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# The Use of Silence as a Political Rhetorical Strategy

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**The Use of Silence as a Political Rhetorical Strategy**

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(TITLE)

BY

**Timothy J. Anderson**

**THESIS**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
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Running Head: SILENCE AS A POLITICAL STRATEGY

The Use of Silence as a Political Rhetorical Strategy

Timothy J. Anderson

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## Abstract

Existing research on the rhetorical strategies of politicians has mainly focused on the speeches, appearances, and debates of political figures. Yet the absence of a clear response when expected, or silence, is a significant and frequently utilized rhetorical strategy. More directly, Erickson and Schmidt (1982) posit that, even though it is important to study, the topic of political silence has only received meager attention. Various politicians including President Clinton and California Congressman Gary Condit have both used political silence as responses to situations, and each instance had a different outcome. The focus of this study is on how the strategy of silence fits into the tradition, examples of how contemporary politicians have used strategies of silence, and the development of criteria to evaluate the use of political silence. The major goal of this study is to examine the silence of the politician and use evidence to determine the effectiveness of that silence. Doing so will further enhance our understanding of political rhetorical silence as not just an absence of speech, but a rhetorical tool in its own right.

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## Chapter 1

The Use of Silence as a Political Strategy

Politicians have used various rhetorical strategies ever since humans have formed societies. Among these is the strategy of rhetorical silence. Many politicians, in one way or another, use this form of rhetoric. To understand just how politicians use silence as a political tool, this thesis will clarify and expand the definitions of political rhetorical silence, develop criteria for the assessment of political silence as a rhetorical strategy, and examine the role that the breaking of silence contributes to the perceived success or failure of rhetorical silence.

In order to be successful, politicians must be adept with a variety of rhetorical strategies. An extensive scholarly body of work on political rhetorical strategies already exists. Some of the more prominent theories include: the closely related ideas of Murphy (1992) and Clayman (1992) on using language to help win over an audience; Black's (1994) explanation of ceremonial dedication in which the rhetor marks the occasion as remarkable; Simons' (1994) theory on going "meta" (usage of language to upstage a political opponent or to divert attention away from an issue); and the use of personal attacks against political opponents (Zarefsky, 1992). All of these scholars, however, treat political rhetorical strategies as an act that produces an explicit message.

The Use of Rhetorical Silence as a Political Strategy*Thinking of Silence Rhetorically*

It is also important to note, however, that silence can be a rhetorical strategy. Silence is a part of language, just as speech is. As has been posited before by other



authors, speech cannot exist without silence and silence cannot exist without speech, and how well we understand each depends heavily on the other (Sewell, 1975; Johannesen, 1974). Bitzer (1968) asserted that a work is rhetorical because it is a response to an exigence—an imperfection marked by urgency, or a situation that “must” be addressed. A rhetor who refuses to address such an exigence is thus using silence rhetorically.

In his 1980 article, Brummet argues that many aspects go into making a politician’s silence strategic. First, and foremost, Brummet states that strategic political silence violates expectations that are held by the public. When a public figure, such as a president, senator, or governor is in a particular situation, and the public assumes that this figure will speak about the situation, and that does not happen, the political figure is violating an expectation to speak. For example, after the 1986 Challenger explosion, if President Reagan decided not to speak out on what had happened because he wanted to avoid blame being placed on his administration or NASA for the incident, he would have violated the world’s expectations of him to speak on the subject. It is under a situation like this, in which talk is expected and none is received, that strategic silence is born.

A second way in which silence can become strategic and political is if the nature of that political silence goes unexplained, and is then later explained (Brummet, 1980). According to Brummet, an adequate explanation of the silence alters expectations about future silence of that type, and aligns people with that view. A political figure (president, senator, etc.) that refuses to speak on a pressing issue does, in fact, violate expectations. However, if the political figure can adequately explain why he or she was silent on the topic, then the public will come to expect silence as an appropriate answer in that

instance (Brummet, 1980). For example, in 1999 Al Gore broke ranks with his party and the Clinton Administration by asserting he believed that Elian Gonzalez, a six-year-old refugee from Cuba, should be allowed to stay in the state of Florida with extended family members until a court ruled on his fate. Then, less than a month later, during a Florida stop on his campaign for the U.S. Presidency, Gore made no reference to his statement or about Gonzalez. However, during his next campaign stop in Ohio, Gore brought up the Gonzalez issue, and reaffirmed his previous statements about the child. Gore never explained why he was silent on the issue, and thus many people in Florida failed to understand his silence and failed to accept it as appropriate. Had Gore given a reason for remaining silent, and the audience accepted it, chances are that the public would have viewed his silence as an appropriate response.

### *Strategic Uses of Silence*

Traditional treatments of political rhetoric have focused on the actual spoken words of politicians. Speeches such as commencement addresses, inaugurals, State of the Union addresses, and speeches to various organizations have all been studied before. However, when we reach silence, we come into a new type of rhetorical strategy.

The use of silence as a political strategy, while it is a time tested and proven rhetorical strategy, has received relatively little academic attention (Erickson & Schmidt, 1982). In fact, going back as far as President-Elect Lincoln's trip from his home in Springfield to the White House in Washington, we can observe the utilization of silence as a political strategy (Gunderson, 1961). There are many ways in which politicians can use the strategy of silence. The functions that we will discuss include the use of strategic

silence (Brummet, 1980), Rose Garden silence (Erickson & Schmidt, 1982), ignoring issues in hopes to deny legitimacy (Perez & Dionisopoulos, 1995), and the practice of avoidance by political figures (Erickson & Schmidt, 1982; Gunderson, 1961). In each of these instances, politicians used the rhetorical strategy of silence in an effort to move past problems of state.

Another function of strategic political silence that has been identified is called the Rose Garden strategy (Erickson & Schmidt, 1982). This strategy of rhetorical silence allows the incumbent president to withdraw from the political game and still act presidential. The important aspect of this sort of rhetorical silence is that it makes the president immune to issues that are going on in the country as well as internationally. The beliefs and platforms that the president holds on domestic and international issues take a back seat to the idealized presidential job. This strategy allows for the president to have a break in which he does not need to express his opinions. For example, in 1979 President Carter was able to “campaign” for the White House by doing his presidential duties when he devoted all of his time and energy to the Iranian hostage crisis pledging he wouldn’t return to business until the hostages were freed. During this time, other presidential hopefuls, such as Ted Kennedy, were actively campaigning for the Democratic nomination. However, because he used this strategy to take himself out of the campaign process and to focus attention on his presidential duties, his popularity among Republicans and Democrats soared, even though he made no mention of issues such as the economy, education, or any other major issues.

A third function of silence is to ignore an issue in hopes of denying the issue’s

legitimacy (Perez and Dionisopoulos, 1995). Ronald Reagan, during his two terms as the nation's highest elected official, waited seven years to publicly acknowledge the AIDS epidemic (Perez & Dionisopoulos, 1995). The seven years of silence that Reagan exhibited in regards to AIDS proved how important the epidemic was to the political agenda of the Republicans. Through his ignoring of the issue, Reagan was denying the AIDS epidemic as a legitimate concern for his administration, even though he knew that the epidemic was a major health concern. Patton (1989) states that one definition of silence concerning the AIDS epidemic is, "The unspeakable, the perceived but best not said, the ignored." This definition of silence shows what the interests of the Reagan Administration were during the time that AIDS deaths were statistically on the rise. As Crocker (1980) asserted, silence can reveal or hide something, and that is just what Reagan's strategic silence did. It did its best to hide an issue that should have been at the forefront of the medical community. Also, since heterosexual males in their senior years were the demographic in power, silence about an issue such as a perceived gay-related disease was expected and the norm, and thus, the issue was always denied (Marcovich, 1999).

Along with denying legitimacy, another silent function used by politicians is avoidance. Avoidance here means that a rhetor is not silent necessarily, but the rhetor is silent on a particular issue. During times of protest and unrest, politicians are faced with the decision of whether or not to discuss issues publicly (Heath, 1978). When the politician decides not to speak on a particular topic and instead continues to dance around the subject, so to speak, he or she is using the practice of avoidance. In a time of

crisis, the politician may wish to try and shift the blame as an avoidance strategy. In the 1992 elections, H. Ross Perot, having bowed out of the race and reentered, tried shifting the blame of his withdrawal to the Republican National Committee, saying they sent spies into his daughter's wedding. As a result of these accusations, and as a result of his poor avoidance strategy, Perot's support wavered and dropped immensely. Tools such as this may end up doing more harm than good. The important aspect to keep in mind is that the ideas of avoidance and the Rose Garden strategy are not mutually exclusive ideas. It is entirely possible that more than one strategy may be present during any single use of silence.

While Brummet (1980) and Erickson and Schmidt (1982) have examined silence as a rhetorical strategy, there has not yet been any research regarding what elements will make for a successful or unsuccessful use of silence by a politician. Brummet, within his article, acknowledges that following the silence, there must be an adequate discourse, Brummett however, does not specify what constitutes "adequate" discourse. In accordance with that lack of research, there has also been a lack of investigation examining what role the discourse breaking the silence has on the perceived success or failure of silence. Therefore, this study will, first, clarify and expand the definitions of political rhetorical silence. Second, this study will develop criteria for the assessment of political silence as a rhetorical strategy, and will finally examine the discourse breaking the silence and the effects it had on the success or failure of the silence.

Using ideas from Brummett (1980) and Erickson and Schmidt (1982) an approach to analyze silence has been developed. The criteria for identifying political rhetorical

silence include: (1) The silence violates expectation, (2) the silence of the politician goes unexplained, (3) the silence is used in order to gain some sort of advantage over a situation, and/or (4) the silence is used to avoid certain topics, and (5) an explanation for the silence is offered that helps to determine how the silence is accepted, finally the discourse is critiqued using an appropriate method.

The remaining chapters of this study will help to further develop the groundwork that will be utilized to examine silence and the role of discourse following it. The second chapter of this study will employ theories of media attention and coverage along with narrative theory to develop a framework for analyzing strategic political silence.

The third chapter within this study will focus on the silence exhibited by the former President Clinton during the Monica Lewinsky investigation. By using the elements and criteria set forth within the second chapter (in regards to critical methodology) we will be able to analyze the silence used by Clinton and will also critique his discourse ending and explaining the silence to ultimately conclude whether this silence was successful or not.

The fourth chapter of this study focuses on the silence used by U.S. Congressman Gary Condit during the investigation into the disappearance of Chandra Levy. By using the criteria for analyzing silence set forth in the second chapter of this study and by critiquing his interview with Connie Chung that ended his silence on the subject, we will be able to conclude whether Condit's silence was successful or not.

The final chapter will be a discussion focusing on what important conclusions we, as critics, can make about the success or failure of rhetorical silence.

## Chapter 2

Critical Methodology

Before beginning an examination of strategic political silence, especially the media attention given to it, the question, “Why is this important to study?” must be answered. The reason that studying strategic political silence is important can best be seen if we look at recent major events within the American political community. High profile cases, such as the Monica Lewinsky matter and the Chandra Levy disappearance are both related to political silence because the politicians involved utilized silence over speech in order to respond to the situation. The goal of this chapter is to develop a framework for evaluating when strategic political silence is successful. The methodological framework will first show how the media virtually create an expectation for a politician to speak on a topic. In other words, by focusing on a particular person, story, etc., they actually create the need for someone to speak on that topic. Drawing from the work of Hart, the method will also explain how the speaker’s role impacts the justification of the silence. Finally, the methodology will show how narratives are used in order to justify and end the silence on the issue.

One reason that political silence is such an interesting field to examine is because the silence used by the politician violates an expectation to speak. Any analysis of silence then, must begin by exploring this expectation to speak. Given the mediated environment that contemporary politics takes place in, the media obviously play a significant role in creating a public expectation to speak. Thus, in order to better understand how an

expectation to speak emerges, I will examine: how political issues are selected for coverage, how the coverage of these stories influences the public perception of the issue, and how the narrative elements and rhetor's role contribute to an adequate response to the issue.

### Attention and the Creation of an Expectation to Speak

The first factor contributing to an expectation to speak is the attention given to the issue or politician by the media. Media attention is an important factor to analyze because the media coverage is highly influential in contributing to the importance an audience places on any issue. The question that must be answered is how does the media decide what news is worthy to cover?

Hiebert, Ungurait, and Bohn (1979) summarize the criteria for news selection. They state that there are five major criteria that the press follows when looking for stories to cover: timeliness, proximity, prominence, consequences, and human interest. Timeliness refers to the overall "newness" of a story. However, the length of time for which a piece of information continues to be newsworthy depends upon the medium (Hiebert, Ungurait, and Bohn, 1979). Newspapers can have more time to work with a story, whereas radio, television, and the Internet all have different lengths of time they need to be aware of when reporting a story. Proximity of a news event is important as well because the closer the news event happens to an audience the more newsworthy it is (Hiebert, Ungurait, and Bohn, 1979). The authors assert that an election of a governor in New York is much more newsworthy to New Yorkers than it is to people from Pennsylvania. The third element discussed is prominence. The criteria of prominence



explains that the more widely known the participants in an occurrence, the more newsworthy the happening (Hiebert, Ungurait, and Bohn, 1979). A scandal that involves the President of the United States is much more newsworthy, for example, than a scandal that involves an under-secretary of the treasury.

Herbert Gans (1979) examines a slightly different set of influences that undergird the media's selection of news. Gans describes four theories of story selection: journalist-centered, organization-centered, event-centered, and externally centered. However, for this analysis, only two of these four different theories will be discussed -- journalist-centered and event-centered. The journalist-centered theory of news selection asserts that the news is shaped by the judgment of journalists. This theory of news selection is very subjective to the individual journalist. For example, one journalist may feel that covering a scandal involving the president is important, whereas another journalist may feel that the event planning for the city marathon is more newsworthy. On the other hand, the event-centered theory to news selection involves importance being placed on an event. This theory basically asserts that the journalist will just give a "mirror reflection" of what is happening. The subjectivity is taken out of the mix and the journalist relies on the event to take center stage.

Another reason why the media pick the stories they do, especially in regards to politicians and presidents, is the exceptional nature of the presidency and vice-presidency (Sabato, 1991). Since the presidency is obviously a position of power, many people believe they should know the intricacies of the position. Because this feeling exists, reporters assume a responsibility to cover the presidency and vice presidency as

thoroughly as they can. To a different extent, reporters also believe that because of past president's flaws in character and policy, there should be no limits to scrutiny undergone by nominees for the office, and for those that actually win the office (Sabato, 1991).

Sabato (1991) quotes a passage from former CBS News worker Eric Engberg, "Anybody who would think that he could lead the free world ought to have every single thing about his past life [exposed] and every moment of it accountable." This belief continues to resurrect during every presidential election cycle. During the 2000 campaigns, the issue brought to the forefront for debate was whether candidates should have their medical records accessible to the press and to the public. The news media, since they believe that presidential candidates and other politicians should have their lives "scrutinized" in every detail, will choose to write stories about the various character flaws and issues that arise during the life of the politician.

Another important component in shaping how news is selected is the element of consequences. This element states that the consequences of an event have a direct bearing on its newsworthiness. The example that Hiebert, Ungurait, and Bohn (1979) use states that an earthquake in Peru might be newsworthy to a small town because Peru is where the small town factory receives its supply of tin for making their product. These same authors also argue that human-interest is an element used to determine news selection. Human interest helps to define newsworthiness because of the responses we have as humans to certain people, things, and situations (Hiebert, Ungurait, and Bohn, 1979).

Not only is human interest used in selecting news stories, but self-interest could

be a factor as well. Gans (1979) states that the news supplied to us by agencies always serve their own self-interests in one way or another. Gans goes on to state, “Journalists... initially secure a monopoly on a sensational story and can thereby scoop their competitors.” Gans demonstrates that the media will often follow up on stories that they believe will put their own self-interests and the interests of the organization that they work for at an advantage. The journalist-centered theory to news selection asserts that the news is shaped by the professional news judgments of journalists.

In the book *Feeding Frenzy*, Sabato (1991) posits that another reason the media decides to focus on an issue is the competitive philosophy that undergirds the process of newsgathering. Sabato asserts there are two main phrases that drive newsgathering and reporting for journalists. These two phrases are, “Don’t get beaten to a story by another media outlet,” and “If we don’t break this, someone else will.” Sabato goes on to state that the second one of these phrases serves to encourage bad judgment and premature decisions to publish and air stories. The pressure to be the first outlet to break a story leads to a heavy aura of competitiveness amongst the various media outlets. It is easy to understand that, especially in today’s society, with immediate access to stories through 24 – hour news channels and Internet coverage of events, the competition between journalists to be the first to break and continually report on a major story is at an all time high. Journalists are so consumed with the competitiveness of reporting that they continue to push aside the accuracy of their news reporting for speediness.

Furthermore, as Sabato claims, these competitive pressures also force the media to feel as though they need to contribute to the sensationalized story no matter how small

or insignificant the information might be (Sabato, 1991). To quote Sabato (1991), “Each new fact merits a new story, complete with a recapitulation of the entire saga.” Sabato states that this type of news coverage is much like water torture because it just keeps dripping and dripping and dripping. The media, once it focuses in on a particular issue (due to the overt competitiveness of the industry) believes that a story must continue to be analyzed in depth. The O.J. Simpson trial would be a perfect example of this type of “wiggle” news reporting. During the O.J. trial, news outlets such as CNN, NBC, and even upstart network Fox broadcast every new detail that came up about O.J.’s life. In fact, the media kept sensationalizing these facts so much that the television program *Saturday Night Live* often lampooned the type of coverage that the major news services and networks were paying to the issue.

Apart from the competitiveness that drives the stories reported, Sabato (1991) posits that “pack journalism” is another reason that the news media decides to focus in on a particular story. The definition that Sabato gives for pack journalism is journalists and editors moving in the exact same story direction on a story, rather than branching out. The question then becomes, however, why would someone want to cover a story in the exact same way that other outlets are? Sabato (1991) quotes former newspaper reporter Jim Gammon as stating, “Journalists want to do something that their peers think is meaningful... Peer pressure matters in this big fraternity, so you tend to turn to the sexy topic of the hour.” In other words, the media was so consumed with the O.J. trial that all of their attention was focused to it. The same can be said with the Lewinsky Scandal and President Clinton. That particular story was the “sexiest” one, so all the media started to

focus on that particular story.

Another aspect that must be considered when analyzing why the media chooses its stories is the time that news event happens in. Sabato (1991) asserts more media coverage happens on issues during “slow periods” than it does at other times. Sabato (1991) states, “The absence of much hard news... allows relatively insignificant events... to be blown way out of proportion.” The fact that news media need to have a story to cover helps us understand just how time is an important influence on the stories that are covered. If there are no “huge” newsworthy events taking place and a reporter has a deadline to meet, they will tend to find a story to fill their quota.

The way that the media determine what stories or events are worthy to cover plays an important part in the emergence of the rhetorical situation. The exceptional nature of the presidency or other high-profile politicians (as Sabato referred to it) mandates an element of newsworthiness. Therefore, if the president decides to remain silent on an issue, or if the president is pushed into silence on an issue, the silence that emanates from him/her is covered by the media as well. The selection of the news story would be an external factor that cannot be controlled by the speaker, and whether desired or not, the politician’s silence sends a message. In other words, the silence of a president becomes newsworthy because of who he is, and the silence utilized to cope with the media coverage then becomes a method of discourse.

The second aspect that must be analyzed to determine how media coverage and political silence are related is the effect that the media coverage of an issue has on the public’s perception of an issue. It is here that the theory of agenda-setting can be used in

order to help explain how much of an impact the media has on the public's perception of an issue. Shaw and McCombs (1977) theory of agenda-setting explains, "Considerable evidence has accumulated that editors and broadcasters play an important part in shaping our social reality as they go about their day-to-day task of choosing and displaying news... Here may lie the most important effect of mass communication, its ability to mentally order and organize our world for us." In other words, as Shaw and McCombs assert, the media may not tell us what to think, but they tell us what to think about.

Furthermore, Iyengar and Simon (1994) emphasize that the amount of news coverage given to an issue will dictate the degree of importance the public attaches to these issues. Therefore, if the media pay a lot of attention to an issue that they perceive to be an important and relevant affair of state, the public will attach an aura of importance to that topic. Through the examination of these various theories prevalent about the media, it is clear to see that the amount of media attention on an issue is an important aspect to examine.

Another theory that demonstrates the media's influence on audience perceptions is what Biocca (1988) calls the involvement characteristic of an active audience. Biocca asserts that in this involvement step, the audience is actively thinking about the situation. The basic premise behind this article by Biocca is that the audience seeks out information in order for some goal to be reached. In other words, an active audience chooses the medium they do in order to meet specific needs. This idea of an involved audience is an important one to consider when discussing public perception. Basically, if the public believes the issue that caused silence to be of extreme importance, they will expect some

sort of response from a politician very soon. However, if the audience decides that the situation is not important to them directly or to the country (in a larger sense) then they will not expect a response as immediately.

Not only does the response from the politician need to be appropriate for the audience, it must also be appropriate for the situation. Bitzer (1968) asserts that in any rhetorical situation there will be at least one exigence which functions as the organizing principle. Furthermore, Bitzer (1968) claims that the rhetorical discourse is always called into existence by the situation. This claim by Bitzer is an important one. Bitzer makes it clear that while the rhetorical situation invites response, it does not invite any response. Therefore, the response must be one that fits the situation.

Just as the media's selection of a news story was important to political silence, the media's coverage of the silence is even more important. When a president is silent, for whatever reason, on an issue, the media picks up that silence and runs with it as a story. Doing so, as was discussed previously in this section, attaches an aura of importance to that silence and the public then perceives the silence as something important. In this case, proving what McCombs and Shaw stated, the media is not telling what to think about the silence, but it is telling us to think about it. When the public begins to think about the silence of the president or other politicians, questions are then asked among the public about the silence. In order for these questions to be answered, the public looks toward the politician to provide an explanation for the silence. Therefore, in a round-about way, the media coverage on an issue has a direct effect on the rhetorical situation because it is the media coverage of an issue that creates the audience's

expectation to speak.

### Role and the Rhetorical Process

Just as understanding how the media creates an expectation for a politician to speak on a specific topic, it is also imperative to understand the rhetorical process of the discourse used. A further understanding can be found by examining role analysis and also narrative. In order to gain a complete and comprehensive viewpoint of role, there are two main areas that we can look at: role generated expectations and how role is used in justifying and ending silence. Hart (1997) explains that the emergence of role as a rhetorical device comes from someone's personal rhetorical history. According to Hart (1997), this personal rhetorical history produces a distinct way of saying things.

#### *Role Generated Expectations*

One's position can also create role expectations, and one of the most role-laden positions in this country is that of president. Hart believes that there are certain characteristics and features that are uniquely related to the president. However, it can also be posited that politicians with high public profiles may also be seen using elements of this presidential role, even though they may not be the president. Hart states that there are three basic features that are linked to the presidential role: 1) humanity, 2) practicality, and 3) caution. In regards to humanity, presidents (according to Hart's study) use self-references that are optimistic in tone. Second is the practicality feature. People that are in the presidential role spend more time using concrete language and using a simpler style of communication than many of their colleagues do. This style of discourse allows the president to foster a practical emphasis as part of their role. The final area in



the presidential role is caution. According to Hart, proponents of the presidential role used less assured language than did those running for office. What can be taken away from this brief analysis of the presidential role? For starters, these features can tell the American people that the president's job has rhetorical requirements built into it. As Hart asserts:

...Dictating that the president must humanize highly technical problems and put a happy face on them as well. The president's job also demands language the layperson can identify with and an avoidance of geopolitical abstractions. Finally, the president must choose words carefully: A Dwight Eisenhower must avoid the formulas of radical politics used by a Barry Goldwater, a Richard Nixon cannot be as pessimistic as environmentalist Paul Erlich, and a President Johnson must personalize issues that a Senator Johnson might have made more general. For several reasons, then, presidents follow a rulebook when they speak, clearly showing how role can dominate a person on occasion.

Based on this passage from Hart, it is easy to presume that most discourse from presidents falls into the features that make up the "rulebook."

However, just because there is a "rulebook" for presidential discourse does not mean that the rhetoric from the speaker cannot be analyzed in other areas as well. Other roles relevant to this study that can be examined are the roles of apologist, agent, and hero. Ware and Linkugel (1973) discuss the elements of the apologist role. It is important to remember that situations generating political controversy are often controversial or stigmas, therefore political speakers using silence often assume the role of the apologist. The research done by Ware and Linkugel (1973) showed that there were four ways in which the apologist responded to attack: outright denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence. Outright denial is just that, a denial. When a speaker states that he/she did

not do something (like Clinton when he stated, “I did not have sexual relations with that woman.”), this is a way of denying the allegations stated about them. In bolstering, the speaker tries to divert attention away from the allegations pointed at him/her. An example of this is in Clinton’s speech where he attempted to say he lied to protect himself and his family from an investigation by Kenneth Starr that went “too far.” Differentiation by the speaker tries to add a brand new spin to what is being said. In other words, the speaker attempts to say, “Lets look at this situation from another angle.”

Furthermore, there is the area of transcendence that can be examined. With transcendence, the speaker attempts to state that there is a larger issue at stake than what is being focused on. A perfect example of this also comes from Clinton’s speech where he states there are “real problems to solve” in America. Thus, he is saying by focusing on this one issue, we are not getting other problems fixed.

#### *Role Used In Justifying and Ending Silence*

Through careful examination of the various theoretical strategies that will be used within this analysis, one can come to a better understanding of just where this criticism’s rhetorical framework comes from. By utilizing theories such as agenda – setting, narrative theory, and the theory of role criticism and analysis, the analyses and criticisms herein, will serve as extensions and case studies for the theories discussed.

#### Use of Narrative

Another area of theory useful for analyzing strategic political silence, especially the discourse that terminates silence, is narrative theory. One major reason for the utilization of narrative theory in this study is that narration is universal and found in all

different cultures and eras (Rowland, 1987). Fisher (1984) supports this idea when he asserts that narrative, whether written or oral, is born of human nature and crosses time and culture. Furthermore, Fisher asserts that narrative is a universal cultural activity and that it is embedded in every culture.

Furthermore, Fisher believes that people experience life as a series of various narratives. In essence, each encounter in life has a beginning, middle, end, conflict, climax, protagonists and antagonists, just like all the elements of a story.

Kozloff (1992) posits that since narratives, much like Rowland (1987) states, are universal and found in many cultures, there are three basic parts that any narrative can be split into: story, discourse, and schedule. Story refers to the question, “What happens to whom?” This is an important aspect of narratives because of the fact that each narrative has a character that is put into some sort of problem. Secondly, discourse is how the story is told to an audience. The discourse of the story is also an important aspect to consider because how the story is told can have a tremendous effect (either positive or negative) on the credibility and image of the story-teller. The third aspect that Kozloff (1992) asserts as important is schedule. Schedule, according to Kozloff is, “How the story and discourse are affected by the text’s placement within the larger discourse of the station’s schedule.”

Within the discourse, or the story being told, Hart (1997) states that there are five different reasons why narratives are effective persuasive tools: 1) narrative occurs in a natural timeline; 2) narrative includes characterization; 3) narrative presents detail; 4) narrative is primitive; and 5) narrative does not argue. First, it is important to understand

that narratives occur in a natural timeline. There are always beginnings, middles, and endings to the narratives that we tell. As Hart (1997) points out, “All stories, even bad ones, inspire the need to see how it turns out.” Narratives, as is evident by this statement, can provide for a sense of closure to a story or a situation. Secondly, narratives all have different characters and these people and the situations they are in make the narrative interesting to listen to. Hart (1997) also states that our natural sense of identification makes us want to find out more about the lives of the people described within the narrative. Third, narratives present details of the story descriptively. Details are very captivating and a good narrator will give vivid and clear details so that the listeners may be able to picture themselves in the situations that the narrator is speaking about. A fourth concept is that narratives are primitive. Narratives have been a part of cultures around the world for as long back as we can think. Even in our own culture and society, it is simple to find a narrative in some form. The important aspect to remember when discussing the primitiveness of narrative is that, as Hart (1997) states, it appeals to the child within us because, unlike life, it contains a complete story with certain consequences. The final aspect to understand about narratives is that they do not argue. The job of the narrator is to tell a story to the audience. If the narrator wishes to make a point, they can, as long as they do not attempt it on the audience. As Hart (1997) asserts, narrative is a depropositionalized argument, meaning that it is an argument with a hidden bottom line. Even Aesop in his fables never overtly stated the argument he was making, it was the storyline and the situations that the characters found themselves in that made the argument of the story clear. Narrators must tell the story effectively to let the hidden

argument come out, and they should not overtly state their argument or they run the risk of alienating the audience.

Another important aspect to narrative (especially when looking at narrative as a story with a beginning, middle, and end) is an adequate closure to the narrative. A clear example of closure's effect on a narrative can be seen from a film on Ronald Reagan from the 1984 Republican National Convention. Mackey-Kallis (1991) argues that the eighteen-minute film that was used to tell the story of then President Reagan's life (as shown at the 1984 Republican National Convention) was successful because it provided a sense of closure to the story being told within the film. Mackey-Kallis (1991) asserts that what made this story so successful in shaping how Republicans viewed Reagan was the closure that the audience was asked to provide after the video had ended. Mackey-Kallis states, "If we accept the images portrayed, if we believe the man narrating our experiences is, himself, the embodiment of these ideals, then we must complete the story." Then, Mackey-Kallis states that we, as the American people, finally provide effective closure to the story when we realize that Reagan is the best man for the job and re-elect him as president. In essence, what Mackey-Kallis asserts is if a politician using a narrative can effectively provide a sense of closure to the silence he/she utilized, the silence can be successful.

We can further understand why narrative is justified if we look at the words of Fisher (1984) when he asserted, "Any ethic, whether social, political, legal, or otherwise, involves narrative." Hence, the use of narrative analysis of these forms of discourse is justified because each of them depicts an episode within the life of the individual rhetors.

In other words, when Clinton was giving his Map Room Speech on August 17, 1998, he was detailing various episodes within the story of his life since he met Monica Lewinsky. In a similar fashion, Gary Condit attempted to detail the various episodes within the story of his relationship with Chandra Levy – all the way up to her disappearance and the investigations surrounding it. In essence, our study using the narrative paradigm is much like a “flash-back” episode of a prime time television program. In a flash-back episode, the major characters within the program each look back on past experiences and then use each of these experiences to set up a new storyline, complete with all the classic elements of a narrative (setting, purpose, characters, events, etc.). That is exactly what Clinton and Condit did, used existing stories or “episodes” and retold them in order to set up a new narrative situation. In viewing the various discourses as “flash-back narratives”, and seeing how each of these discourses were episodes within the lives of the rhetors.

At its core, the critical method for this thesis will do the following: 1) identify how the media creates the expectation of a politician to speak, 2) examine how the speaker’s role both contributes to audience expectations and facilitates the justification and ending of the silence, and 3) explore how narrative is used to justify and/or end the silence. This method will attempt to discover how the politician in question breaks the expectation to speak on an issue, how this breaking of the exigence, combined with role expectations, requires the politician to speak on the issue, and finally, how the discourse used to break the silence effects the public interpretation of the silence as a justified response.

## Chapter 3

Clinton's Silence on Lewinsky Matter

When allegations surfaced about President Bill Clinton's marital infidelities in 1997, people were shocked and amazed. One of the reasons why people were so shocked is because the affair that allegedly took place was between President Clinton and an intern in her mid 20's named Monica Lewinsky. As a result of this affair, Kenneth Starr, White House Independent Counsel, began a direct investigation of the matter that ultimately led to the subpoena of President Clinton, and him testifying to a grand jury about the matter.

In looking at this case from a strict observational perspective, it is clear to see that President Clinton could have lost an incredible amount of credibility. There was a definite potential that Clinton could harm not only his personal credibility, but also the credibility of the office, family, friends, and country. Clinton, in his Map Room Speech on August 17, 1998, stated that he remained silent on the topic to protect himself from the repercussions of his own conduct. He also remained silent in order to protect himself from another investigation that was going on concerning the Whitewater land dealings in Arkansas. Both the Lewinsky matter and the Whitewater matter turned out to be ink spots on the Clinton presidency. Clinton was knowledgeable enough to realize that his only way to avoid an embarrassing personal situation, such as the Lewinsky matter, was to remain silent on the topic.

Not only can the area of credibility, and see how that has been overlooked in the study of political silence, be examined, but also how silence can be construed as an

admittance of guilt. In looking at this particular area, it is imperative that the critic considers the background of the person using the silence. In this case, we need to examine the background of President Clinton, through the lens of the American public.

### Creation of the Expectation to Speak

Within the media there was a large call for President Clinton to speak out on this issue, and since he didn't, he violated the public's expectation for him to speak on the topic. Frank Lutz, a pollster, asserted on the July 30, 1998 *News Hour with Jim Lehrer*, "It's not good for the American people to question the integrity and the decency of the president, and it's not a positive development when these doubts exist. There have been times in the past... when presidents have come forward, admitting mistakes, or challenge them as the case may be, but address the American people head on. And I think if we were to instill some sort of confidence, separate partisanship, but confidence in structure, we need the president to say something." Furthermore, from this same episode of *News Hour*, presidential historian Michael Beschloss, asserted, "If the president can clear his name, he should do it." It is important to note, however, that political pundits and historians were not the only people asking Clinton to speak out on this issue. At a conference in Arlington, VA, then Senator John Ashcroft from Missouri (the current Attorney General of the United States), stated, "I call upon the president of the United States to tell the American people the truth (1998)." In addition, Harris (1998) asserted that lawmakers in both parties felt that the only way Clinton could save his presidency would be to speak out on the Lewinsky matter. Furthermore, colleagues of Clinton called on him to speak as well on the topic. Leon Panetta, former White House Chief of Staff



stated, "I think this matter is important enough that he [Clinton] should sit down, stare the American people in the eye, and do it directly [speak out on Lewinsky matter], from the Oval Office."

It is also important to note that the expectation to speak on the matter was echoed not only by persons that worked with Clinton in the White House, but also by personal friends as well. Woodward (1999) made reference to a conversation that occurred between Clinton and a close friend before his grand jury testimony. Clinton's unnamed friend advised, "You owe the country a few words... You'll be talking to your friends, not your enemies."

Apart from colleagues and personal friends, forty-nine percent of the American public also felt that Clinton should hold a press conference or, in some other way, speak out on the Lewinsky matter (Holland, 1998). For example, during an interview with the *Eagle Tribune*, Eunice Arcidiacono stated, "I think he should come out and tell the truth and get it over with. If he did it he should take his lumps (Godcher, 1998)." By taking all of these statements into consideration, it is clear to see that there was an expectation for Clinton to speak on the topic, and he broke that expectation, thus making his silence strategic and rhetorical.

#### Clinton's Justification and Ending of Silence

Roughly seven months after President Clinton broke his silence on the Monica Lewinsky issue, he testified via video to a grand jury in the Paula Jones case. The evening after he testified to the grand jury, President Clinton gave a speech of apology from the Map Room of the White House. In this speech, Clinton explained the reasons he

remained silent about the alleged affair, and how sorry he was to the people he had hurt. In the final part of this thesis, we will first examine how Clinton, through his silence, broke the expectation to speak on this matter, second, use elements of role analysis to discuss the silence, and finally analyze the breaking of the silence in Clinton's Map Room Speech to understand how the silence he used was justified.

Before an analysis of the silence and discourse can begin, it is important to have a brief understanding of the context the final discourse was given in. The evening after Clinton testified via video to the grand jury, he went on national television and addressed the nation. In a speech that lasted just about ten minutes, and only a page and a quarter in length, Clinton was able to do many things. First and foremost, he was able to tell the American people his side of the story without interruption from the press or anyone else. He was able to put his version of the facts across.

The speech consisted of three parts. The first part was information about the entire Monica Lewinsky fiasco. All the details given by Clinton in this portion of the speech can be backed up. He indicates he gave answers that were "legally accurate," but also indicates that they were misleading. He explains the type of relationship he had with Miss Lewinsky and states that the relationship was inappropriate. Moving away from the first part to the second, Clinton states why he stayed silent on the topic for so long. He mentions that he was concerned, embarrassed, and protective. He discusses how his entire personal life has been turned upside down because of this fiasco, and he just wants to put it all behind him. He also tries to shift the blame away from himself, and to the Office of the Independent Counsel and their investigation by saying, "Too many innocent

people have been hurt.” The third, and final aspect of the speech discusses the need of the country to get past this incident and move forward. He states, “Now it is time - in fact, it is past time - to move on. We have important work to do...real problems to solve.” It is here that Clinton tries to tell the audience that this incident is just a speed bump on the way to solving the other problems of the nation.

#### Role Analysis of Clinton's Discourse

It is important to realize that before Clinton even addressed the nation on this matter, he already had an established persona because of his former relationships and infidelities. During his campaign for the presidency, there were several reports of alleged affairs that the President had (most notably Paula Jones and Gennifer Flowers). These allegations plagued Clinton throughout his presidency. However, something must be considered here. Looking at the past circumstances that he had been in with Jones and Flowers, one might assume that if rumors surfaced about another affair that Bill Clinton had, he would speak on the issue, in order to clear his name, and clear the office of the president from any blemishes. This was not the case, however. Taking into consideration Clinton's past, it would be easy to see how he was not defending his credibility by remaining silent. To put it simply, Clinton created a persona of a philanderer for himself by having various alleged affairs before he ran for President. So now, when he neither admits nor discounts rumors of another affair, the public can look at the persona that was created and make an immediate judgment. Since Clinton did not speak out as soon as he could have, those members of the public that already viewed him as a philanderer would naturally assume that their beliefs about his background were correct, and that he was

guilty of these specific charges.

Now, we must examine elements of Clinton's discourse to view what other roles were used as part of his message. Clinton, realizing that the situation mandated discussing the topic, decided to talk about his affair as a lapse in judgment and a personal failure. He treated his rhetorical situation as one of apologia, and he did apologize for his actions. Also, he used his situation to try and avoid the resurgence of the topic. He parallels his personal problems with problems that the nation is facing, and he states that as a nation, we must move ahead and face the real problems that are facing us. Clinton also takes the situation he is in and tries to draw parallels between himself and other Americans. He states that he had to answer questions that no American citizen would ever want to answer, and he does this for a reason. He tries to draw a connection between himself and other Americans so as to say, "I am just a regular guy. I'm like everyone else, a private citizen." Doing so in this situation makes Clinton identify with the average American. The situation mandated that this be done as well so that the audience could identify with Clinton's position.

Not only can we examine the situation of the rhetoric, we can also look at Hart's idea of the parental persona. Hart (1997) asserts that some rhetors employ a parental persona in which the rhetor tries to lead his listeners through some sort of difficulty. This is seen to be true if we look at the Map Room Speech. Clinton continually states that his affair is not an issue that the United States needs to deal with. Clinton states, "We have important work to do - real opportunities to seize, real problems to solve, real security matters to face." In using this sentence, Clinton discusses what the important things to

America are at this juncture; much in the same way a father or mother might set priorities for a son or daughter by saying, "School is more important than television." The same is true with Clinton's statement, which means his personal dealings are less important than the welfare of the country. By using a parental role, Clinton is able to show that he is an all-knowing leader, in that he knows what is most important for the country, and that is to move on from the dealings that have plagued them for so long. In other words, Clinton is attempting to assert that the only way to grow together as a nation is to move past this scandal and get on with our own lives instead of worrying about someone else's.

#### Narrative Criticism of Clinton's Discourse

Now that we have a brief understanding of the speech, we must analyze it in more detail. We can now examine the Map Room Speech through the narrative method.

Clinton's address from the Map Room sets up a narrative with many characters. The major characters in the narrative are President Clinton, the independent counsel, Monica Lewinsky, and the grand jury. These are the major characters in the narrative because without these characters, the situation that Clinton is faced with (apologizing in front of the nation) would never have taken place. The minor characters of his narrative are his family. Clinton's family is only mentioned twice in this address, and while he uses his family as "glue" to hold his address together, they are really of only secondary importance to the central story. His family had no direct effect on his speaking to the nation about this particular issue. The characters of the narrative are also important in understanding the reason that Clinton remained silent on this issue. The characters of the Independent Counsel, Monica Lewinsky, and the grand jury all contributed to his silence

on the issue. Two of the three characters just mentioned held Clinton's political life in their hands. The Independent Counsel and the grand jury could have destroyed Clinton personally, and could have destroyed his presidential legacy if he did not fight back in some way.

Secondly, Clinton refers during his narrative on the subject of the Lewinsky affair to many events. Narrative theory allows for events to be broken up into two parts: kernels and satellites. The kernels (major events) in the narrative can be seen in three different instances. The first line of Clinton's address is the first kernel. It is here that he states he testified to the grand jury in the Paula Jones case, and to the Office of the Independent Counsel as well. This is a kernel because without this testimony, there is really no reason for Clinton to address the country during prime time television. The second kernel is when Clinton admits he had a relationship with Lewinsky that was inappropriate. This is a kernel because it begins to explain his reason for remaining silent on the topic of the alleged affair for so long. The final kernel can be seen when Clinton states that this matter be kept within his family, and should not involve the nation. This is important because it sets up the tone for the entire speech, and his entire reason for remaining silent on the Lewinsky issue. Put simply, it was his personal dilemma, not the dilemma of the country. Not only are there kernels in this narrative, there are satellites (minor events) as well. There is only one minor event in the narrative. This minor event is evident when Clinton describes the procedures taken by the Office of the Independent Counsel against researching his past dealings in Arkansas. This is a minor event in the story because it has no direct impact on what he is speaking to the nation about. While the actions of the

Independent Counsel had a direct impact on his professional life in Arkansas, the Whitewater land dealings were not of issue in this speech at this point. However, it is important as an event because Clinton believed that the Independent Counsel's actions in the past harmed his credibility, his family's credibility, and the credibility of the office of the President as well. In regards to silence, the events are important because they set up for the audience each reason (both major and minor) that Clinton remained silent on the Lewinsky issue. Each event had a direct impact in Clinton, and his silence was a result of the effects that these events had or were possibly going to have on him. Again, Clinton believed that by silence, he was able to minimize the severity of a major event, his affair with Monica Lewinsky. Unfortunately, for Clinton, this tactic was not successful because due to his silence, the coverage of the event reached a fevered pitch.

The third element to consider is the setting where the events in the narrative take place. The setting of the narrative is of extreme importance to the effectiveness of this particular narrative. The setting is the Map Room of the White House. This is important and intriguing for a few reasons. Most importantly, the choice of Clinton to use the Map Room to deliver his address, instead of the normally used Oval Office for most Presidential addresses, sends interesting messages about Clinton. During the seven months that passed when Clinton did not speak in any length on the topic of Monica Lewinsky, the American public, as well as many people in the press, believed that Clinton had tarnished the integrity of the Oval Office. By choosing to deliver his statement from the Map Room as opposed to the Oval Office, Clinton is agreeing with the public's opinion. By giving his speech of apologia from a room other than the Oval

Office, Clinton sends a strong message. Not only does he agree with the American public that believed he tarnished the Oval Office, he is also, indirectly, admitting guilt by not addressing the nation from the Oval Office and instead from the Map Room. By examining these factors, it is easy to see that the actual physical setting from which Clinton tells his narrative is important to the speech as a whole. The setting of events within the narrative, however, is non-existent. Clinton doesn't state where any actions he involved himself in took place, so determining the narrative's setting is more difficult than finding the physical setting the narrative is being told in.

The next element of narrative criticism that needs to be addressed is the purpose of the narrative. Another way of viewing the narrative's purpose is thinking of the purpose as the point of the narrative. The theme running in this narrative is that Clinton wants to apologize to the nation for his actions. He states that he feels the need to apologize to the nation for his actions, and he must take responsibility for his actions, "Both public and private." Clinton then goes on to speak about his inappropriate actions in more detail. He states that he had a relationship with Monica Lewinsky that was "wrong." He also states that his silence on the subject misled people, and gave a false impression to the American public. Clinton's Map Room Speech was given as a speech of apologia so that Clinton could apologize to the nation for his actions which, much like he insisted, misled people. The underlying lesson that Clinton is trying to teach the nation is that no matter how high up on the political ladder you may be, you are still not immune from problems that face people. His silence on the topic gave him an elitist look, and many people disliked him for that. His silence, now in his narrative, needed to be fully



explained in order to protect his personal credibility. In other words, it was very important that within his discourse, Clinton give some reason to show why he decided to remain silent on the issue. This theme under-girded his narrative. Clinton actually states that he gave a false impression [of himself] through his silence on the issue. It is easy to see by examining the silence, that Clinton's need to explain and defend his silence was the main force guiding his narrative.

After discussing the purpose element in the narrative method, the next aspect is to view the narrator of the story. The narrator of this particular story is Bill Clinton. It is important for this particular story that Bill Clinton is the narrator because it allows the audience to get an inside view of the happenings. A reason that Bill Clinton succeeds as a narrator for this story is that he effectively delivered his story in such a way that he was able to garner sympathy from the audience. He does this by making several references to how he realizes he is not a perfect man, and how he realizes that he has let people down, including members of his family. As a narrator, Clinton also needed to show how the silence on the Lewinsky issue was necessary. He states that he felt the need to remain silent in order to protect the embarrassment he felt, and to protect his family. When Clinton stated the reasons he remained silent, and worded his story to place the blame on the Independent Counsel, he was being an effective narrator. The best example of this were his assertions that he had real concerns about the Whitewater investigation that had been plaguing he and his family for years. He wanted to take the blame for remaining silent off of his shoulders, and place the blame on the Counsel's instead. Clinton continued to state how the Counsel was like a vulture and would not stop investigating

things with Clinton, and they moved on to his family and friends, which he believed was wrong. Next, it is important to examine the temporal relations of the story, or how the events related to each other across time. Clinton mentions in his speech that all the recent problems in his life started out with an investigation about the Whitewater land dealings that he and his wife were involved in two decades before he became the President. He mentions how this investigation merged into another investigation entirely. He also states his present course of actions during the matter (testifying to a grand jury, lying in a deposition, etc.). The temporal aspects of this narrative fit together well, even though Clinton does not go through the relations in a chronological manner. It was not imperative for Clinton to discuss the relationship between the events in a chronological manner, because the thoughts about Whitewater and other land dealings were not at the forefront of public thought at the time. Therefore, he needed to address the most important concerns first, and then move on to discussing less important issues. By discussing elements of his testimony to the grand jury, his relationship with Monica Lewinsky, and then moving on to discuss issues involving Whitewater and Kenneth Starr, Clinton laid to rest the more pressing issues that people were wondering about. This gave the impression that he was willing to cooperate in full and get some of the major issues out of the way before moving on with his life and discourse.

The final element to examine in the narrative method is what events occur that cause other events to occur as well. This is an element known as causal relations. The major causal relationship here is the affect Clinton says the Independent Counsel investigation has had on his personal family life, as well as the life and well-being of the

country as a whole. Clinton states that the Independent Counsel moved on to his personal staff and friends, and had caused so much trouble amongst people that the investigation itself was under investigation. He states that this investigation had distracted too many people from the real problems facing the country, and that no work can get done while the Independent Counsel proceeds. The way Clinton phrases this part of his narrative is important because he needs to effectively garner public support against the Independent Counsel. By stating that the investigation had directly ruined the lives of people in his life, but indirectly the lives of everyone in the country by he is able to rally the troops around a common foe, Kenneth Starr and the Office of the Independent Counsel. Clinton uses the Independent Counsel as the cause of instability in the government and nation, and says that this instability brought in by the Counsel has an adverse effect on the welfare of the nation. By asserting this, Clinton also gives a legitimate reason for the American public to disagree with the tactics of the Counsel.

### Conclusions

Taking into consideration the facts we have learned about silence through this study, it is clear to see that silence as a political strategy was successful in Clinton's case. While Clinton was not thrown out of office or forced to resign, he was impeached on two articles in the House of Representatives. However, even with the votes for impeachment, his job approval ratings remained high. It is important to note, however, that many people, both private citizens and political commentators, had a negative view of Clinton's character because of his admittance to wrongdoing.

Silence will also force the politician using it to one side of an issue, much like it

did with Clinton. People may equate the silence with guilt, once this happens it will be virtually impossible to get away from that guilt. Therefore, politicians that use silence risk being looked at in an unfavorable light, and will have a difficult time being respected by the American public (as is the case with Clinton).

In regards to President Clinton's Map Room Speech, there are also many different aspects that can be discussed as to how it relates to persuasion. Clinton's speech of apologia was just one more speech in that particular genre, but it had some differences that set it apart. Clinton attempted to make himself sound no different from any other man going through a tough time after an affair he was involved in was discovered. He also states how disappointed he was in himself for what he did, and who is really to blame. What sorts of messages does this address send us about persuasion? It tells us that one way in which to gain support for you and to persuade the audience is to identify with the audience, much like Burke suggests (1969). Burke argued that you could best persuade your audience if you understand their thoughts, feelings, customs, etc. Clinton does this successfully by stating he was at fault for having an affair, and many people respected him for this. Moving on, he stated that the independent counsel investigation caused many innocent people to be hurt. Shifting blame on the issue was a smart move by Clinton because he realized many people would agree with his statement that the independent counsel had gone too far. By aligning his personal view of the counsel with the public opinion of the counsel, Clinton was able to find a common foe, and this helped him win support from the American public, and also makes a strong statement about persuasion in general, which can again lead back to the idea of the scapegoat that we also

receive from Burke. One of the best ways to gain support for your argument is to find a common enemy, and exploit that common enemy. The question that then arises, is how effective was the Map Room Speech in defending the use of silence? By examining the factors stated in this paper, it can be concluded that the Map Room Speech was very effective in explaining and defending Clinton's silence. In Clinton's case, the most effective rhetorical response to the Lewinsky issue was his Map Room Speech. The reasoning behind that is simple: silence is ambiguous and can create too much confusion, whereas conventional speech is straightforward and easy to understand in most cases. Clinton's use of silence was very ambiguous, and the public was not sure if he was silent in order to avoid admitting guilt, gain advantage, or because he did not know what to say. It was not until the Map Room Speech that Clinton expresses that he was silent in order to gain an advantage over the media and the Counsel in order to protect his family.

## Chapter 4

Gary Condit and the Silence Over Chandra Levy

The summer of 2001 offered another example of a politician using silence as damage control. We can utilize this example of silence and the discourse following it to determine if the use of silence was effective and if the way the silence was broken was also effective. In late April of 2001, a student intern at the Bureau of Prisons in Washington, D.C. was preparing to return to her home in California – a trip she never completed. The intern was Chandra Levy, and at the time her disappearance has since become a topic of household discussion. While working in this position at the Bureau of Prisons, Levy forged a close relationship with her home district's U.S. Representative, Gary Condit. It was during this time that Levy interned at the Bureau of Prisons that her relationship with Representative Condit started to become more intimate. In fact, information on ABCNews.com (2001) asserts that Levy admitted that she had a relationship with “a congressman” as early as November of 2000, and disclosed the name of the congressman (Gary Condit) six months later in April of 2001.

It is from this point on that information regarding what happened to Chandra Levy starts to get fuzzy. At the end of April, Levy had contacted her landlord to inquire about leaving her apartment early because her job had “abruptly ended (ABCNews.com, 2001).” Roughly a week after this initial inquiry, there had been no word of any sort from Levy, and her family started to grow worried. After Washington, D.C. police conducted a preliminary search of Levy's apartment for her or any signs as to where she would be, Levy's parents contacted Congressman Condit to see if he could get the FBI to help with

the investigation. It was during this phone conversation that Congressman Condit made his first denial of any sort of intimate relationship with Levy. According to ABCNews.com (2001), on May 5, 2001 when Levy's mother directly asked Condit if he and Chandra were having an affair, he denied it.

It wasn't until four months after Levy's disappearance, and a number of interviews and interrogations by the police and FBI that Congressman Condit finally made a public statement on this case. During those four months of silence by Condit, the media had saturated the airwaves and papers with the story. It was virtually impossible for someone to turn on the television and not see the latest updates about the search for Chandra Levy or what role, if any, Representative Condit had in her disappearance.

#### Creation of the Expectation to Speak

It was because of all the media attention given to the Levy-Condit case that many people believed that Representative Condit should put all issues to rest and make a public statement about his relationship with Levy, as well as any other facts about the case. The voices of his constituents in California probably resonated the most. In fact, Kennedy (2001) asserted in the *New York Daily News*, "He [Condit] has remained silent amid ever-growing calls for him to further explain his relationship with the 24 year-old intern." However, even after hearing requests from the family of Chandra Levy, other constituents, as well as high-ranking colleagues from Washington, Condit still refused to talk to the media in any way about the case. Furthermore, Don Vance, a member of the California organization Americans for Credibility in Congress, asserted during a 2001 interview with Fox News Channel's Paula Zahn, "The pressure... on the congressman

besides resigning is to come public and prove his innocence in the world of public opinion that feels that he's a suspect in this case (Murdock, 2001).” However, it was not only private citizens that were asking for Condit to speak out about the Levy issue. Representative Cal Dooley stated at an appearance of the Fresno Business Council, “It’s clearly time for Gary Condit to speak to his constituents... He needs to make sure questions are answered... He needs to go out and respond to those questions (Pollock, 2001).” Lastly, Senator Dianne Feinstein from California also said that she thought Condit should step forward and discuss the Levy issue publicly (Malone, 2001).

As Condit’s silence continued, the requests for him to speak on the topic of Levy’s disappearance continued to grow. According to the *Toronto Star*, Lanny Davis, Special Counsel to former President Clinton pressured Condit to speak out on this topic when he said, “Whatever you've done today, you should call a press conference tomorrow. You should apologize for holding back the truth from the police and possibly impeding the investigation. You should say to reporters, ‘I'm not leaving this room until I answer every one of your questions, with the sole exception I'm not getting into details of my private relationship with Ms Levy. But I'm going to do everything I can to help find this young woman (Walker, 2001).’” Condit, however, refused to ever mention the case. He would, instead, have members of his congressional staff talk to the press. It was not until approximately three months after facts linking Levy and Condit together surfaced that Condit finally broke his silence on the Levy issue.

This type of public pressure clearly creates what Bitzer (1968) would term an exigence. This particular situation that Condit found himself in was definitely one that



mandated he speak out on the topic. Unlike years previously when high profile politicians were found to be having affairs with staff members, the fact that the person Condit was allegedly having relations with ended up missing and presumably dead should have been enough to mandate his speaking on the topic. However, this was not the case. For whatever reasons, Condit believed that it would be best to not discuss the topic at all, thus making this rhetorical situation even more interesting. As a result there was an expectation to speak on a specific critical topic, this exigence was ignored, and Condit was suddenly faced with a much more hostile and complex rhetorical situation than he had previously faced.

Condit's silence on the Levy issue is worthy of study because his silence did break an expectation to speak. His constituents from California, his colleagues from the House of Representatives, and even concerned citizens of the country all awaited and expected Condit to say something, no matter how small or trivial it may seem, on the Levy disappearance. It is because Condit did not speak on this topic when there was an expectation for him to do so, that his political strategic silence is imperative to examine Justification and Ending of Silence

As has been mentioned previously, a politician may decide to remain silent on an issue in the hopes that he/she may be able to keep his/her credibility intact and not harm it. However, with the case of Gary Condit, the silence worked against him, rather than for him. Danielsen (2001) asserts that this issue has certainly damaged not only Condit's long-term political career, but also his credibility. Danielsen continues to point out that the main action that harmed the credibility of Condit was his reluctance to speak out on

the issue in person.

Condit did use measures and tactics, other than direct responses to questions and queries about the Levy issue, to try and keep his credibility intact, however his attempts to do so were not fruitful. He attempted to maintain his credibility by not publicly addressing the Levy issue on his own. Condit, perhaps believing and knowing that admitting he had an affair or a “close relationship” with an intern could have serious and detrimental effects on his political future, refused to personally answer questions about Levy. Instead, he would have his staff or attorney talk to the press. This proved to be an interesting decision on his part because the first months of news coverage were dominated by the allegations being thrown at him. For example, people believed (and some still do) that he was, in some way on some level, involved with Levy’s disappearance. It was because of this belief that the public became increasingly suspicious with Condit, his actions, and his lack of answers on the situation. In fact, during the August 21, 2001 Condit-Chung interview, Chung makes reference to this perception by asserting, “What we’re talking about is whether or not you will come forward to lift the veil of suspicion that seems to have clouded you.” One would think that when faced with these allegations of sexual impropriety and foul play that he would, much like Clinton did, assert publicly that he had no involvement with this woman at all.

Instead of choosing a direct response to these allegations, Condit responded in other ways to get back his lost credibility. For instance, Condit had taken a number of lie detector tests. Interestingly enough, his first lie detector test was a privately administered one, and it had been stated he had passed and also had denied any affair with Levy.

Condit was using the results of these various lie detector tests as a way of speaking to the public. He used these tests to say that he had nothing to hide so there was no reason for him to speak on the topic. Condit hoped that this tactic would work, because if people accused him of not cooperating with the authorities, his aides could assert, "Of course he is cooperating. He just took a lie detector test."

In conjunction with taking polygraph examinations, Condit also, in a move to regain any lost credibility, offered up a sample of his DNA to authorities examining the scene, but remained silent to the public while all of this was going on. His silence and reluctance to speak to the public on his own about this issue further damaged his credibility. Ehrenhaus' work (1988) on silence further supports the belief that Condit's silence was a failure. Ehrenhaus asserts, "Silence is 'filled' by talk, just as talk fills a room; embarrassing silences are viewed as 'gaps,' as empty spaces. This implication remains whether silence is viewed favorably or not." What we learn here from Ehrenhaus is that when there is silence from an individual that silence is being filled by the discussions and ideas of others. From the talk or gap that emerges from the silence, people will attribute either a positive or negative view of that silence and possibly the person using it. Taking this perspective and applying it to the case of Gary Condit, we can see that the silence he generated was in turn filled by talk that was very negative, thus allowing Condit's critics, rather than Condit, to set the dominant tone of the media coverage. A CBS/Evote.com poll from July 16 and 17, 2001 proved this fact when fifty-three percent of people polled asserted that they would not vote for Condit if he ran for re-election in 2002 (which he ultimately ended up doing). Furthermore, Erickson and

Schmidt (1982) believe that political silence is an unethical response to a crisis situation when it, “facilitates neither understanding nor insight, and denies verbal symbols which affirm, delineate, and give definition to rhetorical situations. A politically silent incumbent withholds from the public validating sources of information about a crisis.” Upon closer examination of Condit’s situation, this is exactly what he did. Condit had important information about this specific situation and chose to withhold it. It is because he decided to withhold this information that people viewed his silence negatively, and thus, his credibility was affected as well.

Not only was Condit’s credibility ruined, his future rhetoric suffered as well. Since Condit had been so comfortable avoiding questions about this matter while investigations were happening, the public understandably had a sleazy and dishonest perception of him. President of public relations firm Strategic Communications, Bill Huey, in an August 2001 online forum hosted by *O’Dwyer’s PR Daily* ([www.odwyerpr.com/jack\\_odwyers\\_nl/2001/0829.htm](http://www.odwyerpr.com/jack_odwyers_nl/2001/0829.htm)) commented on this perception, noting, “Condit’s canned non-denial denial about his affair with Chandra Levy looks innocuous enough in print, but in front of a camera it reeks of the media advisor and the lawyer.” Based on this assertion, one could believe that future rhetoric on this issue from Condit would be the same, scripted in both word and action. If this hypothetical case turned out to be true, and his future words and actions followed the same suit, then the perceptions the public attributed to his rhetoric would continue to be verified.

These views of Condit that the public held were put to the test when Condit finally decided to break his silence. Rather than use a more “traditional” form of

discourse, he chose an interview format to prove that he had always been willing to cooperate with whoever wanted to interview him on the Levy matter. The drawback to his planning was that by utilizing this method he relinquished total control of the rhetoric. The elements present within Representative Condit's interview with Connie Chung encourage narrative analysis of the discourse. Condit's interview with Chung contains many elements of a classical narrative. For example, there is a narrator of the events, major characters, a setting, and an interesting storyline that ends in the disappearance of one of the major characters. All of these elements within this interview allow us to use narrative criticism in order to analyze this form of discourse.

#### Role Analysis of Condit's Discourse

Using ideas from Hart (1997), it is also clear to see that Condit assumes various roles during his discourse. Condit utilizes the Experiential role within his interview with Chung. The experiential persona asserts that language is used as an obstacle to truth (Hart, 1997). The experiential persona is defiant and emotional and this persona also has rhetoric that is suited to insiders, or those who have experience within a certain situation or context. Basically, the words people use are evasive and are used only to their own benefit, not to the benefit of the other party or parties within the communication process. Condit clearly utilizes this persona within his interview with Connie Chung. Through his responses to questions, Condit's use of language does hide information that the American public had been waiting approximately four months to hear. Condit's minimum comment (as Brummet (1981) would call it) is the following: "I've been married for 34 years and... I've not been a perfect man. I've made my share of mistakes. But... out of respect

for my family and out of a specific request from the Levy family, I think it's best that I not get into those details... about Chandra Levy." Condit resorts back to this answer five times within the interview. The language he uses answering these questions suggests that Condit is indeed hiding the truth. Furthermore, within the interview, there are moments when Condit does become defiant toward Chung as he attempts to regain control at points where he has lost control as can be seen through Condit's various statements such as, "Let me finish," as well as his attempts to talk over Chung's questions. Condit is clearly being defiant and is refusing to help move the interview along and is keeping his comments brief enough so that only insiders in the relationship would be able to understand them. Thus, it is clear to see that Condit is utilizing the experiential role within his discourse.

#### Narrative Criticism of Condit's Discourse

Almost a full three months after Chandra Levy had been reported missing, Representative Gary Condit finally broke his silence on the issue. ABC News reporter Connie Chung interviewed Condit for the television news program *Primetime Live* on August 23, 2001. During this interview, Chung asks a myriad of questions about Chandra Levy, the relationship that Levy and Condit, and various other questions about their relationship and her disappearance.

Through this interesting form of discourse, one of the goals Condit was hoping to accomplish was to take media attention off himself and his family. Also, he was hoping that by taking part in this interview he would be able to stop the allegations that he was

being uncooperative with police and justice officials that were administering the search for Levy. Bill Schneider (2001), a political analyst for CNN asserted during an online chat, "He [Condit] must stress that he is not hiding anything, and that his failure to cooperate more fully was... driven by the media." However, the task of doing these things would prove to be difficult, especially in this sort of discourse. A more traditional form of discourse (such as a speech, letter, etc.) allows the rhetor to explain any facts that he/she wishes to while having complete control over the situation. However, in choosing an interview to break the silence, the interviewee has no control over the topics raised, and must answer every question. The interviewee is at the complete mercy of the interviewer, and there is no way to avoid addressing topics. In a rhetorical situation like an interview, the interviewee needs to weigh their word choices very carefully. This sort of discourse is different than a news conference or some situation similar to that for one large reason. At a news conference, the person giving the news conference can decide when it is over. So, basically, if an unforeseen question arises, they can just thank everyone and leave the podium. However, with an interview, such impromptu closure is not possible. The closeness and intimacy of an interview requires that questions be answered as fully as possible.

A basic assumption of narrative theory is that the narrator has complete and total control over the story. It is assumed that the narrator is all knowing is thus able to give us important details of the narrative. An interview, however, changes the role of narrator. We, as an audience, are now faced with dual narrators. Just as the narrative paradigm suggests that there are major and minor characters within a narrative, it is also evident

that an interview involves major and minor narrators. The major narrator would be Chung because she has complete control over what topics will be approached, in what order, and what depth of information must be provided in order to be done with a topic. In essence, Chung attempts to fill in the gaps of information that exist from what Condit tells us. Condit then plays the role of the minor narrator since he is the one that gives us the primary information. This is the role of the major narrator who makes the narrative more comprehensive and holistic because whatever information one narrator leaves out, the other can attempt to add back in.

Condit's ability to not act as the major narrator within this story had multiple effects. For Condit, this was a negative move because it meant that he could no longer remain silent on issues, give minimum comments, or evade questions with small quips. Since he could no longer remain silent and he had to answer questions, negative consequences could possibly result from how he answered the questions. This relinquishing of the narrator role, however, was positive for the audience because it meant that the detailed events of the story would finally be given to those interested.

The story that Condit created about the relationship that he had with Chandra Levy is an interesting one. Condit asserts that he and Chandra had known each other for a little under a year before she disappeared. He discusses that the relationship that they had was a "close relationship," and that he did care for her although as nothing more than a friend. Throughout his narrative, Condit continues to assert that he had very little contact with Levy during the last few days before her disappearance. Condit tells his audience that he did, in fact, talk to her a few times, but was puzzled and concerned when she



ended up missing. Throughout his narrative, Condit refuses to admit whether he and Condit had an intimate relationship. He makes ambiguous statements that leave the context of the relationship unclear. For example, when asked by Connie Chung if he and Chandra Levy had an intimate relationship, he replied, "I've been married for 34 years, and I have not been a perfect man, and I've made my share of mistakes. But out of respect for my family, and out of a specific request from the Levy family, I think its best that I not get into those details about Chandra Levy." Condit's narrative does little to advance knowledge on the subject of Levy's disappearance or even on the relationship that existed between him and Levy.

Throughout the narrative, Levy is portrayed as the innocent victim whereas Condit is portrayed as the person with something to hide. This is clearly evident if we examine the first set of questions and answers within the Condit-Chung interview. These questions clearly show us that Levy is depicted as the victim within the narrative and Condit as the villain:

CONNIE CHUNG: Congressman Condit, do you know what happened to Chandra Levy?

GARY CONDIT: No, I do not.

CONNIE CHUNG: Did you have anything to do with her disappearance?

GARY CONDIT: No, I didn't.

CONNIE CHUNG: Did you say anything or do anything that could have caused her to drop out of sight?

GARY CONDIT: You know, Chandra and I never had a cross word.

CONNIE CHUNG: Do you have any idea if there was anyone who wanted to harm her?

GARY CONDIT: No.

CONNIE CHUNG: Did you cause anyone to harm her?

GARY CONDIT: No.

CONNIE CHUNG: Did you kill Chandra Levy?

GARY CONDIT: I did not.

Now it is imperative to determine how the opening of the interview shows Condit with a negative aura. That aspect is evident when looking at the types of questions asked as well as the one they are asked in. The questions asked are accusatory and suggest that Condit may have possibly done something to contribute to the disappearance of Levy. These types of questions are also evident at other places within the interview, particularly when Condit is asked if he had not been truthful when being interviewed by police, and also by Chung addressing the allegations that he had been impeding the investigation into Levy's disappearance.

Now that we have an understanding of the characters, both major and minor, that exist within Condit's narrative, it is important to examine the kernels and satellites that exist within the narrative. The kernels of a narrative are the major events and the satellites within a narrative are the minor events. Throughout this narrative, there are five kernels that are evident. The first is the relationship that Condit admitted he had with Levy. This is the important event because it sets up the groundwork for everything that is discussed after it, from the loss of Levy's internship to her disappearance, all have some sort of tie-in to the fact that Condit and Levy had a relationship. The second kernel is the disappearance of Chandra Levy. Had it not been for the disappearance, none of these

allegations about evading justice would have been tossed at Condit. Also, had Levy never disappeared, one could argue that we would never have heard of Gary Condit at all (or at least not as much as we have heard about him recently). The third kernel is the set of interviews that Condit had to take part in. The various interviews, which were administered by the District of Columbia Police Department, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Department of Justice all added to the drama of the narrative, and they also assisted the various parties in how to approach the case (i.e., whether or not they have reason to continue to question Condit). It is because each one of these events had a large impact on the Levy case, as well as the future rhetoric used by Condit that we treat them as kernels within this narrative. A final kernel within this narrative is Chung's statement regarding how Condit asked for a public airing of details after the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal. Condit stated during debate within the House of Representatives that there should be, "A public airing of every detail of his affair, [because] only when we strip away the cloak of secrecy and lay the facts on the table, can we begin to resolve this matter." The irony of this statement within Condit's context basically guaranteed that it would become part of the narrative.

Next, it is important to understand the purpose of this narrative. Given the fact that there are two different narrators within this story (the major narrator and the minor narrator) we must recognize and consider the two different narrative purposes. The purpose of the major narrator for this story was to accumulate information on the issue of the Condit-Levy relationship, and also to find out if Condit had any knowledge of why Levy was missing. The purpose of the minor narrator is also clear. Through his narrative,

Condit is attempting to alleviate and redirect the media coverage that had been placed on him from the time of Levy's disappearance until this interview took place (a time span of approximately four months). Condit was also hoping that through this narrative he would be able to not only stop the media attention that was focused on his alleged relationship with Levy, he was also attempting to show how willing he was to cooperate with authorities to help find Levy. This is an important fact because many people questioned whether or not Condit had been very cooperative with the authorities searching for Levy. As Condit asserted, "I'm just saying to you that I answered every question asked of me by the police department on every occasion," is an attempt to show that he has been cooperative, in some way, with the authorities investigating this case. And, as stated previously, he is stating this to try and diminish media allegations of being uncooperative with police and other investigators. This purpose is also shown if we examine where the discourse is taking place. By having this interview administered within his own residence, Condit is attempting to show just how much information he has shared with the authorities about Levy's disappearance. Having this interview conducted in his place of residence shows that he feels the media has gone too far with their investigation of the case and have had crossed the line and started to look at his personal life and not just his professional life.

### Conclusions

Taking into consideration the silence by Condit, the elements of his narrative, as well as other factors, a decision as to whether or not his silence was successful in

avoiding the Levy issue can now be made. Condit's main goal while using his silence was to avoid speaking on the Levy issue in any context. While he believed that his silence would help focus public attention on the investigation, it had the opposite effect, and ended up focusing more media and public attention on the role that he played in the entire situation. Ultimately, his silence proved to harm his credibility with his constituents, the American public, as well as his colleagues in the House and Senate. While Condit was able to avoid personally speaking on the subject for a significant length of time, this silence not only allowed his critics to set the dominant media frame, but it also mandated that he eventually break his silence and address the major issues of the investigation. However, Condit's method of breaking his silence ultimately failed even after his interview with Chung, because during that interview, he refused to answer many questions that his constituents in California felt they had a right to know. Instead of answering questions about what kind of relationship he and Levy had, he used a short rehearsed answer, and then went on. Thus, he was being vocal, but remaining silent on one of the main issues of the Levy case. Since he did not break the silence, his discourse had a negative impact on his credibility as opposed to a positive one.

Condit's reluctance to speak to the public about the issue of Levy's disappearance and his relationship with her led many people in the public sphere to believe that he did have some sort of relationship with her and that he might have had something to do with her disappearance. This perception was reinforced when the allegations made by flight attendant Anne Marie Smith became public. However, even then Condit remained silent,

further affirming the public's perception that he did have a relationship with Levy, and possibly a part in her disappearance.

The question that this study will purport to answer is: how effective was Condit's discourse in breaking his silence? Ultimately, his discourse was not effective at all. Through the discourse, Condit should have explained the reason that he remained silent for as long as he did, answered important questions that arose during his silence, and done so while looking warm, friendly, and inviting. However, Condit did none of these things, which prompted the *St. Petersburg Times* to assert on August 28, 2001 that Condit came across as creepy, programmed, and granite-faced during his interview. Furthermore, Representative Dick Gephardt from Missouri, the House Democratic leader, voiced his opinion about Condit's failure during the interview when he asserted, "What he [Condit] said was disturbing and wrong. He was not candid and forward... He stayed in this zone of being evasive (Haussler, 2001)." Essentially, Condit continually avoided answering the questions put to him by Chung about the type of relationship that he and Levy had. In addition, he never asserted why he felt it necessary to remain silent on the Levy issue for so long while public accusations continued to be flung at him. In fact, a CNN/USA Today Gallup Poll taken between August 24 and August 26, 2001 showed that in the days following the interview with Connie Chung, two-thirds of the 814 people polled had a worse view of him following the interview, and sixty-two percent of the people polled said they thought the possibility that Condit was directly involved in Levy's disappearance was "likely" (Holland, 2001). A successful discourse in this case would have answered these two questions, and since they went unanswered, and are still

unanswered, it is impossible to view Condit's political silence on the case of Chandra Levy a success. Furthermore, if we look at recent events, it is evident to see that this Levy issue did have a decided impact on the political career of Condit. During the 2002 general election, Condit was beaten in his bid for re-election - his first loss ever in the state of California since he first started running for political office. In fact, Sanchez (2002) stated, "Running against a former protégé, abandoned by his own party, with hardly any political cash but his own, the veteran Democrat was ousted by voters clearly upset with his conduct in the investigation of missing Washington intern Chandra Levy. The primary vote was not even close: State Rep. Dennis Cardoza finished with 56 percent, Condit with 37 percent."

Furthermore, we can see that the utilization of political silence mandates that in order to be successful the politician using silence must explain and justify his/her actions for remaining silent. Condit failed to do this, and because he did not explain fully why he was silent, his attempt to use silence to distance and isolate himself and his family from the Levy affair failed. People attributed his silence to mean certain things (i.e., his involvement in the disappearance), and there was never a time within his final discourse that he addressed those things and why he decided to remain silent. Condit, ultimately, leaves the task of determining what the motives were for his silence up to the audience. The ambiguity of his actions is a large factor in what makes his silence fail. There are never any cut and dry answers or explanations for why he remained silent. Instead, he continually asserted that he had not been, "a perfect man," or that he cooperated with authorities at every step. While these things may be true, he failed at being an effective

rhetor as far as silence is **concerned** because he never fully explained why he was silent on the issue for so long.

Also, it is **imperative that we examine** what within Condit's narrative made his breaking of silence ineffective. **The answer:** he had no one to blame for remaining silent. For example, as we have **stated earlier** in this study, when Clinton made his Map Room Speech, a significant part of **that speaking event** was when he placed the blame on his silence to the Office of the **Independent Counsel** and a desire to protect his family. In Condit's case, he had no one to **place the blame on**. Within his narrative, he never once attempted to place the blame for **his silence on** to someone else. In essence, there was no "bad guy" to blame like there was with Clinton. Furthermore, no place within the narrative admitted that he had **made a mistake (on any level)** with Levy. Other than just asserting that he was not a perfect man, **there are no other elements** of the discourse or narrative in which we can see Condit admitting he had an improper relationship. Had the discourse just been to claim that he had **nothing to do** with the disappearance of Levy, it would have been effective (especially since he **answered the questions** about his involvement with her disappearance candidly). However, since he evaded questions about the status of their relationship and **did nothing to give information** about the two of them to build a stronger narrative, **the narrative and the discourse failed**.



## Chapter 5

Discussion

Within this study, various aspects of silence have been analyzed. Through the examinations of both former President Clinton's silence on the Monica Lewinsky issue and Representative Condit's silence on the Chandra Levy issue, this study will now consider whether silence was an appropriate response to the situations at hand, and what elements made the silence effective or ineffective.

As noted earlier, scholars have long recognized that silence can be used effectively as a political strategy (Erickson & Schmidt, 1982; Gunderson, 1961; Brummet, 1980; Perez & Dionisopoulos, 1995). Clinton's use of silence during the Monica Lewinsky investigations reaffirms this. Although originally applied to interpersonal communication, Johannesen (1974) puts forth some examples of places where silence is appropriate. It is appropriate to utilize interpersonal silence to help our understanding of political silence because, as Johannesen goes on to assert, silence is advocated as a strategy of social protest. Of the twenty various situations where silence is considered acceptable, the situations that directly link to Clinton's silence are: **when the person is attempting to avoid discussion of a controversial or sensitive issue, the person's silence reflects concern for not saying anything to hurt another person, and the silence marks sulking anger.** Upon review, it is clearly evident to see how Clinton's **silence was an effective response to the situation he had at hand. The Lewinsky issue was a topic that was sensitive (especially in regard to the Office of the President and to Clinton's family)**

and controversial (especially when viewing this case from the perspective of the media). Clinton also remained silent because he didn't want to hurt anyone, not just members of his family, but his close friends that could have been impacted by the issue as well. By not addressing the issue, he wouldn't have had to worry about saying the wrong thing, and hence, emotionally hurting those around him.

Now we are faced with answering why was Clinton's silence on the Lewinsky issue successful? Clinton's silence was effective for many reasons, the least of which was the fact that he admitted he remained silent in order to protect people. Other important elements added to Clinton's successful use of political silence. A very important aspect was the fact that he successfully shifted the blame for why he was silent from his own actions to the actions of a third-party that wasn't directly a part of his romantic relationship. Benoit (1999) asserts, "He [Clinton] attacked Starr's investigation for going on too long and costing too much. The pundits and commentators reacted negatively, but most Americans agreed with Clinton. He argued that his private life should be private, and most people felt this way too." Benoit further asserted, "Starr's personal popularity was lower than Clinton's at this point." Within the Map Room Speech that Clinton used in order to break his silence, Clinton asserted that he had enough with the investigations that Kenneth Starr had launched into his personal life. He went on and admitted that a reason that he remained silent on the issue was so that he wouldn't have to deal with an investigation that enveloped so much of his personal life. When Clinton asserted these statements he was finally verbalizing the anger that he had inside that prompted him to remain silent on the Lewinsky issue for as long as he did. Also, Clinton's silence was

effective because he **admitted that he had done wrong**. Benoit (1997) discusses this in terms of mortification, in **which the rhetor confesses** what they have done wrong and then asks for forgiveness. This is **exactly what Clinton did**, because within the Map Room Speech, he **admitted that he lied to the American people** and misled members of his family as well. This is **important, because it shows that Clinton knows he did something wrong**. In current society, when someone asks to be forgiven, it is normally easier to grant that forgiveness if the **person knows that they have done wrong**. Benoit (1997) also states that if the audience believes that the apology is sincere, they may forgive the act. This was truly the case with Clinton when he admitted that he had an affair, lied, and misled people in order to keep it all private. Hence, when he admitted all of this, it was easier for the public to forgive him because he showed that he knew that he had done something wrong and unbecoming of the office. Another aspect that contributed to the effectiveness was the fact that Clinton basically put this issue into perspective when he asserted that this investigation of his affair and the media spectacle over his silence were taking away from the reporting of real problems and how those problems could be solved. Benoit (1999) also states, "He [Clinton] used transcendence, arguing that his relationship with Monica Lewinsky (however wrong) was private, not public, business. Again, most Americans (but not pundits, commentators, or hard-core conservatives) agreed with this claim. Thus, the main points in his discourse were well-selected." In comparison to other problems that the nation might have (poverty, welfare, national security, etc.) the issue of a married president lying about an affair and then remaining silent on it seems rather miniscule. Thus, by putting this issue into perspective, Clinton

was able to show how his silence was an appropriate response, and hence, shows how silence can be effective. Finally, Clinton's silence was effective because of how he determined this specific issue should be dealt with. Within his Map Room Speech, Clinton asserts many times that the problem is a personal one, not one that deals with the nation. Therefore, Clinton's silence was effective because he believed and explained that since he felt this was a personal problem that affected only his family, there was no reason to get others involved. And, indeed, his discourse was effective because, according to an Associated Press article from August 18, 1998, "early polls were solidly in Clinton's favor, with just around 60 percent of people in a CBS/*New York Times* survey taken just after the speech saying they were satisfied with the president's statement... About 60 percent said the matter should now be dropped. Sixty-nine percent of those in an ABC News poll said the investigation should end... However... 72 percent of people polled said the country would be better off if he [Clinton] stays in office and his job-approval rating held steady at 62 percent.

The ineffectiveness of political silence, however, can be seen if we examine the silence that was exhibited by Gary Condit during the Levy investigation. The most evident factor that was playing against Condit was the fact that the silence he used was not an appropriate response because of the situation he was in. Not only can the thoughts of Johannesen (1974) to discuss places where silence is justified and typical, Johannesen also shows how silence is not justified in some cases. Johannesen asserts, "Just as the right of free speech is not absolute; so too is the right of silence not absolute." What we learn here is that even though we have the freedom to remain silent on an issue, there

may be certain situations that silence may not be an appropriate action to take. We can certainly say that this was the case with the Condit silence. Whereas Clinton's silence impeded an investigation that was attempting to uncover past misdeeds, Condit's silence impeded an investigation into a current life and death situation. Lasorsa (1991) has a similar idea about silence being appropriate in certain contexts when he explained that if the issue at hand had high personal stakes, then one should be more willing to engage in conversation rather than remaining silent. Did this situation have high personal stakes for Condit or others? The answer to that is a definitive yes, and even so, he refused to speak on the Levy topic and then had to live with the negative repercussions that came from it. Also, Scott (1972) believes that if certain data are called for directly, and one has the ability to supply them, then that person has no choice but to supply them. Again, we are given the contexts of Clinton and Condit. Clinton's decision not to supply information, as stated previously, was not as important as it was for Condit. Choosing not to address and supply information regarding an affair is not as urgent as supplying information about a relationship you had with a person that has been missing for a considerable amount of time. Thus, based on the established norms for when silence is appropriate, we can see that Condit's silence was not an appropriate response to this specific situation.

Now that this study has shown that Condit's silence was not an appropriate response, this study must also determine why Condit's silence was not effective. The most evident element that made his silence ineffective was the fact that within his final discourse he admitted to nothing. This was especially evident when he was asked questions about the type of relationship that he and Levy had. Condit would, each time,

give a short rehearsed answer where he stated that he wished not to get into the details of anything. This response that he continually gave neither admitted nor denied the type of relationship that they had. Furthermore, his denial to answer any of these questions further added to the cloud of mystery that surrounded him. Also, it raised the question of why he was even having an interview if he wasn't going to tell his interviewer or the watching public any information. It is here that the element of exigence, the created expectation to speak, that we get from Bitzer, can be further examined. In Clinton's case, since he answered the questions about his relationship with Monica Lewinsky that everyone wanted to know the answers to, he successfully provided closure to that exigence. The case of Condit, however, is completely different. While there was a heavy demand for Condit to answer the question as to whether or not he had a relationship with Levy, he did not do so during his interview, and thus, the exigence remained open. Bitzer explained, "The situation controls the rhetorical response in the same sense that the question controls the answer and the problem controls the solution. Not the rhetor and not persuasive intent, but the situation is the source and ground of rhetorical activity (1968)." What can be learned from this statement and from the discourses given by Condit and Clinton, is that the situation they were faced with, to answer questions fully and honestly, was controlling their responses. Clinton, as stated before, fulfilled that response, whereas Condit did not. Viewing both discourses from this perspective gives an insight to see how, if a rhetor fulfills the expectation to speak about something, the exigence can end.

Condit, to expand on the previous thought, failed to fulfill and end the exigence,

because of how he continually evaded answering important questions that people wanted to know the answers to. For example, to expand on a statement made earlier, when asked if he and Levy had a sexual relationship, all he stated is that he had not been, “a perfect man.” Later on in the interview when asked if he had admitted to the police that he had a sexual relationship with Levy, all he asserts is that he truthfully answered every question asked to him within the first two interviews with the police. While this may be true, he never mentioned anything about the third interview that he took part in (which was the interview where there were questions asked about the relationship that he had with Levy). As is evident to see, ambiguous answers were not just present in one or two answers within this debate. The ambiguous answers given by Condit to important questions were a trend throughout the debate, and since these answers did nothing to effectively prove that he was not connected to her disappearance, and since they did not answer why he was silent for so long, the pressures that originally generated the expectation to speak were never satisfied, and as a result the discourse was ineffective.

In regards to the use of narrative theory to help understand and determine what effectiveness, if any, the final discourse of the silence had, it is imperative to look back at ideas taken from Quintillian, Lucaites, and Condit. First, Quintillian’s ideas on narrations can be easily linked to the discourses of Clinton and Condit. Quintillian asserted that good narrations praise the illustrious characters and censure the immoral characters. Clinton satisfies this qualification from Quintillian, whereas Condit does not. Clinton, through his Map Room Speech, was able to set up who the good and evil characters were. Clinton presented himself as the good character, and then he set up Kenneth Starr and his

team of investigators as the evil characters when he states that the investigation has gone on and hurt too many people and had involved so many lives. Looking at Condit's discourse to attempt to find the varying sides of good and evil proves to be a bit more difficult. The major narrator, Connie Chung, through the questions that she asks, sets up Condit as the evil character within the narrative, and the missing Chandra Levy as the good character. Condit, as the minor narrator, tries attempts to shift the evil characterization from himself to the press that has hounded him, and in essence, tries to affirm himself as a good character. Therefore, it is easy to see that the discourses from both Clinton and Condit are attempting to tell stories of good versus evil. Also, since Quintillian asserts that narratives attempt to set up stories that affirm the struggles of good versus evil, it is clear to see that the use of narrative theory to analyze these forms of discourse is, again, appropriate.

Based on the study just conducted, it is clear to see this assertion to be true. In one instance, the credibility of the speaker rose, whereas in the other, it fell. After Clinton gave his Map Room Speech, in which he admitted to having an affair with Monica Lewinsky, his approval rating actually was not damaged. As we can see from the poll data presented earlier, the discourse given by Clinton did have some effect on his credibility because his approval ratings showed that people still thought he was doing a good job. However, if the other end of the spectrum with Gary Condit is further examined, it is clear to see that negative responses can occur, much like Lucaites and Condit suggest. According to a *USA Today*/CNN/Gallup Poll given after the Condit/Chung interview, 77 percent of people polled believed Condit to be immoral, 79



percent believed him to be dishonest, and 67 percent stated that they believed him to be uncaring. By examining these poll results, it is evident that the credibility of Condit went downhill after his discourse was given. Seeing that narratives have the power to either help or hinder the credibility of the people involved in them again shows how the use of narrative theory is appropriate for the study of these two discourses.

Through this study, it has become apparent that silence can be used effectively as a political strategy. However, after viewing how two high profile politicians used the strategy with extremely different results for each, it is imperative to understand that there are certain criteria that political silence must follow in order to be considered effective.

Therefore, this study posits that silence can be considered effective if it meets the following criteria:

1. The silence must be an appropriate response to the situation.
2. The silence, when broken, must have a discourse explaining it.
3. The discourse must answer pressing questions that arose during the time of silence.
4. The discourse must make the focus of the silence the “victim”.
5. The discourse must attempt to establish identification between the “victim” and the public.

The first criterion is that the silence must be an appropriate response to the situation. When examining the thoughts of Johannesen (1974) it was evident that the silence Clinton used in 1998 was an appropriate response to the situation. Johannesen asserted that silence is typical in situations where a person is attempting to avoid discussion of a sensitive issue, when it attempts not to hurt someone, and also when it is used to show anger. These three ideas were met by Clinton’s silence because we learned from his Map Room Speech that motivations such as these had a direct impact on his

decision to remain silent on the Lewinsky affair. However, if we examine Condit, we can see how the opposite is true. While Condit may have met some of the standards that Johannesen set forth, it is also very important to remember that the freedom of silence is like the freedom of speech, it is not absolute. So, while Condit certainly had the right to remain silent on the Levy issue, the context of the situation mandated that he should have spoken out on the issue instead of remaining silent. Condit's silence, as stated previously, hindered an investigation that examined the life and possible death of a person he had a close relationship with. Therefore, since the right to silence is not absolute, and since Condit should have given up any information he had to the press and authorities and he decided to remain silent instead, it is clear to see that his silence was not an appropriate response to the situation at hand.

The second criterion is that when the silence is over, it must have a discourse explaining it. Both Clinton and Condit meet this criterion. Clinton's discourse was his Map Room Speech and Condit's was his interview with Connie Chung. It is important that there be a discourse explaining the silence so that the various questions that had arisen during the silence can then be answered and explained in detail. As is evident through the cases of both Clinton and Condit, the discourse may take different forms (a speech, interview, etc.), but, in order to be considered effective, it must explain why the silence took place. If the discourse does not do so, then, as a result, the silence cannot be justified.

This leads to the third criterion, which is that the discourse must answer any questions that arose during the time of silence. Here, Clinton again meets the

qualification for an effective use and explanation of silence. During the time of Clinton's silence, the press and the American public kept asking the same questions about the relationship that existed between the president and Lewinsky. These questions ranged from how long their relationship had lasted to why Clinton had refused to speak on the topic to the public for as long as he did. Clinton used his Map Room Speech to answer these unresolved questions by stating he had an inappropriate and wrong relationship with Lewinsky, and that he remained silent because he was scared of what repercussions might come to not only himself, but his family as well. While Clinton answered the questions that were introduced during his silence, Condit did not do this. The main question that the press and others wanted answered was whether or not he and Levy had a sexual relationship. Throughout his discourse, Condit refused to answer this question directly, and instead gave a short rehearsed answer saying he had not been a perfect man. Thus, since Clinton answered the public's queries about his silence directly, his silence was effective, and since Condit didn't answer any of the questions, his silence was not.

The next criterion that makes the use of silence effective is whether the discourse can make the person using the silence the "victim". In the case of Clinton, this criterion was met because of Clinton's ability to scapegoat Kenneth Starr and his investigation. This was especially evident when Clinton said that he was forced to answer questions that no American would ever want to answer. He also made statements that made his family sound like victims of a powerful foe when he asserted that the investigation had gone into his private life and had hurt too many people. It was through these statements that Clinton was able to justify his use of silence as a tool of defense against someone

that was plaguing him. Condit, on the other hand, did not make himself the victim at all. His refusal to answer questions, and his inability to overcome the perception that he was evasive with authorities did nothing to justify his silence as a defense mechanism against a strong foe.

The next criterion that must be met is that the discourse must unify the victim and the public in order for the silence to be successful. In other words, the victim must establish common ground with the public and attempt to rally them around a cause that is something other than the silence. It is possible that once this is done, then the silence will be viewed positively. Clinton did a good job at this point when he asserted that the investigation of his conduct had gone on for too long and there were now real problems to solve and real obstacles that needed attention. With these words, Clinton demonstrated that the problem of his relationship with Lewinsky was a private matter and that the only person that needed to worry about it is him and his family. Clinton is basically attempting to say that there are other, more important things that the American public needed to be worried about, and that his problems aren't that serious compared to the problems of the nation. Condit's discourse, however, doesn't accomplish this criterion in any form. At no point does Condit establish common ground with his audience the way that Clinton did when he asserted his beliefs about Starr.

What can be learned from this study is that it is entirely possible to use silence effectively as a political strategy. When Bill Clinton remained silent in 1998 on the issue of Monica Lewinsky, he was not only using political silence, but his ultimate success in using the strategy set up an excellent frame through which all other uses of political

silence could be examined and measured. When politicians using silence follow the set of criteria put forth within this study, it is easy to see how their silence will be seen as effective because the silence will be appropriate and will ultimately be explained by a discourse that will, among other things, bring about a sense of closure.

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