Times Community News*, *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, and *Hoy Los Angeles*. The Los Angeles Times Media group is also part of the Tribune Company, which is one of the country's foremost

media conglomerates, owning several broadcasting stations, newspapers, and other media ventures.

*The Daily News of Los Angeles* is also part of a large media conglomerate and is considered to be among one of the principal circulating dailies serving Los Angeles. This newspaper is part of MediaNews Group which is a company that is currently considered to be the second largest newspaper company by circulation in the United States, according to the Audit Bureau of Circulation.

*LA Weekly* was founded in 1978 as an alternative style weekly. The publication is based in Los Angeles and has predominantly circulated as a voice to the left in the United States. The publication was bought in 2005 and is currently owned by Village Voice Media, a privately held corporation. Village Voice Media is also the parent company to other major weeklies in the nation. This alternative publication was chosen because of the left-leaning writing style. The alternative weekly and the large daily papers analyzed, allowed the researcher to get a better understanding of how different publications in the Los Angeles area report on local politics.

Two databases were searched in order to generate articles from the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Daily News of Los Angeles*, and *LA Weekly*. Articles from *LA Weekly* and *The Daily News of Los Angeles* were obtained through a Lexis-Nexis Academic search. The *Los Angeles Times* articles were retrieved from a search through ProQuest Newsstand because Lexis-Nexis only provides the last six months of articles published by the *Los Angeles Times*. The time frame of 2006 to 2009 was chosen because Villaraigosa's term as mayor in 2006 was prior to his sex scandal, in 2007 his affair was revealed, and then he was re-elected to serve a second term that started in 2009. This time frame is relevant because it lends to assessing how the coverage of Villaraigosa changed after the revelation of his extramarital affair. The time frame is important

because it covers both a period before the mayor was involved in a political sex scandal and after. This shows how his personal decisions during his time in office affected the way in which the publications depicted him as a political leader.

The Lexis-Nexis search of *The Daily News of Los Angeles* and *LA Weekly* was conducted by using the keyword “Villaraigosa” and (scandal OR affair OR Telemundo OR infidelity OR marriage OR Salinas). “Telemundo” and “Salinas” are relevant search terms because they directly refer to the woman with whom the mayor had an affair during the given time frame. The ProQuest search was done by using the same search terms, however, “home edition” was added so only the home edition of the *Los Angeles Times* was analyzed.

Eliminations were made, including articles that were less than 650 words as well as any articles that were deemed irrelevant. Irrelevance was determined by the topic of the articles. If there was no relation to the mayor’s behavior and political duties, then the article was eliminated. Also, if the article mentioned Villaraigosa’s name or referenced him as the mayor less than two times, then the article was deemed irrelevant.

The first data source of articles came from the database Proquest, which initially produced 1,293 results based on the search terms. The results were then narrowed by the *Los Angeles Times* and furthered by the home edition. Those articles included anything described as news, article, feature, undefined, general information, and interview. The articles were then limited, excluding those that were listed as review, editorial, commentary, statistics/data reports, obituary, correspondence, and letter to the editor. The results yielded 753 articles. The time frame was adjusted to reflect 2006-2009 and 349 articles remained. A random numbers generator was used to generate 27 articles. Each article was then looked at and deemed either relevant for the research or irrelevant and eliminated if it had less than 650 words. If an article

was eliminated then the article directly below was chosen from the 349 articles to come up with a corpus of 27 relevant articles that were then analyzed.

The second data source came from the database of Lexis-Nexis. *The Daily News of Los Angeles* and *LA Weekly* were both searched through this database. A Lexis-Nexis search of *The Daily News of Los Angeles* yielded 412 results based on the search terms. Editorials and articles less than 650 words were eliminated as well as those deemed irrelevant. The article directly below on this list (of the one deemed irrelevant) was then chosen and so on, until 27 relevant articles resulted that were then analyzed.

The same Lexis-Nexis search yielded 63 results based on the proposed search terms for *LA Weekly*. Articles less than 650 words and those deemed irrelevant were then eliminated. The article directly below on this list (of the one deemed irrelevant) was then chosen and so on, until 27 relevant articles resulted and that were then analyzed.

#### *Data Analysis Procedures*

As stated, narrative analysis was used to research the intended perspectives of three Los Angeles news publications. In order to employ a narrative analysis, the researcher first conducts a comprehensive exam of the narrative and then selects elements on which to focus (Foss, 2004). A researcher can look at the setting, characters, narrator, events, temporal relations, causal relations, audience, or theme of the narrative (Foss, 2004). Based on the research questions, the categories determined to be most significant and relevant to consider were characters and themes. Each story was analyzed using a coding sheet in order to generate rich and dynamic descriptions that are representative of the narrative elements used to enhance the overall themes. (See Appendix for code sheet).

Characters: The following questions were asked for the analysis of the characters involved in the narrative:

1. How was Villaraigosa depicted in the articles? (a) Was Villaraigosa characterized as immoral in any way? (b) Was Villaraigosa depicted to be involved in a scandal? (c) Was Villaraigosa's personal life referenced? (d) What were shown as the consequences resulting from the mayor's actions?
2. Who were the other main characters depicted in the articles? (a) Quotes of the other characters depicted in the articles.
3. How was Villaraigosa depicted as a mayor? (a) Was Villaraigosa shown as carrying out his mayoral activities?

Themes: The following question was used to assess the overall meaning of the narrative and to reveal the intended points of significance:

4. What were the major themes of the articles?

After each story was coded, the researcher then reviewed the different elements within the narratives. This was done in order to identify the recurring themes and patterns as well as the similarities and differences between the individual stories and publications. The objective of identifying the elements, as well as the similarities and differences, was to gauge the narratives present before the mayor's personal scandal, during the public revelation, and in the aftermath.

The narratives describing the behavior surrounding Villaraigosa was identified to determine the intended perspectives of the journalists and publications. The researcher also used the collected data to assess how the authors of the narratives made assumptions about the individual politician and the other characters involved. Ultimately, the goal was to gain an

overall understanding of the narratives used by the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Daily News of Los Angeles*, and *LA Weekly* and to get a sense of the similarities and differences in the construction of the stories by each.

### *Limitations*

As with all research, there will be limitations. In this study, 81 articles were analyzed. Although that is a substantial number it is likely there are several other articles that have pertinent information in them which were overlooked. Also, only three publications were included in the study which has limited the results to be assessed solely by the chosen outlets. The time frame was also limiting. By specifying a specific period of time to look at, results were yielded to reflect the narratives present during that particular time frame.

There are also limitations that arose from utilizing the method of narrative analysis. Hanson (1999) identifies limitations that are associated with the use of narrative analysis. One such limitation is that some news articles are more suitable for a narrative analysis than others (Hanson, 1999). Also, the effectiveness of the narrative analysis is limited by the keenness, researching skills, and writing ability of the analyst (Hanson, 1999). Since this method is a qualitative approach, it is much more dependent on the subjective skills of the researcher because it calls upon him/her to make an argument and interpret the results (Hanson, 1999). Lastly, there is a seeming paradox in narrative analysis in which research is conducted in an attempt to make sense of the world, a situation, or event, despite inevitable contradictions (Hanson, 1999).

## Chapter 4

### Findings

In this chapter the findings from the narrative analysis of the *Los Angeles Times* (herein referred to as the *Times*), *The Daily News of Los Angeles* (herein referred to as the *Daily News*) and *LA Weekly* will be detailed. First, there will be an overview that summarizes the findings from the three publications and compares and contrasts the characterization of Villaraigosa in the narrations. The overview will also address the events and topics that were reported on during the analyzed time frame. Following the overview, the remainder of the chapter will break down the results from the analysis by each individual publication.

#### *Overview*

The narrative analysis of the characters and themes show that the *Times* depicts Villaraigosa primarily as a politician with a personal life that overshadows his professional career. *Daily News* depicts him as determined and *LA Weekly* depicts him as lackluster and fame seeking. Although the publications report on the same stories and events, either those focusing on the mayor's personal life or on his political, the themes that result vary. Each publication reports on the mayor's personal behavior and how he tends to be in the spotlight. The reporters also heavily focus on the affair he had in mid-2007 with former Telemundo anchor, Mirthala Salinas. The publications depict how he conducted himself during the revelation and aftermath. During the time frame analyzed, the mayoral duties predominantly reported on are those relating to the mayor's attempted takeover of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and the mayor's efforts to increase safety by working with the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD).

The *Times* and *LA Weekly* both focus heavily on the mayor's personal behavior and how he is constantly in the spotlight. The publications imply that his personal behavior obscures his

mayoral duties, especially in the aftermath of his affair. However, the *Times* avoids depicting his actions as the reason for the obscuring. Instead, it is suggested that the blame be placed on journalists who pushed the mayor to answer questions about his personal life at political events that followed the affair (Helfand, 2007b). *LA Weekly*, however, reports that the obscuring is due to the mayor's love for the spotlight and lack of dedication to city business. This is done in an article showing that the mayor only spends 11 percent of his time on legitimate city business while 89 percent is devoted to events of self-promotion (McDonald, 2008b).

The *Times* also places blame on others in an article that indicates individuals in City Hall had been circulating rumors about the mayor's infidelity (Helfand & Hyman, 2007b). The publication is implying that conversations about city business take a backseat to the mayor's personal decisions.

The first event post-scandal that the mayor attends is to fill potholes and to show how he carries out his political responsibilities. The event is intended to highlight a promise he made in 2005 to fill potholes and demonstrate how he has been able to steadily achieve the filling during his time in office. The *Times* and the *Daily News* both report on the public event and note that the mayor attempts to avoid questioning about his personal life. The *Times* indicates that the event was intended for the mayor to showcase how he carries out his duties, but it instead became a foreground for other reporters to "hound" him with questions about his affair (Helfand, 2007b). The *Daily News* describes him as filling potholes, dodging questions about his personal life, and vowing to press on with civic business (Hopkins, 2007). The *Times* implies that Villaraigosa is a victim to reporters and their questioning about his personal life during a political event. The *Daily News*, on the other hand, focuses more on characterizing Villaraigosa

as a hard worker who is dedicated to the city. This characterization is also in direct opposition to *LA Weekly's* notion that the mayor has little devotion to the city and is lackluster in performance.

The issues of safety and education are reported on by all three publications. The *Daily News* characterizes Villaraigosa as dedicated to safety and education, while *LA Weekly* describes his efforts in both sectors as lackluster and falling short. *LA Weekly* suggests that the mayor is willing to partner with whomever he needs to in order to politically advance and gain spotlight attention. The mayor and the police chief are described as manipulating numbers in order to proclaim that the city is as safe as in the 1950s (McDonald, 2009a). The *Daily News*, however, describes the efforts of the mayor and police chief as substantial in lowering crime throughout the valley and downtown area (Orlov, 2009b).

When reporting on education and the LAUSD, *LA Weekly* suggests that the mayor achieved partial control because “barely” any teachers or parents showed up to vote (McDonald, 2007). On the other hand, the *Daily News* implies that several parents and teachers voted in favor of the mayor and are ready for the positive change his efforts will achieve (Boghossian, 2007a).

Overall the publications suggest that Villaraigosa attracts the spotlight. The *Times* implies that this attraction is insinuated by the media and their infatuation with his personal life. The *Daily News* makes reference to his larger than life appeal by characterizing him as a politician who is dedicated to his city even during times of personal strife, and ultimately, overcomes negativity. Lastly, *LA Weekly* implies that the mayor has achieved his time in the spotlight because it is something that he actively pursues and constantly tries to maintain.

The following sections in this chapter detail the study conducted on the characters and themes. The results of the analysis are broken down by each individual publication.

### *Los Angeles Times' Coverage of Villaraigosa*

The primary narrative the *Times* uses is to depict Villaraigosa's personality and behavior as casting a shadow over his mayoral duties. Another narrative the *Times* uses is to depict the other woman in Villaraigosa's life, Mirthala Salinas. The *Times* focuses more on Salinas during the revelation and aftermath of the affair than any other character mentioned in the analyzed stories. The overall analysis of the *Times* articles reveals a theme that reporting on Villaraigosa's personal behavior is a more prominent subject than his mayoral duties.

#### *Mayor's Personality and Behavior Overshadows Mayoral Duties*

Reporting on Villaraigosa's personal behavior is predominant throughout the analyzed time period. The *Times* publication reports in a manner that shows how the mayor, involved in a scandal or not, steals the media spotlight in many political events. For example in an article, prior to the affair with Salinas, the mayor attended an event in 2006 that was meant to endorse Democratic gubernatorial candidate Phil Angelides. The attention of the media and those in attendance, however, was redirected when a young girl fainted in the auditorium and Villaraigosa fled to her aid, thus, stealing the spotlight (Helfand, 2006). Although the moment occurred off-screen when Angelides' was giving a speech, Villaraigosa "scooped [the girl] up and carried her outside" causing onlookers and the media to take notice (Helfand, 2006, ¶2). The reporter notes that the event highlights Villaraigosa's extraordinary luck in the public eye and seeming ability to overcome any obstacle with charm (Helfand, 2006).

The event that was intended to showcase Angelides turned into a theatrical episode with the mayor as the hero. The reporter states that the mayor's behavior when in front of viewers becomes dramatic moments made for an "ideal political theater, with Villaraigosa as the leading man" (Helfand, 2006, ¶14). This is "a role he relishes but one that at times irks civic leaders, one

of whom referred to the mayor's affection for the spotlight as 'the ambulance chaser phenomenon'" (Helfand, 2006, ¶14). This statement implies that the mayor attracts the media spotlight, although some city leaders see such attention as improper. The article overall suggests that the event shows how Villaraigosa's personal behavior attracts spotlight attention. The publication as well as onlookers focused more on how the mayor responded to a fainting girl instead of the speech being made by another politician. It is implied that when the mayor attends events, dramatic political news and public attention often results.

The media's attraction to the mayor's personal life and behavior is also highlighted in an early article that announces Corina Villaraigosa has filed for divorce (Helfand, 2007c). This article comes before the mayor's affair with Salinas is revealed and focuses more on Corina and why she is filing. The reporter speculates that the couple is separating because of the long hours the mayor works away from home (Helfand, 2007c). The reporter also notes that they had once experienced trouble in 1994 when Villaraigosa had been unfaithful (Helfand, 2007c).

The article states that the mayor's failing marriage generated significant public discourse at City Hall. That discourse is said to have come after reporters had noticed he no longer wore his ring and spent a lot of time away from home (Helfand, 2007c). The reporter says that Villaraigosa's private life provided a steady stream of gossip within "City Hall's sometimes vicious rumor mill" (Helfand, 2007c, ¶21). Implied is that the mayor's personal life is important enough to discuss in City Hall, and that it is also a place where vicious rumors circulate.

The article continues to focus on the personal and describes Corina as, "her husband's mirror opposite – shy, reserved, inclined to avoid the spotlight he so relishes" (Helfand, 2007c, ¶10). Referenced is the mayor's need to relish in the spotlight. However, his actions are contradictory to his usual love of media attention. He is requesting that reporters respect his

privacy and his family's (Helfand, 2007c). This article suggests the contradiction that comes with being a publicly known figure. The media will report on private matters even if the public figure wants the issues to remain hidden.

Approximately a month later, an article is published that addresses the mayor's admission to having an affair that led his wife to file for divorce. The reporter notes the admission was "prompted by a report in the Daily News of Los Angeles," and comes as a "[confirmation] of what had long been whispered around City Hall" (Helfand & Hymon, 2007b, ¶5). There is another insinuation that individuals in City Hall discuss the mayor's personal life. Suggested is that a politician's personal life is among a priority of political business and an important topic of conversation within such a setting.

The article also addresses public reaction to the mayor's admission. The reporters state that hundreds of readers left comments on the *Times* website, some stating that it was a private matter while others argue that it showed a lack of integrity (Helfand & Hymon, 2007b). Referring to the public's concern suggests that Villaraigosa's private life is important news to the consuming public, even if they are in disagreement on how and/or if his actions affect them personally. However, the reference is just a slight part of the article. The majority is a recount of the mayor's behavior and his marriage ending affair with a newscaster.

The disagreeing public reaction to Villaraigosa's affair is continued in an article with the title, "Villaraigosa's personal life" ("Villaraigosa's personal," 2007). The article shows the people of Los Angeles as divided and in disagreement. One individual is quoted saying:

It really irked me to see Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa say that his personal life does not affect his constituents. A truthful person has integrity in all areas of his life. Am I really

going to believe everything Villaraigosa says after what he did to his wife?

(“Villaraigosa’s personal,” 2007).

Another individual agrees that the mayor’s personal behavior is of relevance to the public:

Villaraigosa is a shameless mayor who has no moral or ethical conscience regarding his own family. So how can we trust him with an internationally known city? The mayor has brought more embarrassment to Los Angeles and added more sleaze to its reputation. How is this a private matter? (“Villaraigosa’s persona,” 2007).

There are also individuals in the article that suggest the mayor should not be judged based on his personal decisions:

Why should we hold public officials to a different standard than people in the private sector? Villaraigosa’s personal problems are the concern only of the parties involved. The public should judge him on his job performance leading the city. He is an energetic and talented politician. He should be given a chance to make Los Angeles a better place in which to live. Let’s finally grow up as a nation and a people and admit that these things happen and that they are none of the public’s business, (“Villaraigosa’s personal,” 2007).

Villaraigosa’s personal life is again a priority of the public and a topic of conversation. The publication focuses immensely on the scandal and how the mayor’s actions affect the public, yet devote very little reporting space to stating what he is doing politically during the time.

Public appearances that followed the scandal are noted by the publication as instances where the mayor is being pressed to answer questions about his personal life. In highlighting such instances, there is a suggestion that the personal life of Villaraigosa is a more important

focus than that of his political duties. An article states that, even if Villaraigosa tried to stage events to demonstrate he was business as usual, reporters instead took interest in his story of infidelity (Helfand, 2007b). The reporter describes Villaraigosa in these occurrences as “[striving] to stay composed as he [faces] relentless television and newspaper reporters pressing for him to reveal the most intimate details of his love life” (Helfand, 2007b, ¶2). It is shown as “the kind of persistent media coverage usually reserved for Hollywood royalty hunted by paparazzi in search of a money shot” (Helfand, 2007b, ¶7).

The reporter is suggesting that even if the mayor attempts to focus attention elsewhere and onto his political responsibilities, the media still presses him on the issue of his scandal. At an announcement where parents and teachers are in attendance “nearly two dozen reporters turned a frenzied question-and-answer session into a near-National Enquirer moment” (Helfand, 2007b, ¶8). The reporter is suggesting that the reporters acted out-of-hand towards Villaraigosa and created a dramatic scene at an event intended for a public school announcement.

Another event that suggests the media is persistent and pressing, is when the mayor set out to fill potholes. The reporter describes the mayor as having “removed his tie, donned rubber boots and a neon-green public works vest, grabbed a rake and spread hot black tar over a divot” (Helfand, 2007b, ¶22). Villaraigosa intended this instance to be his first public appearance post-affair to showcase his mayoral duties. However, the reporter says that instead of focusing on the political and civic aspects of the event, television reporters hovered in the background and waited for the opportunity to ask the mayor questions about the scandal (Helfand, 2007b).

It is implied that during public events of political importance, the personal life of Villaraigosa, especially when infused in scandal, creates a frenzied scene. Suggested is that the media seeks to disseminate personal information to the public over that of the political duties that

may be performed. The *Times*' reporters imply that the media's reaction to the mayor's affair is out-of-hand. However, the publication focuses heavily on the personal aspects of the situation as well.

*A Focus on the Other Woman in Villaraigosa's Life*

In the articles analyzed, there are several that describe Mirthala Salinas. Once the affair is public and Salinas is named as the other woman, her career and her life are main topics of conversation. Articles describe her as having been a part of Villaraigosa's life for several months, insinuating she dates a lot of politicians, and suggesting that she breached journalistic ethical codes when she reported on the mayor and had a relationship with him.

One article dates the relationship back to at least 18 months prior to the announcement and quotes a former neighbor of Salinas, Jean Rouda. She recounts personal aspects of the relationship between Salinas and Villaraigosa (Helfand & Hymon, 2007b). The reporter expresses Rouda's encounter with the mayor at the complex:

Rouda recalled pulling into the garage about 9 p.m. and seeing Villaraigosa standing alone and buzzing to get into the building. Rouda said she recognized the mayor and was surprised that he had no security guards and that there was no limousine parked nearby. She said she and her niece entered the lobby where they encountered Villaraigosa, who was wearing a dress shirt and slacks, and was carrying bags of takeout food and a bottle of wine (Helfand & Hymon, 2007, ¶19).

The article also notes that a photograph had been published of Villaraigosa and Salinas together after she had covered him in Sacramento during his push to control Los Angeles Unified (Helfand & Hymon, 2007b). Villaraigosa's staff knew of his budding relationship at the time and worried that the picture would spark rumors and lead to the affair being leaked to the public

(Helfand & Hymon, 2007b). The reporters use this article to express intimate details about the relationship between Salinas' and Villaraigosa and suggest that the public would not approve of the mayor's infidelity. The reporters also imply that Salinas' had been involved with Villaraigosa for some time and put her career and his own in jeopardy. By using Rouda's recount and noting that Villaraigosa's staff had been worried after the photograph was published, the authors suggest that a politician involved in a sex-scandal is something that should be kept from public knowledge. However, reporting the information implies that the story is newsworthy enough that readers are interested in knowing such details.

The article also focuses on Salinas' dating past. The reporter states that "Villaraigosa is not the first politician to be linked to Salinas" (Helfand & Hymon, 2007b, ¶37). She has also been linked to Senator Alex Padilla and Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez (D-Los Angeles). Nunez did end up confirming in an interview that he dated Salinas in 2003 when he was divorced from his wife (Helfand & Hymon, 2007b). Salinas' link to Padilla and Nunez is also referenced in another *Times* article addressing her release from Telemundo and impending investigation. The article notes that her journalistic integrity had been jeopardized as a result of her covering the mayor while simultaneously being romantically involved with him (Helfand & Hymon, 2007a). The reporters suggest that Salinas dating politicians is nothing new and as a result of her actions her accountability as a political journalist is depleted.

Another article focuses solely on Salinas by describing her background and diminishing journalism career (Helfand, James, & Glover, 2007). The first sentence says, "Mirthala Salinas was a rising star at one of Los Angeles' premier Spanish-language television stations before she came to be known as the other woman in Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's life" (Helfand et al., 2007). A former Telemundo executive is quoted and describes her using the past tense. The

former Telemundo executive says she “was very smart and always had her finger on the pulse of the community” and “recalled the 35-year-old newscaster as poised and articulate” (Helfand et al., 2007, ¶3). The reporters quote an individual who describes Salinas as a journalist using the past tense and in turn imply that her career no longer exists. The reporters also suggest that her relationship with the mayor is unethical because she is a journalist and, due to her involvement with him, she now finds her career on hold and will be infamously known as the other woman.

Reporters in another article perpetuate the other woman notion by quoting a former ABC network news correspondent who said, “People will always remember [Salinas] as the reporter who had an affair with the mayor, and that she got in trouble for that” (Helfand & James, 2007b, ¶10). When the publication describes Salinas or uses other individuals to do so there is an overall theme that she has made two ethical mistakes: she reported on the mayor while dating him and she had an affair with a married man.

The *Times* also shows that the news station Telemundo acted unethically because the relationship between Villaraigosa and Salinas was an open secret in the newsroom (Helfand et al., 2007). The same article makes another reference to Salinas’ past with politicians. The reporters state that it is unclear if Salinas’ colleagues at Telemundo had known she had previously dated Nunez and Padilla (Helfand et al., 2007). This implies that Telemundo is at least of a fault because Salinas has a history with politicians that they may not have known about. By constantly referring to her as having dated other politicians, it is implied that she seeks out such men. It is suggested that she gets close to politicians by her own account and has put herself in the current position she is in with Telemundo.

Villaraigosa is presented as trying to negate the idea that Salinas’ relationship with him could have influenced how much information he gave to her or Telemundo. He is shown as

saying that “he never gave Salinas or Channel 52 an advantage, adding that he regularly appears on many Los Angeles’ television newscasts and provides almost unfettered access to reporters seeking one-on-one interviews” (Helfand et al., 2007, ¶32). Since Salinas’ past with politicians is suggested to be frequent and her ethics as a journalist are questioned, the reporters use the same article to indicate Villaraigosa’s innocence. In this comparison it is suggested that Villaraigosa, as a politician, acted correctly. Thus, enhanced is the idea that it is Salinas, the journalist who covered a politician she was secretly romantically involved with, who acted professionally incorrect.

The mayor is shown to have never used his relationship for self-promotion or to have acted professionally dishonorable (Helfand et al., 2007). The article also makes note that if any Los Angeles publication gets the more information from the mayor it is the *Times*. He is quoted saying, “I play more favorites with...the L.A. Times than I have with anybody on this beat. Honest-to-God truth” (Helfand et al., 2007, ¶33). The reporters are implying that their information in regards to the mayor and city politics is most likely the best. This also enhances the notion that Villaraigosa did not use his personal relationship for political gain. By doing so, Salinas is depicted as the one who is in more of a professional dilemma because of the sex scandal.

#### *The Daily News of Los Angeles’ Coverage of Villaraigosa*

The primary narrative used by the *Daily News* is to depict Villaraigosa as determined. He is depicted as determined to succeed in his position by focusing on education and safety and by effectively carrying out his mayoral duties during a time of personal strife. The overall analysis of the articles reveals a theme that Villaraigosa’s mayoral duties are more important to the city of Los Angeles than his personal misbehaviors.

*Mayor Determined to Maintain Safety and Education in Los Angeles*

Throughout the analyzed articles Villaraigosa's connection to the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and his commitment to maintaining safety in Los Angeles are prevalent. In 2009, the mayor is faced with picking a new police chief when the former, William Bratton, announces he is stepping down. A reporter expresses Villaraigosa's determination and depicts him as prepared to take on the responsibility of finding Bratton's successor (Orlov, 2009c). The article states that Villaraigosa and the city will conduct an extensive search both inside and outside the department which implies that the right individual will be chosen to uphold safety in the city (Orlov, 2009c).

The mayor wants Bratton's successor to have the expertise and experience to build off of the already great accomplishments the mayor and chief have achieved (Orlov, 2009b). The publication suggests Villaraigosa's accomplishments and commitment to safety by expressing his success in working with Bratton to strengthen the force (Orlov, 2009b). In this strengthening, the mayor and Bratton are described as having worked together to build one that reflects the dynamics of the city (Orlov, 2009b). This implies that those who run the city are dedicated also to providing ethnic equality in a diverse city.

The reporter states that the force contains nearly 10,000 officers, of which 42 percent are Latino, 37 are percent white, and 12 are percent African-American (Orlov, 2009b, ¶20). Villaraigosa describes this force as, "[looking] like the city of Los Angeles" (Orlov, 2009b, ¶21). A later article reiterates this concept by quoting the mayor as saying, "I expect the next chief of the Police Department of the city of Los Angeles to see diversity as important, as a value. I expect them to be comfortable in every community, be able to outreach to the broad cross-

section of Angelenos” (Castro, 2009c, ¶5 & 6). Again this suggests the mayor’s devotion to providing a diverse city with a police force and chief who reflects the same needs.

When the finalists for chief are down to three individuals, the mayor and police commission president face hostile questioning over why there is “a lack of Latino finalists in a city where almost half the population is Hispanic” (Castro, 2009c, ¶19). The mayor responds with, “I’m not going to let my own biases get in the way of my deliberations here. I’m going to look at all three of these candidates” (Castro, 2009c, ¶20). The reporters also express the mayor’s desire to include community leaders’ and activists’ feedback in the decision process even if they will not ultimately interview the candidates themselves (Castro, 2009c). Implied is that Villaraigosa is aware of the diversity in the city, and as suggested before, he understands that it is an important concept. However, it is shown that he will not let his own biases get in the way. This suggests that he plans on making a fair and unbiased decision. Furthering this notion is the mention of his plans to use the feedback from other members in the city about who they would choose as police chief.

Villaraigosa eventually chose Charlie Beck for chief. A reporter describes the mayor’s decision as being widely praised and cheered on by rank-and-file officers, as well as the police union and civil rights groups (Castro, 2009b). Referencing that Villaraigosa is praised by groups of police agencies shows that he will be able to successfully work with the force and that they are pleased with his decision. Also, by naming civil rights groups as in agreement, the idea that Villaraigosa is dedicated to diversity is highlighted. It is implied that the mayor has found the best individual who will be able to adapt and work with the many ethnicities that make up the city.

The reporter also shows how the mayor will be able to work with the new chief because they believe the same city issues need to be addressed in order to increase safety (Castro, 2009b). One of the issues highlighted is gang violence. The reporter expresses that Villaraigosa believes that Beck's qualifications and work with L.A.'s youth anti-gang programs make him a perfect fit to alleviate such an ongoing issue (Castro, 2009b). Villaraigosa describes Beck as "conservative when it comes to criminals and progressive in his policing" (Castro, 2009b, ¶12). This statement reiterates that the mayor made a well-informed decision. It shows that he chose a candidate who reflects the city of Los Angeles, is dedicated to increasing safety, and will be able to work successfully with the mayor to do so.

In addition to a dedication to safety, Villaraigosa is also depicted as dedicated to enhance education in the LAUSD. An early 2007 article details, "'The Schoolhouse: A Framework to Give Every Child in LAUSD an Excellent Education,'" (Boghossian, 2007e, ¶2). The framework being described involves efforts by the Mayor's Office in hopes to raise student test scores, reduce the dropout rate, and improve the quality of education (Boghossian, 2007e). The reporter notes that the release of the proposal is amid a legal battle that is questioning the validity of a bill that would give Villaraigosa significant control over the LAUSD (Boghossian, 2007e).

In the article there is a comparison of how individuals in the school district feel about supporting the mayor's proposal and involvement. Superintendent David Brewer is shown as slightly concerned with the proposal while school board President Marlene Canter is depicted as looking forward to partnering with the mayor and implementing any or all of his proposed initiatives (Boghossian, 2007e).

A later article brings in more characters that show support for the mayor's proposal. A real estate developer, Richard Lundquist and his wife, Melanie Lundquist, are depicted as two of

the mayor's biggest supporters (Boghossian, 2007c). The reporter says that the couple decided to give \$5 million annually for 10 years to support two clusters of schools that the mayor would eventually control (Boghossian, 2007c). It is noted that the couple had never donated to LAUSD before "because they didn't believe the money would be spent effectively" (Boghossian, 2007c, ¶15). Implied is that because of Villaraigosa's plan, individuals are coming forward in support. To enhance this implication, Melanie Lundquist is quoted as saying, "Now that the leadership is here, the team has been assembled and we can move forward" (Boghossian, 2007c). The overall suggestion in this article is that people are willing to make significant contributions in order to see the mayor's efforts succeed because they believe he is the leader to bring about positive change.

A subsequent article states that the mayor won his bid to manage seven LAUSD schools after a majority of parents and teachers voted to partner on education reform, making a major political coup (Boghossian, 2007a). This article now depicts Superintendent Brewer as fully in acceptance of Villaraigosa's proposal. Brewer is quoted as saying:

When you look at the percent of yes votes from the parents, it's a clear mandate, and as far as I'm concerned, the faculties are also sending a clear message that they want change. Today we're unleashing the power of L.A. to transform the schools in L.A.

(Boghossian, 2007a, ¶8).

The article implies that Villaraigosa's education reform plan is accepted by main players in the district. The publication depicts the mayor's efforts from the beginning and shows how his success was ultimately brought about by his determination. In his success, Villaraigosa is shown as avoiding any implication that he needed the victory (Boghossian, 2007a). The reporter notes that the mayor never saw his past efforts, even his now-defunct legislation that would have

given him a role in the district, as defeats (Boghossian, 2007a). He is instead shown as fulfilled in the outcome of his determination. Villaraigosa is quoted saying:

I am focused on this effort. I could have easily left this a long time ago and said I tried, and after I lost the court decision I could have walked away, but I didn't do that so this is a good day (Boghossian, 2007a, ¶43).

In that quote the author characterizes Villaraigosa as having never given up in an effort to achieve his goals. The efforts of the mayor, in both articles about the LAPD and the LAUSD, exemplify the manner in which he can successfully carry out his mayoral duties. The articles are also indicative of the mayor's determination in maintaining safety and reforming education, as well as, show how imperative individuals in the city support his labors in both sectors.

*Mayor Determined to Carry Out his Political Duties Under Any Circumstance*

Villaraigosa's determination is prominent in the articles that follow the revelation of his affair with Salinas. The publication depicts the mayor in several political situations following the public release of the sex scandal. He is depicted as determined to carry out these mayoral duties to the fullest even during a time of personal strife. For example, shortly after the revelation, reporters use a quote from the mayor in which he describes his relationship with Salinas (Barrett & Boghossian, 2007). He describes their relationship as a "friendship that evolved over time" and in no way has their time together had an effect on his performance as mayor (Barrett & Boghossian, 2007, ¶1). The reporters also show Villaraigosa's concern for his children now that the affair has been revealed and a divorce from their mother is pending (Barrett & Boghossian, 2007). The article is addressing the privacy that such a situation should be given. The reporters show the mayor's acceptance of responsibility and his hopes that, because the

revelation has had no effect on his job, the public can give him and his family privacy during a personally difficult time.

The articles thereafter refer to Villaraigosa's affair, but focus more on how he is carrying out his political duties. The publication also spends time deflecting attention onto others, such as other politicians or Salinas. The other politicians that are reported on are Rudy Giuliani, former President Clinton, and Gavin Newsom. Each is a politician who has been involved in a similar scandal and, consequently, is depicted to have overcome the personal pitfall with political success.

Reporters begin an article with a description of a politician who is involved in a scandal and suggest that the individual is Villaraigosa. However, the reporter is actually recounting Giuliani's affair and indicating how he politically succeeded even after the public knew of his sexual misconduct (Orlov, 2007b). The reporter also shows how sexual misconduct may be shocking, but not necessarily career ending by bringing in experts (Orlov, 2007b). Described are experts who say, although "[infidelity] chatter can shock and titillate; it might not have a lasting impact on Villaraigosa's career" (Castro, 2007, ¶9). The reporter brings in a political historian, Michael Beschloss, as an expert to address the past troubles of President Clinton. Beschloss points to Clinton's sex scandal as when the political climate began to change and voters, in turn, began to have a higher tolerance for marital indiscretions (Castro, 2007, ¶19). The reporter is expressing that Villaraigosa's chances of overcoming his personal misconduct with political success is likely since other individuals were able to do the same and voters today are more lenient to a politician's sexual recklessness.

Another reporter furthers the notion that Villaraigosa will be able to move past the image of the affair by praising the mayor's actions following the public revelation (Castro, 2007). The

reporter says that “Villaraigosa [made] all the right crisis-control moves” and “experts agree” (Castro, 2007, ¶36). The reporter says that even the “much-criticized press conference” where he “refused to address questions about the breakup, served its purpose – to publicly accept blame for the failure of the marriage” (Castro, 2007, ¶36). It is inferred that the mayor’s career is not in jeopardy because of the poor decisions he made in his personal life.

The publication reiterates the idea of overcoming poor personal decisions by describing San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom’s personal carelessness. Attention is deflected onto how he not only overcame political success after an affair and a divorce, but how he also succeeded after a stint in rehab for alcoholism (Orlov, 2007b). The reporter shows firsthand how Newsom was able to get past his troubles. The reporter quotes him saying, “I dealt with it, at least to the extent I could, in a very forthright manner and didn’t try to excuse it and didn’t try to nuance it. That allowed us to move on after some very difficult weeks” (Orlov, 2007b, ¶19). The reporter shows how after Newsom’s admission he stuck to his job and, as a result, the polls revealed his popularity at 80 percent (Orlov, 2007b). This reiterates the notion that even during a personal transgression a political career can still be maintained.

As noted, Salinas also endures media attention after the revelation of the affair. The publication insinuates that Salinas acted improperly as a journalist involved with a politician and that Villaraigosa never used their relationship to get closer to the press (Barrett, 2007). The mayor’s camp is shown as defending his actions by stating that he provides open access for all of the media outlets in Los Angeles and that no one has received special treatment (Barrett, 2007). The reporter describes Salinas’ actions, on the other hand, as having caused “questions to arise over instances in which [she] reported on the mayor” (Barrett, 2007, ¶5). These instances include when she referred on air to his separation from his wife as a “political scandal,” and said

“the rumors are true” (Barrett, 2007, ¶5). It is said that “the key for Salinas is whether she told her bosses about her romance with the mayor” (Barrett, 2007, ¶24). A later article reveals that Telemundo ultimately decided to reassign her to the Inland Empire (Orlov, 2007a). The publication suggests that Salinas’ actions were detrimental to how she does her job and deflects how such actions have an effect on how the mayor conducts his business.

By deflecting the attention onto others such as Giuliani, Clinton, Newsom, and Salinas the publication implies less attention should be paid to Villaraigosa’s misconduct. At the same time, the publication also highlights his political accomplishments. For example in an article that is describing the pothole event, the reporter shows the pothole to be a 2005 promise the mayor has been able to steadily achieve (Hopkins, 2007). The reporter refers to the pothole as “politically powerful” (Hopkins, 2007). The implication is that the mayor is attending to his political responsibilities and has chosen the perfect event to attend post scandal. The reporter then highlights the mayor’s dedication to this political responsibility by describing him. The reporter says:

[Villaraigosa] arrived at the event with workman’s boots, gloves and vest over his usual shirt and tie. He raked, scraped and compacted away, dodging questions about his personal life and vowing to press on with civic business – starting with the politically powerful pothole (Hopkins, 2007, ¶19).

By noting that Villaraigosa is avoiding questions about his personal life and instead vowing to press on with civic business, there is a suggestion that his personal decisions are unrelated to the way in which he carries out his political. The reporter also implies that the mayor is fully dedicated to his promises to the city since he is partaking in an event that is

helping him accomplish one he set back in 2005. Implied is that, as mayor, Villaraigosa can be held accountable, and regardless of the intensity of his personal life, he is dedicated to the city.

### *LA Weekly's Coverage of Villaraigosa*

The primary narrative *LA Weekly* uses is to depict Villaraigosa as a lackluster mayor who over promises to the city of Los Angeles. The second narrative *LA Weekly* uses is to depict Villaraigosa as constantly seeking fame and the spotlight. The overall analysis of the *LA Weekly* articles reveals a theme that Villaraigosa's mayoral activities are often second in importance to his personal life and behavior. This is shown most prominently in the articles that discuss the affair between Villaraigosa and Salinas.

#### *Lackluster and Overpromising Mayor*

Villaraigosa is shown as a lackluster and overpromising mayor. Safety and education are two important aspects in the city and *LA Weekly* depicts the mayor as faltering in both. The mayor and former Police Chief Bratton are characterized as manipulative and unethical, mostly in the way they work together. For example, in a 2009 article the reporter ends the piece by describing Villaraigosa and Bratton as “lackluster” and “[failing] to deliver on a range of promises” (McDonald, 2009a, ¶103). This description comes after a long explanation by various sources on how their claim that the city is as safe as in 1956 is a “slant” in numbers. The reporter describes it as a “bold comparison” that is “[lugged] out to warn voters that the low crime rate could be jeopardized if they [don't] pass the City Council's telephone-utility-tax referendum, a phone tax that Villaraigosa and Bratton said [is] needed for the hiring of more cops” (McDonald, 2009a, ¶5).

The reporter also notes other members of the press did not challenge the notion that the city had been transported back several decades because they were more interested in addressing

the “unsettling and unethical” move by Bratton to endorse the mayor (McDonald, 2009a). This implies that the police chief and the mayor are politicking with each other and suggests that they work together in an unethical manner in order to achieve personal gain. Inferred is that these two main players in the city do not have their city’s interest at the forefront of their decisions.

The mayor’s involvement and proposed takeover of the LAUSD also exemplify *LA Weekly’s* suggestion that the mayor cannot achieve goals he sets forth. A 2007 article title says that Villaraigosa is “gushing over his ‘historic’ school-reform plan” (Krikorian, 2007). It is said that at a press conference Villaraigosa and his constituents used the word “historic” well over a dozen times (Krikorian, 2007). The article says that members of the press did not take the time to ask him tough questions. Instead the setting was used for the mayor to “put his own spin on his two years of bruising attacks on the schools” (Krikorian, 2007, ¶10). The reporter describes these “attacks” as having:

Sent teacher morale plummeting, cost LAUSD nearly \$1 million to fight an unconstitutional mayoral takeover law, and created an icy schism with former Superintendent Roy Romer – viewed by many as the most activist and reform-minded schools leader in Los Angeles since the 1960s (Krikorian, 2007, ¶10).

The tone of the reporter reflects one of criticism and apathy towards the mayor’s involvement with the LAUSD. Several other articles address Villaraigosa’s involvement with the district and describe it using the following words and phrases: unsuccessful, unconstitutional, ill-fated partial takeover, and as not yet having produced any results.

A supporting character in the mayor’s push for taking over the LAUSD is Superintendent Brewer. They are said to be “off-and-on [nemeses]” (McDonald, 2007, ¶21). This implies that they do not always agree on how the district should be handled. The reporter also quotes a

former L.A. Unified board member, David Tokofsky to show the implied odd relationship between Brewer and Villaraigosa and how they handle education reform. Tokofsky is quoted saying:

Brewer cannot do ‘what the mayor is doing, and disappear from the press’ on the issue of school reform. ‘It’s somewhat a brilliant political move, actually,’ he says of Villaraigosa. ‘The struggles of the mayor, whose school takeover failed miserably and whose own competing *Schoolhouse* reform landed with a thud and vanished from the public eye, throw the mistakes made by Brewer into starker relief’ (McDonald, 2007, ¶22).

The article reflects failing, both by the mayor and by the superintendent. The reporter highlights the faltering of both and implies that they decided to work together in order to advance their own personal gain. This is shown by referring to them as “off-and-on nemeses” and implying that they flip-flop in their decisions to work together.

After it has been determined that Villaraigosa will have partial control of some schools in the district, Brewer agrees with the mayor’s proposal. Brewer is quoted as saying that “the mayor and he are going to transform [the] school district” and “that the two [are] joined at the hip” (McDonald, 2007, ¶41). The author then says that the mayor “gushed back, calling the retired admiral his ‘good friend’ and giddily [explained] that they finished each other’s sentences” (McDonald, 2007, ¶41). The article conveys a tone of sarcasm and criticism. There is also the overarching indication that the mayor teams up with people in order to achieve his goals. This time it involved the LAUSD and the superintendent; before it was the LAPD and the police chief.

To exemplify the mayor's lackluster ability to fulfill promises, a 2008 article lays out the amount of time Villaraigosa spends on press events and compares it to the amount of time he spends on legitimate city business. For example, the article begins by stating that the mayor has spent half of his day dining with friends, attending staged interviews, and that he just returned home from a personal vacation in Hawaii (McDonald, 2008). There is a strong suggestion that this devotion of time to his personal life contributes to his inability to fulfill promises.

The reporter also implies that the public, as a result, is upset with how he barely carries out his political responsibilities:

As he began his closed-door meeting to review the million-trees fiasco, a loose coalition of angry community activists billing themselves as the Save L.A. Project stood on the steps of City Hall, venting frustration over the Los Angeles Unified School District, the mayor's stiff new rate increases on Angelenos' utility bills, and a controversy over alleged backroom talks by Villaraigosa's Planning Department 'density hawks' about building yet another big-box project, this time a Home Depot in the Valley (McDonald, 2008b, ¶2).

The reporter enhances the idea that individuals are upset with the mayor's lacking abilities by stating:

Los Angeles' mayor has not yet produced any results in improving schools, addressing greatly worsening traffic, keeping kids from joining gangs, cleaning the city's infamously filthy sidewalks, halting patently illegal clutter like 10-story building ads and thousands of illicitly constructed billboards, or controlling his spending in a time of family belt-tightening (McDonald, 2008b, ¶10).

The article is essentially a laundry list of reasons to how and why the mayor fails at almost everything. The reporter attributes this to a breakdown of how the mayor really spends his time. It is said that 89 percent of his work schedule is devoted to public relations, travel, and fund-raising events of sorts while 11 percent is devoted to direct city business, such as legislation signings and meetings with city-department heads (McDonald, 2008b, ¶44).

The publication when depicting Villaraigosa suggests that as a mayor he is manipulative and in the end lackluster in performance because he cannot follow through with his promises to the city.

#### *Villaraigosa Seeks Fame and the Spotlight*

The second most prominent narrative employed by *LA Weekly* relies on the theme that Villaraigosa is using his political stance, ethnicity, and personality to enhance his fame. This theme is particularly reinforced when describing the manner in which he carries himself at press conferences and when partaking in events that pertain to mayoral duties. For example, in the article detailing how Villaraigosa spends his time, there is also an extensive list of how he seeks fame and the spotlight (McDonald, 2008b). The title contains the phrase “the all about-me mayor: Antonio Villaraigosa’s frenetic self-promotion” (McDonald, 2008b). Villaraigosa’s implied need for fame and attention is highlighted when the reporter notes that he is getting a wax statue. The reporter says:

After getting briefed for a carefully staged press conference scheduled the following day, which would urge L.A. residents to back a big boost in the Los Angeles County sales tax, he prepared for a special meeting at the posh mayoral mansion, Getty House, that was of pressing importance: posing for a statue of himself for Madame Tussaud’s Wax Museum (McDonald, 2008b, ¶3).

The reporter says that “the mayor is all set to become one of 80 celebrities featured at the new Madame Tussaud’s, opening on Hollywood Boulevard next spring – further fulfillment of the fame Villaraigosa avidly pursues” (McDonald, 2008, ¶7). The description that Villaraigosa avidly pursues fame and is being considered a celebrity reiterates the publication’s suggestion that the mayor prioritizes his own self-promotion over the public’s needs.

Another article depicts Villaraigosa as spotlight seeking by stating that he, “as usual posed for pictures, and then speed-talked his way through three TV interviews in less than 10 minutes” (McDonald, 2008c, ¶2). The key components in this statement are Villaraigosa’s ethnicity and the manner in which he speeds his way through attending to political matters. The article is showing that he is endorsing Hillary Clinton and in the title notes that the “Latino factor” has arrived. The author says that the mayor at one point of the rally “seemed so worked up he appeared to be on the verge of hyperventilating” (McDonald, 2008c, ¶1). The implication is that Villaraigosa puts on a show when being filmed because he avidly pursues fame and that he uses his ethnicity to promote himself as well.

Several articles highlight the overlapping themes of lackluster mayor and celebrity seeking public figure. For example, a 2007 article following the revelation of his affair insinuates that he used his relationship with a reporter to get closer to the media that covers him (Zahniser, 2007a). The article is titled “Villaraigosa’s media affair; Telemundo, where his girlfriend is an anchor, lavishes him with free airtime” (Zahniser, 2007a). The reporter also says that, “Villaraigosa, larger than life, somehow elevates himself above politics, getting closer and closer to the vehicles that cover him” (Zahniser, 2007a, ¶17). In the title alone there is an implied sense that the reporter believes Villaraigosa is aware of who he brings into his life and manipulates situations to further his own media attention.

The reporter concludes the article by expressing the fate of Salinas is most likely to be removed from her position, and that the mayor's actions are now something that has become commonplace in the political arena. The reporter does so by stating:

Even if someone else anchors Telemundo's news for a day or two, l'affaire Salinas is the logical endgame in an increasingly chummy L.A. media circle. After all, once things get intimate in print and on the screen, a romantic, possibly even marriage-destroying, relationship between a politician and a journalist seems like just another day at the office (Zahniser, 2007a, ¶20).

Suggested is that it is common for Los Angeles media to cover the degenerative acts of a politician and that politician's manipulate their acts and situations to guarantee continued recognition.

#### *Personal Behavior of Villaraigosa Obscures Mayoral Duties*

In the articles analyzed, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's personal behavior and the way he carries himself are suggested to obscure how he conducts his mayoral duties.

For example, Villaraigosa held a press conference to inform the public that he and his wife were divorcing (Zahniser, 2007b). The reporter describes the scene and expresses that the mayor would like privacy during this time of personal hardship. In the following descriptions of the press conference, it is suggested that the reporter cannot fathom how someone who spends most of his time publicly promoting himself can expect privacy. The reporter says that, "Villaraigosa strode in front of a dozen cameras [to] discuss a very personal matter: the collapse of his marriage to Corina Villaraigosa" (Zahniser, 2007b, ¶1). The implied confusion by the reporter is shown when he states that, "Villaraigosa is sealing off the details of his personal life, even as he presents messages about that personal life for public consumption. If nothing else, the

whole thing has a dizzying circularity” (Zahniser, 2007b, ¶17). In a later article the same reporter describes the press conference again as a “disastrous event where [Villaraigosa] summoned reporters to discuss his split with Corina Villaraigosa, then demanded privacy from those same reporters when they asked about his affairs” (Zahniser, 2007a, ¶1). The author is questioning why Villaraigosa is trying to convey to the public that he would like his personal life to remain a private matter, yet held a public press conference to discuss it with the media.

The press conference immediately led the media to question what caused the break-up and if an affair was behind it. The article also brings up Villaraigosa’s known affair in 1994 that “left his wife in the uncomfortable position of calling his political allies as she tried to locate her husband” (Zahniser, 2007b, ¶13). The reporter is implying that Villaraigosa’s personal behavior interferes with his political responsibilities and that he even involves other politicians in his personal conduct.

The mayor is also depicted to be more preoccupied with his image during the scandal than his political responsibilities. An article states that “with Antonio preoccupied by an affair, L.A. loses its rail funds” (Bradley, 2007b). The author says that Villaraigosa at the time, “in his current scandal-struck state didn’t show up to lobby for his own program” (Bradley, 2007b, ¶1). The mayor did not show up to lobby for rail funds for L.A.’s “badly needed Expo line” (Bradley, 2007b, ¶5). As a result of the mayor’s absence the reporter says that funding for the line is dead and suggests that the mayor’s affair interfered with his job and “he is no longer viewed in Capitol circles as nearly the phenomenon he was last year” (Bradley, 2007a, ¶17).

The publication in areas pertinent to the city depicts Villaraigosa as faltering. Overall *LA Weekly* suggests that the mayor is lackluster, he seeks the spotlight, and during a time of personal strife, disappears from his political responsibilities altogether.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

Political reporting in journalism has transformed to heavily focus on the personal behavior of politicians. This reporting typically includes focusing on a politician's misconduct or his or her deviation from certain societal norms or values considered to be important to voters when deciding who to support. This study examines the personal misconduct of Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and expresses how his sex scandal consequently obscured reporting on his mayoral duties. The analyzed articles about Villaraigosa perpetuate the idea that these narratives are prominent in modern political reporting. After analyzing articles about the mayor's sex scandal, it is evident that even local stories about politicians misbehaving have become a sought-after narrative for reporters to expose.

#### *Sex Scandals and Political Reporting*

Scandals are narratives that are desired by journalists because they contain a specific event that needs heavy reporting, a conflict that needs resolving, and eventually will come to some sort of conclusion (Thompson, 2000). This sequential fashion creates a plot line that is also desired by audience members because there is that need to figure out the unclear future of the individual involved in the scandal and the supporting characters. Scandals fuel speculation and keep a reader always guessing, which contributes positively to audience readership and ratings. The sex scandal of Villaraigosa contains those elements that generate audience interest and journalist recognition.

This desire to report on such aspects derives from the notion that reporters should be investigating and exposing the wrongdoings of politicians. In the realm of political journalism, being successful means that one can report on politicians and also maximize on the elements of

entertainment (Castells, 2009). The political reporting that has resulted is a scandal narrative that fixates on a plot line designed to appeal to the emotions of audience members. Therefore, modern political reporting conveys the idea that the character of a politician is somewhat more important than the policies or political responsibilities of that politician. As a consequence, political reporting is driven by scandal politics and as a result what is now played out in the media is a personalized politics, or candidate-centered politics, instead of policy-centered politics (Castells, 2009).

The *Los Angeles Times*, *The Daily News of Los Angeles*, and *LA Weekly* all contribute to the notion that the media focus heavily on the personal aspects of a politician. All three publications also lend support to the idea that as a politician's misconduct becomes more prominent in the public the narrative tends to follow a common script: accusation or revelation, broadcast denial and/or confession—and frequently, a comeback or attempted comeback (Gamson, 2001). The Villaraigosa/Salinas sex scandal followed that common script. However, the publications reported differently on the incident and the aftermath.

#### *Straying from the Political*

Narratives about politicians misbehaving that follow a common script tend to stray from reporting on how a politician performs his or her duties. Instead the narratives show how he or she acts in their personal life. The *Times* reports on Villaraigosa and the other characters involved in such a manner. The publication portrays Villaraigosa's personality and behavior as having cast a shadow over his political responsibilities. The reporters do so by characterizing the media as the reason why the mayor's personal behavior is the main subject being communicated to the public. The publication also highlights "the other woman," Salinas, and characterizes her actions and career choices negatively. The overall analysis reveals a theme that reporting on a

politician's personal behavior and the characters involved are subjects that are more sought-after by journalists than those of a how a politician is carrying out his or her political responsibilities.

The *Times* is contradictory during the analyzed time period. The reporters focus on other members of the press and criticize them for devoting too many questions to the mayor's sex scandal. However, the publication itself also strays from the political by highlighting Villaraigosa's personal behavior and the other characters involved. For example, the publication devotes an entire article to the public's reaction to the mayor's affair. Quotes from city residents show how the affair affects how he is viewed, but at the same time fail to highlight how his mayoral duties can also contribute to how he is viewed.

The *Times* criticizes the media at political events for focusing on the personal. However, it also reports a story that has little to do with the political event and more to do with highlighting how other journalists are reacting to the affair. The reporters furthermore tend to center a majority of their stories on Salinas. She is depicted as someone who has made a mistake by involving herself with a politician while covering him as a journalist and she is shown as acting inappropriately for having a relationship with a married man. Characterizing "the other woman" and focusing on her mistakes during the sex scandal contribute to the way the publication avoids reporting on the mayoral duties of Villaraigosa.

#### *Entertainment Reporting on Politicians*

Journalists are prone to cover the private acts of politicians in an invasive and revealing manner because there is the idea that they are supposed to be investigative and nonpartisan (Bowman, 2008). Investigative scandals, such as an affair between a mayor and a reporter, are sought-after stories by journalists because they appeal to the notions of investigation and nonpartisanship. The style of story that results, more often than not, is a political scandal-

narrative about a politician's personality and/or behavior that is meant more for entertainment and less for generating key information to inspire democratic participation.

After analyzing the articles by *LA Weekly* it is evident that the publication's stories about Villaraigosa tend to criticize his behavior. As a result, the articles are meant more to entertain the reader instead of politically inform them. Since journalism has undergone a transformation, coverage of politicians is written more for entertainment and to appeal the emotions of readers. Readers then are satisfied and convinced into thinking that such information is of higher intelligence and that they will be well-versed in the private lives of public leaders (Thompson, 2011). This reinforces the concept that privacy boundaries have diminished over time for public leaders. More often than not, what is disseminated to the public by the press is information on how politicians act in their personal lives. Reporting in such a manner ultimately guides society to view politicians based on their character, personality, and aspects of private conduct. Such aspects are important. However, they take focus away from the significance of the policies an individual represents.

*LA Weekly* depicts Villaraigosa as spotlight seeking and lackluster. The reporters say that he spends most of his time on himself and imply that he is more interested in being a celebrity than a mayor. The publication criticizes the mayor for being preoccupied with his personal behavior, but at the same time it is communicating to readers that this is how they should judge him. The articles tend to be one-sided and mocking, constructed more for entertainment and appealing to emotions than towards generating societal conversations about political responsibilities.

*LA Weekly* also suggests that the media in Los Angeles work with the mayor to manipulate the manner in which he is conveyed to the public. It implies that a politician getting

close to the media that cover him or her is something that is a routine between politicians and reporters. Although the publication reports in a negative and degenerative manner about the mayor's personal life, it also makes a valid assumption that the media report on politicians in a less critical manner so that they will keep talking to them. This idea is expanded from a quote by Villaraigosa in the *Times* that suggests he favors them.

The *Daily News* characterizes the mayor as a determined politician who is dedicated to the city even when it was the publication that broke the vastly entertaining story of his affair. Although *LA Weekly* appears to report in a more truthful manner, the criticism and focus on the personal conform to the transformation in journalism. All three publications support the idea that modern political journalism appeals more towards entertaining a reader than engaging him or her in political conversations.

#### *Politicians Can Publicly Succeed After Bad Press*

Over time, information about sexual misconduct has become more common in society and political reporting. As a result, individuals are less likely to withdraw support from politicians because they have acted unlawfully in their marriage (Stoker, 1993). This is typically because the politician is able to satisfy the public's needs when tending to their political responsibilities.

This concept can be attributed to the sex scandal President Bill Clinton was involved in while he was in the White House (Klein, 2010). During his presidency he endured countless negative stories about his infidelity, which caused Americans to view the coverage as excessive and embarrassing (Klein, 2010). He was able to maintain support because of his economically successful policies and his demeanor as president. The public continued to support him in office even if they did not necessarily support his behavior as a husband (Thompson, 2000). Also,

stories of sexual misconduct had typically been kept hidden from the public. Clinton's infidelity was thrust into public view in a blatant and invasive manner, which lessened the intensity of the wrongdoing and allowed audience members to more easily accept his misbehaviors (Klein, 2010).

Although a sex scandal can be damaging to a politician's personal image, it does not necessarily lead to the end of his or her political career. The *Daily News* primarily depicts Villaraigosa as determined. In doing so, the publication conveys to readers that the mayor is determined to succeed at his job even during a time of intense personal strife. Villaraigosa is shown as being able to successfully carry out his political responsibilities, pre- and post- scandal, and in turn he is re-elected for a second term. The overall analysis of the *Daily News* articles reveals a theme that Villaraigosa's mayoral duties are more important to the city of Los Angeles than his personal misbehaviors.

It is clear that sexual misconduct can be shocking when disseminated to the public. However, communication about infidelity in modern society is typically seen as unsuitable, yet fleeting (Gamson, 2001). The *Daily News* conveys the idea that Villaraigosa's infidelity and personal immorality were shocking to the public, yet had little influence on his long-term political career. The publication brings in supporting characters that perpetuate the idea that adultery is a short-lived political negativity if the public responsibilities can be carried out. Rudy Giuliani, Gavin Newsom, and Bill Clinton are all referenced in the analyzed articles as politicians who had affairs and politically succeeded. The publication uses those supporting characters to dismiss the impact that Villaraigosa's affair could have had on his career.

### *Final Thoughts*

Reporting the private acts of politicians guides society to view such individuals on their character, personality, and aspects of their private lives. Modern democracies, like that of the United States, have developed a politics of trust, focused on personality and visibility, which ultimately restricts the kinds of trust that are possible and desirable within democratic institutions (Warren, 2006). Consequently, political scandal narratives in the media have come to dominate and disintegrate the potential for an ideal democratic process.

As a result, moral disorder stories, like that of Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's infidelity, are common in modern political reporting. The immorality of the mayor appeals to both journalists and the public because a story line is created. The story line expresses the transgressions of an authority figure from normative behaviors and cultural and professional values. American values are expressed by an employed media of maintenance that report in line with upholding national order and political honesty based on the ideological values of those governing (Gans, 1980). The public, as subjects to such intense media and political strategy, are conditioned to respond to appearance, visibility, and entertainment.

After analyzing the coverage that pertains to the behaviors of Villaraigosa, the idea that the media and politicians personalize politics for entertainment purposes is furthered. Ultimately, the news is information that is constructed from mediated events and then disseminated to the public for recognition and economic gain. A mediated event that produces a scandal and involves a politician appeals to a reporter's investigative pull and also intrigues audience members who want to hear the plot from beginning to end. The media's influence on elevating scandal is, therefore, legitimizing a crisis of democracy (Castells, 2009). Without the media, there really is no scandal. The media generates what the public consumes, and without it

there would be no reaction to the personal misconduct of politicians. The personalization of politics contributes to the idea that those who create the news are in reality generating information that ultimately hinders the public from engaging in conversations pertinent for an ideal democracy.

### *Future Research*

This study only analyzed coverage from three Los Angeles print publications. Future research could include an analysis of additional print sources as well as television coverage during the same time frame. A study of Spanish-language press in Los Angeles would also be helpful in assessing local coverage of the affair. It could also be valuable to survey voters of Los Angeles and gauge how important personal aspects are to them when voting for mayor. The survey could also ask voters if the affair affected how they voted in the 2008 mayoral election. This could lend support to how important such coverage is to them, if at all, when selecting a political leader. Future research could also bring in publications or television coverage from outside of Los Angeles to better assess how the mayor was reported on during the time frame. Lastly, the time frame analyzed could be extended to include the entire time the mayor has served in public office in Los Angeles and how the coverage transformed over the years. Such additional studies will lead to a better and more sufficient understanding of how sex scandals are covered in the news.

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## APPENDIX – CODING SHEET

1. Media Outlet:
2. Headline:
3. Author:
4. Date:
5. How was Villaraigosa depicted in the article?
  - a. Was Villaraigosa characterized as immoral in any way?
  - b. Was Villaraigosa depicted to be involved in a scandal?
  - c. Was Villaraigosa's personal life referenced? How?
  - d. What were shown as the consequences resulting from the mayor's actions?
6. Who were the other main characters depicted in the article?
  - a. Quotes of other characters depicted in the article.
7. How was Villaraigosa depicted as a mayor?
  - a. Was Villaraigosa shown as carrying out his mayoral activities?
8. What is the major theme(s) in the article?