WEINERGATE, TWITTER, AND MARGINALIZED VOICES: POLITICAL SEX

SCANDALS IN A NEW MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the

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presented by Sarah Turner McGowen

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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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ABSTRACT

Discourse strongly influences the ways in which ideologies are formed, maintained, and

contested, thus the dialogue surrounding political sex scandals may shape the ways in

which individuals negotiate their own beliefs and behaviors. Research into political sex

scandals is further complicated by the changing nature of interactions within a new media

environment, involving numerous voices and perspectives. This research project attempts

to look closely at this phenomenon, discovering the cultural discourses surrounding

political sex scandals and critiquing the assumptions made therein. The first chapter will

explain the importance and significance of the study of political sex scandals. The

second chapter will then review the extant literature surrounding the study of political sex

scandals, as well as covering gender and sexuality and new media theories. The third

chapter describes the multi-methodological approach for the study, detailing a case study

for this project. The fourth chapter reviews the rhetorical strategies employed in the

political sex scandal, Weinergate. The fifth chapter describes the content analysis of

messages about Weinergate sent through the social media website Twitter. The sixth

chapter critiques the ideological messages surrounding the Weinergate scandal,

specifically as they relate to sex, sexualities, and gender roles. The seventh and final

chapter discusses limitations of this project and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Justification

Anthony Weiner, a former U.S. representative from the state of New York,

became the center of a media storm in 2011 when allegations surfaced that he sent

inappropriate pictures of himself to women online and through private text messages. As

media coverage escalated, one unfortunate picture of Weiner's groin[1] was widely

circulated online, as well as shown in numerous traditional news media outlets. Weiner –

whose last name invited the scandal's moniker of "Weinergate" – initially vehemently

denied the allegations, claiming someone hacked into his account to send the pictures

(Associated Press, 2011). However, further media reports provided evidence that made it

difficult for Weiner to continue his denial. Conservative blogger Andrew Breitbart

posted an identifiable picture of Weiner posing shirtless (Memoli & Oliphant, 2011),

which prompted Weiner's admission that he had indeed "engaged in several

inappropriate conversations conducted over Twitter, Facebook, email and occasionally on

the phone with women [he] had met online" (Post Staff Report, 2011). The admission of

his infidelity shifted the tone of public discourse surrounding the issue,[2] as previous

supporters began probing into any misuse of public funds (Vilensky, 2011). Yet Weiner

remained in office for several weeks despite calls for his resignation from a number of

prominent political figures, including then-President Barack Obama.

Although Weiner did eventually resign his position in Congress, this did not end

his political career. Two years later in 2013, Weiner was a candidate in the New York

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[1] This picture was of a man's erect penis covered by underwear, one that news outlets such as CNN and
ABC News frequently used in their Weinergate coverage.
[2] Cartoonist Bryant Arnold (2011) captured this public sentiment best in his cartoonaday.com comic titled
"Anthony Weiner Twitter Scandal: Finally Something Americans Can Agree On."

City mayoral race. Weiner's re-entry into politics may signal a collective forgiveness of his sexual misdeeds, similar to Bill Clinton's eventual reprieve by the American public following his impeachment trial surrounding the Monica Lewinsky scandal (Sonner & Wilcox, 1999). Weiner's reconciliation with the public was evident in his early popularity in the New York City mayoral campaign, demonstrated by the lead he held early in the race over challenger Christine Quinn (Fermino, 2013). Yet New York voters were confronted with a parallel situation as that in 2011 when the online gossip website The Dirty.com accused Weiner of sending sexually explicit text messages to several women *after* he left Congress under the alias "Carlos Danger" (Moore, 2013). This new scandal effectively ended his shot at the mayoral election, as his previously strong support dropped rapidly. According to a *Wall Street Journal* report, Weiner lost 9 percentage points after news of the scandal broke, representing more than a third of his total support (Durkin & Fermino, 2013). To cap off his rocky re-entry into politics, Weiner's most infamous sexting partner, a woman named Sydney Leathers, attempted to crash his election night watch party. Photojournalists covering the event jumped on the chance to snap shots of the woman who helped return Weiner's sexual escapades to the spotlight (Gay, 2013).

Although Weiner's political career has remained effectively dead, the former Congressman did come into the spotlight *again* for another sex scandal. In August 2016, reports from the news outlet *New York Post* showed that Weiner had continued to engage in online conversations with women who were not his wife. However, this scandal crossed a moral boundary previously unseen when Weiner shared a picture of himself in bed with his toddler son. This picture shows his son's face within inches of his aroused

penis, which is covered in his white boxer briefs. When news of this scandal broke, Weiner's wife Huma Abedin, who was campaigning for Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton, announced that she would be leaving Weiner, effectively ending their relationship after the public humiliation. It seems that Weiner's actions resulted in a three-strikes-and-you're-out rule for both Abedin and the general public.

"Weinergate" represents an important moment in both the study and evolution of political sex scandals. Not only did technology create a new way for Anthony Weiner to engage in salacious behavior, but the technology itself – in this case, the social media website Twitter – played an important role in the evaluation and formation of public opinion regarding Weiner's guilt in this scandal. Huffington Post blogger William Bradley (2011) contended that this scandal showcased the American media and public's consumption of sex scandals – especially those involving high-profile political figures. The very nature of social media, specifically Twitter, not only allowed individuals to follow the story as it developed, it facilitated the rapid spread of information among personal social networks (Entman, 2012). Bradley (2011) argued that Weiner's "underlying exhibitionism, one of the driving forces of social media, [is] the real point in this first ever social media political sex scandal" (para. 16). Weiner's infidelity[3] most likely still would have occurred if social media had not provided him with an outlet. However, the public response and creation of a narrative regarding Weiner's guilt took place at a quicker speed and with more relentless force than previously seen in political scandals.

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[3] Although sexting itself may cause outrage among the general public, doing so while married to Huma Abedin may have been a greater blow to his political career than the sexual behavior alone. For a related discussion, see Barbara Risman's (2011) take on how adultery charges derailed Herman Cain's bid for the Republican presidential nomination in 2011 more so than sexual harassment allegations.

Weiner's sex scandal dominated media coverage over the course of several days,[4] sparking discourse about appropriate sexual behaviors and relationships, as well as the role of political officials and media outlets in light of political scandals (Bradley, 2011; Vilensky, 2011). Twitter served as a place for news outlets to post information about the scandal as it unfolded, but it also became a place for social media users to make jokes and voice opinions about Weiner. The interaction between scandals and the new media environment subsequently provided an opportunity for the women involved in these scandals to be subjected to and resist stereotypical characterizations. Gamson (2001) previously argued that women involved in sex scandals attract a level of celebrity status that subsequently pigeonholes these women in one of several dichotomies, including a virgin-whore and/or vixen-victim binary. At the onset of Weiner's first scandal, several media outlets – including the Associated Press and CBS News (Associated Press, 2011) – attempted to contact any and all of his partners, subsequently inundating these women with (perhaps unwanted) attention. One woman, Megan Broussard, came forward with photos, e-mails, and Facebook messages that she released along with a statement posted to the website BigGovernment.com (Hartenstein, 2011). Broussard said she chose to release the information, not in an attempt to destroy Weiner, but "… because she was afraid the private messages she sent to Weiner would be published as he was investigated, and she didn't want to be misrepresented" (Hartenstein, 2011, para. 10). Additionally, Gennette Cordova, the recipient of the first picture that sparked the media firestorm, decided to use Twitter to clarify her level of involvement with Weiner (as

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[4] As Chris Taylor (2011) put it, "unless you [lived] under a boulder large enough to block data signals" (para. 1), it was impossible to avoid discussion of the controversy – as well as lewd images of Weiner – within traditional news coverage.

opposed to issuing a statement via a traditional news outlet). Cordova said, "If it wasn't clear, I was not one of them" (as quoted in Alfarone, 2011). Broussard's and Cordova's choices to issue statements gave them greater control in a situation where marginalized voices are often overlooked or mischaracterized, something lacking from other contemporary political sex scandals.

For example, when former Republican presidential candidate Herman Cain was accused of sexually harassing several women during his tenure as head of the National Restaurant Association, the two women who publicly identified themselves as victims of his harassment received a fair amount of negative media coverage. Cain, his campaign staffers, and certain political commentators divorced these women from their claims, framing them as greedy individuals who sought financial or political gains (Shear, Rutenberg, & McIntire, 2011).[5] Similarly, media coverage during Weiner's second scandal marked Sydney Leathers primarily as a sexual body interested only in getting noticed, focusing attention on her "surgical enhancements" and clothing. One photo tagline speculated on her motives, suggesting Leathers was "perhaps soaking up the last of her 15 minutes of fame" (Gay, 2013). Rather than provide any substantive information about Leathers and the relationship she maintained with Weiner, the coverage she received emphasized her body, her sexuality, and her motivation for coming forward publicly. If these are a sample of the ways women involved in political sex scandals are covered by traditional news outlets, it is no surprise that sexual partners of political officials may use social media, including Twitter, in the future to manage their image.

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[5] Perhaps in an attempt to distract attention from the allegations against him, Cain and his campaign questioned his accuser's timing of coming forward with the charges, specifically implying that Sharon Bialek in particular may have had a financial motive due to a "long and troubled" financial history.

This research project focused on the nature of discourse that surrounds political sex scandals like Weinergate by critiquing the ways in which social media is used to foster political discussions about sex, sexuality, and gender roles. Past research has largely focused on news coverage of scandals (Black & Allen, 2001; Entman, 2012; Puglisi & Snyder, 2011; Yioutas & Segvic, 2003) and public officials' rhetorical choices made during the image recovery phase of damage control (Achter, 2000; Benoit, 2000; Harrell, Ware, & Linkugel, 1975; Ware & Linkugel, 1973). However, this project sought to answer a larger question about how political sex scandals guide cultural discourse, especially as it occurs in a new media environment. This chapter will clarify the scope and range of the project in terms of media analysis, as well as explain the significance of better understanding marginalized voices present in political sex scandal discourse. However, I first begin by defining political sex scandals as they relate to the current project.

A Few Words on Scandal

Before beginning a project of this magnitude, it is important to first define the breadth of scandals studied herein. Entman (2012) defines *political scandal* as "individual misconduct by presidents or candidates that the media *do* publicize as an urgent problem for the polity, one that must be investigated and somehow remedied (original emphasis)" (p. 4), while he distinguishes *potential scandal* as misconduct that the media could presumably cover in the same manner. This definition provides room for a variety of behaviors deemed misconduct, including sexual, financial, and ethical wrongdoing both legal and illegal. Narrowing the focus on mediated discourse, Achter's (2000) definition of a *mediated sex scandal* provides further refinement: "clear instances

wherein dominant moral boundaries regarding sexual behavior are transgressed,"
especially when these transgressions are covered publicly by the media (p. 319). This
may include political sex scandals such as Weiner's infidelity or Clinton's relationship
with Monica Lewinsky, in addition to celebrity sex scandals such as Kim Kardashian's
and Paris Hilton's respective sex tapes or Tiger Woods' affair and domestic dispute with
his wife. *Political sex scandals* pulls from both of these definitions, involving politicians
(both office-holders and candidates) at any level in government whom the public
perceives as having engaged in sexual behaviors where clear moral boundaries have been
transgressed. It is important to note that perception plays a crucial role in this definition,
both in relationship to the offensiveness of behaviors and the guilt of the associated party.
As Benoit (1997) explains with regard to crisis management, public perception regarding
offensiveness of a particular act and guilt assigned to a particular party tend to be highly
influential to public opinion. He further says that these perceptions of guilt and
offensiveness are stronger than any factual basis surrounding the circumstances of
scandal or crisis. Although perceptions may differ from person to person, cultural
analyses may reveal collective beliefs about sexual morality and ethical boundaries,[6] as
Gamson (2001) has argued in his discussion about the gendered nature of sex scandals.

　　Political sex scandals may occupy a large portion of media attention, but the
agenda setting function of news coverage may not reflect cultural norms regarding
scandalous behaviors. Entman (2012) argued that political scandals rarely reflect cultural
notions of morality, citing the media's propensity to rely on excessive coverage of
shameful conduct at the expense of investigative reporting on meaningful political

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[6] Further, cultural discourses may actually involve debates about the offensiveness of an act, revealing
conflicting viewpoints that resist dominant discourses.

actions. For example, Entman pointed to traditional news media's incessant coverage of

Clinton's marital infidelity with Lewinsky as contrasted with the relatively hidden

potential scandal involving George W. Bush's financial dealings with the Harken Energy

Corporation. Both scandals involved a sitting president, yet the potentially illegal insider

trading Bush was accused of committing received little to no attention by the press.

Entman claimed that lack of coverage of illegal behaviors cannot genuinely reflect the

American society's acceptance of such activities but rather mediated discourse of

political scandals does not accurately represent dominant cultural values.

I argue, however, that Entman misses the mark by focusing on the media's failure

to follow up on a potential scandal such as the Bush-Harken insider trading. Whether the

behaviors discussed in a larger cultural conversation are legal, moral, innocent, or

otherwise, the point should be that these incidents are entry points for public

conversations regarding norms and values. Take the 2014 tragedy of the Isla Vista

shooter and the subsequent #NotAllMen and #YesAllWomen Twitter hashtags. While

blame and guilt are difficult to assign posthumously, cultural critiques should focus on

how these events spark important political discussions regarding values of sex, sexuality,

and gender. In a new media environment, these conversations often occur through

mediated forms, including news coverage and social media use, which I discuss below in

greater detail.

News Coverage and the New Media Environment

As evident in the prior discussion of Weinergate, the new media environment

stands to play a particularly important role in political sex scandals, both in the enactment

of said scandal and dissemination of information. Twitter was especially important in the

Weinergate scandal, both in the photo-sending incident itself and its demonstration of online political discourse. Although scholars like Papacharissi (2002) and Goldberg (2011) argue that online participation in public deliberation is problematic at best, social media websites – especially Twitter – are increasingly a part of political engagement. Rainie, Smith, Schlozman, Brady, and Verba's (2012) research has shown that 34% of social media users have used these websites to share their own thoughts on various political and social issues, including reposting (or retweeting) information others originally shared. While social media users make up only 60% of American adults, the politically active users tend to be opinion leaders of sorts among social networks on and offline (Smith, 2013). The influence of these voices may help explain the media narrative surrounding Weiner's sex scandal, since Twitter played a significant role in the news media narrative regarding the scandal, including how to navigate social media use as a politician. As Ned Potter of ABC News (2011) explained, unless indicated otherwise, messages sent through Twitter are public, not private, something any savvy social media user should know. Yet, the very nature of social media does not encourage serious consideration for potential consequences: "One's so-called tweets are so quick, and so short, that they discourage complete spelling – much less thought about the consequences of sending something" (para. 7). Weinergate highlighted this contradiction between intention and action, prompting further self-reflection in traditional news media outlets, as well as among users on the site itself.

Twitter was only part of the story, however, with Weiner's indecent photo sparking the most interest among many journalists. Previous research has shown that traditional news sources, such as newspapers and broadcast news, report and frame

stories about political sex scandals (Puglisi & Snyder, 2011; Yioutas & Segvic, 2003). While some media critics decry the oversaturation of news coverage of scandals (Greenblatt, 2010), Bird (2003) explains the value of giving scholarly attention to these stories:

> No matter how often media scholars and columnists scold them for it, people like scandal. Scandal sells newspapers and tabloids, keeps people in front of their televisions, and provides endless opportunities for conversation. This is not a new phenomenon; the penny press, early tabloids, and "jazz journalism" thrived on scandal. (p. 21)

Both media producers and consumers give attention to scandal, and this longstanding attention has led to a dense cultural discourse with intertwining layers of meaning regarding scandalous behaviors. Adorno (1954) calls on critical scholars to study these dense meanings and their accompanying ideological assumptions, arguing that media discourse informs culture through the elucidation of behavioral norms and values. Fiske (2003) has explained that mediated conversations – in this case, those regarding scandals – help shape, reinforce, and contest dominant ideologies. Because news coverage of sex scandals has often relied on stereotypical representations of women (Gamson, 2001), this ideological negotiation plays an important role in shifting perceptions of gender roles and sexuality. As Johnson (1986-87) has argued, "culture is a site of social differences and struggles" (p. 39); in the case of political sex scandals, this has significant power implications for political officials and their partners. Even more noteworthy are the potential consequences non-heteronormative individuals face as political sex scandals outline acceptable social behaviors that may differ from one's private preferences.

Power and societal tolerance are important issues to consider with regard to new media scandals, prompting closer study of this phenomenon. If previous research shows that traditional media coverage frames scandals in a particular light, new media scandals suggest room for further exploration of news coverage. Two such questions are how to determine which online and digital sources constitute legitimate news media outlets and how the Internet itself shapes the discourse of scandals. The first is a topic for a much larger project on a different subject entirely, that question being how scholars might classify news outlets and the related question of how scholars should place value on various journalistic practices. Although it may be easy to discredit a scandal's validity by questioning the legitimacy of its origin point, it is difficult to argue that circulation of information in online news sources does not have an impact on the development of a political scandal.[7] For example, Entman (2012) explored the scandal involving George W. Bush falsifying his time spent in the National Guard, which quickly turned into a scandal focused on the journalistic practices of CBS News and Dan Rather. Entman suggested that this example not only demonstrates the news media's propensity to converge on one narrative frame of a story, but also the role newer online media plays in terms of shifting attention towards a particular narrative desired by the political communication system. Entman explained further:

> Intentionally or not, bloggers helped the Bush campaign deflect a dangerous scandal by implanting decoy issues. The blogger credited with making the first public allegation regarding the "fake" memo was actually a professional Republican activist, Atlanta attorney Harry MacDougald (Wallsten 2004).

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[7] The Clinton sex scandal was originally broken by the online news site *The Drudge Report*, which elevated the site's status from a gossip site to a news outlet.

Manipulative or ideologically blinded online populism can fail to serve the goals

of democratic accountability, as it appeared to in this instance … (pp. 126-127)

While Entman questioned the democratic function online media serves when covering

political scandals, there is no doubt that the new media environment – including a heavy

reliance on online sources – helps shape political scandals. Scholars should study online

sources such as social media to learn how discourses circulated online influence related

dominant cultural norms (e.g. how discourses regarding political sex scandals shape

sexuality and gender norms).

Social Media's Many Voices

While the debate over the utility of online sources continues in certain spheres of

political communication scholarship,[8] scholars such as Jenkins (2004) and Dahlgren

(2005) suggest that online interactions offer an opportunity to reshape political discourse

and include previously suppressed voices. The new media environment invites a variety

of perspectives, including those which may be marginalized. Edgerton (2010) defines

marginalization as the "process of becoming or being made marginal to centers of power,

social standing, or dominant discourses" (p. 556) saying that both groups or individuals

may become marginalized as a result of numerous circumstances such as being a member

of a historically oppressed social group or choosing to associate with particular

ideologies. For example, offending politicians are often marginalized from mainstream

political life as a result of engaging in scandalous behaviors. However, the discourse

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[8] For example, Entman (2012) suggests that the new media environment is problematic in terms of its journalistic notions, while Kushin and Yamamoto (2010) argue that social media has no positive impact on political engagement variables such as efficacy and involvement. However, Warner, Turner McGowen, and Hawthorne's (2012) work indicated that the use of social media websites could serve to increase levels of political information efficacy among users.

surrounding political sex scandals may also reach beyond a handful of disgraced

politicians to include their partners, wives, victims, and more.

In addition to the marginalization of people, ideas may be socially marginalized

because of their threatening nature towards dominant viewpoints. The marginalization of

beliefs is of particular importance to the current line of research, as political sex scandals

indirectly communicate the morality of various behaviors and lifestyles. Following this

line of thought, Bird (2003) noted that " … news stories of scandals … offer an entry

point to everyday discussion of morality, boundaries, and appropriate behavior" (p. 179).

Although traditional news coverage is still worth studying with regard to political

scandals, better understanding marginalized voices could be easier in a new media

environment. As Jenkins (2004) has argued, this is due in large part to the participatory

nature of media convergence. In particular, media convergence provides an explanation

for how individuals may use social media as a site of resistance to dominant ideologies.

Following Foucault's (1971) argument, the body has been historically shaped by various

discourses circulated through society, giving dominant beliefs significant power over

marginalized individuals. He further argued that "power's hold on sex is maintained

through language, or rather through the act of discourse that creates it" (Foucault, 1978,

p. 83). Therefore, the choice of language used to discuss relevant topics effectively

asserts power over sex, sexuality, and gender, specifically stifling the perspectives of

those who defy sexual morality and ethical norms.

In spite of the power wielded by dominant discourses, marginalized voices will

not always remain suppressed. de Certeau (2003) argued that disenfranchised groups

often engage in mundane behaviors[9] as a strategy to make their silenced voices heard, particularly through participation in culture. This is done because, as Fiske (2003) claimed, culture itself operates as a place where meaning is negotiated among various groups, including those who help define dominant values and beliefs. The new media environment also serves a similar function; while new media is similar to more traditional media products (like television), it additionally creates new space to struggle over meaning. Wang's (2007) research showed that the more Internet users voiced opinions through new media outlets, the more likely they are to have greater trust in the political process. Further, Warner, Turner McGowen, and Hawthorne's (2012) research on political scandals and social media demonstrated that Twitter and Facebook users relied on these social media websites to share perspectives about Rush Limbaugh's derogatory comments about Sandra Fluke. The existing research, therefore, suggests that new media, including social media, provide a unique opportunity to explore cultural narratives regarding political sex scandals.

Moving Forward

Given the fact that political sex scandals will most likely continue in the future, this line of research holds great possibility for better understanding cultural discourses of sex, sexuality, and gender roles. Discourse strongly influences the ways in which ideologies are formed, maintained, and contested, thus the dialogue surrounding various issues – both mundane and critical – shapes the ways in which individuals negotiate their own beliefs and behaviors. Dahlgren (2005) has said that "politics becomes not only an instrumental activity for achieving specific goals, but also an expressive activity, a way

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[9] Sending a tweet about political sex scandals is both a mundane and political act, in this instance.

of asserting, within the public sphere, group values, ideals, and belonging" (p. 155).

Political expression asserts beliefs on wide-ranging activities, including sexuality, and

can therefore influence the course of legislative actions. Therefore, communication

regarding political sex scandals wields power beyond dominant discourses into the

political arena, making the study of scandals and their surrounding discourses vitally

important to critical scholars.

Research into political sex scandals is further complicated by the changing nature

of interactions within a new media environment, since it involves accounting for

numerous voices and perspectives. Because new media allows people to voice

previously silenced perspectives, and because the lines have blurred between content

producers and consumers, new media have significantly altered the ways in which

meaning is negotiated. This research project attempts to look closely at this

phenomenon, discovering the cultural discourses surrounding political sex scandals and

critiquing the assumptions made therein. The next chapter will review the extant

literature surrounding the study of political sex scandals, as well as covering gender and

sexuality and new media theories. The third chapter will then develop a methodology for

the proposed study, detailing a case study for this project.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Anthony Weiner's sexting scandal was not the only recent political sex scandal to involve an element of secrecy and confusion. In mid-June of 2009, South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford failed to make contact with anyone in his family or security detail for almost a week. His unknown location prompted public statements decrying his behavior, including Lt. Gov. Andrew Bauer who said "I cannot take lightly that his staff has not had communication with him for more than four days, and that no one, including his own family, knows his whereabouts" (as quoted in Davenport, 2009, para. 9). After his six-day absence, Sanford returned to South Carolina and admitted he had actually been in Argentina visiting his mistress, Maria Bella Chapur. Unlike Weiner, who did eventually resign from his office, Sanford filled out the remainder of his term. His remaining time in office was not without controversy, as the South Carolina House of Representatives officially censured him for bringing "dishonor, disgrace, and shame" (Thrush, 2010, para. 4) upon himself, the state of South Carolina, and its citizens, according to the House resolution.

Sanford's private affairs became public interest due in large part to his failure to complete the duties the governorship required. Although Weiner's sexting scandal may seem inconsequential in comparison to Sanford's misdeeds, both scandals actually demonstrate a number of realities about the modern U.S. political landscape (not least of which is the potential for a politician to bounce back from negative public opinion).[10]

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[10] In 2013, Sanford successfully ran for the 1st Congressional District House seat in South Carolina, winning a competitive primary and a widely publicized general election against TV personality Stephen

The overwhelming amount of news coverage of both Weiner's and Sanford's private lives reflect a general interest in politicians' personal lives, as well as the ubiquitous media coverage that is often devoted to the political sphere. As Delli Carpini (2000) has argued, public access to information is vitally important to the democratic process, giving added importance to how news media disseminates knowledge to citizens.[11] Constructed primarily around online interactivity and a 24-hour news cycle, I argue the new media environment has significantly altered the ways in which information is shared among news media and the public.

Information dissemination is especially relevant within political discussions of morality issues, such as those involving sex, gender, and sexuality. The shape of public discourse that surrounds topics such as access to birth control, for example, arguably influences the course of action legislators take. In early 2012, political debate centered on whether women's contraceptives should be funded through the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, more commonly referred to as Obamacare. In response to calls for female perspectives on the topic, Sandra Fluke, a Georgetown University law student, testified at a Congressional hearing that contraceptives are a necessary part of women's healthcare. Fluke's testimony prompted backlash from conservative radio personality Rush Limbaugh, a staunch opponent of the measure. Limbaugh referred to Fluke as a "slut" who needed contraceptives so that she could have as much sex as she wanted. Limbaugh said, "[Fluke] wants to be paid to have sex. She's having so much sex she

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Colbert's sister, Elizabeth Colbert Busch. At one point in the race, Colbert Busch was criticized for deleting old posts on her social media account.

[11] This was particularly relevant to Sanford's scandal, since news media relied on the state's open access laws to obtain documents related to the governor's failure to uphold his duties while visiting his girlfriend in Argentina (see Smith & O'Connor, 2009, for more details).

can't afford contraception. She wants you and me and the taxpayers to pay her to have

sex" (as quoted in Kain, 2012).[12] Although the controversy began with Limbaugh's on-

air comments, it grew exponentially as social media users brought greater attention to the

scandal, eventually prompting news media to cover the scandal. Public outrage clearly

fueled this controversy, as *Forbes* contributor Erik Kain (2012) noted, saying that "the

outrage was felt organically across the country, and spread like wildfire over social media

networks like Twitter and Facebook until it was deafening" (para. 14). Online pressure

from social media users even went so far as to cause some of Limbaugh's advertisers to

pull their commercials from his show. As Warner, Turner McGowen, and Hawthorne

(2012) argued, this controversy not only illuminates a new way for citizens to participate

in our political dialogue, it offers an example of media interconnectedness that marries

politics, new media, and gender.

     Political sex scandals are one way that the U.S. political sphere intersects with

contemporary gender discourses, often times largely communicated through mediated

discussions in the news media and in social media outlets. This chapter will detail

specific research that has been previously conducted on political sex scandals, looking at

the rhetorical strategies commonly adopted by politicians who must face the aftermath of

scandalous behavior. Next, the chapter will detail framing theories employed to study

news coverage of political sex scandals, exploring the critical and empirical research

previously conducted. With this initial background defined, the chapter will next turn to

a discussion of theories that explain political implications of gender and sexuality

discourses. This exploration includes a specific look at gender constructions, dominant

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[12] It should be noted that Limbaugh clearly did not understand the way that women's contraceptives work, since quantity of sex does not directly correlate with quantity of birth control needed.

structural discourses, and the influence of power and ideologies in these conversations. Last, the chapter will explore theories that propose the potential revolutionary power of a new media environment, including media convergence and cascading activation. With these theories in mind, we can begin to question and explore the interaction among politics, sexuality, and new media with greater clarity.

A History of Research on Political Scandals

Scholars have long studied scandals in various contexts, including corruption scandals, sex scandals, presidential scandals, and celebrity scandals. Although each situation has its own defining characteristics, each shares three major elements. Marion (2010) defines these as "an action or event, publicity, and a public response" (p. 11), each of which have been studied academically. This section will describe some of the most common approaches to researching scandals, beginning with the long-used theory of apologia.

Apologia

As long as humans have erred, there have been apologies. These apologies have been traditionally studied through the lens of apologia, or a classic rhetorical theory that frames public atonement as a speech of self-defense at its core. Over time, the apologia genre has evolved as scandals and their subsequent apologies have changed, as Downey (1993) explains, saying that "what distinguishes the past from the present is not the existence of threat followed by defense, but the manifestation of the response, the situational conditions accompanying it, and its emergent meaning" (p. 58). So while specific content, context, and meanings have changed, the structure of apologies has not varied greatly over the course of history, allowing this genre to occupy its own form of

public address. Vartabedian (2003) defined apologia as formal acts of self-defense or self-justification that are conducted in a personalized manner (p. 38), agreeing with Downey (1993) that apologia occupies an important ritual in past and present cultures. Ware and Linkugel (1973) further clarify apologia as a defense of one's personal morals, saying "the questioning of a man's [sic] *moral nature, motives,* or *reputation* is qualitatively different from the challenging of his policies" (original emphasis, p. 274). Emphasis on morals invites a personal element into the evaluation and composition of self-defense messages. Political apologia, therefore, blurs the lines between public and private, making defense of one's character centrally important to successful apologia. This mix of public and private reflects the general public's interest in knowing more about the personal lives of politicians, as apparent in both the Weiner and Sanford sex scandals described in this chapter's introduction.

When identifying instances of apologia, consistent substance, style, and purpose provide a starting point. Vartabedian (2003) describes the typical form of apologia, saying that "first, a statement of the case at hand is given. Then, a refutation of the charges is advanced. Next, an explanation unfolds—particularly stressing the speaker's character. Finally, a conclusion is given bolstering the apologist's integrity" (p. 38). All of this is done in self-defense, with the speaker adhering to the structure previously described; yet, the purpose or reason for response varies by situation. Ware and Linkugel (1973) detailed four distinct strategies most commonly used in apologia, including denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence.[13] Denial strategies involve the contention of particular facts, objects or relationships of a scandal, including, as Ware and Linkugel

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[13] It should be noted that any combination of these strategies may be present in a given account of self-defense, so that often times apologia is built on a number of tactics and approaches.

say, "the denial of *intent*" (p. 276). Bolstering strategies, on the other hand, rely on positive reinforcement of facts, objects or relationships deemed favorable by the speaker's audience, such as a close feeling to the community.[14] Both differentiation and transcendence strategies attempt to transform some fact, object or relationship of the scandal and redefine it in such a way that positively alters audience perceptions. Differentiation occurs through a division of contextual properties, separating the speaker from certain aspects of the scandal, while transcendence occurs through the unification of previously unmarried ideas. Transcendence strategies may find the politician seeking to reframe the scandal in a positive light by bringing in a new contextual way to understand the situation. Politicians who rely on apologia must assess the contextual nature of the transgression and current political climate so they may adopt whichever strategies best suit the rhetorical exigencies inherent to their situation.

Since context plays a vital role in apologia strategies, Achter (2000) argues for the theory's refinement to account for how cultural values are directly relevant to an evaluation of successful (or unsuccessful) apologies. Similarly, Downey (1993) expanded on Ware and Linkugel's original strategies by arguing that apologia strategies evolved over time to include strategies that function as self-serving or self-deceiving, with political apologies often divorcing themselves from a focus on ethical perceptions and speaker credibility. Even though the theory may have advanced to gain a more nuanced understanding of apologia, the political climate in which these apologies occur is

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[14] Bolstering even goes so far as to serve as a sort of identification, one that may work to bridge the gap between the public personas of politicians and the respective private lives of the audiences to whom they address.

filled with its own moral ambiguity.[15] Morality is an important component of politics, as

Weisberg (2005) argues, making it worth studying in terms of successful and

unsuccessful apologia attempts.

Both successful and unsuccessful apologia attempts have been studied in the

aftermath of numerous political scandals: Richard Nixon's apology following the

Watergate scandal (Harrell, Ware, & Linkugel, 1975), Bill Clinton's defense following

the Monica Lewinsky scandal (Kramer & Olson, 2002), and Dick Cheney's apology after

accidentally shooting his hunting partner (Theye, 2008) have all been explored.

Rhetorical apologia research has resulted in several key findings over the years, as

Vartabedian (2003) explains, ranging from morality and ethical considerations to the

image and character constructed through apologia attempts.[16] Context influences a

politician's choice of apologia strategies, including perceived character traits that aid a

remorseful politician as he or she attempts to bolster his or her credibility. In their

research of Nixon's failed apologia following the Watergate scandal, Harrell, Ware, and

Linkugel (1975) argued that reinforcing personal legitimacy through one's actions and

behaviors could also strengthen public perceptions of political authority. Personal

legitimacy is based largely on the actions and behaviors one adopts while in office, and

therefore how a politician reacts in the face of a scandal speaks volumes about his or her

authority (and his or her potential re-electability). Character traits such as honesty and

loyalty are of great importance to evaluations of personal legitimacy, so much so that

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[15] Not only are politicians perceived as engaging in unethical behaviors, political sex scandals are inherently about immoral sexual acts (Dagnes, 2011).

[16] It should also be noted that image and character may also be negatively affected, or lost, through failed attempts at character repair through apologia. This is further discussed in the image repair discourse theory section that follows.

often the character assessment of a politician is also a measure of their authority and leadership skills. Apologia strategies can subsequently turn into rhetorical moves designed to do much more than simply recover one's image in light of a scandal, seeking ultimately to advance further political goals.[17] In order to gain a more nuanced understanding of apologia strategies with multiple goals, the use of image repair theory may shed further light on the successful self-defensestrategies speakers adopt to thrive after a scandal.

Image repair and other rhetorical strategies

Although apologia research has proven fruitful in terms of seeking to explain the success or failure of various political apologies, it does not explain all instances of communication that may happen after a scandal occurs. Therefore, use of Benoit's image repair theory[18] may also be helpful in terms of better understanding rhetorical behaviors after a political sex scandal. Image is a central concern for a politician's public relations, especially since political credibility is largely based on one's image. Harrell, Ware, and Linkugel (1975) explain these aspects:

> The peculiar mix of desired qualities in any particular authority figure provides a
> unique momentary blend of supportive sentiments from the audience. A
> rhetorical persona is a public symbol and therefore wields moral authority over
> those who receive it. This symbolic quality means that each constituent of the
> persona, having been present at its creation, identifies closely with and is
> responsible for it. This identification with the persona is the means by which

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[17] Downey (1993) refers to this as a dual motive apologia.
[18] This theory is also referred to as image restoration discourse, but I chose to use the term repair because I believe it more accurately reflects the immediate concerns following a politically damaging scandal.

individuals indirectly identify with and participate in the political system. (pp. 251-252)

Image is therefore of central importance to the maintenance of political power, as it enables candidates to appear relatable to constituents. In instances where a politician's image is challenged, several strategies may be adopted to positively reinforce his or her character, credibility, and/or image.

In order to use image repair theory to evaluate rhetorical strategies, Benoit (1997) provides two contextual situations that must be met first: 1) some public must hold an accused party responsible for committing some particular action; and 2) that action must also be deemed offensive to the same interested public. In these instances Benoit argues that guilt is largely based on perceptions, not factual basis of any behavior; in other words, the *perception* that an action is offensive and that the guilty party committed it are more important than the specific facts of the act. Image repair discourse tries to account for this, as well as the multiple audiences who have different interests and concerns, which subsequently influence the invention strategies adopted by speakers. Not only do perceptions of acceptable actions complicate image repair discourse, but varying degrees of accountability also make it especially difficult to adopt a rhetorical action that pleases everyone.[19] The situational complexity involved in speaking to a variety of audiences with varying perceptions of guilt has helped scholars define several repair categories, each with separate end goals:

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[19] This may explain why some politicians use misleading language when embroiled in a political sex scandal, such as when Bill Clinton made it clear that he did not have "sexual relations" with Monica Lewinsky, despite being engaged in an extramarital affair.

Denial and evasion of responsibility address the first component of persuasive

attack, rejecting or reducing the accused's responsibility for the act in question.

Reducing offensiveness and corrective action, the third and fourth broad category

of image restoration, concern the second component of persuasive attack:

reducing offensiveness of the act attributed to the accused. The last general

strategy, mortification, tries to restore an image by asking forgiveness. (Benoit,

1997, para. 8)

Based on any number of contextual factors, the speaker will select a variety of strategies

to combat perceived attacks against his or her image. Individuals and groups alike can

adopt these strategies, and therefore this theory has proven useful to atoning politicians as

well as public relations practitioners who advise companies on which tactics to use on a

case-by-case basis.

A particular problem with image repair discourse theory and many rhetorical

theories that are grounded in strict typologies or categories is that analyses that use these

theories have the potential to produce predetermined outcomes. If scholars seek to

understand apologia and image repair discourse through adherence to set criteria, then

identifying instances of this rhetoric may only serve to reinforce the categories previously

defined. However, Benoit (2000) responds to this criticism, saying that these strategies

are not always successful, and that lack of success can very well illuminate characteristics

about one's image. He further contends that scholars "should realize that image is

dynamic and almost certainly cannot be 'restored' to exactly its state prior to the

offensive act" (p. 42), calling on critics to consider a number of messages of self defense,

including ideographs and nonverbal behaviors. More importantly, choice of rhetorical

strategy may indirectly indicate the public's acceptance of certain behaviors over others.[20] The invitation to explore communication other than straightforward forms of public address broadens critical understanding of image repair and the ways in which politicians respond to scandals. Following this argument, the actions a politician takes online can convey just as much meaning as the public speech they may deliver in the midst of a sex scandal. Importantly, this also invites further assessments of why some offenses remain harder to forgive than others, such as infidelity.[21] In order to more fully understand the nature of differing political sex scandals, a complete picture of the communicative landscape must be obtained, including the ways in which social media messages are communicated in the midst of the scandal.

(Re)framing the Focus on Political Scandals

Image repair discourse theory is, in essence, a rhetorical classification scheme that emphasizes rhetorical steps taken to recover from damage to public perceptions and evaluations of one's image. In other words, political image repair involves attempts at *re-framing* a negative situation into a political advantage. Image repair is only one kind of rhetorical framing strategy, adopted from the perspective of the speaker or accused. However, rhetorical frames can be studied from a number of perspectives. Previous political sex scandal research relied on the frames used by damaged politicians, victims

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[20] For example, a politician engaged in sexual acts that are deemed inappropriate by only a small portion of his or her constituency may adopt avoidance as a self-defense strategy or attempt to reduce the offensiveness of the act. The choice of these strategies in place of mortification or exoneration, on the other hand, suggests a lack of concern from the politician than if he or she were accused of actions that offended the majority of the public.

[21] When Herman Cain, a candidate for the Republican Presidential nomination in 2012, was initially accused of sexual harassment, he faced no substantive political ramifications from this potentially scandalous news. However, weeks later after it was revealed he had engaged in an extramarital affair for many years, Cain was forced to pull out of the race due to a lack of support and internal organizational problems with his campaign staff.

of sexual harassment, and their respective supporters when studying the Clarence Thomas-Anita Hill sexual harassment accusations that coincided with Thomas' appointment to the Supreme Court. Robinson and Powell (1996) highlighted four competing frames that dominated news coverage of the hearings, including Thomas' frame of Hill that characterized her as "nobody's victim" (or ruthless opportunist), a habitual liar, a "scorned woman," and a "pawn" of liberal conspirators. In comparison, Hill's frame of Thomas focused on his sexist behaviors, complicating the relationship between Thomas and Hill's race and sex. Although these frames were analyzed by looking at media messages about the scandal, Robinson and Powell's research still focused on the frames Thomas and Hill used to communicate about each other. Rhetorical frames may shift based on the medium in which they are communicated, subsequently altering the ways in which discourse surrounding a particular scandal is framed. Given today's increasingly complex new media environment, a political sex scandal may be constructed in a completely different manner from one media context to the next. Therefore, pursuing a more media-centered framing theory can illuminate the influential nature of mediated discourse surrounding political sex scandals.

Media frames

While understanding framing theories from a rhetorical perspective is informative, media effects framing approaches also offer useful insight into contemporary political sex scandals. Communication scholars have historically studied the effects media exposure has on its audiences, especially with regard to the influence of political decisions. Framing is one such theory that helps shed light on the way media may shape political discourse, including that which surrounds political sex. Framing

theories traditionally explore the role the news media play with regard to influencing citizens about a variety of topics relevant to the democratic process, including U.S. anti-nuclear policy (Entman & Rojecki, 1993), the struggle between free speech rights and maintenance of public order (Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997), coverage of casualties ranging from World War I to the second Gulf War (Althaus et al., 2014), among others. In fact, framing remains one of the communication discipline's most frequently used media theories to study a wide variety of phenomena.

Framing's centrality is based on its wide applicability to numerous situations, as well as its assertion that the media does influence public perceptions on any number of issues to which they are exposed. The ubiquity of media exposure many individuals experience on a daily basis also gives added significance to the explanatory power of this theory. Scheufele (1999) explains that the cognitive process of framing occurs when individuals use a point of reference to understand messages to which they have been exposed. Therefore the ways in which material is presented may have a later effect on how that information is interpreted and used in subsequent cognitive associations. Framing can thus be defined as the mental process of selecting and interpreting messages, filtering out some ideas and emphasizing others. Often, the framing process also includes the communication of these sense-making frames to others, building a shared lens from which to perceive information.

Although this theory is heavily based in psychological processes, it is often used as a justification to better understand the content presented in mediated messages. Conceptually, this suggests that how the media reports information may suggest particular readings for audiences to adopt. In her analysis of news coverage of the Mark

Sanford scandal, the John Edwards affair,[22] and the Larry Craig scandal,[23] Sipes (2011)

identified two broad frames for all three scandals: a lying/denial frame that explored the

honesty of the politicians' statements following their respective scandals, and a political

future frame that explored the politicians' ability to continue in their respective political

careers. Applying framing theory in this analysis suggested that news coverage that

focused on one of these two themes provided a prevalent way for individuals to make

sense of these scandals and understand the reasons for engaging in the politicians'

problematic behavior.

　　　While framing does suggest particular interpretations of news stories, the process

of selecting and highlighting specific facts over others is a decision that must be made by

some party (i.e. a journalist or editor). Framing is not based on selection of information

alone, as Entman (2003) explains that "making connections among [these facts] so as to

promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution" (p. 417) is also important

when establishing a particular frame. While factual information may remain the same

when reported in various news outlets, the implications suggested allow room for

multiple interpretive frames. Several frames will often compete for dominance in any

particular news story, but typically one frame dominates the entire news story. However,

the presence of multiple frames leaves room for a wide variety of frame interpretations.

Yioutas and Segvic's (2003) analysis of media framing regarding the Clinton-Lewinsky

scandal identified themes present in only two news outlets, *The New York Times* and *The*

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[22] John Edwards was accused of having an affair with former campaign worker Rielle Hunter, which he denied for years before eventually admitting to the affair and of fathering Hunter's child all while his wife battled cancer.
[23] In 2007, Idaho senator Larry Craig was arrested for lewd conduct in a men's room, allegedly seeking to engage in sex with an undercover police officer in the Minneapolis-St. Paul airport.

Washington Post. Themes, or attributes used to make up a frame, included those that

mentioned the sex scandal or adultery, politically motivated actions related to a partisan

battle, the impact the scandal had on others, a comparison to past scandals, perjury or the

obstruction of justice, lying, and character and morality, among others. If the presence of

numerous attributes making up news frames were found in only a couple of media

outlets, the abundance of online sources suggests the presence of multiple competing

frames online.

It should be noted that multiple frames do not all receive the same amount of

attention, since it is common for one dominant frame to be most common among

mediated messages. The presence of multiple frames alongside one dominant frame is

particularly relevant to the study of political sex scandals in a new media environment.

Cultural discourses surrounding political sex scandals illuminate dominant norms

regarding acceptable sexual behavior. However, the new media environment presents an

opportunity for inclusion of multiple perspectives, meaning that competing frames have

the ability to challenge the dominant frame adopted by the majority of media outlets. For

example, Sipes's (2011) study found that many news outlets focused on the lying/denial

frame when covering the Sanford and Craig scandals. Sipes suggests that the use of this

frame stemmed from the disconnect between the politicians' actions and words, arguing

that "perhaps the most damning elements of political sex scandals is lying" (p. 108).

However, an alternate reading of the media frames regarding these two scandals may

imply that Sanford and Craig's evasion of truth stemmed from a desire to protect

themselves from judgment against their behaviors, leading them to the lesser of two

political evils: lying rather than be ostracized for engaging in their desired sexual activities.

As critics, we should question the news media's choice to use a lying/denial frame while questioning Sanford and Craig's dishonesty, problematizing the public and cultural disapproval of certain sexual acts in addition to these politician's attempt to avoid public judgment. As illustrated in this example, the presence of multiple frames does not negate the influence of one dominant frame, yet it invites a variety of interpretations that critique dominant norms (in this case those that involve sexuality). The multitude of frames present in the online discourse regarding Anthony Weiner's sex scandal makes it particularly important to conduct a content analysis to determine the kinds of frames used to discuss Weinergate. Even more helpful is understanding the dominant discourse used online, which may also play into the larger cultural narrative. The second and third parts of this project explore the dominant frames used to discuss Weinergate and their influence on cultural discourse surrounding sex, sexuality, and gender norms, respectively.

Understanding how the news media cover political sex scandals and how politicians respond to these incidents may shed light on what occurs, yet it does not provide a theoretical framework for what makes these scandals culturally significant. The next section of this chapter will cover theories that help explain the political implications of public discourses about gender, sex, and sexuality, especially in terms of power relations among marginalized and dominant voices.

Politics, Power, and Sexuality

When Bill Clinton faced inquiries into the sexual nature of his extramarital relationship with Monica Lewinsky during his impeachment trial, the personal details of the president's life became very public. Whether the public had a great interest in his sex life or not, media outlets continued to cover a story that would remain private for most individuals.[24] The intersection between personal and public led some to question which journalistic practices cross ethical and moral boundaries. Sabato, Stencel, and Lichter's (2000) book *Peepshow* seeks to answer this question by outlining two categories of private conduct: "behavior that generally *should* be covered by the press and behavior that in most cases *should not* [emphasis added]" (p. 3). These classifications are designed to provide guidelines for journalists and media outlets in terms of what is newsworthy and what is not, often times relying on moral judgments regarding newsworthy cases. However, the impact of what happens once these private details are disclosed remains a grey area. Biesecker (1992) argues that power is illuminated in places of discipline and deviance, which become apparent when particular behaviors or beliefs are challenged in public discourse. Clinton's sexuality was most certainly questioned among media outlets and political rivals, prompting a larger cultural discussion of acceptable sexual behaviors. This conversation extended to expectations of how politicians should behave and what is deemed offensive practices. In the following section, I discuss the politics of sex, specifically looking at social constructions of sex and gender and their dominant structural discourses. I then discuss how these constructions relate to power and cultural ideologies, which are often communicated in mediated forms.

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[24] Several discussions regarding Clinton's sex life took a more graphic turn to determine whether a certain stain on Lewinsky's dress was actually the president's semen or not.

Politics, sex, and power

Powerful individuals have long occupied the political realm, and, as Greenblatt (2010) suggests, powerful figures may be particularly drawn to engaging in scandalous sexual behaviors such as extramarital affairs or interoffice romances. Although the instances of political sex scandals tend to garner much media attention, they are not the only moments when sex and politics are culturally negotiated. In order to study the negotiation of sexual politics, it is important to take a closer look at the gendered and sexist nature of modern U.S. politics.

The professional field of politics is similar to several other careers in that it remains largely gendered in terms of employee expectations. Carroll and Fox (2006) explain that since the electoral field remains primarily dominated by male candidates, male strategists, male consultants, and male journalists, it may be difficult for women to receive equal representation within the political arena. Devitt (2002) further argues that if a majority of those reporting the news are male, it follows that the coverage of political candidates may skew towards voicing the concerns of men. A key feminist concern lies in women's struggles against the patriarchy, or male ruling class. Feminist theory argues that patriarchal power exists in all entities of the status quo, especially formal structures such as government and politics. Bryson (2003) argues that "the state is seen as an arena of conflict which may be systematically biased against women but within which important victories can nevertheless be won" (p. 196). As noted previously, males largely dominate the political process, which reinforces the patriarchal power present in that system.[25] Patriarchy coerces women to play according to the male rules in order to

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[25] Sexual politics are not limited to the political arena, as they bleed into many other areas of life.

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gain power, rules that Bryson describes as being "stacked against them [females] and which require them to assimilate to the male norms they are supposed to be attacking" (p. 196). Bryson continues her argument by suggesting that in order to resist patriarchal oppression, feminists must expose male biases while simultaneously emphasizing female knowledge. Male biases exist not only in terms of policy debates, political discourse, and media coverage, but also in cultural discourses often regarded as unrelated to politics.

Large cultural discourses may reinforce dominant values, such as those that reinforce the supremacy of male perspectives over female viewpoints. Foucault (1971) argues that the body has been historically shaped by various discourses used throughout society, giving dominant discourses significant power over marginalized individuals. One such cultural construction that exists is the preference often given to masculinity over femininity, as Fahey (2007) explains, which correspondingly preferences male/masculine figures in place of female/feminine figures.[26] Masculinity is both defined and valued in contrast to femininity, with masculine characteristics presented as superior to feminine traits. Although Cloud (1994) argues that power disparities such as these exist in an ever-shifting network of discourse, as dominance is constantly renegotiated, discursive formations are effectively where power *lives*. Cloud suggests that discursive formations not only play home to these cultural discourses that often delegitimize marginalized values, but they constitute reality itself. For example, when male sex equates to masculine gender, gendered discourses dictate proscribed behaviors for different sexes and in that way *become* reality. Therefore, the cultural discourse that

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[26] Although cultural discourses continue to designate male with masculine and female with feminine, significant research has previously demonstrated that sex and gender are not inherently assigned to one another. In fact, Monique Wittig's (1981) essay *One is Not Born a Woman* argues that sex is a cultural construct in the same manner that gender is.

seeks to overthrow patriarchy in a variety of cultural sites – including politics – not only

provide a means for negotiating this power but the reality of power's existence, too.

Before going further, it is important to clarify masculinity in terms of its

relationship to rhetorical choices, as well as the relative dominance it has in U.S. culture.

Connell (2010) explains that gender identity is effectively a social practice, which ties

gender expressions to other social structures and constructions of personal identity. The

social construction of a personal identity does not limit an individual to explicitly

embody ones' physical body; however, it does influence gender identity through the force

of socially agreed upon norms that are attached to different biological sexes. Stereotypes

of gender norms can be inherently negative, making it important to emphasize the fluid

nature of gender identity and expression as something separate from the physical body.

This allows for socially constructed identities and knowledge systems to incorporate and

subsume multiple kinds of gender construction. Following this argument, Connell (2010)

describes multiple masculinities, some dominant, some subordinate, others complicit in

supporting the dominant. However, this project will focus on hegemonic masculinity.

As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) define it:

> Hegemonic masculinity was distinguished from other masculinities, especially
>
> subordinated masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be
>
> normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was
>
> certainly normative. It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man,
>
> it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it
>
> ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men. (p. 832)

Hegemonic masculinity is therefore related to patriarchal power, as Nystrom (2002) argues. If masculinity – especially hegemonic masculinity – is deemed essential to a man's personal identity, it may hold more influence over masculinities exhibited among non-dominant men and other masculine groups. The significant role masculinity plays with regard to gender norms, then, should attract the attention of scholars who wish to understand cultural discourses of power.

Sites of cultural discourse are ever-changing positions, as Cloud (1994) and Fiske (2003) have previously argued. Because of this, the fluid and unstable nature of power leads those who hold power to seek to maintain power. Subsequently, dominant ideologies are continuously reinforced, causing particular discourses to be recirculated in various aspects of society and culture. The recirculation of ideology is inherent to various cultural sites and deserves close scholarly attention in order to better understand how and why particular discourses remain dominant.

Ideological circulation

As I discussed earlier, power can be viewed as a material discourse, one that shapes the physical world in which it inhabits. Power is often communicated through ideologies, which McGee (1980) defines as a reflection of state structures that exist to exert power over other belief systems. McGee suggests scholars seek out ideographs, which are the unit of analysis within larger ideologies. These ideographs accomplish several tasks: they exist to both unite and/or separate individuals, they clash with opposing ideographs, and they represent a particular moment in history, reflecting the beliefs and values of that time (McGee, 1980). In order to accomplish all this work, ideographs must be communicated across a wide audience, often in some sort of cultural

site. The cultural site serves as the location of struggle among competing ideologies, and it is here where dominant and subordinate groups struggle for power and legitimacy. de Certeau (2003) suggests that subordinated groups will often adopt specific tactics to resist dominant values. *La perruque* is one such tactic, defined as work for the individual that is disguised as work for the employer. Although de Certeau's notion tends to focus on the relations between employee and employer, it can apply to any inequitable power dynamic, such as those between dominant and marginalized voices.

Cultural discourses provide an opportunity for critical scholars to study the ways in which these power struggles occur, and several sites exist where meaning is created, negotiated, and renegotiated. The media is one such location where large structures seek to reproduce and reinforce dominant cultural messages, as Horkheimer and Adorno (2006) argue[27]. These critical scholars regard mass mediated messages as a way to obtain wide-spread consent of dominant ideologies, which are sustained through the compliance of a passive audience. Modern theories regarding audiences do not frame media consumption in such a submissive manner, but the notion of ideological circulation designed to obtain consent for a given ideology is a frequent component of media criticisms. Gitlin (2000) argued that commercial culture does not manufacture ideology on its own, but it does reproduce it through certain aspects of the media, including format, narrative formula, and slant, among others. The reproduction of ideology is present in what *is* communicated and what is *missing*, as Gitlin further explained, noting that "consent is managed by absorption as well as by exclusion" (p. 589). Allowing for a

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[27] It should be noted that Horkheimer and Adorno completed most of their writing in the aftermath of World War II, placing them in an era that would see them horrified by the media coverage of sex scandals such as Weinergate.

wider analysis of textual discourse is helpful, especially when taking a variety of reading positions into account.

Critical theorists would be quick to point out that in spite of any one dominant ideology that may be identified, several polysemic interpretations also exist alongside that core message. Hall (2006) suggested that in lieu of researching the intent of those who create mediated messages scholars should explore the multiple ways in which audiences read a text. Hall proposed a model to better study culturally circulated messages known as the encoding/decoding model, which outlined a four-step process through which mediated messages progressed. An important component of this process were the two moments of encoding and decoding, which are defined respectively as the moment when institutionalized meaning is imprinted on a text and the moment when the text is read in relation to one's individual practices and beliefs. Hall identified three different kinds of decoding positions: a dominant-hegemonic position that accepts the entirety of the imprinted message, a negotiated position that accepts some portions while rejecting others, and the oppositional position that rejects the entirety of the intended meaning. Although scholars have criticized Hall's work for his confusing terminology,[28] these reading positions are conceptually important to studying cultural negotiation of ideology because they provide an opportunity for resistance to dominant norms and beliefs. The next section of this chapter will argue that the new media environment serves a similar function, providing a new cultural site in which readings, meanings, and ideologies may be contested.

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[28] Encoding refers to a preferred reading, while decoding refers to a preferred meaning. In practice, the preferred meaning reflects the predominant way a text is read by any audience member.

New Media Theories in a New Media Environment

Over the last few decades, the so-called "new media" have become an increasingly important form of communication for individuals interested in politics and feminism. In particular, this can be seen when we look at how online media sources have been used in recent political campaigns. Pollard, Chesebro, and Studinski (2009) identified three different online functions in presidential campaigns: 1) operating as a distinct sociopolitical system that creates its own standards and rules for presidential campaigns; 2) tracking and predicting candidate success at various stages of a political campaign; and 3) creating ideological unity, involvement and commitment among candidate supporters, including financial support. Similarly, Dahlgren (2005) argues that online communication has facilitated a growth in grassroots movements, providing the opportunity for a new kind of political engagement. As the Internet and other forms of technology continue to advance, political communication scholars continue to decipher the role new media plays in the discussion of political issues, including political sex scandals. Although political sex scandals are not the only topic discussed in online contexts, they benefit from the application of two particular theories: media convergence and cascading activation.

Media convergence

Thanks in large part to the ever-changing technological advances of the 21st century, the general public may participate in the new media environment in ways previously unseen. Media convergence seeks to explain the ways in which technology and cultural development shape critical discourse about topics both mundane and significant. Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013) explain, saying:

The growth of networked communication, especially when coupled with the
practices of participatory culture, provides a range of new resources and facilitates
new interventions for a variety of groups who have long struggled to have their
voices heard. New platforms create openings for social, cultural, economic, legal,
and political change and opportunities for diversity and democratization for which
it is worth fighting.

Media convergence in this sense refers to the fact that the new media environment has
several moving parts and important players. Because fewer corporations have
consolidated ownership of traditional media companies, less sources of content exist than
previously, reducing the quantity and diversity of mediated messages. Coupled alongside
this phenomenon is the increase in specialized media outlets that tailor content to various
interest groups.[29] While it may be easy to suggest that fewer companies results in
monolithic behavior from the media, consolidated ownership is contrasted by the
increased access to diverse voices and perspectives.

Many political communication scholars believe that greater diversity of voices is
a positive transition for democratic practices such as public deliberation (see Delli
Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2007, and Sunstein, 2001, for more discussion of this notion).
Media convergence theory suggests a potential for greater inclusion of previously
unheard voices. The presence of greater perspectives is due in large part to the
interactive nature of the new media environment, as those who may have previously
consumed traditional media may now be active producers, too. Jenkins, Ford, and Green

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[29] For example, the existence of the Golf Channel caters to sports fans, similar to the popular network
ESPN. However, only avid golf followers may enjoy watching the content on the Golf Channel, while
those who have an interest in a wider variety of sports can find information about sports outside love of the
greens.

(2013) refer to this as a shift from distribution to circulation, making for a more participatory model of culture. In this model, individuals shape, share, and reframe media content in new ways, doing so "not as isolated individuals but within larger communities and networks, which allow them to spread content well beyond their immediate geographic proximity" (p. 2). With regard to political sex scandals, this means that the dalliance of the New York-based representative Weiner or the South Carolina-based governor Sanford yields great interest across the nation, unlimited by its geographical boundaries. Similarly, social media movements such as the #YesAllWomen movement following the aftermath of the mass shooting incident in Isla Vista, California bring together media users in various locations, uniting them in their shared experience of sexism and misogyny. Media convergence, then, shifts the balance of power from solely being in the hands of the producer and disperses it more equitably among consumers, as well.

An important part of the shift from distribution to circulation is how cultural discourses are shared and reinforced. Both dominant and alternative ideologies may be shared online, creating a new site of cultural resistance and struggle for power. If media participants are to be viewed as de Certeau (2003) described them – as fighters in a guerilla war – the new media environment is a battleground for the creation of meaning and legitimacy. Although media convergence has previously explored the creation of fan texts for entertainment programming, this can easily be applied to the creation of messages relevant to political sex scandals as well. Adopting this theoretical lens to the study of sex scandals may help challenge the patriarchal bias present in the political sphere, as Bryson (2003) has called on scholars to do. Media convergence does present

an optimistic outlook on the ability of individuals to participate in democracy through new media technologies, providing a form of resistance to dominant voices and power structures. However, scholars must still remain attentive to the dominant messages that are communicated through various media. Cascading activation is one useful theory that seeks to explain why particular messages are more widely circulated than others.

Cascading activation

While media convergence emphasizes the ways in which a new media environment influence the process of sharing cultural discourses, cascading activation offers an explanation for why some discourses are more resonant than others. Cascading activation is a refined theory of media framing, which Entman (2003) explains incorporates newer technologies. He proposes that certain frames of reference – or ways of understanding a particular issue – may spread more rapidly among a given culture due to their relevancy among various networks. In other words, certain frames may activate and spread more quickly than others because they are more culturally significant than their counterparts. For example, during the 2012 presidential election, Mitt Romney was widely criticized for his comments delivered to a private fundraising event in which he said that 47% of American voters were not interested in voting for him. His pragmatic strategy to ignore these voters who favored Obama and his more liberal policies could have been viewed in a few ways, the first being that Romney was adopting a strategy designed to maximize his campaign with no outward disdain or hatred towards the group of voters who were uninterested in supporting him. However, the much more widely accepted frame of this story was that Romney's comments illustrated his contempt for people who had no interest in his conservative policies, particularly suggesting they were

more likely to be lower or middle class individuals. To better understand why this second frame was more widely accepted, we can refer back to cascading activation. Ease and speed of spread is influenced by a number of factors, including the power of the frame, the motivation of the media, and the cultural convergence of that frame – in other words, how true a given frame is perceived to be. Because a large portion of American society already believed that Romney was uninterested in helping lower and middle class Americans, it was easy for them to believe his comments were negatively directed towards them. Frames that are widely used and accepted culturally have greater credibility, making it easier for them to occupy a dominant position over other frames and spread more rapidly throughout social networks. This is only further heightened by the quick spread among various social networks – including friends and family – which may be further facilitated by new media tools like social media.

Using cascading activation as a lens, Entman (2012) has proposed that scandals involving the presidency are particularly suited to the adoption of framing. The frames for these scandals can occupy four different dimensions: high degree of social cost, significant realm of transgression, high magnitude of publicity, and large political impact. Those that meet all four are most likely to cascade among various networks, yet this is a rare event: Entman points to Watergate as one such unique instance, saying most scandals only meet a few of these criteria. However, each presidential scandal occurs with "repeated, resonant scandal framing in the mainstream media. Such scandals arise only when the media make information on misconduct readily accessible and easily interpretable by the public as scandalous" (pp. 187-188). In other words, the media make the scandal. The repetitive nature of news media coverage of scandals makes it more

widely available to the public and easier to understand, giving it greater salience in the larger cultural narrative. This could be heightened even further in a new media environment that allows for more participatory content sharing than traditional media. Scandals themselves attract a lot of attention from both media and audiences alike. As Bird (2003) explains, scandals highlight questions of morality among an audience, influencing discourse surrounding appropriate behaviors. Entman (2012) says that a disturbing byproduct of attention to scandals is that they "can distract the public from serious, substantive issues by highlighting the easily grasped, sensational and salacious" (p. 194). Sex scandals may be salacious stories, but their influence on cultural discourses of sexuality *is* a serious issue to consider. It is important to understand how and why certain stories spread rapidly through a given network, so that media consumers and producers may take steps to participate in this cultural dialogue. This becomes central to those who may wish to resist dominant frames that reflect dominant ideologies, especially those related to gender, sex, and sexuality norms.

Proposing a New Approach to Political Sex Scandals

The research and theoretical perspectives discussed in this chapter shed light on my understanding of how political sex scandals have previously been studied and how they may be more usefully explored going forward. Therefore, the next chapter of my dissertation will detail the methods used to complete this project. My multi-methodological study incorporated a three-pronged approach that addresses the ideas developed in this chapter. First, I conducted a rhetorical analysis of the self-defense strategies Weiner employed during his sex scandal, identifying how he hoped to direct the public discourse surrounding his online relationships. Second, I sought to better

understand the content of our cultural conversations about scandals, exploring the cultural discourses surrounding one particular political sex scandal. This discourse focused specifically on the messages communicated via social media, since this online source provides an opportunity for a wide-range of voices to participate in the conversation. After obtaining an idea of *what* has been said about my case study, I last critically analyzed the discourse surrounding cultural norms of sex, gender, and sexuality, critiquing the problematic ways in which scandals marginalized certain groups of people and certain sexual behaviors. Chapter three provides further detail on the methodologies of this study, as well as the guiding research questions.

Chapter 3: Methodologies

As the Anthony Weiner sexting scandal played out publicly through American media outlets, Weiner's wife, Huma Abedin, befell the problem many wives of disgraced politicians face: how to publicly cope with a private problem. Abedin, a long-time aide to Hillary Clinton, became a focal point for both Weiner's supporters and his opponents. Republican Eric Cantor, then-House majority leader, referred to Abedin while calling for Weiner to admit to his inappropriate online communications, saying, "Think about his wife. I mean, I'm really saddened for his wife" (Epstein, 2011, para. 5). Expressing a similar sentiment, then-House minority leader Nancy Pelosi, a Democrat like Weiner, issued a statement, saying, "I am deeply disappointed and saddened about this situation; for Anthony's wife, Huma, his family, his staff and his constituents" (Memoli, 2011, para. 2). Even Weiner himself referred to Abedin when acknowledging his wrongdoing, saying, "I am deeply sorry for the pain this has caused my wife Huma and our family" (Weiner, 2011, para. 4). While Abedin was most likely coping with the realization of her husband's infidelities privately, her position as Weiner's spouse put her in the complicated position of being a public object used in several political statements.

The willingness of several politicians to include Abedin as part of their political statements, only in relationship to her husband's indiscretions, illustrates how cultural standards of acceptable sexual behaviors often reach beyond the individual who has engaged in sexual misdeeds. The shadow cast by one's transgressions may plague the friends, family, and acquaintances associated with the offender. However, familial shame has more to do with cultural norms and expectations rather than some sort of real

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guilt by association, demonstrating that the circulation and reinforcement of sexual standards (and what constitutes a transgression against those standards) has the power to taint those indirectly involved in political sex scandals. Although Abedin was arguably a victim of Weiner's indiscretions, she also became part of a disenfranchised group: cuckold wives. And while the women Weiner partnered with online may have been directly involved in the affair, they also became marginalized because of their role in the sex scandal as "the other women." Sexual and relational norms, such as marital fidelity, infiltrate public and private discourse, including conversations regarding political sex scandals. The details involving Weiner's sexting scandal make this a compelling case study of these cultural discourses, which may shed light on the ways in which cultural norms regarding sex, sexuality, and gender roles are communicated in public discourse.

The remainder of this chapter will explain the methods of analysis I used in this project, starting first with a rhetorical analysis of Weiner's various responses to his involvement in Weinergate. Following this description of the first portion of the study, I will then explain the content analytic method I employed when analyzing public discourse surrounding Weiner's scandal as it occurred in real time along with Weiner's use of various rhetorical strategies. In addition to identifying the dominant frames adopted by users of the social media website Twitter, I also sought to better understand how social media was used in general to communicate about the sex scandal. The third element of this study critically analyzed the body of cultural discourse discovered from the first two parts of the study, looking specifically at how sex, sexuality, and gender norms were discussed. Although any individual method described below would be an adequate way to study political sex scandals, I chose to adopt a multi-methods approach

to this project for two reasons: 1) coupling a rhetorical analysis with a content analysis

provides for an exploration of how public comments may be influenced by rhetorical

strategies, and 2) political sex scandals that occur within a new media environment is a

relatively new phenomenon and should be studied as an exploratory research project.

Before I move to a more detailed description of my methods of analysis, I will first detail

the case study of Weinergate, including a timeline of key events.

Weinergate: A Timeline

Weinergate initially began on May 27, 2011 when Anthony Weiner sent a lewd

picture of himself to one of his Twitter followers, Gennette Cordova, a 21-year-old

college student from Washington state. This picture was captured by Dan Wolfe, a man

who followed Weiner on Twitter and frequently posted about the Congressman. Wolfe

went on to send the picture to conservative commentator Andrew Breitbart, who posted it

to his website. Over the next few days, media outlets slowly began to cover the story,

asking Weiner to comment on the picture. Weiner's initial response was denial, saying

that his account had been hacked and the photo was indeed sent from his account but not

on his behalf. In the interviews that initially followed the release of the photo, Weiner

used vague language when discussing the photo. In an interview with MSNBC on June

1, he said of the photo, "I'm going to say that I can't say with certitude it's me or it's not"

(as quoted in Epstein, 2011, para. 10), a phrase he used frequently during the beginning

of June when asked if the picture was of him or not. Weiner's vague response and denial,

as well as his attempt to divert attention to other matters eventually led to calls for further

clarification from the representative. Although his vague response was intended as a

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denial, his evasion of direct answers to the questions posed to him eventually led to further investigation from the media.

Media reports regarding Weinergate did not die down as Weiner hoped, but rather more information continued to surface regarding his online behavior. On June 6, Breitbart released a picture of Weiner posing shirtless that was supposedly obtained from a second woman.[30] This photo had also been sent online, as well as several other photos of himself, according to the woman. The inescapable fact of Weiner's photos led to his public admission of guilt. Weiner said he wanted to apologize and take "full responsibility" for his actions after allowing the media to cover the story for about 10 days. In the process of admitting to sending the first photo that began the scandal, Weiner also admitted to engaging in other exchanges online with women who were not his wife: "I have exchanged messages and photos of an explicit nature with about six women over the last three years. For the most part, these relation … communications took place before my marriage, though some have sadly took place after" (Weiner, 2011). Weiner focused on mentioning his family, specifically singling out his wife, Huma Abedin, who had also been the focus of many media reports of concern.

Despite Weiner's admission to the sexual messages he sent online, he did not resign on June 6 during his press conference. His failure to resign prolonged the scandal for several more days, which slowly led to Republican and Democrat leaders alike to call for Weiner's resignation. Instead of stepping down from office, Weiner chose to request a leave of absence from Congress in order to enter a rehabilitation facility. Days after

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[30] In addition to the second damning photo, sexually explicit conversations between Weiner and young women he met online were also published by Radar Online and Star. Although these media outlets may not be seen as highly credible sources, the release of further information regarding Weiner's indiscretions may have further influenced Weiner's decision to publicly admit to the affair.

Weiner's press conference, news outlets also reported that Abedin was pregnant with her and Weiner's first child, further problematizing the representative's infidelity. While Weiner received treatment, Congressional leaders took a greater interest in the scandal as more pictures of Weiner surfaced, some seemingly taken in the private gym used only by members of the U.S. House of Representatives. It was only days later that Weiner did resign from office, notably the day after a former porn actress released information indicating that she and Weiner had an online relationship. On June 16, 2011, 20 days after the original photo was leaked, Weiner announced his resignation from Congress thus effectively ending the Weinergate controversy.[31]

As Allison Dagnes (2011) has noted, "the technological developments of the media now allow [the public] to see every facet of our politicians," in some instances reinforcing a pre-existing negative perception of elected officials. Whether Weiner's scandal demonstrates a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy regarding the scandalous actions of politicians is difficult to prove; however, Weiner's choice of actions following the initial discovery of his lewd picture clearly helped shape the course of this scandal (although maybe not in the way the representative had hoped). Speaker intent is arguably impossible to pinpoint, but an important line of inquiry to examine regarding the Weinergate scandal lies in relation to Weiner's choice of self-defense strategies throughout the duration of the scandal. The next section of this chapter will detail a rhetorical analysis to better identify and understand the self-defense strategies Weiner employed through the lifecycle of his political sex scandal.

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[31] Although media reports would slowly continue covering the scandal, no further developments occurred until two years later when Weiner ran for the office of New York City mayor.

Rhetorical Criticism

Political communication scholars have historically used rhetorical theories as a way to understand the strategies employed by public speakers. While some rhetorical scholars have mistakenly attempted to conduct rhetorical analyses as a way to understand the effect speech has on an audience, Zarefsky (2008) points out that rhetorical criticism often presents interpretations of rhetorical acts that "could be seen as *invitations* for an audience to respond in a particular way, and that the critic is not making a statement about *actual* causes or effects" (p. 637).[32] However, this does not diminish the importance of understanding particular rhetorical acts. Weiner's particular exigencies may have been unique to his speaking situation at the time (given that this was the first time social media played a significant role in the development of a political sex scandal), but there are some similarities shared among other rhetorical acts in the past and following the Weiner incident. For example, Weiner's choice to deny allegations of his inappropriate sexual relationship may seem familiar to Bill Clinton's initial decision to deny his relationship with Monica Lewinsky while serving as president of the United States. Thus, while each specific rhetorical act may be unique, it does not remove the rhetorical critic's ability to generalize certain aspects from case to case (Zarefsky, 2008).

To better understand Weiner's choice of self-defense strategies, I employed a rhetorical analysis of Weiner's public statements from the beginning of his political sex scandal to the day he announced his resignation from office. My primary texts for analysis were news reports of Weiner's comments regarding his sexual relationships and

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[32] This distinction is important to this particular study, especially because the following section of this chapter describes a quantitative content analysis whose results will be used to better understand the public's response to Weiner's strategies.

online communications. Although my analysis in this portion of the study focused on

Weiner's denial and defense, I relied on transcripts of his public statements that I

obtained from a variety of media sources.[33] Together, these simulated a timeline of

events in the unfolding scandal, of which I primarily focused on four separate dates: 1)

May 28, 2011, the day after the initial photo of Weiner surfaced online; 2) June 1, 2011,

representing the most active day of Weiner's media interviews; 3) June 6, 2011,

specifically Weiner's public admission of guilt for sending inappropriate pictures to

women who were not his wife; and 4) June 16, 2011, specifically Weiner's statement of

resignation from his Congressional seat. These four dates are important because they

mark key changes in Weiner's different approaches adopted in light of his sex scandal, as

well as offering a somewhat longitudinal look at the rhetorical choices Weiner made to

attempt to repair his image.

Using a traditional rhetorical analysis, chapter four of this dissertation identifies

and analyzes the variety of self-defense strategies Weiner employed throughout the

various stages of his sexting scandal. After a cursory examination of Weiner's

statements, apologia was deemed a useful theoretical perspective to better understand the

disgraced politician's rhetorical choices. Weiner engaged in a series of traditional self-

defense strategies as he appeared on several news media programs after news broke that

the picture of his crotch had been sent online, offering various explanations for the

picture. Additionally, following the overwhelming evidence indicating his responsibility

in this scandal, Weiner also made a public admission of guilt. Last, amidst mounting

pressure to step down from office, Weiner eventually succumbed to the requests for his

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[33] These sources will be described in greater detail in chapter four of the dissertation.

resignation after days of defiance. Each point in Weiner's evolving response is telling, communicating much about acceptable sexuality and sexual behavior. Thus, it is important to examine each point in the lifecycle of Weinergate.

In order to identify specific apologia strategies, I reviewed Weiner's statements from each of the four dates listed above. After an initial examination to familiarize myself with the rhetorical acts, I then repeatedly read and reflected on Weiner's statements, taking detailed notes on significant phrases, symbolic assertions, and other striking components of his rhetoric. From these notes I then identified distinct apologia strategies, which shed light on the rhetorical exigencies present in this particular situation and at each point in time while drawing comparisons to other political sex scandals. Therefore, the guiding research questions used in chapter four are: 1) Which apologia strategies did Weiner use in self-defense following the beginning of his political sex scandal? and 2) How did these strategies change throughout the course of the scandal? Chapter four provides further details regarding the methods and results used to conduct this rhetorical analysis.

Content Analysis

Although political communication scholars have traditionally relied on rhetorical analysis to understand public statements from politicians in light of scandalous behaviors, content analysis is especially suited to systematically and objectively examine the large-scaled data found in online public discourse. The analysis revealed in the first part of this study helped inform the second section of analysis, particularly in how Weiner's choices of rhetorical strategies were reflected in the overall framing of public discourse surrounding this political sex scandal. Krippendorff (2004) has described content

analysis as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (p. 18). Inherent in this description is the notion that content analysis produces results that are reliable, replicable, valid, and determined from a specific text. Content itself emerges through the research process of a scholar analyzing selected texts, as Krippendorff claims, which helps identify what is being said within any given message. Because content analysis is particularly suited to work with large volumes of data, it is an appropriate tool of analysis for the second part of this dissertation project, which explored public responses to Weiner's sex scandal as communicated via the social media website Twitter.

Weinergate itself is closely tied to Twitter, and, as Rainie, Smith, Schlozman, Brady, and Verba (2012) have shown, more than a third of social media users have used such sites to share their opinions and beliefs regarding political and social issues. These two reasons alone make it important to better understand how the public engaged the topic of Weiner's sex scandal through Twitter. Content analysis is an appropriate method of analysis for online conversations because it can examine, describe, and assess messages, in this case those regarding sex, scandal, and political rhetoric. While the first portion of this project identified Weiner's choice of rhetorical messages, the second revealed the ways in which the Weinergate scandal was framed in the public discourse.

Sample

To obtain an understanding of online discourse regarding Weiner's sex scandal, an appropriate and relevant data set was selected. The research population for this portion of the study included posts (a.k.a. tweets) from Twitter users that discussed the Weiner sexting scandal in 2011. In order to collect this historical data from 2011, I

utilized the data service TweetReach, a company that archives and analyzes tweets

containing certain content within a specific date range.[34] Tweets were collected within a

date range that marks the beginning and end of the scandal, from May 28, 2011 (the day

after Weiner sent the picture of his crotch to Cordova, when major media outlets begin

covering the story) to June 16, 2011 (the day Weiner resigns from office). Every tweet

sent on these days could have potentially contributed to the larger cultural narrative

regarding political sex scandals; however, I limited the analysis of tweets to only those

that specifically mention Anthony Weiner or the scandal, refining the population to a

more meaningful data set. Because social media topics range widely and vary greatly on

any given day, the population was narrowed by including tweets that contain one or more

of the following search terms: "#weiner," "#weinergate," and "Anthony Weiner."   While

some of these search terms included tweets that were unrelated to the sexting scandal,

these tweets were not included in the final data set.[35] (For example, if someone chose to

tweet about enjoying a hot dog "weiner," this would be captured in my sample; however,

it does not directly relate to the sexting scandal and was not analyzed for this project.)

Because the number of tweets present within my population was significantly

large, falling into the range of tens of thousands of tweets per day, I further refined and

narrowed my population through a probability sampling procedure. My sampling unit

was defined after conducting a goodness-of-fit test run through the G*Power statistical

analysis program. To determine this number, I ran an initial test on G*Power to

determine the sample size for the content analysis, predicting an a priori small effects size

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[34] For more information about TweetReach's services, visit https://tweetreach.com.
[35] Irrelevant tweets were filtered at the coding level, as coders were asked to determine whether the tweet discussed the Weiner sex scandal or not.

of .3. Using a standard alpha coefficient of .05, a standard power size of .80, and the df

score of 14, the initial results indicated my total sample size should be 204. Although

this number may meet the minimum requirements for a goodness-of-fit test, I compiled a

much larger sample in order to decrease the potential for error in the sample. Ultimately,

my sampling unit consisted of 5% of the total population, including 5% of tweets taken

from each day of the scandal.

As a reflection of the timeline defined previously in this chapter, the data set was

organized according to the four distinct days that were significant in the lifecycle of the

Weiner sex scandal: May 28, 2011, June 1, 2011, June 6, 2011, and June 16, 2011. Each

of these dates marked a change in Weiner's public responses to the sex scandal.

Therefore, isolating these dates allowed for a comparative analysis of the online

discourse as it reflected Weiner's various strategies. Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (2005) note

that stratified random sampling may be best for obtaining data that shows changes over

time. After conducting a stratified random sample, I randomly selected every 20th tweet

from the total group of tweets provided by TweetReach on the four dates mentioned

above, bringing the total sample size to 7,342 units of analysis. Chapter five provides

further details regarding the selection of a sampling unit.

As I alluded previously, the unit of analysis selected for this project is the

individual tweet within the overall sample of tweets. Studying individual tweets allows

for a close examination of messages that are part of a larger conversation, and in this case

public discourse regarding Weiner's sex scandal. The individual tweet message as a unit

of analysis is the most complete unit available among Twitter messages and seems the

most appropriate and useful segment of discourse to analyze when seeking to understand

the specific frame of an individual online message.[36] As framing theory suggests, it is possible for multiple frames to be present in any one message (although one usually carries more significance than others), suggesting the exploration of various frames regarding Weiner's sex scandal is necessary. Conducting a systematic content analysis of this unit of analysis – individual tweets – shed light on the varied as well as dominant frames the public used when discussing Weiner's sex scandal.

Coder training

   To conduct the content analysis, this project recruited and trained three coders to complete the analysis, one of which was the lead researcher. The coders were graduate students who were already familiar with the conceptual notion of a framing analysis, aiding in the training process. Coders were trained to identify the absence or presence of the variables related to this study by becoming familiar with the codebook and coding procedures (see Appendix A).

   The coding process consisted of familiarizing coders with the codebook and coding procedures. Coders were given the coding documents in advance of our first meeting together. During the first meeting, the lead researcher verbally explained the coding procedure to follow, along with the various categories and variables included in this study. After the initial meeting to familiarize the coders with the process, the group met again to jointly code a sample of units to practice the coding procedures. The lead researcher guided coders to help them better understand the definitions of the variables and how to recognize them within units of analysis. When the coders felt comfortable with the entire process, each coder individually coded a subset of the population to

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[36] Analyzing at the sentence or word level, especially in very short – 140 character – comments, would be less helpful in terms of determining frames utilized to discuss the sex scandal.

determine inter-coder reliability. Cohen's *kappa*[37] was used to calculate inter-coder

reliability, seeking to reach a reliability score between .80 and .90 for each variable in

this project. Inter-coder reliability was conducted on a random sample[38] of the data set

by three coders, with all categories reported reaching an acceptable reliability score (see

chapter five for details). Coders then each individually coded approximately one-third of

the remaining sample. Results were analyzed using the SPSS program for statistical

computation and presented in further detail in chapter five.

Categories and research questions

Previous research has explored the frames used by the news media when covering

political sex scandals, most notably those that studied the Bill Clinton-Monica Lewinsky

sex scandal. Yioutas and Segvic (2003) found the presence of several frames within

news coverage of the Clinton scandal, including the frames described as sex

scandal/adultery, politically motivated/partisan battle, impact on others, comparison to

past scandals, and character/morality. However, as media convergence theory suggests,

the changing news media environment – complete with independent journalists reporting

information online – suggests that multiple frames may be present in a new media

environment. The frames identified in previous research studying news media presents a

point of entry for the current analysis of social media messages. Frames are defined for

this project as the individual interpretation or inference that is applied to a message

within the unit of analysis, in this case the individual tweet. Frames may by a central

idea or frequently discussed concept related to the Weiner sex scandal, which will be

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[37] Although Krippendorff's *alpha* (2004) is a more conservative reliability test, the predicted large size of
the data set for this project makes Cohen's *kappa* an appropriate reliability measurement.
[38] This sample size met and exceeded the minimum required size determined by Riffe, Lacy, and Fico's
(2005) equation for selecting an appropriate size.

isolated into one of several framing categories derived from a preliminary analysis of comments posted to a news story discussing the Weiner sex scandal.

In order to develop the categories used in this project, I studied dozens of different online comments posted to a Politico news story regarding the Weiner sex scandal. Beginning with several categories from the pre-existing research of Yioutas and Segvic (2003) and Sipes (2011), I performed a grounded and thematic qualitative analysis of the online comments to test the face validity of their categories. Based on the content of the comments I analyzed, I continuously revised and refined the categories used in this project, altering categories to reflect the online messages about Weiner's sex scandal. My analysis led to the development of eight different categories, which I will detail next.

Lying. As Sipes' (2011) research demonstrated, several news media outlets focused on the facts regarding whether politicians involved in political sex scandals had been caught lying to constituents and/or the broader public. The lying frame refers to this in addition to factual information presented that proves whether or not the politician in question, in this case Weiner, was or has been lying about his involvement in the scandal. Discourse regarding whether lying has the potential to impact future political actions would not fall within this category, but within the political work category detailed below.

Politics and work. This frame refers to whether the politician would be able to continue holding office or needs to resign. Because a large portion of the timeline regarding Weinergate revolved around calls for the representative's resignation, this frame will include individual calls for Weiner to resign as well as comments from prominent political figures also asking Weiner to step down from office. In addition to the question of Weiner's resignation, this frame will also refer to Congress's ability to

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work while this scandal is ongoing. Because the sex scandal occurred at a time when legislators were working to settle on a national budget, any mention that politicians should "get back to work" would be included in this frame.

Sex and Women. As Yioutas and Segvic (2003) found in their analysis of news media coverage of the Clinton sex scandal, discussions of sex or sexual behavior are common when discussing a political sex scandal. This frame refers to any discussion of the Weiner scandal in terms of sexual aspects, including the sexual relationship(s) between Weiner and his partner(s). This frame will also include any discussion of the women involved in this scandal. Mentions of adultery, how Weiner had cheated on his wife, Abedin, the impact the scandal has on Abedin or Weiner's other partners, and any discussion of the scandal in terms of the "women" of the scandal would fall into this category. For example, discussion of Abedin's relationship to Hillary Rodham Clinton would also fall into this category if comparisons are made between the women's public role as being married to a man involved in a political sex scandal.

Political motivations. Political sex scandals are different from other sex scandals because discussions of the individuals involved may seep into governmental affairs. For example, in the initial stages of the Weinergate scandal, Weiner suggested his political opponents manufactured the scandal to distract from the work he was doing in Congress. Therefore, this frame refers to any discussion of these claims, as well as other calls that the scandal was a moment for Republicans and Democrats to fight one another. Any reference to the scandal as an attempt by Weiner's opponents to attack him would fall into this category, as well as a discussion of calls for his resignation being based solely on party affiliation. Because Weiner was a Democrat, political motivations frames could

also include references to previous scandals committed by Republicans with regards to the political fallout (or lack thereof) faced.

Comparison to past scandals. Yioutas and Segvic (2003) found that news media commonly compared current political sex scandals to those that had occurred in the past. Thus, this frame refers to any comparison between Weiner's sex scandal and a previous sex scandal, such as the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal or the Mark Sanford scandal. Although other political scandals may be discussed, this frame only refers to sex scandals involving politicians.

Character and morality. This frame includes discussions of the politician's ethics and personal character, such as discourse involving whether his or her actions were wrong. In this case, character and morality frames may commonly refer to the indecency of Weiner's sexual relationships, but they may also refer to whether or not he should have denied the scandal in the beginning or openly admitted his actions. This frame does not focus on any potential legal ramifications of Weiner's actions (such as those that may involve online communication with minors) unless explicitly discussing the ethical questions surrounding the sex scandal. Discussion of character and moral judgments should be positive or negative in tone, unlike the next category.

Neutral or uninterested. Although some discourse may pass judgment on a politician's personal actions, other messages may simply state the lack of concern over the scandalous behavior. Any time someone communicates a neutral position on Weiner's infidelity, it would be categorized in this frame. This frame also captures statements that indicate his sexual behaviors are "no big deal" or that they have nothing to do with his ability to be an effective legislator. Comments that indicate a lack of

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interest in the scandal as a news story would not be classified here, but fall into the next category.

Media coverage. Any mention of the news media coverage of a political sex scandal would fit into this category. Mentions or discussions of how the news media covers the Weiner sex scandal or whether they should cover the scandal further would fall into this frame. This frame may also include calls for the media to cover other topics deemed to be important, such as budgetary talks in Congress.

Based on the development of the categories discussed here, the first research question for this part of the project is:

RQ1: What are the dominant frames used on Twitter to discuss Weiner's sex scandal?

The wide variety of frames that may be present within online discourse of Weiner's sex scandal indicates the broad scope of discourse surrounding political sex scandals. Particularly important to the understanding of how online discourse responds to evolving scandals lies in how these frames change over the course of the scandal. Therefore, time plays an important role in examining the public discourse surrounding Weinergate. In order to look at how public discourse shifted over the course of the Weiner sex scandal, the four dates isolated in the timeline as significant moments in the scandal will be assessed. Analyzing the data according to the four distinct time periods will help answer the next research question posed in this section of the study:

RQ2: How if at all did the dominant frames used on Twitter to discuss Weiner's sex scandal change from May 28, 2011 to June 16, 2011?

Social media played a significant role in the development of Weiner's sex scandal, particularly through his use of Twitter to send sexual pictures. However, social media arguably also influenced the public discourse surrounding the scandal as it evolved. Scholars have noted that technological advances (such as those available online) now shape critical discourse surrounding political topics (Dagnes, 2011; Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013). New voices can participate in democratic discourse due in large part to the resources available online, creating opportunities for diversity in terms of opinions and forms of communication. As Warner, Turner McGowen, and Hawthorne's (2012) research demonstrated, there are several ways social media users may use these websites to share information about scandals. However, more information is needed to understand how the technology specific to social media sites (such as image sharing or embedding links into short messages) is used when discussing political sex scandals, which leads to the next research question in this part of the project:

RQ3: How frequently did social media users add images, audio files, videos, or links to their tweets discussing Weiner's sex scandal?

Last, social media presents an opportunity for networked groups to communicate with one another rapidly online. As Entman (2003) notes, new technologies (such as social media websites) may stimulate the quick and easy dissemination of certain messages among a particular network. While cascading activation often refers to the ways messages spread between different forms of communication (i.e. from news media to political elites and back), cascading activation may also apply to the way online discourse stimulates relevant frames of reference among a wide variety of social networks. One way to explore this phenomenon in the current study is to see if social

media users are directing their comments to other individuals specifically, which

indicates the intentional communication of a message to another individual. Therefore,

examining how many tweets were directed to other users (through the use of an "@" sign

followed immediately by a Twitter user name) may shed light on how the online dialogue

occurred, suggesting how cascading activation may work in a social media environment.

The last research question for this part of the study seeks to explore this phenomenon by

asking:

RQ4: How frequently did social media users direct their comments to other users?

Critical Analysis

Although content analysis can systematically and objectively evaluate the content

of public discourse, it is unable to provide close examination and critique of particular

messages. Therefore, the third part of this project is a critical analysis of the discourse

surrounding the Weiner sex scandal, including messages collected in the first and second

parts of this study. This analysis explored the implications regarding how political sex

scandals have shaped our cultural notions of sex, sexuality, and gender roles, drawing on

the critical theories discussed in chapter two. In particular, I explored the way that

marginalized groups were silenced (or elevated) in public discussions of political sex

scandals.

As noted in chapter two, ideological circulation plays an important role in the

reinforcement and circulation of cultural values regarding sex, sexuality, and gender

roles. Dominant ideologies regarding these cultural values (such as the notion that

romantic commitment involves a monogamous relationship between two adults) often

leave little room for alternative perspectives, effectively marginalizing these perspectives

as immoral or wrong. While this may seem benign, the practice of ideological circulation can be quite physically damaging to these marginalized groups. As Cloud (1994) argues, power exists at the level of discourse, with discursive structures creating physical reality. In terms of political sex scandals, great significance should be placed on the rhetoric and framing of the issues related to the scandal, notably sex, sexuality, and gender.

After conducting the first two portions of this study, I reviewed messages communicated in each instance, subsequently exploring discourse from the politician, the news media, and social media users alike. I also reflected closely on the notes I made throughout the research process, as well as contextual evidence obtained in further familiarizing myself with all three of Weiner's scandals. Taken together, this data set constituted a cultural conversation regarding Weiner's sex scandal, allowing me to critically analyze the discourse found therein. I closely reviewed the messages collected within this conversation, paying special attention to discussions of sex and sexuality, as well as the role gender plays within the scandal. For example, the discourse regarding Weiner's wife, Abedin, and his sexual partners has implications for gender roles, e.g. feminine women should maintain loyalty to their husbands rather than engage in extramarital, sexual relationships. A closer examination of the cultural discourse regarding the scandal shed light on the ideological values regarding acceptable (and marginalized) forms of sexuality and gender.

While ideological values are a significant focus of the critical analysis in this part of the study, it is also important to better understand how the new media environment structures cultural discourse on these topics. Fiske (2003) argued that sites of cultural discourse are ever-changing, and social media websites are an important site of cultural

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discourse in the Weiner sex scandal. Examining the messages circulated within these sites is important to better understanding the creation, negotiation, and renegotiation of dominant ideologies, including those regarding sex, sexuality, and gender roles. As de Certeau (2003) argued, several tactics exist for subordinate groups to resist dominant values: one such tactic may be the use of social media websites to voice opinions that contrast with dominant values. However, Horkheimer and Adorno (2006) provide a skeptical warning regarding mediated messages, which, they argued, largely reinforce dominant cultural messages. Closer analysis of cultural sites and their messages is needed to gain clarification on whether social media may be used as a tool of empowerment for marginalized voices or a means of control for dominant values. Therefore, relying on the critical lens of power and ideological discourse, the third part of the research project was guided by the following questions: 1) In what ways are ideological values regarding sex, sexuality, and gender roles communicated following a political sex scandal? 2) Does the acceptance or rejection of particular sexual actions lead to a marginalization of certain groups? And 3) Does the structure of social media as a site of cultural discourse shape the conversations regarding political sex scandals?

Moving Forward With the Research

Given this framework, the remaining dissertation chapters each feature one part of this multi-methodological research project. Chapter four provided the analysis of the rhetorical strategies of self-defense Weiner employed throughout the duration of his scandal. Chapter five provided the results from the content analysis of the Twitter messages related to the Weiner sex scandal. Chapter six provided the discussion and implications related to the critical analysis of the messages collected in the two previous

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chapters. Chapter seven offers a discussion of the broad implications of the study as well

as future areas of research to continue within this field of study.

Chapter 4: Rhetorical Criticism

One of the most notable political sex scandals in recent history was the scandal involving president Bill Clinton and White House intern Monica Lewinsky. Clinton's initial denial that he had no inappropriate "sexual relations" with Lewinsky was the cause of much debate in the months and years that followed, including a grand jury investigation into whether he lied under oath. At the end of a speech discussing his education policy proposals at the White House, Clinton offered the following denial, along with his signature wagging of his index finger for emphasis:

> But I want to say one thing to the American people. I want you to listen to me.
> I'm going to say this again. I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss
> Lewinsky. I never told anybody to lie, not a single time—never. These
> allegations are false. And I need to go back to work for the American people.
> (Clinton, 1998, para. 12)

The phrase "sexual relations" became particularly important in Clinton's following legal proceedings, primarily because of semantic differences in regards to what specific acts of a sexual nature the term referenced. Although Clinton was impeached by the House of Representatives, his impeachment trial in the U.S. Senate resulted in an acquittal. Therefore, Bill Clinton became only the second president, along with Andrew Johnson in 1868, to be impeached yet not removed from office. Despite his impeachment, Clinton managed to weather the scandal and salvage his political career, leaving office even more popular than when he was re-elected. While the facts regarding Clinton's sexual relationship with an intern and potential abuse of power may have been the focus of the

impeachment process, his image and public popularity were tied to his self-defense strategies.

As Kramer and Olson (2002) note, Clinton's choice of rhetorical strategies changed several times throughout the investigation, ultimately shifting to combat various facts that emerged over time. In the beginning stages of the scandal, Clinton's strategies did not garner strong support. Sonner and Wilcox (1999) note, for example, that Clinton's initial silence lead many people to believe that he lied and had also asked Lewinsky to lie. However, as Clinton adopted a strategic plan for denying the allegations, his popularity with the public rebounded. Even as the truth of Clinton's relationship with Lewinsky became public, his approval ratings remained high. Kramer and Olson described this public support, writing:

> Many analysts argued that once the public was forced to confront Clinton's guilt, they would turn on Clinton. Instead, the public came increasingly to believe that even if the allegations were true, they did not justify removing the president. As the scandal progressed, a pattern set in. With each new revelation, Americans became more convinced of Clinton's guilt, and less supportive of his removal – and his popularity remained steady throughout. (p. 555)

Aside from political actions that may have played into his public support, Clinton successfully utilized rhetorical strategies of defense to maintain his political image throughout the scandal.

Other politicians facing political sex scandals, including Anthony Wiener, may hope to maintain a similar level of public support while facing allegations of their sexual impropriety. However, the fallout from such a scandal often has serious ramifications

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personally, publically, and professionally. From the date that Weiner's sexually explicit

photo was originally published online to the date he resigned, Weiner's political capital

waned as media coverage and public reaction grew increasingly critical of his response to

the allegations levied against him. Even after Weiner admitted to sending the original

picture, little could be done to repair the damage his reputation had already suffered.

Throughout the scandal, Weiner's New York City constituents continued to support him,

but the backlash from the representative's political colleagues, including Nancy Pelosi

and Barack Obama, forced Weiner's hand. Eventually, Weiner resigned from office,

stepping down to "heal" from the damage the scandal had caused in his personal and

professional life (Weiner, 2011).

Weiner's choice of self-defense strategies often did not portray the politician in

the best light and therefore may have ultimately hindered his ability to fully recover from

this scandal. Although Weiner initially denied his involvement in the scandal (much like

Clinton), his attempts to obscure the facts of the scandal often left those in the media with

more questions than answers, perpetuating the scandal beyond its initial lifecycle.[39]

However, Weiner's choice to deny the allegations with humor may have offended some

with his flippant attitudes towards socially unacceptable sexual behaviors. To make

matters worse, Weiner's wife and the women involved in the scandal were often times

inserted in the unfolding story for political purposes. Weiner's inability to recover from

this sex scandal has as much to do with his choice of rhetorical strategies as his original

offending behavior, therefore deserving closer examination. This chapter discusses the

apologia strategies Anthony Weiner employed throughout the course of his political sex

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[39] The media lifecycle may have also been extended by the visual evidence present in the Weiner case, which was absent from the Clinton case.

scandal, first reviewing the different rhetorical postures commonly adopted in self-defenses before examining four separate strategies adopted by Weiner. The chapter ends with a discussion of Weiner's exploitation of women in his rhetorical strategies and the greater impact this has on socialized norms of sexuality and gender.

Looking Back at Apologia

Each political sex scandal in the past decade has led to some form of defense issued from the politician embroiled in the scandal. One lens for exploring this rhetoric is apologia, a classic theory that frames public atonement as a speech of self-defense at its core. Ware and Linkugel (1973) described four distinct strategies to use when apologizing, strategies that when used in different combinations result in one of four different rhetorical attitudes. These strategies are typically marked by the use of denial, bolstering, differentiation, and/or transcendence. Close study of public responses can determine which strategies have been used or which strategies could have been more effective in a variety of situations; therefore, critical scholars, public relations managers, and speechwriters have all employed apologia to illuminate self-defense messages from varying perspectives.

Ware and Linkugel (1973) explicate the four different strategies mentioned above: denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence. Denial is marked by rejecting certain facts, relationships, or intentions, and can be particularly useful to a speaker "…only to the extent that such negations do not constitute a known distortion of reality or to the point that they conflict with other beliefs held by the audience" (p. 275). Therefore, denial may work whether it is honest or not, but only if widely held beliefs are

not violated.[40] Bolstering, on the other hand, involves affirming some truth, reinforcing a fact, relationship, or intention. Bolstering usually occurs when the speaker tries to remind an audience of a relationship with something positive. As the authors say, "denial is an instrument of negation; bolstering is a source of identification" (p. 278). This identification is particularly useful to politicians who are often attempting to strengthen their identification with constituents.

Of the remaining two apologia strategies, differentiation and transcendence are also related to one another. Differentiation involves separating two or more constructs from each other, accompanied by a change in the audience's interpretation of meaning for these constructs. Often times, this involves a reframing of some fact, relationship, or intent to give it a new meaning that is distinctly different from its previous context. As Ware and Linkugel (1973) say, "any strategy which is cognitively *divisive* and concomitantly transformative is differentiation [original emphasis included]" (p. 278). Conversely, strategies that attempt to join two different facts, relationships, or intentions together are referred to as transcendence. Ware and Linkugel again say that "those strategies which involve a change in cognitive *identification* and in *meaning* factor together as transcendence [original emphasis included]" (p. 280). For example, transcendence may involve changing audience perceptions about the particulars of a scandal to re-shift the focus towards a more positive evaluation of character for the transgressing party.

Although identification of these four strategies seems a rudimentary undertaking on its own, discovering apologia strategies serves to illuminate more than simple

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[40] For example, if the public believes a politician has committed a certain act, denying it – even if truthful – will be largely unsuccessful.

classification. As Ware and Linkugel say, "The terms we employ as names for the various categories of strategies are dialectically related; each term, like the strategies they name, is a function of the others" (p. 281). Apologia strategies that are in dialectical tension with one another illuminate much about what is said and what is *not* said. Ware and Linkugel argue that denial and bolstering are dialectic pairs, while differentiation and transcendence are another set of dialectic pairs. In other words, what is missing in one strategy is found in its dialectical pair. If a politician chooses to utilize bolstering instead of denial, this not only means identification may serve a beneficial purpose but also that rejecting certain information may be ineffective.[41]

Each of these strategies may be combined in different ways to attempt different rhetorical postures. Ware and Linkugel (1973) describe these four postures as absolute, vindicative, explanative, and justificative. Absolute postures, or attitudes, involve denial and differentiation strategies, finding the speaker denying any wrongdoing and seeking distance from the offensive act. Vindicative postures are similar to absolute postures in that they rely on denial. However, rather than differentiate oneself from a particular act, the speaker uses transcendence to preserve reputation. Explanative postures involve "… a combination of bolstering and differentiation" in which "the speaker assumes that if the audience understands his [sic] motives, actions, beliefs, or whatever, they will be unable to condemn him [sic]" (p. 283). Last, justificative postures involve bolstering and transcendence, seeking not only audience understanding but also approval. Exploration of rhetorical postures are particularly beneficial in critical analysis

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[41] This becomes particularly important to Weiner's self-defense strategies, as later in the scandal denial became essentially ineffective, leaving its dialectic opposite of bolstering of central importance to Weiner's rhetoric.

as they shed further light on the contextual factors of apologia. For example, often times in political sex scandals, the disputation of facts is an important focus of apologia strategies (see Kramer and Olson [2002] for specific details about Bill Clinton's denial strategies during the Monica Lewinsky sex scandal). However, adopting an absolutive posture versus a vindicative posture may result in a different response from audiences.

Exploring rhetorical acts through the lens of apologetic speech helps focus the attention of rhetorical critics on an important component of self-defense. As Ware and Linkugel (1973) point out, exploring factor terminology (such as denial, bolstering, etc.) "… focuses the attention of the critic upon what language does for the apologetic rhetor when he [sic] deals with the charge or his [sic] character attributes, the strategic points in any speech of self-defense" (p. 282). On a broader contextual note, exploring apologia strategies also illuminates meaning about larger cultural norms and values. Harrell, Ware, and Linkugel (1975) argue that there are three different kinds of legitimacy that may be communicated in apologetic speech: structural, ideological, and personal. Structural legitimacy involves a speaker relying on the authority of his or her office to gain greater strength and support. However, a politician has limits to the ways in which he or she can use structural legitimacy: "a [politician] may reap the benefits of structural legitimacy only if he [sic] acts within the broad limits of behavior acceptable to the people" (p. 248).

Thus, political sex scandals mark a point of departure often times for the reliance on such structural legitimacy, usually because these scandals are bound by their very nature of violating acceptable behavior. Ideological legitimacy relates to "the degree to which the public perceives [a speaker's] values and principles as similar to theirs" (p.

248). If a politician engages in actions that indicate a difference in morality from that of the public, it may be difficult to rely on ideological authority in apologia. Last, personal legitimacy is "… found in beliefs regarding [the speaker's] honesty, intelligence, and independence" (p. 250). This kind of legitimacy is closely tied to the politician rather than any sort of external factor; however, it is largely based on perceptions from an external public. Evaluations of personal morality and character may differ greatly from actual personality traits, making this legitimacy difficult to balance.

As explained here, there are several contextual factors to take into account when evaluating the rhetoric employed in self-defense following a political sex scandal: strategies, postures, and differing forms of legitimacy. As Harrell, Ware, and Linkugel (1975) note, authority and success of strategies has as much to do with the offending act as the public persona of the speaker: "the persona is not the person, but rather is the auditor's symbolic construction (and implied assessment) of the person" (p. 251). Apologia strategies can prove an important part of this construction and relate to whether the public perceives a politician is able to continue holding office. Therefore, a better understanding of apologia serves multiple purposes, including the evaluation of the success and failure of various rhetorical strategies and exploration of how public acceptance of political figures is maintained.

"The weiner gags never get old, I guess": Apology and Responsibility in Self-Defense

Upon closer examination of Anthony Weiner's rhetorical strategies, as well as the contextual factors surrounding his sexual indiscretions, a variety of self-defense strategies and postures become apparent. With a better understanding guided by the lens of

apologia, we can more fully understand Weiner's attempts at self-defense throughout the course of his scandal. Over the three-week timespan of the Weinergate scandal – from the time the scandal broke until Weiner resigned his office – Weiner adopted various apologia strategies and rhetorical postures, ranging from an absolutive attitude in the beginning days of the scandal to a justificative attitude as he left office. As information about Weiner's private life became public knowledge, the representative made several statements that captured sentiments spanning humor and anger, defiance and humility. Although the starkest difference in Weiner's strategies can be marked before and after his confession of inappropriate online relationships, there are subtle differences between Weiner's strategies on each of the four key dates that occurred over the course of the scandal. I will discuss each of these in greater detail in the next section.

Funny Business: Humor as a Distancing Mechanism

Weiner first used humor to both deny and differentiate himself from the actions of his supposed hacker. By making jokes, Weiner acknowledges the peculiarity of his name and its relationship to the leaked photo – "wiener" being a common euphemism for penis.[42] In fact, a huge part of the Weinergate scandal was directly tied to the connection between the congressman, his actions, and his last name.[43] As the representative put it, "The weiner gags never get old, I guess" (as quoted in Allen & Smith, 2011, para. 4). Weiner chose to acknowledge his last name's synonym through a series of jokes posted on Twitter, nodding to the collective jokes made online. However, the use of humor also

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[42] Whether this explains his desire to take the photo in the first place, living out some sort of unconscious fixation with his name and genitalia, is a discussion for another time.
[43] Had his name been John Smith, perhaps the scandal would never have held public and media interest quite like it did.

served as a way for him to deny responsibility while distancing himself from those who might prank him.

Ware and Linkugel (1973) explain that the absolute posture is a combination of denial and differentiation strategies, "one in which the accused denies any wrong and in which he differentiates any personal attribute in question from whatever it is that the audience finds reprehensible" (p. 283). In the early stages of the Weinergate scandal, Weiner was quick to deny any involvement in the matter. Moments after the picture of Weiner's crotch was posted online, it was taken down and Weiner was making jokes about how his account had been hacked. Politico writer Ben Smith (2011) wrote that "Weiner tweeted, before anyone asked him about it, that his account had been 'hacked'" (para. 3), suggesting that the photo was posted as an attempt to make fun of the politician's last name. His use of humor and claim that this was a joke played on him are suggestions that Weiner had nothing to do with the tweet and picture being sent. Weiner continued to deny his role in sending the photo by frequently suggesting that it was instead the work of a hacker. The representative's spokesman, Dave Arnold, reinforced this idea when he said that both Weiner's Facebook and Twitter accounts were hacked. Although Weiner's Facebook account was never in question originally, Weiner and Arnold both asserted that his Facebook account also had been hacked. Adding Facebook as a potentially hacked account served to make the problem seem larger than it initially was. Increasing the scope of the problem changes the nature of the scandal from one misstep to a systemic problem, making it easier to deny the actions entirely.

Although his initial denial may have served as an attempt to misdirect attention away from the original photo, this strategy also gave question to the potential legal

ramifications of hacking Weiner's accounts. As Politico writers Allen and Smith (2011) explained, hacking into Weiner's social media accounts "could fall under laws prohibiting cyberhacking and impersonating federal officials" (para. 9). The serious nature of this offense would theoretically concern any public official; yet, Weiner' office initially refused to comment on whether they would aid law enforcement officials in conducting an investigation. Weiner's attempt at misdirection may have initially made the Twitter photo seem like part of a larger scandal, but his unwillingness to participate in a federal investigation was inconsistent with the idea that his accounts had been hacked. In the early days of the scandal, the politician's inconsistencies may have been largely dismissed. As the story continued to be investigated, however, the contradiction became a point of contention with his personal and structural legitimacy.

Weiner's original strategy of denial disputed his previous knowledge of the leaked photo, a strategy he coupled with differentiation to distance himself from the supposed hacker's actions. The use of humor also served as a form of differentiation, primarily because of its ability to disarm and dislodge attention away from the facts. According to the *New York Times*, Weiner wrote a humorous response on Twitter about 15 minutes after the photo was posted, saying "Tivo shot. FB hacked. Is my blender gonna attack me next?" ending the tweet with the hashtag "#TheToasterIsVeryLoyal." He later joked, "Touche Prof Moriarity. More Weiner Jokes for all my guests! [sic]" (Otis, 2011, para. 11-12). Technology of all sorts – particularly of the kitchen variety – becomes a source of betrayal for Weiner, a treachery likened to the literary villain of Sherlock Holmes fame, Professor Moriarty. In the same way that Weiner's denial strategy sought to widen the scope of the offensive posts, referencing Moriarty

differentiates the politician from villainous acts while also placing himself in the role of hero. Here, humor becomes a subtle mechanism Weiner employs to maintain his personal legitimacy by distancing himself from the offensive photo.

As Weiner adopted an absolutive posture in the early days of the scandal, women are rarely mentioned, if at all. When one of the women involved in the scandal – Genette Cordova – is mentioned, the reference simply clarifies and differentiates her from Weiner. For example, Dave Arnold, the representative's spokesman, clarified in his statement to the press that "the woman who got the crotch shot has no ties to Weiner and isn't known to be part of his staff" (Otis, 2011, para. 13). Formality and distance translate to a relative absence of women in Weiner's early strategies. Yet, at one point, Weiner, oddly enough, mentions a woman uninvolved in the scandal – Minnesota Congresswoman Michele Bachmann. He tweets, "Thanks to all my new followers im drawing close to Bachmann. #ScrappyChasingCrazy [sic]" (as quoted in Allen & Smith, 2011, para. 8). Not only does Weiner reference his surge in social media attention, he calls Bachmann crazy, a puzzling move that does little to clarify his involvement in the scandal beyond redirecting attention to another public figure. Ultimately, this tactic does nothing to repair Weiner's image, although humor seems to be the main goal of this tweet.

While attempting to adopt an absolutive posture, Weiner starts mainly with attempts at humor, using these jokes to redirect attention away from the scandal with early denial. His self-awareness of how funny his name could be when making a joke is used as a way to explain why someone would potentially hack his account and send a picture of male genitalia. To further delegitimize the claims that this might have been a

photo of Weiner himself and one that he posted, he failed to initially issue a statement directly to the press, opting instead to post a series of jokes on Twitter. Last, he fails to mention the women involved in the scandal in any substantive way. If Weiner took harassment seriously, he might have reached out to Cordova to apologize on behalf of the person who hacked his account for sending an inappropriate and potentially offensive picture. Additionally, he might have mentioned the embarrassment his wife suffered by this breech of their personal life or conversely not mocked another women completely unrelated to the scandal. As the following sections argue, Weiner's initial strategies and use of an absolutive posture were largely ineffective. His lack of success may explain the frustration communicated in his next stage of apologia strategies: a vindicative attitude towards the scandal's continued lifecycle.

Serious Business: Anger at Continued Questioning

In what was almost a 180 degree turn from his previous stance, Weiner's second set of rhetorical choices throughout the Weinergate scandal involved a great amount of anger as he adopted a more serious approach to dispel rumors of his involvement in the sex scandal. Weiner continued to deny his involvement in the scandal, arguing technological complications may have caused the problem (rather than an intent to harass women). However, he also attempted to use transcendence as a sort of moral arbiter, advising the media and journalists on ethical practices they should use when pursuing this story. His frustration at the continuation of the scandal boiled over into anger at the media, a primary form of communication Weiner used in adopting his vindicative posture. Ware and Linkugel (1973) describe vindicative speech as rhetorical strategies

designed to enable an accused individual to discuss more than just the details of an accusation. They say:

> The *vindicative* address, due to the reliance upon transcendental strategies,
> permits the accused greater ease in going beyond the specifics of a given charge.
> Such an apology aims not only at the preservation of the accused's reputation, but
> also at the recognition of his [sic] greater worth as a human being relative to the
> worth of his [sic] accusers [original emphasis included]. (p. 283)

As these authors describe, vindicative postures may contain strategies of a moral nature, those communicating the speaker's value as an individual. Although Weiner's previous stance involved denial and differentiation, in the vindicative posture the representative sought to strengthen his association with the desirable traits and qualities he possessed through his structural legitimacy. In other words, Weiner relied on his role as a member of the U.S. Congress who was trying to do his job but faced mounting distractions from the media's unfair coverage of this silly sex scandal (at least from his perspective).

Immediately after the scandal started, Weiner opted to make jokes about the picture, saying a hacker had posted the picture to his account without his consent. After a few days of continued media coverage, Weiner's rhetorical strategies shifted from humor to a more serious – if not vague – message of denial. Although Weiner initially had a light-hearted attitude towards the hacking the day after the photo was posted, a few days later when speaking to CNN, Weiner said, "Look, this is a prank and not a terribly creative one … I was hacked. It happens to people. You move on" (as quoted in CNN Wire Staff(a), 2011, para. 3). Further, his spokesman Dave Arnold said that the representative had retained an attorney to advise him about potential legal actions to take,

adding, "This was a prank. We are loath to treat it as more, but we are relying on professional advice" (para. 5).[44] Although Weiner maintained that his social media accounts had been hacked, the tone of the denial was intended to address pressing legal and moral concerns about the scandal rather than Weiner's behavior.

Throughout this phase of his apologia strategies, Weiner and his spokesperson were both clear that Weiner's social media accounts were hacked. However, Weiner provided a vague response in answer to the question of whether the photo was actually of him or not. When asked this question directly, Weiner said that "Photos can be manipulated. Photos can be of one thing and changed to something else. We're going to try to get to the bottom of what happened" (CNN Wire Staff(b), 2011, para. 5). Technology – of the kitchen variety as well as digital – seems to be a mystery to Weiner, as he is unable to clearly say whether the picture posted online was of him or not.[45] Rather than the original denial of *any* involvement in the scandal, Weiner's denial shifts to *intent* with this strategy. If Weiner did in fact take the photo, this denial strategy simply seeks to clarify that he did not intend to publicly send this private image online. Hacking or not, a public dissemination of a private photo opened up a new line of questions regarding Weiner's social media practices. Matching the vague language used to discuss the photo, Weiner similarly avoided specifics when describing messages sent through Facebook and Twitter, saying, "I'm not going to get into how I communicate with people on social media" (para. 11) because he does not (or does not want anyone to

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[44] Previously, Weiner and his staff refused to discuss the legal ramifications of a hacker. The switch in concern here may have occurred in response to questions posed by the media rather than a strategic plan to seek legal advice.
[45] Clearly, having one's social media accounts hacked does not preclude an individual from taking photos of a sexual nature.

think he would) send inappropriate messages online. These responses both deny

Weiner's guilt in the scandal by denying his sending the picture or any other

inappropriate messages while also avoiding whether the picture is in fact his genitalia.

Again, denial of harmful intent becomes the aim of this rhetorical approach rather than a

flat denial of taking the picture at all.

Invasion of privacy and suitable online exchanges most certainly raised morality

questions as Weinergate wore on, and yet Weiner adopted a strategy to challenge the

ethical practices of the most vocal party critiquing his responses and actions: the media.

The unclear answers Weiner provided to the media during coverage of the scandal

prompted further investigation from political and mainstream news organizations alike.

Continued probing eventually led to Weiner's growing frustration, which bubbled over

into an outburst of anger directed towards the journalists with whom he usually

maintained positive relationships. At one point when Weiner was approached by a group

of journalists, he lost his temper and strongly asserted that he would not talk about the

scandal anymore. As reported in a CNN Wire Staff(b) (2011) article, Weiner said, "I

understand you're doing your job, but I'm going to go back to work now," adding, "I

participated in the story a couple of days now, given comments on it. This is a distraction

and I'm not going to let it distract me" (para. 17). Although Weiner had provided

unsatisfactory answers to the questions posed to him (such as, is the photo of you), he

failed to recognize the role this would play in continuing the story within the news media.

Rather than recognizing this and providing direct answers to the questions he received

from journalists, Weiner instead opted to chastise those with the power to report this

story and his responses most quickly and broadly.

At this stage, Weiner draws on his structural and personal legitimacy with the media in an effort to intimidate reporters in hopes they would no longer pursue the story, implying the story provided too great a distraction from his ability to continue his important work as a member of Congress. Perhaps voicing the opinion of those who desire more substantive reporting from the media, Weiner articulates his wish for the media to allow him to return to the work that he cares most about. At one point, he even implies that the media are manufacturing drama with this scandal, drama that is unnecessarily upsetting his wife, Huma Abedin. Weiner refers to Abedin while expressing frustration for how pained she has been throughout the scandal, a simultaneous suggestion of guilt and sympathy coming into play here.

One of the most visible moments of Weiner's frustration came when he referred to CNN Senior Congressional Producer Ted Barrett as a "jackass" after Barrett pressed Weiner for information on whether he had indeed sent the photo on Twitter. As quoted in a CNN Wire Staff(b) (2011) article, Weiner said, "I am going to have to ask that we follow some rules. You ask questions and I do the answer ... that would be reasonable, you do the questions, I do the answers and that jackass interrupts me" (para. 12). Admittedly, this exchange may not have been part of Weiner's strategic apologia, and it certainly did not serve him well in his attempts to quell the scandal. However, this moment marks an important point in Weiner's attempt to use transcendence as a self-defense strategy. Weiner may have referred to Barrett as a "jackass," but he first instructs the media on how to conduct their interviews. In doing so, Weiner takes a position of moral superiority that demonstrates he knows how journalists should ethically and respectfully cover a story. The fact that Barrett pressed Weiner for clarity serves as

an example of how *not* to report on a political sex scandal, at least by Weiner's standards. His frustration with the line of questioning manifests in an unprofessional response, yet still indicates his position as a moral arbiter of journalistic ethics. By directing attention away from himself and towards the treatment he received by the media, Weiner attempts to transcend the scandal. However, as the coming days would show, this instance of anger did not do enough to remove the scandal from public interest. Rather than end the scandal, Weiner's apologia approach in this stage ended up having a direct impact on the self-defense strategies he would later adopt when confessing to his role in the scandal.

Defiant Regret: Remorse for Previous Actions

As more details came out about Weiner's sex scandal, it became increasingly difficult – nearly impossible – for Weiner to deny his extramarital relationships. Therefore, it became necessary for Weiner to admit his involvement in the original photo, as well as sending sexual messages to other women through Facebook and Twitter. Because Weiner had spent the previous few days berating journalists who were trying to get more information about the story, it was particularly important that Weiner apologize for his actions when atoning for them. Because of this, he finally attempted to accept full responsibility for his actions. Early on in his press conference on June 6, Weiner said, "I came here to accept the full responsibility for what I've done," (as quoted in Post Staff Report, 2011, para. 10) likening his extramarital affairs to criminal behavior. The original attempt at masking Weiner's involvement in sending the original photo caused a lot of confusion regarding his level of responsibility for the scandal, so clearing up confusion was an important part of Weiner's atonement. Weiner not only used the word "clear" or some variation several times in his press conference, he also tried to be candid

about the nature of the relationships he had with other women. He said, "To be clear, the picture was of me, and I sent it," (para. 3) and continued with, "To be clear, I have never met any of these women or had physical relationships at any time" (para. 4). Although Weiner admitted to engaging in an extramarital affair, his contention that these affairs were not physical was intended to limit the damage to his reputation.

Despite seeking to clarify his involvement in the scandal, Weiner did not offer as much clarity as some desired. When questioned further about the extent of his affairs, he simply said, "It was a destructive thing that I did that I accept responsibility for. But if you're — if you're looking for some kind of deep explanation for it, I simply don't have one except that I'm very — except that I'm sorry" (as quoted in Post Staff Report, 2011, para. 56). A common question Weiner received during his press conference was why he engaged in these online relationships, but it was one that Weiner either refused to answer satisfactorily or simply could not answer: "I know that there is the sense that everything is part of a plan, and it was thought through and calculated. In this case, it was just me doing a very dumb thing, and for that I accept the responsibility" (para. 58). When Weiner could not explain his reasoning adequately, he shifted attention back to his responsibility for the scandal.

In direct contrast to Weiner's most previous strategy of denial, Weiner's accepting of responsibility utilized the apologia strategy of bolstering by reinforcing the fact that he had in fact sent the original photo on Twitter and additionally messaged several other women. Weiner confessed:

I haven't told the truth, and I've done things that I deeply regret. I brought pain to people I care about the most and the people who believed in me. And for that I'm

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deeply sorry. … I'm deeply ashamed of my terrible judgment and actions. (as

quoted in Post Staff Report, 2011, para. 5)

This somewhat lengthy statement captures a wide range of sentiment from Weiner,

including his admission that he lied when asked about the scandal, as well as his sorrow

for hurting family and friends. Additionally, he mentions his shame regarding his

behaviors, acknowledging that extramarital affairs are something to feel embarrassed for:

"I am deeply sorry for — that I lied about this. But at the end of the day, I lied because I

was embarrassed. I lied because I was ashamed of what I had done and didn't want to get

caught" (para. 228). Shame plays prominently in Weiner's apologia strategies here,

largely to communicate an ideological legitimacy that values monogamous marriages.

Although Weiner accepted responsibility for his actions, he refused to resign from

office, which has the potential to imply that his transgressions were not enough to

indicate a violation of the trust placed in him by his constituency. He reinforced this idea

that his personal actions did not reflect on his professional ability to perform his job when

he concluded, "but I don't believe that I did anything here that violates any law or

violates my oath to my constituents. What I did — what I did was something that

demonstrated a very deep personal failing, and that's why I'm here to apologize" (as

quoted in Post Staff Report, 2011, para. 115). A "deep personal failing" is different than

an inability to legislate, and Weiner hopes to reinforce this distinction. Again, he tries to

turn the focus of the scandal away from his position as Congressman and back onto his

personal relationships by denying any concerns about running for office again:

Look, the last thing on this day when I have done this harm to my wife, to my

family — that I'm standing before all of you and accepting responsibility for this

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shameful thing — is thinking about next year's election or the election after that.

(para. 65)

Even though Weiner attempts to shift attention away from his role in Congress, the fact that the scandal even *exists* is directly related to his position as an elected official. Weiner's strategies here seem to refer to a personal legitimacy of doing the right thing: accepting responsibility for a mistake. It is the combination of bolstering and differentiation that comprises Weiner's explanative posture, one that aims for understanding the motivations for engaging in an offensive act. This posture proves difficult to accomplish, however, as Weiner fails to offer concrete explanations for his motives for engaging in extramarital affairs.

Weiner later uses differentiation to communicate his lack of knowledge of how harmful his actions would be. He confesses, "I know I didn't — I never met these women, and I know I never really had much desire to, and to me, it was — it was, you know, almost a frivolous exchange among friends; that I don't think I made an important enough distinction about how hurtful it was and how inappropriate it was" (as quoted in Post Staff Report, 2011, para. 183). Although it was nearly impossible for Weiner to deny his actions, at this point Weiner decided to differentiate his action from his intention, therefore mitigating the full weight of his guilt in the scandal. If Weiner did not realize how harmful his actions would be, it makes it seem less offensive. However, at one point he discusses his wife's prior knowledge of his extramarital relationships, saying "My wife has known about some of these online relationships since before we were married. And we spoke frankly about them because — well, we spoke frankly about them. But she didn't know until this morning that I had not been telling the truth

about whether I posted the Twitter posting last week" (para. 84). Weiner's wife Abedin may have forgiven him for previous indiscretions, but the photo posted on Twitter was a separate offense altogether. Whether he did not realize the magnitude of sending one picture is unclear, but what is apparent is that he must have disclosed prior relationships to Abedin for some reason (most likely to apologize for being with other women). This complicates the narrative Weiner was attempting to paint regarding his intent to cause harm. Things did not get better for Weiner after the press conference, as he continued to face calls for his resignation – this time from his one-time supporters.

Solemn Resignation: Formality Used to Protect Weiner's Future

Although Anthony Weiner most likely hoped to avoid stepping down from office, he eventually succumbed to the mounting pressure that he should resign from his position as the representative for the 9th U.S. Congressional district of New York. During the press conference in which Weiner announced his resignation, a heckler in the audience repeatedly tried to interrupt him, cutting the press conference short. However, Weiner continued to reinforce and justify his decision to step down. In this last stage of his apologia strategies, Weiner adopted a justificative posture to explain why he did not initially step down from office at the beginning of the scandal,[46] using bolstering and transcendence strategies to communicate his passion for holding public office. One of the strongest strategies he employed was bolstering in the form of taking blame for the distraction. As quoted in Hernandez's (2011) *New York Times* article, Weiner said, "I am here today to again apologize for the personal mistakes I have made and the embarrassment I have caused" (para. 4). He then announced that he would take a leave

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[46] Although Weiner eventually did resign from office, he first decided to take a leave of absence while remaining in office.

of absence to "heal" from the damage he caused. Although Weiner focused on the personal growth he hoped to gain, he also attempted to reinforce his relationship with his wife.

As Hornick (2011) noted, "Weiner, who announced this weekend that he would take a leave of absence and seek treatment, has repeatedly said his focus was on repairing his relationship with his wife Huma Abedin" (para. 6). While apologizing to his constituents for the distraction of his scandal, he said he directed his apology specifically to his wife, Abedin. Weiner's leave of absence was done in part, as he said, so "most importantly that my wife and I can continue to heal from the damage I have caused" (Weiner, 2011). Not only had Weiner's personal life become a point of contention for his public persona, it affected his wife, damaging their relationship. Weiner refers to his wife's need to heal in order to bolster his relationship with her, demonstrating his commitment to maintaining their marriage. However, this strategy has the added benefit of connecting him more closely with his immediate audience, too – his constituents.

As Weiner attempted to transcend the scandal, he relied on comparisons between himself and his constituents. At one point, Weiner said explicitly that "The middle class story of New York is my story, and I'm very proud of that" (Weiner, 2011). He later continued to bemoan his lost opportunity to represent these middle class interests, saying, "I had hoped to be able to continue the work that the citizens of my district elected me to do, to fight for the middle class and those struggling to make it" (Weiner, 2011). As much as he hoped to serve his constituents in a publicly elected capacity, serving their best interests, the scandal ultimately returned him to his middle class roots. Weiner's focus now shifted on how he could continue to improve life for his neighbors: "I got into

politics to help give voice to the many who simply did not have one. Now I'll be looking for other ways to contribute my talents …" (Weiner, 2011). Although his strategy was to remind his audience that he is essentially a New Yorker just like everyone else, this did not mitigate his involvement with the sex scandal.

In earlier stages of the scandal, one of Weiner's strategies was to refer to the media coverage as a distraction from the work he hoped to do in Congress. At this point in the scandal, however, Weiner found himself in the unenviable position of using his own words against himself. Although he originally called the scandal a distraction from his work in Congress, simultaneously blaming a hacker for sending the photo, Weiner was later forced to acknowledge that the distraction was of his own doing and centered on him, making it his responsibility. The distraction became an insurmountable problem that led him to resign his position in Congress. He explained, "Unfortunately the distraction that I have created has made that [remaining in office] impossible. So today I am announcing my resignation from Congress so my colleagues can get back to work, my neighbors can choose a new representative" (Weiner, 2011). So, while Weiner had originally referred to the scandal as a mere distraction, he later had to acknowledge the fact that he, in fact, was the very distraction that needed removal.

Ultimately, Anthony Weiner was unsuccessful in utilizing apologia strategies to repair his image in the fallout of his sex scandal because the damage done from sending a private picture through a public medium was too much to overcome. Although he denied the allegations at first, insurmountable evidence linking him to the photo made this strategy impossible. Eventually, Weiner faced responsibility for his actions and eventually resigned from office. The political and personal ramifications Weiner

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experienced as a result of this scandal were difficult enough on their own, but perhaps even more harmful was Weiner's disregard for the women involved in the scandal. The exception to this rule was most obvious when Weiner referenced his wife. Although she was a brief afterthought early in his self-defense strategies, she became an important part of the self-defense narrative Weiner employed in the latter stages of his apologia. The following section will discuss the disregard for female perspectives in Weiner's rhetoric.

"A frivolous exchange among friends": Women Used for Political Purposes

While Anthony Weiner's sex scandal destroyed his political career, it also had other unseen victims: the women in Weiner's life. In the few days following the publication of information regarding Weiner's genitalia picture, he only referred to his wife to say that she was suffering from hearing these stories. In a way, this was an attempt to place guilt on the reporters who were pursuing the story. As quoted in the CNN Wire Staff(c) (2011) article, "Asked whether he was protecting anyone, Weiner replied, 'Yes, I'm protecting my wife, who every day is waking up to these insane stories that are getting so far from reality. You know, we've been married less than a year'" (para. 9). In truth, as we would later learn, the story *was* reality, and Weiner had already disclosed information to Abedin of his previous online relationships. So, this attempt to redirect attention away from the scandal through sympathy for his new wife did little to actually protect Abedin from the knowledge of Weiner's indiscretions.

Additionally, his inclusion of how long they had been married seems designed to simply reinforce that they were newlyweds, providing no substance regarding the facts of the scandal (or reason to leave these questions alone). Later, when asked about the nature of his communication online, Weiner said, "I'm not going to get into how I communicate

with people on social media. There was nothing ... inappropriate" (as quoted in CNN Wire Staff(c), 2011, para. 11). Again, rather than acknowledge his part in sending sexual pictures online, Weiner denied any wrongdoing and was vague in his response. Particularly troubling was his choice to not mention women specifically – rather, he says he will not discuss how he communicates with "people." However, Weiner's choice to be nonspecific with his discussion of social media users online was politically important, as elusiveness helped communicate his strategy of denial. Expressly acknowledging the lives of women who had been impacted by Weiner's scandal served little purpose to him and therefore was not a central part of his self-defense strategy.

However, when Weiner later had to accept responsibility for his actions, he no longer used Abedin to make the media feel guilty, but rather expressed *his* guilt at hurting his wife: "My primary — my primary sense of regret and my primary apology goes to my wife" (as quoted in Post Staff Report, 2011, para. 21). Abedin is a placeholder for all the people Weiner has wronged, including members of the media he mistreated. Simultaneously, Abedin becomes a caricature of the cuckold woman, remaining largely absent and voiceless in Weiner's media appearances. Her silence regarding the scandal may have been a personal choice to avoid media scrutiny, yet it also served as a form of consent to Weiner's infidelity. Weiner's frequent reference to his wife amid her absence only heightens her visibility, despite his calls for privacy. During his June 6, 2011 press conference, Weiner says that Abedin was "very unhappy" and "very disappointed" (para. 176) in him, yet confirmed that she was staying with the representative through the ordeal. (Only after Weiner's third scandal in 2016 did Abedin announce she would separate from the former Congressman.) To complicate matters further, it was

announced in the middle of the 2011 scandal that Abedin was pregnant with the couple's

first child. Because Weiner is the focus of the scandal, what little information is divulged

about Abedin serves to characterize her in a limited manner. She is the wife of the

Congressman, as well as the mother to his child. However, we receive little other

information about her, such as her employment as an aide to Sen. Hillary Clinton. Only

years later with the release of the documentary *Weiner* do audiences gain insight into

Abedin's feelings regarding Weiner's infidelities.

If Abedin's portrayal throughout the scandal was unidimensional, the other

women involved in the scandal faired even worse. Weiner provides vague details

regarding his relationship with the women he messaged online, the one exception being

the woman to whom he sent the photo that first started the scandal, Genette Cordova.

When discussing Cordova, he refers to her as "this poor woman" at one point, saying that

"[Cordova] did reach out to me and express what — how she'd been set upon, and I

expressed my apologies to her. But there was no coaching of any sort going on" (as

quoted in Post Staff Report, 2011, para. 217). Reinforcing Cordova's detachment from

the representative and his staff, Weiner tries to erase her involvement in the scandal.

However, the women with whom he willingly engaged in an extramarital relationship are

barely mentioned, and when they are mentioned, they are discussed in ambiguous terms.

The audience learns that the women are not "uniformly young women" (para. 226) but

were involved in a "consensual, you know, exchange of emails" (para. 244) with Weiner.

Other than this small amount of information, we learn little else, which Weiner attributes

to his desire to protect their privacy. However, his choice to refer to age, albeit in a

vague manner, brings up further questions: Were the women old? Was Weiner

concerned with accusations of sex with minors? Why bring up age if no further

clarification would be offered? Weiner's reluctance to provide further details may have

caused further harm to these women, as well as his rhetorical defense strategies.

Although the exchanges occurred with women of varying ages and were

consensual in nature, Weiner tried to establish that these relationships were a mistake.

However, without ever fully disclosing more information about the nature of these

relationships, his vague descriptions do more to strip these women of their personhood

than to protect his image. One of the larger problems with being elusive about the

women involved in the scandal is due in large part to its contrast with reality. At one

point, Weiner says in regards to these women, "I didn't — no, I didn't have the sense that

they were complete strangers. These were people that I had developed relationships with

online, and I believed that we had — we had become — we had become friends" (as

quoted in Post Staff Report, 2011, para.197). Because he characterizes these women as

friends, it delegitimizes their interactions. He even calls their communication "a

frivolous exchange among friends" (para. 183). The non-specific language used to

describe these women actually strips these women of their personhood, rather than

respect their privacy. By not allowing them an opportunity to voice their opinions or

perspectives regarding their relationship with Weiner, the representative speaks on behalf

of these faceless, bodiless women and characterizes their significance to him as

"frivolous." Privacy concerns aside, Weiner could have at least acknowledged his

concern for these women by reaching out to them to let them decide how they would

handle the matter of his public sex scandal.

"Clearly a mistake, and one that I deeply regret": Weiner's Failed Defense

From the onset of this political scandal, Anthony Weiner failed to manage his public perception in a way that allowed him to salvage his political career. Whether being flippantly humorous or belligerently angry, Weiner's initial denials did little to move the nature of the conversation away from his scandalous picture that was posted online. Instead of controlling the conversation, Weiner allowed media coverage and online discourse to shape the scandal. Even when he finally confessed his intention to post the picture online, his admission stemmed from overwhelming evidence of his guilt rather than a desire to be honest with the public. His lengthy apology on June 6 provided greater clarity than he had previously offered, yet this explanation was too little too late. At this point in the scandal, Weiner held little personal legitimacy, which in turn weakened his structural and ideological legitimacy. His inability to maintain legitimacy in office resulted in his resignation from Congress and the virtual end of his political career.

Weiner's choice of rhetorical strategies and apologetic postures were most certainly damning to his own political career, but they were also hurtful to the women involved in the scandal. In the aftermath of Weiner's infidelity, his wife, Huma Abedin, faced intense media scrutiny, coverage that may have ended sooner had Weiner chosen to publicly confess sooner. Additionally, his choice to disclose information in an unclear manner led to more questions, including those that focused on the women Weiner was involved with online. Instead of speaking honestly and respectfully of these women, Weiner chose to largely ignore them, disregarding their perspectives at the same time. Silencing these voices is damaging to the individual women involved in the scandal, to be

sure. However, Weiner's rhetorical choices – especially those in the later, confessional half of the scandal – also provide a negative template for future politicians facing sex scandals, one that may reinforce the idea that women involved in extramarital affairs with political figures are insignificant compared to one's career in public office.

Although Weiner stayed in office for several days following his confession, his choice of rhetorical strategies in the early days of the scandal was a mistake for him professionally. Weiner's eventual resignation from office became an inevitable outcome after he lost the trust of the public and the media covering the story. Rather than focus the conversation on legislative work, the discourse surrounding the entire scandal – including responses to Weiner on social media – centered on private relationships and sexual innuendos. Whether Weiner's rhetorical strategies resonated with public discourse is doubtful; yet, the extent to which his actions illuminated cultural values regarding sexuality and gender norms in the United States requires closer study. The next chapter of this dissertation attempts to describe public response to the Weinergate scandal, measured by social media posts captured on the same four dates discussed in this chapter. While Weiner's rhetorical strategies certainly affected his political career, gauging the public response to his attempts at self-defense illuminates cultural discourse throughout the course of the scandal. More importantly, examination of public response through social media provides a model for future researchers who wish to capture a snapshot of public opinion of political sex scandals. Last, this public response can be used as a way to evaluate the relative success of Weiner's rhetorical strategies. The next chapter details the results of the content analysis of Twitter messages regarding Weinergate posted online throughout the course of the scandal.

Chapter 5: Content Analysis

Although the confluence of politics and sex pre-dated the creation of the internet, the Anthony Weiner scandal marked a turning point in the nature of political sex scandals. For the first time, a political sex scandal not only originated on a social media site, that same website served as a place for public opinion to be shared and shaped. News of Weinergate broke on Twitter, and in the days following Weiner's original tweet, Twitter became a site for discussion of the scandal. In fact, more than 70,000 tweets referencing Anthony Weiner's sex scandal[47] were sent on one day alone. Details of Weiner's infidelity created a fever pitch on the social media platform, in many ways mimicking the news coverage featured from several prominent news outlets (Bradley, 2011; Taylor, 2011).

As Weinergate took center stage on Twitter, online discourse undoubtedly aided in the social construction of the political sex scandal. Smith, Rainie, Shneiderman, and Himelboim (2014) explain the connected nature of social media websites, saying that "social media is used by millions of individuals who collectively generate an array of social forms from their interactions" (para. 4). This networked sharing of information not only means that information is being shared quickly – especially with regard to breaking news stories – but also that what is shared online adds to the larger cultural narrative regarding the news story itself. In this way, online discourse is one of many ways citizens and journalists may discuss and engage in political discourse, even those

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[47] This number was determined through the use of the search terms "#weiner," "#weinergate," and "Anthony Weiner" on June 6, 2011. Although there may have been more tweets discussing the scandal, the search parameters used here were designed to exclude irrelevant tweets.

involving sex scandals. Using the framework of cascading activation (Entman, 2003) and media convergence (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013), Weinergate provides an opportunity to study how Twitter users may influence narratives regarding political sex scandals.

A media convergence framework suggests that the social media users will shape, share and reframe media content in new ways, allowing for the presence of greater, diversified voices. Unlike Weiner's apologia strategies detailed in chapter 4, Twitter provided a place for many who were interested in the Weinergate scandal to discuss their thoughts without adhering strictly to Weiner's narrative framing. Additionally, geographic proximity was not a limiting factor for discussing this political sex scandal; rather, an interest in the news story spawned larger communities and networks for interested individuals to join. Although media convergence presents an optimistic outlook on the ability for diversified voices to be heard, this is a possibility that needs closer inspection. While social media certainly played an important role in the growth of the Weinergate scandal, the ways in which Twitter users discussed the news of Weiner's indiscretions is less clear. As such, a framing analysis will help shed light on the many messages that were shared online. This chapter will present results of the content analysis of Weinergate tweets, identify the most common social media frames of the sex scandal, and provide results and analysis of Twitter comments posted throughout the duration of the Weinergate scandal. In this way, we can begin to understand more about how Twitter users discussed the political, cultural, and sexual ramifications of Weiner's scandal.

Descriptive Statistics

Before diving into the results of the content analysis, it is important to note certain overall statistics and findings. Tweets were collected using the TweetReach service on four key dates within the scandal: May 28, 2011, June 1, 2011, June 6, 2011, and June 16, 2011.[48] In order to capture tweets that directly referenced Weinergate, I limited the collection of tweets to only those that specifically mention Anthony Weiner and his sex scandal on the four dates surrounding the unfolding scandal. To do this, I narrowed the search parameters for tweets to only include those that contain one or more of the following search terms: "#weiner," "#weinergate," and "Anthony Weiner." Almost 150,000 tweets were captured; this large volume of data led to the use of a sampling method to analyze the data set (refer to Appendix B, Table 1 for the number of tweets captured and analyzed for each date). Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (2005) note that stratified random sampling may be best for obtaining data that shows changes over time, and as such this method was used to sample 5% of the tweets, with the total number of tweets analyzed for this project including 7,342 tweets.

Three graduate student coders, one of whom was the author, received extensive training in order to learn how to implement the codebook. The coding of trainers took approximately 10 hours, with coders practicing on several units that were not part of the final reliability sample.[49] Of the final sample (*N*=7,342), 7,029 tweets were coded as actually being about the sex scandal, while 313 tweets were determined to be about unrelated topics and were discorded for the sample of coded tweets. Thus, the overall dataset was almost entirely (95.7%) comprised of tweets about the Weinergate scandal.

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[48] Refer to chapter 3 for the significance of each of these dates.
[49] Please see chapter 3 for more information about the coder training process.

In order to reach intercoder reliability, the three coders independently coded a portion of the overall data set, totaling 2,448 tweets (or 1/3 of the dataset) per coder. Drawing a reliability sample from this data set, I calculated intercoder reliability by relying on Krippendorff's alpha as a standard measure (Krippendorff, 1980). I chose this measure because it calculates a trusted level of stability, one specifically helpful with the frames used in this study. Krippendorff (2004) explains that reliable conclusions can be drawn from variables scoring a .80 or higher, while tentative conclusions can be drawn from variables scoring a .667 to .79. (Conclusions drawn from variables that only reach a reliability score below .667 may be unreliable.) When calculating intercoder reliability scores, I relied on the website VassarStats.net to help calculate these numbers.

After the coder training process, eight of the 10 variables relevant to the research questions explored in this project did achieve acceptable reliability. Krippendorff's alpha for the Weinergate variable was .81, which resulted in an acceptable level of reliability. However, the sometimes-complicated nature of determining if tweets were indirectly referencing Anthony Weiner or simply making inappropriate jokes[50] most likely resulted in a lower reliability score for this variable. There were two variables that were below acceptable levels of reliability, yet were still high enough to begin to draw tentative conclusions. Krippendorff's alpha for the character variable was .77, and Krippendorff's alpha for the media variable was also .77. This allows tentative conclusions to be drawn regarding whether Twitter users critiqued Weiner's character or the media's role in the scandal, impacting part of the results of research questions 1, 2, and 3. However, all other variables achieved acceptable reliability, and the results of the study provided

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[50] Weiner's last name may not be spelled the same as the euphemism for penis, but some users still used "weiner" to make jokes unrelated to the scandal.

findings worth further discussion. (Refer to Appendix B, Table 2, for Krippendorff alpha

scores for each variable.) The next section of this chapter will discuss the results of the

content analysis as they relate to each of the four research questions posed in chapter 3.

Research Question 1

Research question one sought to determine the dominant frames used on Twitter

when discussing Weinergate. According to the frequency tests run in SPSS, the *politics*

and work (regarding whether Weiner can continue to hold office or should resign) and

sex and women (any discussion of the sexual nature of the scandal or mention of the

women involved in the scandal) frames were used more than any other frames,

accounting for 2,145 (29.2 %) and 1,890 (25.7%) tweets, respectively. Other frames that

were commonly used include the *character and morality* (discussions of the politician's

ethics and personal character) and *neutral or uninterested* (a lack of interest in the

scandal or acceptance of scandalous behaviors) frames, accounting for 822 (11.2%) and

1,217 (16.6%) tweets, respectively. The *lying* (factual information and discussion of

whether Weiner lied), *partisan* (regarding whether the scandal would favor Democrats or

Repubicans), and *media coverage* (how or whether the media should cover the scandal)

frames each showed up less than 10% of the time, with the *comparison to past scandals*

(mentions of previous political sex scandals) frame utilized even less than 5% of the time.

While these frames did appear in the dataset, the primary focus of many Twitter users'

comments was on the political implications and sexual nature of the scandal. (Refer to

Appendix B, Tables 3A and 3B, for frequency data and rank ordered data on each frame.)

The design of this content analysis did not view frames as mutually exclusive,

meaning that more than one frame could be present within any one tweet. In other words,

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the coding of tweets allowed for multiple frames in a single tweet. Therefore, the total

number and percentage of frames reported in this analysis will not equal the total number

of tweets (or 100%). Doing so allowed for more nuance with the interpretation of the

frames over the course of the scandal, despite leading to unmatched numbers between the

frames and total units coded.

Research Question 2

Research question two explored how, if at all, the dominant frames used on

Twitter to discuss Weiner's sex scandal changed from May 28, 2011 to June 16, 2011.

On May 28, 2011, the *sex and women* frame appeared most frequently (*N*=79), or 31.9%

of the time, while the *neutral or uninterested* frame was used 23% of the time (*N*=57).

On June 1, the *sex and women* frame was used 28.2% of the time (*N*=268) and the *neutral*

or uninterested frame was used 20.6% of the time (*N*=196). On June 6, the *sex and*

women frame was used 27.1% of the time (*N*=985), while the *politics and work* and

neutral or uninterested frames were both used a little more than 15% of the time (*N*=562,

N=559, respectively). Last, on June 16, the *politics and work* frame was used

overwhelmingly more than any other frame (*N*=1509), 60.1% of the time. After this

frame, the *sex and women* and *neutral or uninterested* frames were used the most: 22.2%

(*N*=558) and 16.1% (*N*=405), respectively. While the *politics and work* frame was used

the most over the course of the entire scandal, it only appeared as the dominant frame on

the last day of the scandal. On June 6, the date Weiner admitted his guilt in the scandal,

it was the second most common frame. However, before this point the *politics and work*

frame was used less than 10% of the time: 4% on May 28 and 6.7% on June 1. (Refer to

Appendix B, Tables 4A and 4B, for frequency data and rank ordered data on each

variable over time.)

Although the *sex and women* frame continued to be a consistently used frame

throughout the course of the scandal, the *politics and work* frame did not become a

common frame among Twitter users until after Weiner admitted his guilt. Also worth

noting is that the *comparison to past scandals* frame was never widely used among

Twitter users. While news media frequently attempted to draw comparisons between

Weiner's scandal and those of previous politicians (Bill Clinton, Newt Gingrich, etc.),

Twitter users seemed largely uninterested in making references to these past scandals.

Additionally, there was a greater use of the *lying* frame in the middle days of the scandal,

yet hardly any mention of it on the last day of the scandal. This decline in use of the

lying frame most likely reflects the waning need to question whether Weiner was being

truthful or not since he openly admitted to sending the inappropriate picture in the middle

of the scandal. So, in some way, the rhetorical strategies he employed (as discussed in

Chapter 4) were successful: the discourse surrounding Weinergate eventually shifted

from questions regarding his behavior to whether he should remain a member of

Congress. However, as noted at the end of Chapter 4, these strategies proved to be too

little too late since he did ultimately resign his position in Congress. As his rhetorical

strategies shifted from lying about his involvement in the scandal to an announcement

regarding his work in Congress, the frames adopted by Twitter users also shifted from

lying to *politics and work*.

Research Question 3

Research question three asked how frequently social media users added images, audio files, videos, or links to their tweets discussing Weiner's sex scandal. Originally the project sought to determine which type of social media function was used in each individual tweet. However, the nature of the data received made it impossible to distinguish images from audio or from videos, with each item showing up as a hyperlink. Therefore, the different kinds of media were collapsed together into one kind of social media function, including hyperlinks to external websites. Frequency tests showed that Twitter users included social media functions 30.6% of the time (N=2,248). This result means that slightly less than a third of the time tweets included a hyperlink to an image, audio, video, or website of some sort.[51]

Research Question 4

Research question four explored how frequently social media users directed their comments to other users. Although coders were not explicitly trained to search for this, the TweetReach dataset came complete with this information provided. On May 28, 20 tweets were specifically written as responses to other individuals; on June 1, 96 tweets were specifically written as responses to other individuals; on June 6, 259 tweets were specifically written as responses to other individuals; and on June 16, 132 tweets were specifically written as responses to other individuals. The total percentage of tweets that were directed at other users for the entire sample was 6.9% of the time (507 tweets out of 7342 tweets). (Refer to Appendix B, Table 5, for frequency data on this variable.)

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[51] It should be noted that the integration of images and videos functions differently with the more current version of Twitter, and therefore the integration of social media functions would likely occur more frequently in tweets posted now.

Discussion

Based on the results of this content analysis, Twitter users did not *vastly* change the frames used throughout the course of the Weinergate scandal. The commonality of frames used may speak to the cascading activation of central ideas related to the scandal. One such example of this can be found in the frequently-used *sex and women* frame, which appeared regularly on each key date in the scandal. The specific nature of the scandal may have increased the use of this frame, since Weiner's actions made it necessary to discuss sex and sexuality in some way. For example, when the New York Post discussed Weiner's denial of the picture being of him, @NYRoyal19 (2011) tweeted "Rep. Anthony Weiner says he 'can't say with certitude' whether Twitter pic was of his crotch." Although some other news outlets chose to refer to the picture as "indecent" or "lewd," some news outlets chose to be specific when describing the sexual content of the picture itself. Because of the nature of the photo involved in Weinergate (e.g. a picture of an erect penis covered only in underwear), the *sex and women* frame was sure to be used frequently throughout the course of the scandal[52].

However, detached descriptions of the scandal only made up a fraction of the use of the *sex and women* frame. Several Twitter users took discussion of the sex scandal as an opportunity to make jokes about Weiner's genitalia, such as @Hwk765's joke, "Unlike ballpark franks, Anthony Weiner shrinks when you grill him!" (@DALHOU, 2011). @ethanjweiss (2011) referenced male and female genitalia in his joke, saying "Too bad Anthony Weiner is not a woman. It would have been so easy to replace the first "i" in "twitpic" with an "a"." Some of the jokes online were subtler, such as

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[52] Although some discussion of genitalia may have been necessary to discuss the details of Weiner's infidelity, the amount of "penis jokes" was excessive and surely avoidable.

@codypd's (2011) tweet, "Sunday Morning Panel questions: Should Weiner hold firm? Did Weiner hackers violate the penal code? Will he brief us? #weinergate." This series of sexual puns and innuendos characterizes much of the humor used in the *sex and women* frame, speaking to the way jokes were spread frequently among the social network of Twitter. Humorous sexual references remained a constant throughout the course of the Weinergate scandal. As @James_Nevin (2011) put it best, "I could do #Weinergate jokes all night."

In addition to indirect and direct references to sex, several tweets mentioned the women involved in the scandal. Weiner's wife, Huma Abedin, was often referred to in sympathetic tones, suggesting Twitter users related to this scandal in terms of Abedin's perspective. @fatemehf (2011) commented on another user's tweet regarding whether Abedin was wise to avoid Weiner's press conference, saying, "Agreed. I feel so awful for her." @californiaDCgrl (2011) tweeted, "I feel terrible for Rep. #Weiner's poor wife, but at least he finally admitted what everyone knew all along." In general, Twitter users expressed sympathy for Abedin and/or anger directed at Weiner on her behalf. However, some users also commented on the attractiveness of the women in the scandal. @AskTheOz (2011) said that "[Broussard's] not even hot... well not as hot as me. I'm smarter too," directing the comment to Weiner's Twitter account. Another user, @gvcimbalo (2011), was excited about the prospect that Abedin might be single again, saying, "If this means that Huma Abedin (Mrs. Anthony Weiner) is available, may I be the first to say, va va va voom!" Similar to frequent discussion of the sexual nature of the scandal, attention – both welcome and unwelcome – was also given to the women who

were impacted by Weiner's actions. That attention was often sexualized by those commenting, despite their relative bystander role in the scandal.[53]

Although Twitter users frequently shared sex jokes and made sexual innuendos (and thus used the *sex and women* frame), they also repeatedly made comments that adopted the *neutral or uninterested* frame. While news outlets covered the scandal in its early days, some Twitter users insisted they did not care about this story. As Bird (2003) has noted, audiences do in fact enjoy news coverage of scandals, suggesting a contrast to this narrative. However, users frequently suggested that they did not care about the scandal, which may have backfired against the intention to downplay the scandal. Rather than indicate a lack of interest and lead to the scandal's fading from popular discourse, discussing it *at all* on Twitter may have emphasized the use of the *neutral* frame online, subsequently creating even further dialogue about the scandal. In other words, Twitter users were discussing the scandal online, but largely to say that they did not care about the scandal (and continued sharing of the story – even if to say one was neutral – further encouraged others to use the *neutral or uninterested* frame).

One such example of this indifference came from @MsBehavior (2011), who summed up her feelings by saying, "You know, I really don't care who my elected officials are having sex with, so long as they're not screwing ME. #Weiner." @Token12ga (2011) echoed this sentiment, saying, "Yeah, the sad thing is I don't consider #weinergate a big deal at all, there's a ton of other stuff far more important [sic]." Twitter users also indicated they were upset with the fact that the scandal was even a news story, specifically because these users wished the news media and Twitter

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[53] The objectification and general exploitation of the women involved in this scandal will be discussed further in chapter 6.

users would spend less time discussing the scandal itself. @kausmickey (2011) communicated a lack of interest in Weinergate, saying "How can you talk about Anthony Weiner when middle class incomes are stagnant?" Tweets such as @kausmickey's indicate concern over why the scandal received attention when issues such as wage increases garnered little attention, epitomizing this use of the *neutral or uninterested* frame. However, the popular narrative and widespread discussion of the scandal would indicate a large interest in the scandal. As Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013) note, new technologies such as social media sites allow for greater control of mediated discourse regarding the news. Twitter users, in this instance, emphasized the information they deemed most important, or unimportant. Yet even as many Twitter users believed the scandal unworthy of attention, many others disagreed and continued to engage in discourse surrounding Weinergate.

After the scandal continued to receive news coverage for almost two weeks, Twitter users began to adopt different frames to discuss the scandal. This shift in frame usage reflects the way that framing may change within a social network, especially dependent upon the cultural narratives circulating regarding a news story. Previous research attempts at understanding social media have typically examined dialogue by social media users. However, this research suggests that users change their framing of a topic as the scandal continues to develop and evolve. Although media coverage may depend upon certain frames, users were able to shift attention towards different parts of the scandal as it developed. For example, in the beginning stages of the scandal, Weiner largely denied the allegations of sending the photos, and the social media discourse reflected discussion of Weiner's honesty through the use of the *lying* frame.

In the instance of Weinergate, the *neutral or uninterested* frame was still used frequently all throughout the scandal. However, the overwhelming frame Twitter users adopted on the last day of the scandal was the *politics and work* frame. This frame was partially concerned with whether Weiner should continue to keep his job or not, so it makes sense that this frame would be used more frequently on the day Weiner resigned from office. Twitter users were torn over whether he should continue to be employed or not. @TheGeNeCySt (2011) simply said, "I don't want Anthony Weiner to step down," while @neiljamesmorton (2011) said that Weiner should "be a real man and resign." While users differed on the action Weiner should take, they framed their discussion of the scandal in terms of the ramifications it could have on Weiner's career, not the political ramifications on Congress itself. Few if any tweets actually mentioned what actions Congress should or could take, aside from reports that then-Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi would call for an ethics investigation into Weiner's behavior.

Although there were certain frames used more frequently than others throughout the course of the scandal, there were often tweets that adopted the use of more than one frame at a time. @pedrozero's (2011) tweet adopted several frames, including the *lying* frame and *sex and women* frame: "Clearly Rep. Anthony Weiner has qualms about lying. His wife works for HIllary [sic] Clinton. It's in the culture." @pedrozero's certainty regarding Weiner's dishonesty is connected to a woman completely uninvolved in the scandal, linking the two together in this tweet. Additionally, Weiner's wife, Abedin, is charged with wrongdoing despite her relative bystander role in this scandal. Another tweet that adopted multiple frames includes @Fire_Obama_2012's (2011) tweet, which said "@repweiner is a liar and an arrogant, perverted little man. His credibility and

career are OVER! #littleweiner #weinergate #tinysausage." This tweet features at least

three distinct frames, including the *lying* frame, the *politics and work* frame, and the

character frame. @Fire_Obama_2012 not only argues that Weiner lied about the

scandal, but that he will be unable to continue his career due to his dishonesty. Tweets

such as the two discussed here represent the ability for Twitter users to post complex

comments about Weinergate, despite the social media site's limit of using 140 characters

or less when crafting a message. As such, it was important that this study allow for the

presence of more than one frame per unit of analysis, since it would be difficult to parse

out which frame carried the most significance in either of these previously mentioned

tweets.

While discussing Weinergate, Twitter users sometimes provided external links to

websites or images, videos, or audio files, using this Twitter function almost 1/3 of the

time. These links would commonly appear as URLs to another website with further

information about the scandal. For example, @DarthVectivus's tweet said, "RT

@amyrolph @GennetteC Take a look at this story -- love to talk with you today if there's

more. Thanks! http://bit.ly/lmIOon #weinergate." The frequency with which Twitter

users included social media functions to discuss Weinergate would indicate that they did

rely on a shared network to discuss the scandal. Copying and sharing links – whether

images, audio files, videos, or websites – indicates a collaborative approach to discussing

the news. Similarly, the content shared on Twitter enabled an ease of spread for various

kinds of Twitter users. Journalists and media outlets shared links to news stories posted

on their home websites, which other users shared with their own social networks. For

example, @ReutersSgBuro (2011) tweeted the headline, "Top News: Congressman

admits to Tweeting lewd photo: NEW YORK (Reuters) - Representative Anthony Weiner admitted... http://bit.ly/kSCNBG," complete with a link to the news story attached to the end of the tweet. Twitter users such as @erassmy (2011) then later posted the same link on their own timeline, spreading the reach of this tweet to another distinct social network. This information-sharing function certainly demonstrates the convergent nature of social media use when discussing political sex scandals, as well as the ways in which certain frames are easily shared among a given network, as cascading activation theory would suggest.

Regardless of the collaborative approach used when discussing Weinergate on Twitter, the rate in which users directed their tweets to other Twitter users suggests otherwise. Since only 6.9% of the total tweets posted discussing Weinergate were directed at other users, this could imply that users were uninterested in engaging in a conversation with other people. The very nature of social media might imply, however, that tweets are always directed at others within one's social network, even if not explicitly indicated as such.[54] For example, @SamValley's (2011) tweet addressed others without specifically tagging any individual, saying "So Twitterverse; is it going to be #WeinerShows, #WeinerSongs, or #WeinerFilms as the official #weinergate hashtag game? #tcot #GOP #p2." His reference to the "Twitterverse" invites responses from other Twitter users who are not directly tagged in the post. Discourse within the Twitter network may occur differently than face-to-face communication, meaning that social

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[54] Gottfried and Shearer's (2016) research showed that social media users use different sites for different purposes, including those who seek out news on Facebook or Twitter versus those who happen upon it while doing something else.

media users likely engaged with one another frequently despite the relatively small appearance of directed tweets.

Implications for Further Research

        This content analysis presents several implications for future research. Content analyses of social media content should definitely rely on the theory of cascading activation in the future, as several tweets would appear multiple times in the dataset. Repeated tweets indicate that users would seize upon an idea or comment and share it over and over with their followers, who would then send the same message to their followers. The quick spread of certain frames lend themselves to easy familiarity with audiences, suggesting that thinking about politicians involved in sex scandals is not something unfamiliar to social media users. As Entman (2003) says, cascading activation works particularly well when the frame shared *makes sense* among a given network; in this case, the belief that Anthony Weiner would engage in a sex scandal while holding public office spread quickly among various Twitter users because it was easy to believe.[55]

        For future scholars who hope to study social media, framing provides a helpful way to better understand the content posted online. The volume of information shared through social media is such that it can be daunting to sort through the information. However, framing begins to help categorize and sort through all the messages communicated in this way. When using a framing analysis with social media, it is important to allow for the presence of multiple frames in any one tweet, as content is usually dense despite the limited character count allowed per tweet. Polysemy is particularly relevant in social media content that features links to external websites,

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[55] Perhaps it was easy to believe Weiner would engage in a sex scandal, but it might have simply been easy to believe *any* politician would be caught in a sex scandal.

images, videos, and audio files. As online communication continues to develop (i.e. memes become a widely used form of political communication), allowing for multiple frames in a given content analysis unit is key. Similarly, framing provides a tool to explore how online discourse changes over time. As evident in the results discussed in this chapter, the frames adopted by Twitter users did change over the course of the scandal. Understanding the changing nature of framing strategies allows for a more nuanced study of political sex scandals, especially when coupled with the changing nature of rhetorical strategies and critical discourse surrounding sexuality and relationships. Scholars who choose to adopt a content analysis framework for studying social media messages should consider this, noting that a framing analysis centered on one moment in time may present a limited picture of the discourse posted online.

Last, social media provides an easy forum for individuals to engage in and indulge in crass humor, especially sexual puns and innuendos. Weinergate presented a particularly appealing opportunity for social media users to make penis jokes, given that wiener is a euphemism for male genitalia. However, Weiner himself was not the only source material for comedy – the women involved in the scandal (and occasionally those who were not) also became the subject of sexually suggestive humor. This practice seems to be particularly meaningful, given that women continue to be targets of harassment on social media sites – Twitter, especially.[56] The final chapter of the dissertation will discuss this further, examining the ways in which Weiner's rhetoric, the frames used on Twitter, and larger cultural narratives congregated on this political sex scandal.

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[56] For further proof of this harassment, see Anna Silman's (2016) timeline of the Twitter abuse that Leslie Jones, comedian and star of *Saturday Night Live* and *Ghostbusters*, suffered in the summer of 2016.

Chapter 6: Critical Analysis

While the embarrassment of twice being caught engaging in extramarital affairs might prevent some individuals from straying outside their marriage a third time, this cannot be said about Anthony Weiner. The former New York congressman was, once again, caught messaging women who were not his wife, Huma Abedin. On August 28, 2016, *The New York Post* broke the news that Weiner had engaged in *another* sex scandal with a woman he met online. Weiner's actions were similar to his previous sex scandals, where he sent flirtatious and sometimes sexually explicit text messages to a woman he met online. The timing even occurred in the midst of another political campaign: rather than his own run for New York City mayor, however, this scandal occurred in the midst of Hillary Clinton's bid for U.S. president (notable as Abedin served as one of Clinton's chief advisors).[57]

These similarities aside, this scandal seemed to cross an unforgiveable line for both Abedin and the general public when reports showed that Weiner had involved his son in the extramarital affair. *The New York Post* released pictures proving his involvement with a woman who was not his wife, included one suggestive photo that also showed his son was in bed with him. As Rosenberg and Golding (2016) described, Weiner told the woman about his visitor in bed, saying "someone just climbed into my bed" before sending her a lurid picture featuring both his son's face and his aroused penis. As reported by Rosenberg and Golding, "Weiner then hit 'Send' on the cringe-inducing image, which shows a bulge in his white, Jockey-brand boxer briefs and his son

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[57] Perhaps a coincidence, but neither campaign was successful.

cuddled up to his left, wrapped in a light-green blanket. … Moments after forwarding the photo, Weiner freaked out over the possibility he had accidentally posted it publicly — just as he did during the infamous episode that forced him to resign from Congress in 2011" (para. 7-9). It seems that Weiner's concern was not over the presence of his child in the photo, but rather that he would get caught engaging in an extramarital affair … again.

To complicate matters further, Weiner also faced a federal investigation regarding a series of messages exchanged with a 15-year-old girl. According to reports from the *Daily Mail* and the *Associated Press*, Weiner and the minor exchanged sexually explicit photos and texts for several months, which prompted federal agents in both New York and North Carolina to investigate whether any criminal activity had occurred. As if sending sexually suggestive pictures that included his son's face were not bad enough, Weiner's potential involvement with a 15-year-old girl may result in Weiner facing child pornography charges.

The involvement of minors was not the only fact that differentiated this scandal from his previous two scandals. Following this third scandal, Weiner *actually* deleted his public Twitter account. As of January 20, 2017, Weiner's account was still deactivated (although several joke accounts still exist, and he could be operating an account under a pseudonym[58]). And yet Weiner's use (or non-use) of social media or technology did not overshadow the potential exploitation of children.[59] Unlike previous scandals that saw Weiner disclose details to Abedin in advance of their release to the news media, Weiner,

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[58] As mentioned earlier, Weiner did use the alias Carlos Danger previously to obscure his continued online flirtations.
[59] It seems that children and minors are the only groups that must be more protected than women in the hierarchy of protected classes.

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it seems, chose to hide the involvement of minors – specifically, his son. Hauser (2016) noted that "Ms. Abedin learned only on Sunday while the couple were in the Hamptons with their son that Mr. Weiner had sent a photo of himself and the boy to the unidentified woman" (para. 15). Whether it was solely the presence of their son in the photo, the fact that Weiner withheld the information, or the fact that he had strayed outside their marriage again (or some combination of the three), Abedin's patience appears to have run out and she decided to file for divorce.

Weinergate marked the beginning of what turned out to be one politician's downfall in both his professional career and spousal relationship. However, each scandal continues to uncover more about what society will deem as socially acceptable and what it does not. This chapter will focus on the original Weinergate scandal and the cultural implications for how it was discussed. While chapter four summarized the results of the rhetorical analysis conducted for this project, the current chapter will discuss the critical analysis of the scandal. The critical analysis features a wider range of data to pull from than chapter four, which focused solely on Weiner's statements to the news media. Chapter six, however, pulls from Weiner's statements, the social media comments collected from chapter five, and the broader cultural norms observed during the initial 2011 scandal. After summarizing the previous research conducted in this project, I will discuss gender, sex, and sexuality as they relate to the scandal, finishing with suggestions for future research.

Unsuccessful Rhetorical Attempts at Apologia

Chapter four explored the rhetorical strategies Anthony Weiner employed over the course of his political sex scandal. Four different apologia strategies – denial,

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bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence – were employed at varying stages of the scandal, combining in different ways to communicate four different postures – absolutive, vindicative, explanative, and justificative. It could be said that each one of these strategies and postures were used in ways that harmed women. When Weiner adopts an absolutive posture, he not only denies his involvement in the sex scandal, he seeks to distance himself from the women he texted. Denial of knowledge also equates to a silencing of their voices and perspectives, as well as their personhood to an extent. And Weiner's distancing position from these women negatively stigmatizes them. As quoted in Otis (2011), Weiner tweeted the joke, "Tivo shot. FB hacked. Is my blender gonna attack me next?" (para. 11). While this tweet may have been an innocuous way to deny his actions of sending the penis photo, it also compared the use of technology, and the women who used that technology to talk to him, to an attack. Weiner's use of a vindicative posture not only denies his own responsibility in the scandal, it also tries to transcend above the fray, leaving the women in the scandal down to rot in the muck. By repeatedly referring to the incident as a "prank" and a "distraction," he also attaches the same connotation to the women in the scandal – that they are a joke or unworthy of attention. Weiner's explanative posture refocuses attention to his positive traits while again distancing himself from the negative scandal. Even as Weiner admits his shame, he tries to bolster his reputation by assigning himself the protector role: "I was trying to protect my wife. I was trying to protect myself from shame" (as quoted in New York Post, 2011, para. 37). Yet, simultaneously he distances himself from the other women, not even mentioning these women until asked directly about them. Last, he adopts a justificative posture to not only bolster himself but to also transcend the scandal. Even as

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he resigned from Congress, he notes that he "… got into politics to help give voice to the many who simply did not have one" (as quoted in Hornick, 2011, para. 3). However, this does not seem to encourage the women impacted by the scandal, as he never offered them an opportunity to share their perspectives.

Weiner's apologia gives little thought, care, or attention to the women impacted by his actions, aside from the attention he must give them when it benefits him personally. Rather than accepting responsibility for his actions and allowing the women in the scandal to speak, Weiner monopolizes the attention by focusing it on himself. It could be argued that Weiner was the most famous person involved in the scandal, and therefore it was important to pay attention to him. Similarly, his role in Congress may have also warranted closer scrutiny and thus encouraged him to focus the attention on himself. Last, Weiner might have been attempting to protect others involved in the scandal, as he claimed to do. Regardless of Weiner's motivations, his actions resulted in the silencing and exploitation of the women involved in the scandal. In particular, Weiner used his wife for his own personal gain, at times shaming the media's insistence on covering the story as being harmful to her (rather than his actions being harmful). As quoted in CNN Wire Staff(c) (2011), Weiner said, "I'm protecting my wife, who every day is waking up to these insane stories that are getting so far from reality" (para. 9), referencing the news stories reported by the press corps to which he was speaking. Displacing blame, denying responsibility, using his wife as a focal point – each tactic was designed to avoid his own accountability. Similarly, by insisting that the women he messaged remain "anonymous," Weiner opted to try to control the release of information rather than simply allow these women to make their own decisions. Rather than

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providing a platform for these women to speak for themselves, Weiner instead tried to control their side of the story, too.

In a way, Weiner's actions are arguably chivalrous. Many individuals may shy away from unwanted media attention, and by serving as a lightning rod of sorts, Weiner takes the brunt of this barrage to save his wife[60] from harassment. Yet in actuality, nothing could stop the news story from escalating and Abedin from being questioned. Although it may have been unpleasant for Abedin in the initial days, Weiner's early admission of guilt *could* have mitigated the continued coverage of the scandal. Taking responsibility early would have done more to protect Abedin than denying the affair in the first place. Instead, Weiner did deny and misdirect, leading to his wife's eventual embarrassment. Meanwhile, Abedin's silent stoicism existed in direct contrast to Weiner's erratic strategies, highlighting his reliance on and attraction to media coverage. Had Weiner really been interested in acting on his wife's behalf, he might have followed her lead.

Sexual Innuendos Widely Shared Online

Chapter five studied the way that social media users discussed Weiner's scandal on Twitter, revealing the most frequently used frames throughout the course of the scandal. Weinergate most certainly was both political and sexual in nature, prompting social media users to discuss the scandal in these terms. The *politics and work* frame was used most frequently, with the *sex and women* frame being the next most commonly used frame. Tweets that contained discussion of whether Weiner should resign from office adopted the *politics and work* frame, which helps explain the frequent appearance of this

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[60] And the other women he messaged

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frame. However, the *sex and women* frame's popularity was not as easily explained. Although the sexual nature of the scandal precipitated some use of the *sex and women* frame, the amount of sexual humor used online seemed excessive in light of the political ramifications of Weiner's resignation from Congress. Other frequently used frames included the *neutral or uninterested* frame and the *media coverage* frame. This result can be interpreted to mean that social media users were divided in their thoughts about the scandal. While some users called for more attention and scrutiny to be given to the scandal, others seemed to be exhausted by the coverage it had received. Like many "hot topics," public consensus was split over the topic, even with regard to whether it deserved discussion at all.

While previous content analyses typically explore one moment in time, this analysis demonstrated that frames will change as the scandal does. As the scandal developed and further news and information was shared about the scandal, social media users changed the way they discussed the scandal. The *sex and women* frame was always a popular choice for social media users, taking the most frequently used frame spot for the first three days of the scandal. It was only on the last day of the scandal that the *politics and work* frame became the most frequently used frame, and it was so overwhelmingly used that its frequency on this one day made it the most widely used frame over the entire course of the scandal. In the early days of the unfolding scandal, many social media users chose to use the *lying* frame, most likely because there was some question regarding the honesty of Weiner's claims that he had not sent the inappropriate picture.[61] Last, social media users did discuss Weinergate through the

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[61] He had.

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media coverage frame some of the time, mostly in the beginning of the scandal. While it may make sense to experience media coverage fatigue near the end of the scandal, users decided to complain about the scandal most at the beginning, indicating they were uninterested in hearing more about it in the initial stages when it was unclear whether Weiner had actually sent the scandalous photo. Alternatively, some social media users may have complained that Weinergate was not being covered *enough* by the media. Either way, the *media coverage* frame was only used more than half the other frames in the early days of the scandal.

When the scandal was first discussed on Twitter, there were several potential ways to discuss Weinergate: emphasis could have focused on whether Weiner had lied about his involvement in the scandal, it could have focused on the political ramifications of the scandal, or it could have focused on Congress's (in)ability to continue conducting business. Instead, while some social media users did focus on these issues, Twitter seemed to become the most popular location to make penis jokes. Scholars like Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013) have discussed the potential democratic benefits social media may present, especially in terms of raising public engagement levels (see also Warner, Turner McGowen, and Hawthorne, 2012). However, political participation on social media may be of little relevance when political sex scandals simply present an opportunity for individuals to publicly make sex jokes – often times with little serious intent, humor being the sole focus of these tweets. Sex jokes aside, the results of chapters four and five suggest it is likely that either the news coverage of the scandal or Weiner's apologia strategies (or a combination of both) may have influenced the ways that social media users thought about and discussed the scandal. Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013)

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might also suggest that the change in frames could have in turn influenced both media coverage and Weiner's strategies, demonstrating the reflexive nature of media use today.

Given the previous findings from the earlier chapters of this dissertation, I will now discuss the following questions: 1) In what ways are ideological values regarding sex, sexuality, and gender roles communicated following a political sex scandal? 2) Does the acceptance or rejection of particular sexual actions lead to a marginalization of certain groups? And 3) Does the structure of social media as a site of cultural discourse shape the conversations regarding political sex scandals?

Porn Stars, "Real Men," and Good Wives: Implications for Sex, Sexuality, and Gender Roles

Looking at the research conducted in this project, it is important to explore the ramifications with regard to sex, sexuality, and gender roles. Although it could be argued the actions of one individual (i.e. Weiner) only impact his immediate friends and family, those who hold political office occupy the public spotlight, bringing their actions under closer scrutiny. Therefore, what Weiner chooses to do within the confines of his relationship become subject to public debate, regardless of whether it is anyone else's "business." Weinergate, then, becomes an instance where scholars can explore the tension between the public and the private, or more specifically, an instance where private relationships becomes publicly discussed. Additionally, this public discussion provides an opportunity to interrogate the ideologies regarding sexuality, critiquing the ways that masculinity and normative sexual behaviors are reinforced and circulated online.

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Masculinity reinforced

Throughout the Weinergate scandal, both Weiner and social media users reinforced hegemonic masculinity, discussing the scandal in terms that marginalized less dominant forms of gender expression. In particular, paternalism played heavily with regard to Weiner's expressions of hegemonic masculinity. One of the most apparent examples of this lies in Weiner's choice of rhetorical strategies. Following the release of information about his scandal, Weiner discussed women in ways that were both paternalistic and exploitative of women at the same time. When speaking to reporters, Weiner at times lectured journalists on how to complete their work. As reported in a CNN Wire Staff(b) (2011) article, Weiner said, "I understand you're doing your job, but I'm going to go back to work now," adding "I participated in the story a couple of days now, given comments on it. This is a distraction and I'm not going to let it distract me" (para. 17). Similarly, Weiner refused to discuss with reporters covering the story his communication behaviors, saying, "I'm not going to get into how I communicate with people on social media" (para. 11). Weiner's tone was defiant in the face of legitimate questions about his sex scandal, communicating a sense that he knew better than the professional journalists around him (much like a father may lecture a misbehaving child). The choice of aggressive strategies fit within a masculine archetype of how to respond to both personal and political attacks, a strategy that Weiner had previously been praised for when using it on the House floor.[62]

Weiner not only sought to protect himself from attack, but also to fend off the perception of attacks directed towards his wife. However, Weiner was often paternalistic

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[62] Weiner previously gained national notoriety for his fervent speeches delivered while serving in the House of Representatives.

when asking the media to stop covering the scandal so that his wife and the other women involved in the scandal could maintain some measure of privacy. At one point, he even implies that the media are manufacturing drama with this scandal, drama that is unnecessarily upsetting his wife, Huma Abedin. In an interview with news media, Weiner (as quoted in CNN Wire Staff(c)), said, "Yes, I'm protecting my wife, who every day is waking up to these insane stories that are getting so far from reality" (para. 9). Weiner refers to Abedin while expressing frustration for how pained she has been throughout the scandal, a simultaneous suggestion of guilt and sympathy coming into play. However, what Weiner misses from the equation is that the media is covering the scandal *because he sexted other women*. The news media would likely not cover Weiner's personal sex life without warrant, despite his suggestion that the scandal was manufactured. So by shaming the press corps for questioning his behaviors, Weiner also scolds them for their role in making women feel bad. Not only does this strategy involve an aspect of denial and differentiation, it suggests a "father knows best" mentality.

Women lose as a result of Weiner's actions

Chapter four discussed the ways in which Weiner's rhetorical apologia strategies exploited women to his advantage, silencing them while also referring to them when it suited his needs. Building on this notion with the Twitter analysis, women involved in multiple aspects of the scandal were both patronized and exploited by Weiner and also social media users. Social media users discussed the women involved in the scandal – particularly Weiner's wife, Huma Abedin – in sympathetic, often pitying tones. Many users focused on the status of Weiner and Abedin's marriage, tweeting updates such as @bandshirt's (2011) post that said, "#Celebrity: Anthony Weiner Reunites With Wife:

Anthony Weiner is back with wife Huma Abedin ... at least for now...." Abedin was

primarily framed in reference to her relationship to Weiner, whether in supportive or

humorous terms. @p8riot (2011) referenced Weiner's own previous tweet while alluding

to his treatment of Abedin, saying, " … The toaster loyalty is more relevant to Huma,

now isn't it? #WeinerGate," implying an inanimate object was more loyal than Abedin's

own husband. Some users suggested Abedin would (or should) take violent action, such

as @USAHipster (2011), who tweeted "Huma Weiner has lots of options. Hmm. Let's

see. NYC = Mafia & Hitmen. #weinergate." Comedian Joy Behar joked, "Wonder what

that conversation w/ Huma was like. It's so hard to converse with someone who's trying

to stab you. #weinergate" (@swaman85, 2011). Not only should Abedin consider

violence against her cheating spouse, she would be justified in harming or killing him.

Abedin's agency as an individual who exists outside her marriage was largely ignored,

instead relegating her to the role of wife alone.

While many users discussed Abedin in largely limiting ways, some users became

interested in the notion of Abedin running for Weiner's seat, with life imitating art ala

The Good Wife. @katiemiller91 (2011) tweeted, "I'm obsessed. @GOOD's

@annfriedman on why #Huma should run for #Weiner's seat. http://t.co/VwKz7Ye

#shatteringtheceilingthathillarycracked." At least in these moments, Abedin was seen as

more than just a politician's wife, even if the comparison highlighted this fact. However,

Abedin's position to Weiner was *still* the most notable characteristic on which many

social media users focused. For example, several people felt a right and duty to defend

Abedin, despite her silence on the scandal. This defense helped reinforce the stereotype

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that women should be protected from "bad boys," even from outsiders who do not have a personal stake in the relationship.

Similarly, the other women involved in the scandal were discussed only in light of their relationship to Weiner. Twitter user @redstoneage (2011) commented on Weiner's communication with "porn star and stripper Ginger Lee," while @jasongroman (2011) referred to Megan Broussard as a "college chick." Regardless of the relationship to Weiner, the women who were mentioned online in reference to the scandal were boiled down to caricatures: the cuckold wife, stoically silent partner, sexy mistress, obsessive stalker, etc. Social media websites present the opportunity for individuals to voice their own perspectives, yet in this instance Twitter served as a place for women to be stereotyped based on their relationship with a man. So even when expressing sympathy, social media users were both paternalistic and pigeonholing of the women involved in the scandal.

Heteronormativity privileged

While sexting technology may be relatively new, Gamson (2016) argues that the media narratives circulating the Weinergate scandal proceeded according to pre-existing scandal scripts. If Gamson argues that the news media adopts such stereotypical narratives, I would extend that argument to also include Weiner and social media users in the reinforcement of normative cultural scripts, specifically that of heteronormative privilege. This takes the form of reinforcing the sanctity of marriage, both through Weiner's rhetorical choices and social media users' tweets.

The way that Weiner spoke about the scandal and the reaction from Twitter users reinforced traditional relationship roles, specifically that romantic relationships should

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only exist between two people (in this case, a man and woman). Weiner's choice of rhetorical strategies emphasized this norm through his apologies to Abedin and his family. Weiner (2011) claimed he "hurt the people I care about the most" (para. 2) and with his online communication, reinforcing the strength of his relationship with Abedin as well as the sanctimony of their marriage. Weiner described his actions as "destructive," "regrettable," and "embarrassing," all negative connotations associated with sexting women who were not his wife. Similarly, social media users criticized Weiner for his infidelities, describing him as a "pervert" and "dirtbag" and suggesting that he was not a "real man," among many other derogatory terms. @Austin1622 (2011) tweeted that Weiner was an "#Idiot" for cheating on his "Hot Wife," saying, "You just married her last summer! #pathetic #weinergate." Not only was Weiner critiqued for lying to the American public about whether he had originally sent the scandalous photo, he was condemned for cheating on his wife.[63]

Monogamy, therefore, is a widely shared value that is circulated through Weiner's rhetorical choices and the discourse of social media users. While several individuals communicated a preference for the sanctity of marriage[64], those who may prefer more of an open relationship are marginalized by the reinforcement of heteronormative relationships as the norm. At one point, Weiner (2011) acknowledges that Abedin was aware of his online communication prior to the 2011 incident, saying "My wife has

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[63] Abedin's attractiveness was frequently used to bolster the criticism of Weiner's infidelity, leaving me to wonder if the outcry would have been as harsh had Abedin not been as "hot." Few social media users (if any) described other attributes of Abedin as reason why Weiner should not cheat, such as her intelligence, success, humor, etc.

[64] Rarely would social media users comment on non-heterosexual relationships in the context of this scandal. However, users such as @mrspete (2011) attempted to draw a connection between Weiner's sex scandal and those who do not support gay marriage, saying, "I know its [sic] gay to keep bringing this up, but it's still illegal for me to get married. #gingrich #schwarzenegger #weiner."

known about some of these online relationships since before we were married. And we spoke frankly about them because — well, we spoke frankly about them. But she didn't know until this morning that I had not been telling the truth about whether I posted the Twitter posting last week" (para. 84). Some couples may acknowledge and accept a non-monogamous structure to their relationship, and this disclosure provides an opportunity for Weiner to remind others of this fact. However, instead Weiner continues to apologize for his behavior, suggesting his communication with women who were not his wife is wrong. Near the beginning of his press conference on June 6 when he admits to sending the picture online, Weiner (2011) says the following: "I am deeply sorry for the pain this has caused my wife Huma and our family and my constituents, my friends, supporters and staff. … To be clear, I have never met any of these women or had physical relationships at any time" (para. 3-4). Instead of offering clarity in his explanation, Weiner could have chosen to simply not comment at all.

Alternatively, Weiner could have acknowledged his online communications in the early days of the scandal and therefore normalized it. Yet he chose to deny his actions, simultaneously distancing himself from non-monogamous relationships and creating further interest in his personal life. Weiner's rhetorical choices were a missed opportunity to start a national conversation about the nature and privacy of one's sexuality. A 2010 Pew Research Center study found that "marriage, while declining among all groups, remains the norm for adults with a college education and good income but is now markedly less prevalent among those on the lower rungs of the socio-economic ladder" (para. 2). Given that marriage is generally less present within American households, it remains a commonly privileged form of relationship. And yet

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sexual partnerships differ more and more in their makeup. Marginalization of non-normative groups is not only detrimental to those who choose to behave this way, but to non-male, non-masculine, non-heterosexual individuals, too. While Mandell and Chen (2016) describe Abedine as both present and vocal, "The 'political wife' typically stands next to her husband, a [silent] symbol of spousal support that has received significant [reinforcement] from the media" (p. 85). By privileging a monogamous, heterosexual relationship where the scorned wife should be protected, ideological narratives such as this one minimize the agency women have in their own relationships, as well as non-monogamous, non-heterosexual couplings. In an effort to provide a thorough defense of Abedin, social media users and Weiner may have inadvertently harmed a greater number of people as well.

Further, Cohn (2013) reported that a successful marriage is *not* the top priority of most Americans, with being a good parent taking the top spot of those surveyed. Given this data, it may help explain both Abedin's and the general public's response to Weiner's 2016 sex scandal, which indicated his parenting decisions could harm his child. The public response to Weiner's sexting shows that even non-physical relations that occur with individuals who are not in the primary pairing may be damning to the credibility of the "cheating" offender. Although the interpersonal acceptability of this kind of behavior largely depends on the agreement of the couple in the "open" or "closed" relationship, non-normative relationships are largely viewed negatively in both public opinion and media portrayals (Morin, 2011). A lack of visibility of couples who engage in romantic relationships in non-monogamous ways may reinforce to these people that they are not accepted within mainstream culture, thus marginalizing their behavior

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and their bodies to fringes. Weiner may not have had the political will to take a stand for

non-heteronormative relationships, relegating the action to Twitter. However,

disappointingly, this was not the case as I will discuss further below.

Twitter: Safe Space for Misogyny and Not Much Else

Twitter and other social media sites not only provide an avenue for harassment to

occur, they also serve as a way for couples to cheat on their respective partners. In the

case of Weinergate, the website served as a way for Weiner to engage in his infidelities.

Although Weiner has gone on to use other platforms[65] to meet women, he maintained an

active Twitter account until after his third public exposure of an extramarital affair. The

combination of anonymity and notoriety allowed with social media creates a unique

space for engaging in duplicitous behaviors. Similar to the way some individuals enjoy

the sexual thrill of consorting in public spaces, Weiner might have found pleasure in

sexting women who were not his wife through the public forum of a social media

website.

Public concern with private affairs is arguably a feminist project, but in this

instance it may have caused more harm than good to gender equity. For social media,

this scandal exhibits some of the traits that we have come to know the medium for:

specifically, creating a hostile environment that readily criticizes people, even when at

their lowest points. Twitter in particular is somewhat known for being a space where

hate speech and abuse flourishes. For example, up until his comments regarding

pedophilia and child abuse, Milo Yiannopoulos was a Twitter user who gained political

notoriety largely through controversial media tactics exhibited towards women and

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[65] In 2016, Weiner used Skype to communicate with a 15-year-old girl, according to reports from the
DailyMail.com.

minorities (Cumming, 2017). Yiannopoulos frequently used the medium of social media to share offensive perspectives, highlighting how Twitter, in particular, has become a place where misogyny develops freely without greater scrutiny from the general public. While the comments shared online during the Weinergate scandal may not have sparked as much outrage as Yiannopoulos's comments have, the subtle acceptance of dominant narratives offered for the sake of humor reinforce harmful gender stereotypes.

One of the most frequently used frames that emerged from the Weinergate scandal centered on sexuality, especially those found in reference to Weiner's status as a "real" man. Social media users frequently criticized Weiner for his infidelity, yet several jokes were made about his genitalia, jokes that were not discussed in Weiner's rhetoric or the news media coverage. @EWILLIAM08 (2011) retweeted the joke, "Now the world knows why @repweiner is such an angry little man #smallpeepee #weinergate #whereistherestofit," alluding to Weiner's penis size. @ExpeditionOK (2011) also referenced inadequate genitalia, saying, "That's [sic] all????? #weinergate #tcot Y'all are making a big deal out of something very small." Other references to size were common, almost always accompanied with a negative connotation. Regardless of political ideology, Weiner was closely associated with his genitalia (for good or bad). Not only does this discourse unnecessarily bring sex into the equation, it tied Weiner's political and professional worth to his physical prowess (much in the same way that Abedin was frequently discussed in terms related to her physical appearance).

The series of jokes aimed at Weiner's genitalia could easily be classified as sexual harassment, taken in its totality. Similarly, the women involved in the sex scandal also faced online sexual harassment. In fact, Genette Cordova, the woman who originally

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received the picture of Weiner's crotch, felt compelled to clarify that she was not in fact

Weiner's girlfriend, saying in a public statement: "The point I am trying to make is that,

contrary to the impression that I apparently gave from my tweet, I am not his girlfriend.

Nor am I the wife, girlfriend or mistress of Barack Obama, Ray Allen or Cristiano

Ronaldo, despite the fact that I have made similar assertions about them via Twitter" (as

quoted in Pierce, 2014, para. 14). She also noted in this statement that she had been

referred to as a "femme fatale" and "coed mistress" while some individuals online had

found pictures of her from when she was a minor and posted them online without her

consent. Cordova's treatment mirrored that other women have received online,

especially through the medium of Twitter.[66]

One last component the Weinergate scandal illustrates about social media is the

seeming dissonance between public and private matters. Although the muddying of the

two spheres is a traditionally feminist practice, doing so can come with certain personal

and social risks. Social media blurs the lines between what is personal and what is public

in a way that makes it very easy to confuse the two. This particular sex scandal exists

largely in this place – between public and private matters. If Weiner's private messages

that were sent through a public medium were not discovered largely by the body public,

the private matter of his relationship with his wife would not have been subject to as

much debate among the public as they eventually became. Accordingly, Weiner's private

activities became public domain, yet with problematic reinforcement of gender norms.

Had the feminist project of making the private public been adopted as the sole purpose of

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[66] See Silman's (2016) article regarding the Twitter harassment Leslie Jones received.

the scandal rather than an unfortunate byproduct, a different set of cultural norms may have been circulated in society.

America: Land of the Hypermasculine, Oversexed Male

While scandals speak to the general moral compass of a particular society at a given moment, political sex scandals have not changed much in the past century, except in regard to how the transgressions occur and how they are covered by the media (Dagnes, 2011). In line with this logic, public response to scandalous behavior has changed little, meaning that much of what offended the general public in the past continues to do so today. America has always had puritanical views of sex and sexuality since its inception (Greenblatt, 2010), and while cultural norms may take time to evolve, those regarding sexuality seem to be particularly slow to progress. As our public society and politicians continue to struggle with questions of gender and sexuality[67], political sex scandals simply provide another outlet for heteronormative ideologies to be reinforced. Just as monogamous, heterosexual marriages are privileged through both Weiner's rhetorical choices and the discourse shared among social media users, masculinity is also reinforced above other forms of gender expression.

Political sex scandals such as Weinergate demonstrate the continued place of honor masculinity receives culturally. Not only does the response to Weiner's actions demonstrate a traditional stereotyping (and privileging) of masculinity, Weiner himself exists as an example of what happens when *hyper*masculinity becomes accepted – even favored over other forms of gender expressions. As evident in the three public sex

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[67] Political debates regarding which restroom transgender individuals should use, as well as President Trump's comments about grabbing women by their genitalia, highlight the struggle to make sense of sex, sexuality, and gender within political discourse.

scandals Weiner has faced in a matter of six years, the former Congressman seems to be unable to stop himself from seeking sexual attention and gratification from women outside his marriage. And so Weiner became one more name in a long line of male politicians who have been found guilty in the court of public opinion after engaging in a political sex scandal, effectively ending his political career. As Greenblatt (2010) and other scholars have suggested, the frequency with which male politicians fall victim to sex scandals may have as much to do with an obsessive focus on sexual conquests as it does on power and notoriety that accompany holding political office. Adding in the element of social media as both a way to seek attention and to seek potential partners seems to only reaffirm hypermasculine behaviors further, as evident in the Weinergate scandal.

In summary, social media provides an opportunity to highlight and reinforce dominant ideologies regarding sex, sexuality, and gender norms, especially those that reinforce masculinity and heteronormativity. As an extension of this, women have more and more often become the subject of online harassment, making it more likely that their femininity is unwelcome among the social media environment. With regard to the Weinergate scandal, women are silenced and exploited at the expense of those who wish to comment on Weiner's actions. Even the unwilling recipient of Weiner's inappropriate picture, Genette Cordova, became the focus of online harassment simply by virtue of being targeted by Weiner. Perhaps there is something about the structure of social media websites that makes it easier for women to be targeted. The relative anonymity of a public forum where masculinity and patriarchy flourish, the ease of sending abusive messages rapidly, the microcosm of heteronormative ideologies seeking ways to silence

nondominant gender expressions – any combination of these factors may contribute to the predominance of women being exploited through social media websites.

Proponents of gender equity may take some solace in the knowledge that women themselves tend to avoid being the actor involved in political sex scandals. In fact, female politicians in America are largely uninvolved in political sex scandals (Greenblatt, 2010), with an almost notable absence from this phenomenon. This fact may illustrate several factors: 1) women who are involved in politics do not share the same personality traits as their male counterparts and are therefore less likely to be predisposed to engaging in sex scandals; 2) women who are involved in politics feel a responsibility to other women to behave in a manner that does not prevent future women from running for and being elected to office; and 3) women in general may engage in sex scandals less frequently because their sexuality is restrained more so than men, both in terms of media narratives and acceptable behaviors. Whatever the cause, this phenomenon of political sex scandals does seem to fall largely within the purview of men and masculinity, even if women become the victims of such scandals. The last chapter of this project will discuss the limitations of this study, as well as suggestions for future research into political sex scandals.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Political sex scandals undoubtedly receive copious amounts of news media coverage; therefore, it should be no surprise that the Weinergate scandal would also be the subject of a political documentary. *Weiner* chronicled Anthony Weiner's failed run for New York City mayor in 2013, including the release of damning photos and messages from a subsequent sex scandal. Following a brief summary of the 2011 scandal, the documentary showcased the structure and tedium of a political campaign (striking a similar vein to previous political documentaries like *War Room*). It also portrays Huma Abedin and the relationship between Weiner and her. As with his political career in Congress, Weiner's political ambitions are derailed as pictures from his 2013 scandal are released. The panic from this revelation is captured by the documentarians who film the immediate aftermath of the release of those pictures, focusing on the fallout between Weiner and Abedin. Throughout the second half of the film, Abedin is visibly upset with Weiner, the media coverage, and the situation in general. However, she is overshadowed by Weiner's large personality and inability to self-censor. At various points, Weiner's frustration with the news media's continual coverage of the scandal boils over into angry outbursts, which then continues to feed the coverage. A calmer quote from Weiner seems to sum up this symbiotic relationship:

> There's a phoniness on that side of the debate, about how outrageous my behavior
> is. They love stoking it they love talking about it they love building me up having
> me on their shows so they can excoriate me and everything. You know, there's a
> phoniness to it. But let's, I'll make this very clear. I mean, I did *the thing*,

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though. … I told you that I understood politics and I understand the rhythm of the press and everything else. I did *the thing*, so it's not their fault that they played their role, they were just doing. … You know, it's the, it's the frog and the scorpion. (Clements, Kriegman, & Steinberg, 2016)

Although Weiner is describing the relationship between the press and his scandal, he could also be describing his relationship with sexting other women, especially with regard to the remorse he feels.

As evident in this project, Anthony Weiner provides an unusual case study of political sex scandals, one that became a gift that kept on giving. And although Weinergate may have been a first of its kind, it certainly will not be the last political sex scandal to involve social media.[68] The conclusions drawn from this project may be specific to this sex scandal, but there are broader implications that can apply to other scandals, both political, sexual, or involving new media. This chapter will briefly recap the major findings and conclusions of the project, discuss limitations of the project, and provide suggestions for future research.

Major Findings

Like many previous political sex scandals, Weiner adopted a variety of rhetorical strategies when facing the news media in the aftermath of his scandal. His initial evasion and denial was eventually replaced with a straightforward apology to his family and constituents; however, this apology only came after several days of media coverage and calls from his political colleagues to resign. If Weiner's goal was to continue serving as a U.S. representative from the state of New York, he was largely unsuccessful in his

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[68] Even as the time of writing, a political sex scandal involving the misuse of Apple technologies became the downfall of former Alabama governor Robert J. Bentley.

employment of rhetorical strategies. In fact, Weiner was never successfully able to resurrect his political career after this scandal, as evident in his failed 2013 bid for New York City mayor. External factors not withstanding, it is conceivable that Weiner *could* have recovered from Weinergate had he been forthcoming in the beginning days of the scandal, opting for honesty instead of obfuscation. Instead, Weiner denied his wrongdoing, and then he continued to engage in online relationships with more women in the following years. Not only did Weiner fail to adopt rhetorical strategies to help repair his self-image, he failed to change the behaviors that caused the scandal in the first place.

In the context of studying political sex scandals, apologia became particularly relevant to better understanding Weiner's choice of strategies to help recover from this scandal. Apologia may seem irrelevant in light of Donald Trump's political success, which largely hinges on his unwillingness to apologize for his behaviors. However, outright denial is a rhetorical strategy to adopt, one that is accepted much more readily in the political climate of 2016 versus that of 2011. Perhaps more telling is the fact that Weiner was largely unable to revive his political career with the use of denial as a strategy, while Trump seems to remain impervious to scandal regardless of his response. This stark contrast suggests that the political climate has drastically changed in the matter of five years, or that Trump's scandalous behavior is simply not as offensive as Weiner's.

The Weinergate scandal presented new opportunities for individuals to discuss political sex scandals, specifically through the platform of social media. At a minimum, the content analysis conducted for this project revealed Twitter users were interested in commenting on Weiner and his behaviors in large volume. Looking closer at the framing of these tweets showed that users were predominantly focused on the sexual nature of the

scandal, closely followed with an interest in whether Weiner had lied or not. However, the frames social media users adopted changed over time as the scandal developed, eventually leading to a discussion of whether Weiner should resign his position in Congress. This shift in framing indicates that social media can provide a dynamic avenue for political discourse to unfold in real time as information is presented. Similarly, the framing analysis conducted in this project also demonstrates that complex political topics can be discussed in multiple ways at any given point. However, the nature of political sex scandals – especially those involving a man named Weiner – may lead many individuals to focus on superficial issues, such as childish sex jokes regarding male genitalia. Scholars who believe in the democratic function of social media should take this humor into consideration, seeking to better understand its rhetorical power.

Finally, this research study reinforces the role that scandal plays within cultural narratives, in this case those that involve sex, sexuality, and gender roles. Masculinity was reinforced both in Weiner's rhetorical strategies and social media users' discourse, largely through paternalistic narratives and emasculating humor. Similarly, heteronormative relationships were privileged while non-monogamous relationships were delegitimized. Ultimately, the first political sex scandal to be closely tied to social media did not present an opportunity for diverse voices to be heard. Rather, many perspectives that marginalize women and non-heteronormative individuals were circulated among Weiner, the news media, and social media users. Weinergate did not have a direct effect on the formation of public policy, unlike other recent political scandals.[69] Yet, the ideological ramifications of the reinforcement of dominant sex norms were highlighted

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[69] For example, the Sandra Fluke/Rush Limbaugh scandal regarding women's access to birth control had far more practical implications for policy formation than Weinergate.

by Weiner's resignation from Congress. If cultural norms regarding marriage were not as strong as they were, Weiner's political allies, including then-President Barack Obama and then-Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi – might not have felt compelled to call for his resignation. Had Weiner's colleagues not requested he step down from office, he might have filled out the rest of his term.[70]

In the male-dominated world of politics, sex scandals only highlight the limited way that women are allowed to exist in American culture. Huma Abedin – a strong political operative in her own right – and the other women with whom Weiner was involved were discussed in largely stereotypical ways: the cuckold wife and the sexy mistress, for example. Weiner exploited the women in his life for his own political purposes, using their pain to advance his own rhetorical goals. Social media users did little more, primarily discussing Abedin and Genette Cordova in paternalistic and objectifying ways. While much attention is given to the personal and professional ramifications Weiner has faced in the subsequent years following his multiple sex scandals, little attention has gone towards the struggles Abedin and Cordova (and the other women involved with Weiner) faced and continue to face. The cultural discourses surrounding Weinergate and other political sex scandals make it clear that women continue to be marginalized through the actions of men in politics.

Limitations

One of the most significant limitations of this study was the length of time it took to complete the study. This project began in the summer of 2014 and is now concluding

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[70] Weiner's constituents seemed to largely support him throughout the course of the scandal, with much of the public outrage he faced coming from political opponents and those who lived outside his Congressional district.

in the spring of 2017. Although each portion of the study was completed in a relatively

reasonable amount of time, the totality of the work took longer than desired. Some of the

delay in this study furthered the problem of the dated nature of the data. Weinergate

continues to remain an important moment in cultural history, especially with regard to

political sex scandals. However, the changing nature of technology and the political

landscape limit the timeliness of the analysis to a degree.

Because of the nature of this previous limitation, there were few published

systematic content analyses of social media content. This means I designed the project as

a pilot study, making it more difficult to draw strong conclusions. However, the robust

nature of the data I did find still provides a valuable contribution to the literature

regarding political sex scandals and social media scandals. It also provides a framework

for future study of political sex scandals, which I will discuss further below.

Another limitation of this study was that there was no mechanism in place to

separate news media tweets from the public's social media data. The TweetReach

service utilized to obtain the tweets did not filter the data by user, and Twitter was still

new enough at this point that it was difficult to confirm verified news accounts from

regular users. This project did not systematically explore the difference in discourse from

news media and the general public, limiting the strength of claims regarding the discourse

exchanged among Weiner, the news media, and the public. Future research should

continue to study the ways that the news media interact with political rhetoric and social

media comments.

Last, this project only explored social media comments from Twitter, which is not

the social media website used by most Americans (Rainie, Smith, Schlozman, Brady, &

Verba, 2012). Additionally, Twitter attracts a particular kind of user, one who may not fully reflect the diversity of the American public. Any conclusions made regarding the way that citizens may use social media to participate in the political process is limited by the small subset of people who actually use Twitter. For a more robust understanding of how social media is used to discuss political sex scandals, it would be wise to include other social media platforms like Facebook and Reddit.

Future Research

Some of the suggestions for future research are mentioned in the previous section regarding limitations, but I will summarize them here again. One important area of future research to explore is how news coverage influences and is influenced by public discourse and political rhetoric. The interplay among these three areas is loosely explored in this study, but further research into this interaction is needed. Cascading activation and media convergence serve as useful frameworks to analyze this relationship and would be helpful to the scholar wishing to pursue this more closely.

Similarly, future research should explore the role of other social media websites, such as Facebook, Reddit, Snapchat, and others. It is likely that social media users will use different social media to achieve different goals, especially with regard to engaging in political discourse. A more complex understanding of this would be helpful for those who wish to study the influence of this ever-changing technology.

This study presents three distinct methods to use when studying political sex scandals. Because of the exploratory nature of this project, there is room to look even deeper into this analysis. The rhetorical analysis, content analysis, and critical analysis conducted each provide a framework for how to more closely study political sex scandals

in the future, whether interested in rhetorical strategies, social media posts, or cultural ideologies.

Anthony Weiner's political career may be over for the foreseeable future, but other political sex scandals are likely to occur in the future. Therefore, the implications from this project can be applied to future analyses of political sex scandals – regardless of whether they involve a specific misuse of social media technology or not. Additionally, those who wish to study large-scale social media data regarding political discourse can also look to this pilot study as a guideline for how to design their analysis. While many data analytics companies are able to present quantifiable data that shows the frequency with which certain topics are discussed, content analysis research can provide a deeper understanding regarding the trends present within these online discussions.

Communication scholars should continue exploring the influence of political rhetoric on cultural narratives, especially those that have implications for sex, sexuality, and gender roles. Ideological circulation of stereotypical norms persists in the current political climate, one that finds women around the country marching simply to ensure their voices and perspectives are heard. Sex scandals should not be overlooked when considering the reinforcement of outdated norms. As this research project has shown, the discourse surrounding politicians and their "bad" behaviors not only illuminate moral standards, such discourse shows how American culture views women in general. During the June 6 press conference in which he acknowledged sending the illicit picture that began the Weinergate scandal, Weiner (2011) said, "My wife [Abedin] has known about some of these online relationships since before we were married. And we spoke frankly about them because — well, we spoke frankly about them" (para. 84). The former

representative did set an important precedent in discussing his sexual behaviors openly with his partner. However, he did not fully comprehend the detriment caused by his actions. Weiner said, "I treated it [sexting other women] as a frivolous thing, not acknowledging that it was causing harm to so many people and would eventually come out" (para. 95). Scholars must learn from Weiner's mistakes, encouraging open discourse of sex, sexuality, and gender norms while taking care to acknowledge the perspectives of women and other marginalized groups. Anything less would diminish the study of political sex scandals.

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APPENDIX A

Codebook and Code Sheet

This coding protocol is designed to identify the types of narrative frames and message formats used on Twitter during the Anthony Weiner sexting scandal in 2011. The project is designed to shed light on how social media was used to discuss a political sex scandal. The study will identify narrative frames used online to discuss sex scandals, as well as different social media functions utilized when referencing the scandal. The following definitions constitute the variables for this study.

Operational Definitions

Weinergate
This variable is defined as any reference to the Anthony Weiner sex scandal. Reference to the scandal may come in the form of a hashtag or use of Weiner's name in the content of the tweet. Indirect references to the scandal may also constitute the presence of this variable.

Frame
This variable represents the various topics referenced within the coding unit. Frames are the individual interpretation or inference that is applied to a message within the individual tweet, or rather they are the concepts deemed important enough to discuss with regard to the scandal. Frames may by a dominant idea or frequently discussed concept related to the Weiner sex scandal, and more than one frame may be present within a given tweet. Frames have been broken down into the following categories:
Categories
1. Lying: The lying frame refers to discussion of the facts regarding whether Weiner had been caught lying to his constituents and/or the broader public. Additionally, it refers to factual information presented that proves whether or not Weiner was or has been lying about his involvement in the scandal. Discourse regarding whether lying has the potential to impact future political actions (of any politician) would also fall within this category.
2. Politics and Work: This frame refers to whether Weiner would be able to continue holding office or need to resign. Because a large portion of the timeline regarding Weinergate centered on calls for Weiner's resignation, this frame will include individual demands that Weiner resign as well as comments on prominent political figures also asking Weiner to step down from office. In addition to the question or Weiner's resignation, this frame will also refer to Congress's ability to work while this scandal is ongoing. Any mention that a politician (including Weiner and others) should "get back to work" would be included in this frame.
3. Sex and Women: This frame refers to any discussion of the Weiner scandal in terms of sexual aspects, including the sexual relationship(s) between Weiner

and his partner(s). This frame will also include any discussion of the women involved in this scandal. Mentions of adultery, how Weiner had cheated on his wife, Abedin, the impact the scandal has on Abedin or Weiner's other partners, and any discussion of the scandal in terms of the "women" of the scandal would fall into this category. For example, discussion of Abedin's relationship to Hillary Rodham Clinton would also fall into this category if comparisons are made between the women's public role as being married to a man involved in a political sex scandals.

4. Political Motivations: In the initial stages of the Weinergate scandal, Weiner suggested his political opponents manufactured the scandal to distract from the work he was doing in Congress. This frame refers to any discussion of these claims, as well as other calls that the scandal was a moment for Republicans and Democrats to fight one another. Any reference to the scandal as an attempt by Weiner's opponents to attack him would fall into this category, as well as a discussion of calls for his resignation being based solely on party affiliation. This could include references to previous scandals committed by Republicans (such as Newt Gingrich).

5. Comparison to Past: This frame refers to any comparison between Weiner's sex scandal and a previous sex scandal, such as the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal or the Mark Sanford scandal. Discussion of Abedin's relationship to Hillary Rodham Clinton would also fall into this category if comparisons are made between the women's public role as being married to a man involved in a political sex scandals. Although other political scandals may be discussed, this frame only refers to sex scandals involving politicians.

6. Character and Morality: This frame includes discussions of Weiner's ethics and personal character, such as discourse involving whether his actions were right or wrong. Although it may commonly refer to the morality of his sexual relationships, it may also refer to whether or not he should have denied the scandal in the beginning or openly admitted his actions. This frame does not focus on any potential legal ramifications of Weiner's actions (such as those that may involve online communication with minors) unless explicitly discussing the ethical questions surrounding the sex scandal.

7. Neutral or Uninterested: Any time someone communicates a neutral position on Weiner's infidelity, it would be categorized in this frame. This frame also captures statements that indicate his sexual behaviors are "no big deal" or that they have nothing to do with his ability to be an effective legislator. Comments that indicate a lack of interest in the scandal as a news story would not be classified here, but fall into the next category.

8. Media Coverage: Any mention of the news media coverage of the scandal would be classified as fitting into this category. Mentions or discussions of how the news media covers the scandal or whether they should cover the scandal would fall into this frame. This frame may also include calls by the media to cover other topics deemed to be important, such as budgetary talks in Congress.

Social Media Function
This variable refers to the particular ways in which a user incorporates communicative functions specific to social media. This may be including a link as part of the tweet, or adding in a photo, video, or audio file. Social media function should be more than text alone or the use of a hashtag.

Dialogue with Others
This variable refers to whether the tweet was written in response to another social media user. Although tweets may indirectly reference other individuals (such as Weiner himself), this variable is limited to tweets that specifically mention another social media user's user name.

Coding Procedures

Code each unit first with its unique coding number. This number will be assigned to each tweet you see. Read through each tweet thoroughly. Based on your understanding of the variables, select one category for each variable. Refer to the codebook for each variable to assist you with determining the category in that coding unit.

Unit #: Code the unique coding number assigned to the tweet. You should see this at the top of each unit.

Coder ID#: Enter your coder ID number with each variable.
1. Coder 1
2. Coder 2
3. Coder 3

Weinergate: Code whether or not this tweet discussed Weiner's sex scandal.
1. Yes
2. No – if no, do not code any further
9. Cannot determine

Date of Tweet: Enter the date in MM/DD/YY format. The date should be visible in each individual tweet. (For example, a tweet on June 6, 2011 would be coded as 06/06/11.)

Frame: Code for the presence or absence of each of the following variables. (Note: multiple frames may be present in any one tweet.)
Lying:
1. Yes
2. No
9. Cannot determine
Politics and Work:
1. Yes
2. No
9. Cannot determine
Sex Scandal:
1. Yes
2. No
9. Cannot determine
Political Motivations:
1. Yes
2. No
9. Cannot determine
Comparison to Past:
1. Yes
2. No
9. Cannot determine

Character and Morality:
1. Yes
2. No
9. Cannot determine

Neutral or Uninterested:
1. Yes
2. No
9. Cannot determine

Media Coverage:
1. Yes
2. No
9. Cannot determine

Social Media Function: Code for the presence or absence of each of the following variables:

Audio File:
1. Yes
2. No

Image File (includes links to Instagram or other imaging services):
1. Yes
2. No

Video File (includes links to YouTube or other video services):
1. Yes
2. No

External Link:
1. Yes
2. No

Dialogue with Others: Determine whether the tweet was written as a response or directed to another user. (Responses are indicated by the presence of an "@" sign followed by a username.)
1. Yes
2. No

APPENDIX B

Table 1

Total Units in Data Set and Number of Units Coded

	May 28	June 1	June 6	June 16	Total
Coded Sample *N*	248	950	3,632	2,512	7,342
Total Data Set *N*	4,953	19,000	72,638	50,234	146,825

Note: Sample for each day and total tweets is 5% of total in data set.

Table 2

Intercoder Reliability Scores for Each Variable

Variable	Krippendorff's alpha
Weinergate	.81
Lying	.90
Politics/Work	.94
Sex and Women	.91
Partisanship	.90
Past	.86
Character	.77
Neutral	.82
Media	.77
Social Media	.96

Table 3A

Dominant Frames Used on Twitter During Weinergate Scandal

	Lying	Politics	Sex	Partisan	Past	Character	Neutral	Media
Total	608	2145	1890	408	315	822	1217	665
(%s)	(8.3%)	(29.2%)	(25.7%)	(5.6%)	(4.3%)	(11.2%)	(16.6%)	(9.1%)

Note: Percentages refer to the number of frames present out of the total number of units coded, including units that were categorized as being unrelated to the Weinergate scandal. Therefore, percentage totals should not equal 100% for this table, as frames were not mutually exclusive.

Table 3B

Dominant Frames Used on Twitter During Weinergate Scandal, Rank Ordered

Date	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th
Overall	Politics (29.2%)	Sex (25.7%)	Neutral (16.6%)	Character (11.2%)	Media (9.1%)	Lying (8.3%)	Partisan (5.6%)	Past (4.3%)

Note: Percentages refer to the number of frames present out of the total number of units coded, including units that were categorized as being unrelated to the Weinergate scandal. Therefore, percentage totals should not equal 100% for this table, as frames were not mutually exclusive.

Table 4A

Dominant Frames Used on Different Days Throughout the Weinergate Scandal

Date	Lying	Politics	Sex	Partisan	Past	Character	Neutral	Media
May 28	23 (9.3%)	10 (4.0%)	79 (31.9%)	25 (10.1%)	11 (4.4%)	17 (6.9%)	57 (23.0%)	30 (12.1%)
June 1	137 (14.4%)	64 (6.7%)	268 (28.2%)	60 (6.3%)	33 (3.5%)	110 (11.6%)	196 (20.6%)	132 (13.9%)
June 6	417 (11.5%)	562 (15.5%)	985 (27.1%)	206 (5.7%)	138 (3.8%)	445 (12.3%)	559 (15.4%)	405 (11.2%)
June 16	31 (1.2%)	1509 (60.1%)	558 (22.2%)	117 (4.7%)	133 (5.3%)	250 (10.0%)	405 (16.1%)	98 (3.9%)

Note: Percentages refer to the number of frames present out of the total number of units coded, including units that were categorized as being unrelated to the Weinergate scandal. Therefore, percentage totals should not equal 100% for this table, as frames were not mutually exclusive.

Table 4B

Dominant Frames Used on Different Days Throughout the Weinergate Scandal, Rank Ordered

Date	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th
May 28	Sex (31.9%)	Neutral (23.0%)	Media (12.1%)	Partisan (10.1%)	Lying (9.3%)	Character (6.9%)	Past (4.4%)	Politics (4.0%)
June 1	Sex (28.2%)	Neutral (20.6%)	Lying (14.4%)	Media (13.9%)	Character (11.6%)	Politics (6.7%)	Partisan (6.3%)	Past (3.5%)
June 6	Sex (27.1%)	Politics (15.5%)	Neutral (15.4%)	Character (12.3%)	Lying (11.5%)	Media (11.2%)	Partisan (5.7%)	Past (3.8%)
June 16	Politics (60.1%)	Sex (22.2%)	Neutral (16.1%)	Character (10.0%)	Past (5.3%)	Partisan (4.7%)	Media (3.9%)	Lying (1.2%)

Note: Percentages refer to the number of frames present out of the total number of units coded, including units that were categorized as being unrelated to the Weinergate scandal. Therefore, percentage totals should not equal 100% for this table, as frames were not mutually exclusive.

Table 5

Frequency of Tweets Directed at Other Social Media Users

Date	May 28	June 1	June 6	June 16	Total
Replies (%s)	20 (8.0%)	96 (10.1%)	259 (7.1%)	132 (5.2%)	507 (6.9%)

Note: Percentages will not equal 100 because this variable does not measure units without replies.

VITA

Sarah Turner McGowen was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma and currently resides there with her husband, Dustin, her daughter, Grace, and her son, Liam. She obtained her bachelor's and master's degrees from Northeastern State University, where she now works as an Assistant Professor of Communication Studies. Sarah studied political communication at the University of Missouri, where she further developed her research interests in politics, gender, and social media. When she is not teaching or writing, Sarah enjoys spending time with her family and traveling to as many new locations as possible.