

SEXUAL SCANDAL REPORTAGE  
1960s THROUGH 2000s:  
PROPER PERSPECTIVE OR A RETURN TO YELLOW JOURNALISM

By

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To my mother, Marty Stearns, grandmother, Florence Patoski, and Ms. Fran Testa, the strongest women I have ever known, and who, through their tireless love and support, helped me to become the woman that I am today

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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School  
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SEXUAL SCANDAL REPORTAGE  
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The reportage of political sexual scandal had undergone a metamorphosis in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Gone is the post-war era press club that had silenced the rumors surrounding political figures, replaced by a press corps that filled the nation's leading newspapers with the character flaws and philandering of elected public servants. Amid cries of sensationalism and a return to yellow journalism by the media after each new scandal, the study analyzes the editorial approach news organizations have traditionally taken on the subject of political sexual scandal. This contextual analysis considers three scandals beginning in 1969 with Edward Kennedy and Mary Jo Kopechne, continuing in 1987 with Gary Hart and Donna Rice and ending in 2008 with John Edwards and Rielle Hunter.

Employing close reading and computer-aided text analysis methods, and building on Benoit's Image Restoration Strategies as a theoretical guideline, the researcher reviewed *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the *Chicago Tribune's* coverage of these scandals to determine the editorial stance, and changes if any, of each publication during the roughly 40-year time span.

A discussion of the results and implications for the dissemination of political sexual scandal in the current mainstream media reveal that the editorial stance of these newspapers remained fairly consistent during the time frame under consideration, whether that be a liberal, moderate or conservative position. Further, that the newspaper's reportage was directed, in no small part, by the actions and strategies these figures employed in the wake of the scandal's publication.

However, there are distinct changes in the language and overall tone of the reportage, which became increasingly unfavorable toward figures embroiled in political sexual scandal over time. The researcher finds that as time progressed, the focus of the reportage shifts from external event to internal ethos and the language from reserved to racy.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

For the most part, political sexual scandal, or any scandal for that matter, fades with time, or the emergence of other important issues and events (Adut, 2009). But political sex scandals can generate changes felt not only within the current political climate, but also in the news outlets reporting on such events as well as the public at large. Throughout the political landscape of the latter half of the 20th century, the publication of political sexual scandal has heralded the ruin of more than one elected official's career, while other politicians seemingly have escaped with only minor damage to their personal and professional image. But that was not always the case.

*Scandal*, as defined by the American Heritage College Dictionary, Fourth Edition (2004) (hereby referred to as AHCD) is "a publicized incident that brings about disgrace, or offends the moral sensibilities of society" (p. 1238). The AHCD defines *reportage* as defined as the act or process of reporting news or information.

Thompson (2000) posited that political scandal, of any form, is that which has the power to divert public attention from the everyday issues of real-world importance, such as economic instability and civil strife (p. 5) So powerful is the story of political sexual scandal that it nearly eclipsed mankind's first footsteps on the moon.

To date, there has been little research on the subject of political sexual scandal reportage and its journalistic, as well as political, implications. Indeed, even less research exists on the subject of the press' position, editorially speaking, on political sexual scandal and how it responds editorially to the actions of the figures involved.

This study forwards the current body of knowledge on the subject of political sexual scandal and the media using contextual analysis to pinpoint the editorial position

of print news publications (hereafter referred to as “the press”) in the U.S with regard to political sexual scandal in the years between 1969 and 2008. That is, whether the content focused more on the subject’s private or public life, and whether that content was more favorable or unfavorable in nature overall. The study includes a discussion of the language used to report on political sexual scandal during the timeframe in question and analyzes to what extent that editorial position and the language used had been affected by the actions of the political figures in response to the publication of the scandal.

Specifically, this study considers three political sexual scandals occurring over a span of roughly 40 years, beginning in 1969 with Edward Kennedy and Mary Jo Kopechne, continuing in 1987 with Gary Hart and Donna Rice, and ending in 2008 with John Edwards and Rielle Hunter. The study analyzes the direction—especially the reporter’s tone or emphasis—of three national print news publications and determines whether that reportage focused more on the personal or the professional qualities of the political figures in question.

In the face of an increasingly ubiquitous electronic media, which may or may not hold to the same standards as print journalism (Abdulla et al., 2002), a rigorous study to determine the extent, if any, of the changes in print journalism’s editorial position on reporting political sexual scandal was warranted.

To facilitate that inquiry, the researcher conducted a contextual analysis of the language, theme, and scope of news copy, editorials and op-ed pieces, as well as news wire stories and Letters to the Editor collections (hereafter collectively referred to as “articles”) pertaining to three political sexual scandals appearing in *The New York*

*Times*, the *Washington Post* and the *Chicago Tribune* during the timeframe in question. Specifically, Edward Kennedy and the Chappaquiddick incident July 20-August 3, 1969; Gary Hart's adultery exposure and denial May 4-18, 1987; and John Edwards' confession to infidelity August 9-22, 2008. The text from these articles were analyzed using a word-mining system to determine key terms and linguistic patterns occurring within the publications themselves. (The researcher limited the analysis to print publications, as online news services were not available for the entire timeframe in question). These terms and patterns were then comparatively analyzed to determine thematic range and linguistic relationships.

The results of the contextual analysis was used to further this study's theoretical assertion that Image Repair Discourse (Benoit et al., 1995), or the strategies used by political figures involved in any potentially damaging scenario, are directly related to the position, editorially speaking, the press took in the reportage of the sexual scandals herein noted. In other words, it was the actions of the political figures involved in the reported sexual scandal, both before and after publication, specifically their efforts at damage control, which determined the press' editorial position and the reporting techniques used to cover the scandal.

The history of the press in the years between 1969 and 2008 reflect an industry that had matured from the partisan presses of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century into a respected body of writers, editors, and publishers which held the held the country's political elites in the highest esteem, yet also wrote with an increasingly critical eye toward their professional behavior. Indeed, during the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a marked separation appeared between Washington's elites and the press. Further, changes in

societal and cultural norms taking place in the U.S. and worldwide forced the press to take a more in-depth approach to news reporting and a more watchful position toward political elites than ever before.

Borrowing from Creswell (2007), this study used a collective case study approach to the contextual analysis and developed a holistic account of the political sexual scandals chosen in order to understand to what extent, if any, the press has changed its editorial position on these types of events during the nearly 40-year time span in question.

For purposes of this study, political sexual scandal was defined as an event(s) concerning the sexual conduct of those serving as elected public officials or who were campaigning for an elected public office within any level of the U.S. government (local, state or federal) at the time of the scandal. In addition, political sexual scandal was be further defined as an incident of sexual conduct having a national impact on American audiences That is, those events that directly called into question the judgment and decision-making skills of the political figure(s) involved. Further, the study focused on scandals that received cross-media attention. That is, those events that received print, radio or television broadcast and/or online coverage, though this study limited its focus solely to the print media coverage.

The analysis focused on the following three cases of political sexual scandal where the persons involved either flourished or floundered in the wake of the sexual scandal and analyzed the scope and position of the print media's reporting on these scandals: Edward Kennedy and Mary Jo Kopechne in 1969, Gary Hart and Donna Rice in 1987, and John Edwards and Rielle Hunter in 1008.

The scandals under consideration were chosen for their relevance and prominence in the American political landscape, namely, presidential candidates and or long-serving Congressmen who were actively at work in the public sphere. The associate aspects that were implicit in making these events of national importance and, thus, factors in the selection process include the implications of scandal on the outcome of a presidential election and subsequent criminal investigations into felony charges of campaign fraud and criminal negligence that followed.

However, this study did not include analysis of issues such as the personal toll of terminally ill wives, illegitimate children being thrust into the national spotlight, or the moral fiber of deceased secretaries in the wake of these scandals. These associate aspects are beyond the scope of this research, nor did this study include the Bill Clinton/Monica Lewinsky affair, as the national and international ramifications would have been an overarching theme in and of itself. The researcher believes that sexual scandal involving a sitting president, versus a senator or presidential candidate, would generate an overwhelming amount of press articles on associate aspects outside the scandal of origin and thus outside the study parameters.

These three case studies represent a unique time in the history of print journalism, including the creation of the Internet—an invention that literally shattered the business model for print media and forced news organizations to restructure the way news they disseminate news. In addition, other major events were competing for news readers' attention during the timeframes under consideration; man's first walk on the moon just one day after Sen. Kennedy's accident on Chappaquiddick; the Iran-Contra arms-dealing hearings being held in Washington at the same time Democratic

presidential candidate Gary Hart was meeting with Donna Rice at his townhouse; and the economic recession and record unemployment resulting from the sub-prime mortgage debacle of 2006, while John Edwards is dogged by the media about an extramarital affair and subsequent love child.

Though this study did not focus on these associate aspects of science, non-related scandals or economics, these issues represent a unique element in competition for news play—that is, the amount of coverage given to any one subject.

These three case studies, present a unique opportunity to look at the ways three different news organizations approached the reporting of political sexual scandal—whether that be with a conservative, more strident voice, a liberal, broad spectrum approach or perhaps even an evolving editorial posture—in 20-year intervals. This 20-year span encompasses not only changes in technology, but social norms and language—integral components for contextual analysis. In addition, these three scenarios represent varying degrees of legality and morality—not necessarily in that order—in the unfolding of the scandal.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the press seemingly became much more inclined to cover sexual scandal involving political figures; so much so, that the tide seems to have swung away from treating political figures with restraint and discretion to a no-holds-barred position that dispelled “vintage news taboos,” such as graphic details about oral sex and semen-stained dresses, and savored every steamy scrap of information available (Cleghorn, 1998).

### **Image Repair Theory**

In a study on how public figures defend themselves when involved in situations that are less than flattering in the press, Benoit (1995, et al.) proposed a theory of Image Repair Discourse, which offers strategies when the subject in question can no longer deny involvement in a given scenario, often one that has been revealed by the press, and where the subject must offer some type of self-defense. This theory figures prominently with the notion that a bad or unfavorable public image is the last thing a political figure would want. Indeed, most people, when faced with a threat of damage to their personal or professional reputation would not hesitate to address the situation.

Benoit’s theory posits that the subject has a determined agenda in communicating his apology when a) an “offensive act has occurred,” and b) that the “individual has been accused of that act,” insofar that damage control, especially with regard to reputation and career, is necessary. Strategies for reducing potential damage include “denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, admission with corrective action and mortification.” Other processes include claiming victimization and blame shifting (pp. 74-75).

Benoit (2001) studied the 1998 sexual scandal of then-President Bill Clinton and former White House intern Monica Lewinsky. Though initially denying his affair with Lewinsky to the American press, even denying having “sexual relations” with Lewinsky and waffling on the definition of the word “is” before a grand jury, Clinton did, eventually, confess to having a relationship that was “not appropriate.” According to Benoit, his public admission of inappropriate conduct, though not overtly asking for forgiveness, served as an effective apology. According to Benoit, it was a measure that, combined with his acquittal by the U.S. House of Representatives on charges of perjury and obstruction of justice, served Clinton’s political career well. He eventually re-won the approval of the American public and subsequently with the press; actions that Benoit found consistent with his theory that admission and remorse via the American media are vital to image repair.

Conversely, Benoit (1998) also analyzed the actions of U.S. Sen. Edward Kennedy in the wake of the Chappaquiddick incident and found that Kennedy’s delayed apology and attempts to deflect responsibility inflamed initial suspicions. However, his later remorsefulness and deferment to the public about whether or not to resign his senate seat seems to have turned the tide to his favor.

These scenarios confirm that the press’ position, to a large degree, is in fact determined by the political figure’s reactions to the alleged scandal’s publication and the threat to their public image. While expressing guilt, shame, and remorse and then taking immediate corrective action has proved to be the most effective of these strategies for damage control in the wake of an alleged scandal, denial is by far the most common initial response—and the most damaging.

## **Scandalization by the Media**

Adut (2009) argued that publication of sexual scandal is the first step in the process of turning what amounts to moral misdeeds into a breach of the public trust. The American public holds their elected officials, and the offices they represent, to a higher standard of conduct than the average person; thus, the transgression, whether moral or legal, becomes public knowledge with publication by the print media, radio or TV of any actions by those officials which falls outside society's norms of conduct or in direct violation of common law. According to Adut, scandal of any kind has three elements: 1) transgression, whether real or merely just possible; 2) publication, whether deliberate or accidental; and 3) negative public impact. Further, it is not necessarily the sexual conduct itself that is offensive but the status to which the public attributes the offender, namely that of role model, and because of the nature of the power wielded by such officials over public policy and the welfare of their constituency.

In a Finnish study on the reporting of sexual scandal and shame, Laine (2010) discussed the media's role in reporting on the sexual scandals of two high-level officials within the Finnish government. Her research focused on the media's coverage of the sexual scandals, the actions of the political officials in question and the reactions of the Finnish public to that coverage, specifically with regard to the admission of guilt, responsibility and exhibition of remorse or shame by the figures involved; actions which correlated directly to the amount of favorable or unfavorable press each scandal received.

Laine (2010) used the scandals of then-Foreign Minister Ilkka Kanerva and a sexual dalliance with exotic dancer Johanna Tukiainen and former Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen and his very public relationship with girlfriend Susan Kuronen. Both scandals

were the result of the publication by local media of sexually explicit SMSs (Short Messaging Service) texts between the parties. Kanerva blamed the media for his downfall and dismissal from his Ministry post in the days following release of the SMSs. And though he had explicitly expressed shame and remorse for his behavior, apologizing to both the Finnish people he served, as well as to his superiors, the admission came only after first denying and then obfuscating facts concerning the text messaging. Combined with a history of womanizing behavior in connection with his public duties, Kanerva's political credibility and judgment came under severe scrutiny by his superiors, as well as the Finnish public.

Conversely, after many letters to the editor from readers urging silence on the issue, Vanhanen ignored the scandal entirely, refusing to address the media's goading, retaining not only his position in the Ministry, but also his popularity with the Finnish people; this despite the revelation that Vanhanen had actually lied publicly about meeting Kuronen in a furniture store rather than an online dating service. Indeed, it was Kuronen who was vilified by the media after posing semi-nude for, and giving a tell-all interview to, a local tabloid in an attempt to elicit sympathy, if not profit, from the public.

Laine argued that both the media and the public, as well as the subjects involved, share responsibility for the "scandalization" of these sexual encounters, and that while the media may publish information of a sensational or prurient nature, it is not without the "participation and support" of its readers (p. 155). That is, the public may experience a vicarious pleasure via these events much like a "farce or daytime soap opera" (p. 159). Further, those readers are engaged in the "spectatorial logic of shame" (p. 153), that is that readers understand and empathize with the shame the individual feels when

their behavior is negatively exposed. And, that readers experience the vulnerability of the accused's public humiliation, often sensing their own inability to regain control given the same situation

It is this engagement that has been the driving force in the news industry both in the U.S. and abroad, yet more than one online writer to the Finnish daily, *Helsingin Sanomat*, questioned the newspaper's devotion of hundreds of meters of text to the coverage of these sexual scandals, and whether it was the job of the media to moderate the private affairs of public figures. That same question was raised in letters to the editors in all three of the cases included in this study.

### **Political Fallout**

In analyzing the Gary Condit/Chandra Levy scandal, Len-Rios & Benoit (2004) posited that repeated attempts to deny responsibility, muddle the facts and maintain a position that lacks remorse will almost certainly result in a failure to save professional face.

In the disappearance of Chandra Levy, Condit's actions from the start indicated that he was more interested in saving his own reputation than in aiding in the search for Levy. More to the point, Len-Rios and Benoit (2003) indicate that his lack of sorrow or regret for the pain and suffering the Levy family endured because of his actions, his lack of candor with the FBI, his arrogance in insisting on a live television interview with Connie Chung, where he denied, evaded, and attempted to minimize his role in Levy's life, as well as his repeated attempts to blame the media for misconstruing his actions, was "unacceptable to voters" (p. 104), Condit lost the 2002 Democratic primary by nearly 18 percent. According to Len-Rios and Benoit (2003), Condit's image repair strategy of a sustained denial of involvement with Levy, repeated attacks on the other

women he had been involved with, as well as his out-and-out refusal to answer certain questions, led to his popularity plummeting and “made his own situation worse” (p. 105).

According to Sanchez and Dvorak (2011), Condit’s continued denial of any wrong doing, evasion of responsibility and a sustained lack of shame or remorse not only provided fuel for his opposition but also warranted a distancing by Condit’s own party, of which several members publicly urged him to resign from office.

Strong evidence already exists to the effects Image Repair Discourse strategies have on the public when an individual attempts to defend his or her reputation, whether personal or professional (Benoit et al., 1995, 1998, 2001, 2004). This same research has been extended to political sexual scandal and the reactions of both the press and the public to that scandal. But while reportage of scandal is generated as a “newsworthy” matter of public interest, unfavorable reportage (or favorable for that matter) is not generated by the scandal itself, but by the actions and subsequent reactions of the figures involved in the scandal. Over time, that reportage has taken on a more in-depth tone and scope.

### **Historical World View Change**

Journalism in the U.S. has evolved from the partisan and penny presses of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which had thrived on the machinations of the political party machines. Lowenstein (2012) argued that the press had grown into a respectable industry with an elevated position in Washington, and that during the administrations of Franklin D. Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy and even Lyndon B. Johnson, an intimate group of print reporters known as the “Press Club” kept the affairs and secrets of the Oval Office out of print. According to Lowenstein (2012), “there were very small groups of people who knew these secrets and had a gentlemen’s agreement that they would keep them.”

Likewise, Adut (2009) writes that the press routinely exercised restraint and discretion with regard to the sexual proclivities of FDR, JFK, and Johnson among other lesser-known politicians, though their sexual liaisons were common knowledge among the White House reporters.

Brody (1992) asserted that the American people and the American press held these men, and the offices they represented, in the highest esteem though their approval waxed and waned with the successes and failures of the government's political policies. And though the political administrations and policies were still fair game, the personal and private lives of these men—including their sexual proclivities—were kept from their constituents and known only to the most intimate of their inner circle.

Hetherington & Rudolph (2008) asserted that during the mid-1960s, a line of demarcation was drawn between politics and the press. If the Civil Rights movement, sexual liberation and the counter culture had opened the door to a more graphic and uncompromising form of reportage in the Fourth Estate, then Vietnam kicked it in altogether. Seemingly, the faith and trust of America's politicians displayed by the American public for nearly 50 years was gone, and the press responded accordingly. Or did they?

The changes taking place in the U.S. during this time marked a turning point for the press. In the closing decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the press became the watchdogs of American politics, engaging in in-depth reportage on political players' and their actions regardless of their positions within the government. From presidential hopefuls to long-serving Congressional members, the press reported extensively on the actions of America's political elites – including the missteps they made along the way.

With television beaming in panoramic, Technicolor images of bloody battlefields in Southeast Asia and civil unrest in cities both in the U.S. and abroad, the personal and professional actions of American politicians became more questionable, and the press had no choice but to turn to a more in-depth, and some would argue, more sensational form of reporting.

Faced with political protests and war on their doorsteps and a presidential administration that demanded the press downplay the Vietnam conflict, Heubner (2005) contends the Tet offensive in Vietnam during January and February 1968 may well have been the breaking point between the press and the U.S. political machine.

Sloan (1991) argued the changing professional perspectives of the press with regard to political sexual scandal and the stance of reportage from decade to decade could be attributed not only to a changing worldview of society in general, but reporters and journalists specifically. He noted, "Each generation, although it may be influenced by the view of its parents' time, has its own attitudes and outlooks. Each holds to the views distinctive of its own age" (p. 2).

In addition, the English language has gone through much refinement in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; some would argue that its usage has also radically declined in its definitiveness. In Sloan (1991), Startt asserted "context must inform content" (p. 18). For example, words like "romance," "honor" and "shame" can have both positive and negative connotations depending on the usage. With that thought in mind, it is imperative that primary source documents, analyzed in the context of the time in which they were written and the phrasing or language employed, be used to answer the researcher's questions.

In addition, Startt argued that “facts” are multi-dimensional and researchers need to think about the “nature” of the fact. What is the context of the fact and how does it play into the larger context of the political sexual scandal being discussed? He cautioned against the “too-perfect” explanation, which may be apparent but not altogether correct.

Sloan (1991) asserted that each reporter, editor, and publisher involved with the creation of articles on political sexual scandal would bring their own individual interpretations to the table, despite a journalistic ethos that claims to take a neutral position. Sloan writes that while historians may hold varying perspectives based on a generational worldview about events involving political sexual scandal, the press would interpret these same events based on the social norms at that given moment.

Further, Sloan posited that journalistic historians who followed a developmental school of thought, that is, those who saw the development of journalism in terms of its formulation of professional standards, did so in the belief that the post-World War II media became more confrontational in the wake of events such as Vietnam and the Civil Rights movement, turning points in American history which also contributed to the press’s assertion of itself as a separate and independent entity, divest of any governmental or societal influence or control (p. 7).

At the same time, cultural media historians held the belief that society continued to directly influence the press well into the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (p. 8). Geyl (1955, 1970) noted that when the reader avoided the “one-sided admiration or detraction” of a particular subject or event, they could then “become aware of finer shadings where originally there was only the crude contrast between black and white”

(p. 71). Citing Geyl, Sloan (1991) later wrote “careful evaluation lies at the core of the study of history” (p. 21).

Bearing these admonitions in mind, the researcher conducted a critical evaluation of the evidence during the course of this study to provide perspective and insight into the editorial position the press developed for reporting political sexual scandal.

**R1:** What was the editorial approach the news publications under consideration took in reporting on each of the three political sexual scandals?

**R2:** Did that approach change between 1969 and 2008, with regard to tone or emphasis?

## CHAPTER 3 METHOD

This study utilized a contextual analysis examination of three case studies to analyze the content of 349 individual newspaper articles from the sample frame of print news publications, namely *The New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Chicago Tribune*.

The term “articles” is being used in a generic sense to represent all news copy, editorials and op-ed pieces, news wire service articles (except for those written during the Edward Kennedy scandal, which are analyzed as a separate element) and Letter to the Editor collections. The researcher believes that as gatekeepers for their news publications as well as their readers, the publishing and editorial boards in place during the studied timeframe made conscientious decisions to include both unsigned editorials generated by their own hand and the news wire stories, which they were under no obligation to publish.

The researcher believed a qualitative approach was best for achieving the broadest possible overview of the subject. McKee (2003) defined contextual analysis as “an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of the text” (pp. 127-128). The researcher believed analyzing primary documents written during the event gave the best overall view of the press’ editorial position on this event.

Behrendt (2008) expanded McKee’s definition, defining contextual analysis as a way of analyzing text within its own “historical and cultural setting”; in other words, considering what event occurred that generated the language, what was the political or social climate at the time of the writing, and what was the *possible* mindset of the author at the time of the writing that would warrant using that specific language. The contextual

analysis revealed the various key terms located within the text and provided a foundation for an interpretation of those terms in relation to one another. This method was best suited for looking at the changes in depth and scope of coverage, as well as the tone or language used in the content of the articles during the time period in question. Again, this analysis offered explanations based on McKee's definition as the *most likely interpretations*.

In addition, the researcher believed contextual analysis was the best method for providing evidence for determining the nature of the coverage of political persons involved in sexual scandal; that is, whether the reportage was focused on the private or public aspects of the subject in question and whether that coverage was more favorable or unfavorable in nature overall.

Keyword-specific software, T-Lab version 8.0, based on a word-mining system and using a lexicon imported by the researcher, aided in the thematic, contextual and comparative analysis. The software was used to determine, analyze, and compare language patterns, associations and other linguistic devices used in both the content and structure of the coverage.

### **Analyzing for Latent Content Using T-Lab v. 8.0 Software**

The T-Lab v. 8.0 software, a "word-mining" system developed by Dr. Franco Lancia, utilizes syntactical and probabilistic diagnostics to analyze latent content for a given sample text. T-Lab used a three-facet analysis of co-occurrence, word association, and comparison, based on a comprehensive list of key terms, to determine the substance and tone of the article; that is whether the article focused on the figure's private or public life, and whether the text denoted favorable (positive connotation) or

unfavorable (negative connotation) with regard to the treatment of the political sexual scandal reporting being disseminated to the public.

The T-Lab thematic modeling tool, incorporating the key-term listing and a co-occurrence word association analysis, conducted a thematic analysis and identified between five and eight key terms for each body of text analyzed.

Unfavorable treatment is operationally defined as words that have a negative connotation with regard to the political figure and or the accompanying participant's behavior both before and after the scandal's publication. Indicators consist of words exemplifying the characteristic of condemnation.

Favorable treatment is operationally defined as words that have a positive connotation with regard to the political figure and or the accompanying participant's behavior both before and after the scandal's publication. Indicators consist of words exemplifying the characteristic of forgiveness (See Appendix A).

Due to an ever-present flux in U.S. speech patterns, which changes with time as new words are added to the lexicon while others fall from use, the researcher reserves the right to modify characteristic definitions and key words as the research progresses.

A three-facet approach analyzed each article's content and headlines; articles that appear as a complement of the main element were subjected to their own test as a separate unit of analysis (The use of page layout reproductions rather than page numbers will be useful in determining whether one article is a complement of another.)

The co-occurrence analysis tool identified word and phrase relationships and established concordances or alphabetical indexes for these relationships within the text; the thematic analysis distinguished emerging and re-occurring key terms within and

between text samples and analyzed the context, grouping and topic of key terms emerging from a sample text.

Key word searches for the sampling frame included the names of the political figures and any other person(s) prominently involved in the scandal, as well as words that typify the situation. For example, in a Lexis-Nexis Academic search for Senator Edward Kennedy, the terms “Chappaquiddick” and “Kopechne” were included in the researcher’s initial search. Other key word searches might include “Monkey Business” or “Miami” in searches for Gary Hart and “webisodes” or “love child” in searches for John Edwards. The researcher found that each scandal will generate its own list of key words, most of which were intuitive, but others were found through repeated trial and error.

### **Participants / Scandals**

#### **1969: Ted Kennedy and Mary Jo Kopechne**

In the early morning hours of July 19, 1969, Sen. Edward Kennedy was returning to the island of Martha’s Vineyard along the narrow roads of Chappaquiddick Island after a party with family and several work acquaintances. Kennedy’s passenger, Mary Jo Kopechne, drowned when the car the two were riding in ran off a bridge and into a tidal channel. Kennedy escaped the wreck but was unable to rescue Kopechne. He delayed calling for help for nearly 10 hours, returning first to the party and then his hotel while Kopechne’s body lay under the water. In addition, Kennedy was vague with authorities on the details of his delay as well as the accident itself. An inquest by the coroner’s office into the incident was further delayed. Kennedy meanwhile pleaded guilty to leaving the scene and received a 2-month suspended sentence. But public speculation about the events of that night and Kennedy’s relationship with Kopechne,

fueled in part by the timeframe of the accident and by a nation enthralled with all things Kennedy, would mar his political career for the remainder of his life.

### **1987: Gary Hart and Donna Rice**

In April 1987, former Sen. Gary Hart announced his run for the U.S. presidency, enjoying a comfortable lead in the polls as the frontrunner for the Democratic nomination. During an interview for a *New York Times Magazine* story on that appeared on May 3, Hart was openly asked about his reputation as a womanizer. Hart responded by “daring” the press to “follow me around,” claiming they would “be very bored” by what they found. Meantime, in the days leading up to this interview, reporters from the *Miami Herald* had been following up on a tip that Hart was having an affair with a Miami model named Donna Rice. Coincidentally, The *Herald* released also released a story on May 3, describing how Rice and Hart had spent Friday night and most of Saturday (May 1-2) together at Hart’s Washington townhouse while his wife was home in Colorado.

Days later, the *Miami Herald* received another tip that Hart had spent a night in Bimini aboard the yacht “Monkey Business” with Rice. The paper secured a photograph of Hart, wearing a “Monkey Business” T-shirt with Rice on his lap though the photo did not appear in print for another month. Hart officially withdrew from the presidential race on May 8 after the *Washington Post* raised allegations about, yet, another woman that Hart was thought to have had a long-term relationship with. He returned to his law practice and became a consultant to the U.S. government on national and homeland security issues.

### **2008: John Edwards and Rielle Hunter**

In Dec. 2006, Sen. John Edwards announces his candidacy for the 2008 presidential election. Leading up to this announcement, Edwards’ Political Action

Committee commissioned a series of campaign “webisodes” and hired filmmaker Rielle Hunter. At a March 2007 news conference, Edwards announces that his wife, Elizabeth, was undergoing treatment for incurable breast cancer. In October of that same year the press reported Edwards was having an extramarital affair, but does not name the woman. In December, the press publishes a photograph of a pregnant Hunter. A daughter, Quinn, is born Feb. 27, 2008. Edwards denies allegations of any liaison with Hunter or paternity of the child for months, but on August 8, 2008, he admits to the affair on national TV, though he continues to deny being Quinn’s father. In August 2009, Hunter testifies before a grand jury investigating Edwards’ use of campaign money for her personal expenses. In Jan. 2010 Edwards admitted publicly to being Quinn’s father; he was indicted on conspiracy and campaign fraud charges in June. His wife Elizabeth died on Dec. 7, 2010; he was found not guilty on one count of fraud; a mistrial was declared on all other charges. Federal prosecutors have declined to re-file charges.

### **Sampling Frame**

The population units of analysis for the three noted sexual scandals were drawn from a sampling frame consisting of archives from *The New York Times* (NYT), *Washington Post* (WPost) and the *Chicago Tribune* (CTrib) print news publications via the newspaper’s own websites or online archival resources such as Lexis-Nexis and ProQuest Historical Newspaper Archives. These news publications were selected for their representation as authoritative voices within the U.S. news reporting sphere as evidenced by their total daily circulation figures (excluding branded editions i.e., commuter, community or alternate-language newspapers) in a May 1, 2012 report compiled by the Audit Bureau of Circulations (Lulofs, 2012):

Table 3-1. Average Daily Circulation Figures Through March 31, 2012

Newspaper	Circulation Figures
New York Times	1,586,757
Washington Post	555,327
Chicago Tribune	414,590

In addition to being among the highest circulating newspapers today, these print publications also represent a broad scope of authoritative publications available to the reading American public at the time of the scandals being studied.

By July of 1969, *The New York Times* was considered one of the most authoritative newspapers in the country with articles that tended toward a moderate, objective and reserved style of reportage. Those elements were integral to the information model of reporting adopted by founder Henry Jarvis Raymond in 1851, and continued by Adolph Ochs in 1896, in direct response to the so-called yellow journalism of Joseph Pulitzer and Randolph Hearst. Ochs wanted a newspaper that was not so much entertaining as factual and respectable.

In 1963, Ochs' grandson, Arthur Ochs Salzberger, assumed the reins as publisher with the vision of transforming the *Times* into a news conglomerate that was not only vibrant and compelling, and "the heart of a diversified, multi-billion-dollar media operation" but a newspaper where the tenets of good journalism were practiced (*New York Times*, Sept. 30, p. 1). In 1971, under Ochs tenure, the *Times* published the secret government files on the Vietnam War known as the Pentagon Papers, much to the embarrassment of President Richard M. Nixon.

In contrast, the *Washington Post*, founded in 1877, had enjoyed a long, if not highly respected, reputation as a newspaper of national politics. Purchased in 1933 from a bankruptcy auction by California industrialist Eugene Meyer, the newspaper was

infused with enough money to operate, but it was poorly managed and could not seem to capture any significant advertising or readership numbers.

Halberstam (1979) wrote that Meyer knew he wanted a “liberal, enlightened, internationalist” audience and felt that truth, decency and the public good were fundamental principles for a newspaper. To further his revisionist ideas for the *Post*, Meyers hired son-in-law Phil Graham as associate editor in 1945. Halberstam notes the brilliant Harvard Law School graduate was shrewd and audacious and both admired and feared in Washington, D.C. Under his direction, the *Post* was to become one of the most influential, and in some cases, the most intimidating newspapers in the country.

Graham used the *Post* as a veritable weapon of choice for his personal brand of liberalism when faced with what he considered social injustices and the political machinations behind them. Graham committed suicide in 1963. His wife, his wife, Katharine, and new editor Ben Bradlee retained the *Post*’s liberal editorial perspective throughout the 70s and 80s, but moved to the more conservative right in the 1990s. The early years of the new millennium showed the *Post*’s reportage once again leaning to the left, though as a leading member of the mainstream media, the shrill cries of bias in the paper’s reportage now rang out from both the liberal and conservative camps (Bartlett, 2007).

Much like *The Times* and the *Post*, the *Chicago Tribune* rose from turbulent beginnings. Founded in 1847, the *Tribune* was to have several incarnations, moving from Democratic to Republican mien during the pre-Civil War years forward into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Morgan and Veysey (1981) wrote that in 1910, co-owners Col. Robert R. McCormick and his cousin Joseph Medill Patterson would turn their finely tuned brand

of conservatism toward national and international politics taking on a watchdog style of reportage to rail against government waste and internationalism.

By 1969, the *Tribune* had become less of a firebrand, but still retained a measure of the staunch Midwestern conservatism of the McCormick era. Under the leadership of publisher Harold Grumhaus and Clayton Kirkpatrick, the paper continued with the modified spelling unique to the *Tribune* but with a more open perspective to its news coverage.

These daily newspapers, rather than news magazines, radio or television programs, provided the public with a daily source—in some instances with morning, afternoon and evening editions—of information, which could be easily analyzed, archived and retrieved, making them the ideal medium for this study.

### **Timeframe**

The population timeframe was July 19, 1969, to August 23, 2008. The sampling frame included coverage beginning with the first day of public reporting of the scandal (the day the scandal was made known to the public either by news publication, radio or TV), and included 14 consecutive days of print media coverage of the event. This 14-day timeframe ensured that each publication had ample time to fully realize its coverage of the scandal.

### **Operational Definitions**

The American Heritage College Dictionary, Fourth Edition (2004) defines *reportage* as “the act or process of reporting news or information” (p. 1180). Reportage tone was operationally defined as the amount of “news play” (Budd, 1964) or attention the news publications gave to the reporting of sexual scandal involving the political figures under consideration. This included the language used in the articles and

headlines. That is, the degree of favorable or unfavorable coverage generated, and the degree of, or emphasis—personal or professional—with regard to the sexual conduct of the political figures under considerations by one of the following news publications: *The New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Chicago Tribune*.

“Content” is operationally defined as headlines, story, photographs and other information in the sample frame concerning the sexual conduct of the political figures under consideration and appearing in one of the aforementioned news publications.

Time is operationally defined as the decade that the political sexual scandal takes place. As stated in R2, the researcher believes the time element is a vital component in the changes that have taken place in the press with regard to the aforementioned tone of political sexual scandal content.

Political sexual scandal was operationally defined as an event(s) concerning the sexual conduct of a politician serving as an elected public official, or a politician campaigning for an elected public office within any branch of the U.S. government (local, state or federal) that brings about disgrace or offends the moral sensibilities of society. In addition, political sexual scandal was further defined as an incident of sexual conduct having a national impact on American audiences, that is to divert public attention from real-world issues, and receive cross-media attention, though this study focused solely on the print media coverage.

The researcher conducted a separate linguistic analysis on each publication’s content using the T-Lab v. 8.0 software to analyze for latent content associated with “co-occurrence, thematic and comparative analysis” (Lancia, 2012).

Qualitative research must also be concerned with the dependability and the credibility for data analysis. Babbie (2007) defined dependability as the measure by which the same results would be obtained with several independent trials, whereas credibility means to measure what the researcher proposed to measure. Both are necessary for comprehensive qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed an “inquiry audit,” a comprehensive list of questions the researcher should address to assess the data and the process by which that data was obtained to ensure these criterion are adhered to (p. 417) A sample list of questions is included in Appendix B.

### **Other Definitions**

Each print news publication’s article of the named sexual scandal was operationally considered as a separate *element* and included the article’s content and headline as the *operational unit of analysis*. Each element was drawn from the electronic archives for each publication via Lexis-Nexis, ProQuest’s Historical Newspaper Archives and/or the news publication’s archival database.

*Scandal*, as defined by AHCD, is defined as “a publicized incident that brings about disgrace or offends the moral sensibilities of society” (p. 1238).

*Cross-media attention* of a sexual scandal is operationally defined as an event(s) concerning the sexual conduct of a man or woman serving or in a position to be of service in a political capacity, that has been reported in more than one medium on a national level; e.g. TV, radio, newspaper or the Internet on the same date as those appearing in print news publications in the sampling frame.

### **Procedure**

The analysis examined a population consisting of all elements for the following three political sexual scandals published in *The New York Times*, *Washington Post* and

the *Chicago Tribune* for the timeframe 1969 to 2008: beginning with Ted Kennedy and Mary Jo Kopechne in 1969, continuing with Gary Hart and Donna Rice in 1987 and John Edwards and Rielle Hunter in 2008.

The three scandals under consideration represented varying types of political figures, including a two-time presidential candidate, a long-serving and wealthy senator from a prominent political family and a relative newcomer to Washington politics. In addition, these scandals were chosen for their relevance to the timeframe under consideration or because of associate aspects that were implicit in making these scandals of national importance, namely, presidential elections and criminal investigations in connection with the scandal under consideration. These associate aspects were only considered in the context of how they affected the notoriety, and possible sensationalism, of the sexual scandal by the press, and the political figure(s) under consideration.

This study did not include analysis of related questions such as the drowning of Mary Jo Kopechne or the personal aspects of terminally ill wives and illegitimate children. These associate aspects were beyond the scope of this study and the researcher believed they may well be confounding variables with regard to this contextual analysis. However, they do present interesting implications that may warrant future consideration and study.

The sample elements were drawn from the following news publications: *The New York Times*, *Washington Post* and the *Chicago Tribune*, and encompassed a period not to exceed fourteen (14) consecutive days of coverage beginning with the first day the

sexual scandal under review was reported in the American media (regardless of whether this information was released via radio, TV, or newspaper).

The analysis utilized the T-Lab 8.0 linguistic system to analyze the latent content within the text. The software used the imported list of key words provided by the researcher to identify associations and correlations, journalistic themes as well as relationships between the sample elements to determine if the sample elements are public or private and favorable or unfavorable toward the political figure in question (See key word appendices).

Using the T-Lab system's co-occurrence tool, the researcher distinguished the relationships contained within the text between individual words, as well as word pairs and phrases, to support the notion that the tone of reportage had changed, and to further the assertion that the theory of image restoration via the media influenced those changes. Additionally, the researcher conducted a thematic analysis to identify emerging or re-occurring key terms within the text of the news publication. The T-Lab system generated graphical depictions of these various analyses, not for quantitative purposes, but merely to facilitate a visual comparison and comprehensive presentation.

## CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

### **Findings and Thematic Analysis**

An analysis of predominant themes is included in this chapter, which reflects the philosophical positions of the newspaper's publishers and editorial boards. These themes demonstrate not only a liberal, moderate or conservative perspective, but also how the scandals were perceived by the press from a legal, moral and social point of view.

By 2008, *The New York Times* had established an authoritative and liberal voice editorially among mainstream media outlets. Moving from a reserved informational model of news reporting, the *Times* developed this liberal editorial stance in the years between 1969 and 1987 with little change to the perspective in the years since. From 1969 to 2008, the *Washington Post* maintained a liberal editorial stance, while developing an investigative edge to its reportage. Maintaining its reputation as the leading political newspaper in the country, the *Post* showed the least amount of change editorially in the 40 years under consideration. By 2008, *the Chicago Tribune's* editorial stance was still largely conservative, but after 1987, the *Tribune's* reportage no longer resembled the watchdog-style of reporting it had during the Kennedy and Hart scandals.

The T-Lab v. 8.0 software was used to conduct a contextual analysis on the full text of articles published by *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the *Chicago Tribune* for the political sexual scandal case studies under consideration. Using T-Lab's Emergent Modeling, Key Term Listing and Co-Occurrence Word Associations tools, the researcher was able to create a list of key terms for each body of text, establish a correlation between those key terms and the dependent variable (i.e.:

Kennedy, Hart, Edwards) and determine what predominant key terms best encapsulated the text being analyzed.

These analyses, combined with close readings of each case study by the researcher, resulted in a holistic account of the scandals under consideration and a fully developed interpretation of the researcher’s thesis; namely, that print media has maintained a proper perspective editorially—that is an editorial perspective that is in keeping with their traditional editorial stance—with regard to political sexual scandal, rather than a lean toward sensationalism, in the years between 1969 and 2008.

### Word Counts and Article Population

The following tables illustrate the breakdown of published articles (including news copy, wire service stories editorials and Letters to the Editor collections) for each of the publications under consideration during the time frame indicated.

Table 4-1. Published word counts for each of the three case studies under consideration.

	WaPo	NYT	CTrib	WaPoWire	NYTWire	CTribWire
Kennedy July 19-Aug. 3, 1969	34,267	43,532	23,476	2,527	962	5,416
Hart May 4-18, 1987	64,045	57,812	29,752	-----	-----	-----
Edwards Aug. 9-23, 2008	10,122	13,262	3,560	-----	-----	-----
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>108,434</b>	<b>114,606</b>	<b>56,788</b>	<b>2,527</b>	<b>962</b>	<b>5,416</b>

Key: WaPo -- Washington Post; NYT – The New York Times; CTrib – Chicago Tribune; WaPoWire – Washington Post Wire Service; NYTWire – The New York Times Wire Service; CTribWire – Chicago Tribune Wire Service.

Table 4-2. Totals of published stories for each newspaper within the population.

	WaPo	NYT	CTrib	WaPoWire	NYTWire	CTribWire
Kennedy July 19-Aug .3, 1969	37	51	39	8	5	15
Hart May 4-18, 1987	64	60	41	-----	-----	-----
Edwards Aug. 9-23, 2008	11	12	8	-----	-----	-----
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>15</b>

Key: WaPo – Washington Post; NYT – The New York Times; CTrib – Chicago Tribune; WaPoWire – Washington Post Wire Service; NYTWire – The New York Times Wire Service; CTribWire – Chicago Tribune Wire Service.

In comparing the breakdowns for the three different scandals under consideration, two key findings emerge. 1) The higher word counts in the Gary Hart scandal reflect a stronger willingness to report on scandal in 1987, than in 1969 or 2008; 2) the devotion of such large amounts of copy to a single incident correlates with the print news industry’s strength, both as a news and advertising venue, before the advent of online news outlets.<sup>1</sup>

### Contextual Key Terms and Themes

The T-Lab thematic modeling tool identifies between five to eight thematic trends for each body of text being analyzed. Radial graphs depict the Co-Occurrence Word

<sup>1</sup>All Letters to the Editor collections on the given date of publication within the sample frame have been considered as one article, as the individual letters are too short in content to be analyzed by T-Lab for word association or thematic content. However, the researcher believes the letters accurately convey the prevailing attitude of a cross-section, though by no means random sampling, of readers for any one given case study. Wire service stories, namely *United Press International (UPI)*, the *Associated Press (AP)* and *Thomson Reuters (Reuters)*, were used by all three publications under consideration, but the bulk of these were printed during the Edward Kennedy scandal. Therefore, wire service stories appearing in *The New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Chicago Tribune* were analyzed as separate elements labeled KennedyNYTWireService, KennedyWaPoWireService and KennedyCTribWireService. Though wire service stories do continue to appear in all three publications during both the Gary Hart and the John Edwards scandals, the number of these stories is too small to be considered a separate element. In addition, the researcher believes that the editors and publishers at the news publications acted as gatekeepers for both their newspapers and their reading public when they made the choice to include the wire service coverage.

Associations for the political figure under consideration. The shorter the distance from data point to variable (e.g. Kennedy) the stronger the association. In addition, a key term listing represents the most frequently used words within the text and the total word counts for the 20 key terms within the text under consideration. The listing was significant in providing the researcher with clues to thematic development during the close reading of the text.

### **Edward Kennedy and Mary Jo Kopechne; Coverage July 19 – Aug. 3, 1969.**

#### ***The New York Times***

*The Times* first approached the Chappaquiddick incident from a legal frame, focusing the bulk of its reportage on what charges would be brought against Kennedy. Reporters were in Edgartown, Mass., by mid-morning July 19, and by midday were filing reports filled with minute details of the accident, Kennedy's statement to police, a profile of Kopechne and the first of what was to be 59 articles, editorials and Letter to the Editor collections containing more than 44,000 words of copy about the actions of the Senator on the night in question as well as the days and weeks to follow.

The eight dominant key terms emerging from *The New York Times* text included "accident," "call," "car," "Miss," (as a courtesy title), "Kennedy," "Senate" and "Senator." The *Times* uses courtesy titles to this day, so the terms of "Miss" and "Senator" are more a linguistic style rather than key terms for analysis.

These key terms mirrored the coverage the *Times* provided factual, straightforward and moderate in tone. The reportage gave succinct, detailed accounts of the accident, including the orientation of the bridge in relation to the party, data on automotive braking for the make and model of car Kennedy was driving and tidal pool current speeds, without drawing any conclusions as to the exact cause of the accident.

The key term of “accident” was the predominant term to emerge from the text as it is the heart of the incident and an integral component to all other terms.

*The Times* noted a lack of evidence indicating whether there had been any excessive drinking at the party, but the newspaper’s reporters and editorial board kept speculation about additional charges in reference to impairment to a minimum. Instead, it concentrated its rhetorical questions on the ramifications to Kennedy’s anticipated presidential nomination.

The key terms of “Kopechne” and “Kennedy” emerged from the *Times*’ extensive profiles and background information on the figures at the heart of the story. This included several interviews with Kopechne’s friends and fellow workers, her early days in Washington and how she had grown into her role among Washington’s political players. Further, the *Times* wrote extensively on Kennedy’s unremarkable rise through the Senate, life as the last living brother of a powerful political family and his subsequent seclusion in the days following the accident.

There was a high percentage of copy dedicated to the secondary terms of “statement,” “police,” “time” and “party.” These terms would correlate to the coverage of Kennedy’s initial report to local authorities almost 10 hours after the fact, the timelines of when the accident happened and Kennedy’s whereabouts during those 10 hours as well as details of the party.

The one anomaly in the analysis may be the key term of “call.” The *Times* reportage includes extensive coverage of the telephone calls received by leading newspapers, television and radio stations across the country in response to Kennedy’s nationally broadcasted statement on July 25.

Kennedy's televised statement included a description of his actions during and immediately following the accident, his reasons for not speaking to the press sooner and a plea to his constituency for advice as to whether he should remain in the Senate.

Following the broadcast, the *Times* reportage bore an unmistakable but measured undertone of moral culpability and barely concealed disbelief about Kennedy's actions in the hours after the accident, further articulating the key terms "accident," "car" and "Kennedy." And in response to an eyewitness who said he saw Kennedy and his Oldsmobile more than an hour after Kennedy said the accident happened:

The Senator's accounting last night raises the possibility that Mr. Look actually saw Mr. Kennedy returning to the scene of the accident with Mr. Gargan and Mr. Markham (July 27, p. 48).

The response to the broadcast was immediate. Area newspapers, television and radio stations were flooded with thousands of telephone calls from citizens across the country. The *Times* reported that much of this initial regional response was overwhelmingly in favor of Kennedy remaining in office and may very well have been the turning point in the media coverage. Yet, a number of citizens outside Massachusetts expressed doubt about the accident details and skepticism of his presidential abilities.

Senator Edward Kennedy deserves a four-star rating for his television production explaining the circumstances of Mary Jo Kopechne's death. Having just completed a study of political imagery on television and the techniques used for optimum performance in this regard, one must applaud the Senator and his expert staff for a job well done.

However, this is not the time and these are not the circumstances for improving one's political image. What is called for now is the truth—plain and simple, without the Kennedy boldness and arrogance and without exhuming John Kennedy and "the curse on the Kennedy family" – Timothy J Deegan, *Fire Island, L.I.* (New York) (July 30, p. 38).

What if he were President and the Russians phoned on the hotline and said they were going to bomb us within the hour and he forgot to report it to the Pentagon?" – John Chauvin, New Orleans taxi driver (July 27, p. 51).

Fellow members of the Senate also believed the statement left unanswered more questions than it addressed:

The feeling that the Senator has a long political recuperation ahead of him was based on residual doubts even after his statement last night.

Some of the doubts related to what one Senator called "the unresolved questions" about what happened, and the conduct of the Senator and two of the men who were at the cookout party—Joseph F. Gargan, a cousin, and Paul Markham, an old friend (July 27, p. 50).

Though remorse and shame, necessary components according to Benoit's Image Restoration Theory, are evident in his speech, the contrivance of the wording, coupled with the reports of sequestered meetings with some of the most astute political advisers in the country during his seclusion at Hyannis Port detracted from the sincerity of the statement.

It has been written a man does what he must in spite of personal consequences, in spite of obstacles and dangers and pressures, and that is the basis of all human morality.

Whatever may be the sacrifices he faces if he follows his conscience – the loss of his friends, his fortune, his contentment, even the esteem of his fellow man – each man must decide for himself the course he will follow (July 26, p.10).

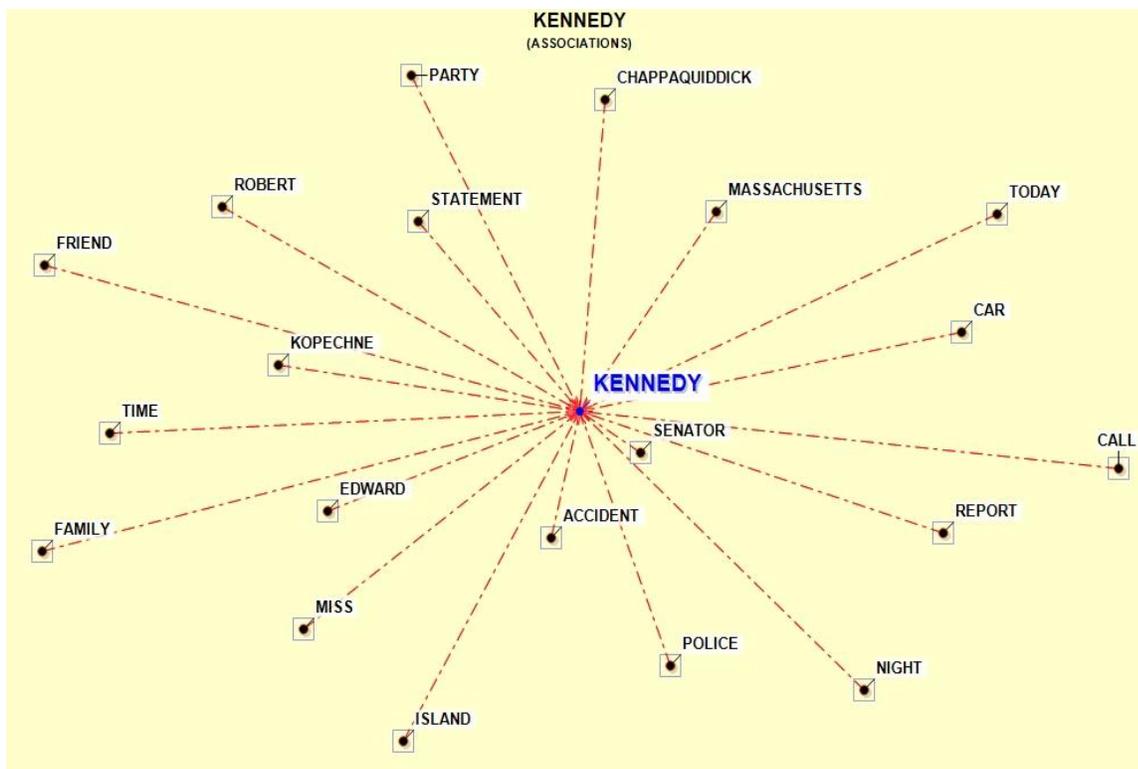


Figure 4-1. *The New York Times*

Table 4-3. Total key term word counts for *The New York Times* coverage of Edward Kennedy July 19 – Aug. 3, 1969. (Excludes wire service articles)

Term	Count	Term	Count	Term	Count	Term	Count
Kennedy	701	Mary Jo	123	Party	105	Chappaquiddick	82
Senator	627	Mass.	123	night	101	call	81
accident	237	police	117	Edward	93	friend	80
car	174	statement	115	Chief	91	man	79
Kopechne	147	time	107	report	90	ask	79

*The Times* used freelance reporters (denoted as “Special to *The New York Times*) almost exclusively in 1969 for on-the-scene reporting from Martha’s Vineyard and Chappaquiddick islands as well as Kennedy’s offices in Boston and Washington. Many of these stories included detailed information about the accident and the subsequent investigation and legal issues.

The five wire service stories accounted for less than 1,000 words of copy and consisted mainly of filler information such as the Hyannis Port Post Office being

inundated with mail after Kennedy’s televised statement and the family taking in a day of fishing in Hyannis Sound.

While the bulk of the stories represented background information, one story detailed the reaction of the Kopecchne family to Kennedy’s televised statement and their desire to protect their daughter’s reputation. The family was reported to have been satisfied with Kennedy’s explanation; their decision to forego an autopsy may well have been swayed by it (July 26, p. 11).

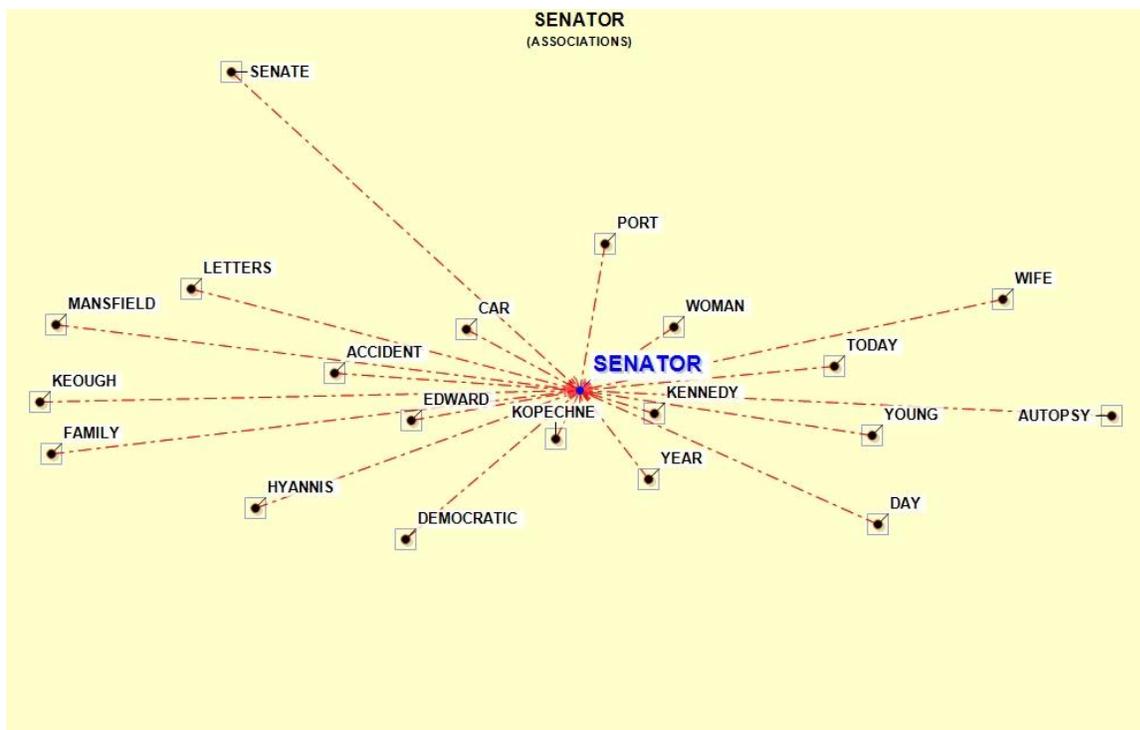


Figure 4-2. Wire service articles published by *The New York Times*.

Table 4-4. Total key term word counts for wire service articles of Edward Kennedy published by *The New York Times* July 19 – Aug. 3, 1969.

Term	Count	Term	Count	Term	Count	Term	Count
Senator	21	Edward	5	Day	4	mail	4
Kennedy	21	family	5	Democratic	4	Massachusetts	4
Mansfield	8	Hyannis	5	accident	4	Port	4
Kopecchne	7	autopsy	4	letters	4	Senate	4
woman	5	car	4	Young	4	wife	4

## ***The Washington Post***

The Kennedy incident at Chappaquiddick garnered nearly as much newsprint as the Apollo 11 moonwalk of July 20, 1969, the day after Kennedy's accident on Chappaquiddick. Reflected in the 45 news stories, editorials, op-ed pieces and Letter to the Editor collections published in the *Post* during the two weeks following the accident, the newspaper assumed an aggressive editorial stance in pursuing the facts, but also a measure of compassion for the nature and people involved; namely, a young woman's tragic death and the very public scrutiny of a much-admired political figure's less than admirable reactions under duress.

In analyzing 45 articles and more than 36,000 words of text, eight dominant key terms emerged from the *Washington Post* coverage. These terms vary somewhat from that of the *Times* in that the *Post* took a more liberal and pragmatic stance editorially. Not surprisingly "accident" and "car" are the two most predominant terms emerging from the *Post* text; they are also No. 1 and No. 3 respectively in the *Times* analysis. But the remaining key terms of "case," "Edward," "Mary Jo," "Party," "political," and "statement" are substantiated by the focus and stance of the *Post's* publishing and editorial boards.

The *Post's* coverage seemed to highlight the nearly aristocratic position the Kennedy family held in the public mind. Camelot had not yet been forgotten. In the *Post's* coverage of Kopechne's funeral, the writer draws a comparison between the service being held "in a shabby mining town outside Wilkes-Barre" to that of Robert Kennedy "in the grandeur of St. Patrick's cathedral." Numerous references allude to the public's curiosity and fascination when it came to the Kennedy mystique—in some instances to the point of absurdity (July 22, p. A3):

But young people swarmed around his car, girls pinched one another, squealed and said, "Isn't he beautiful? I saw him, I saw him!" It all caused people to remark that it was like a scene from an old campaign.

The middle-aged and the Medicare generation stood around quietly, neither hostile nor enthusiastic. What did they think? 'I don't know, I don't know,' said a woman who had known Miss Kopechne's family. 'There was something strange about that (the accident).'

Today, a middle-aged woman stood holding a hand-lettered sign that said: 'Kennedy for President, 1972' (July 23, p. A3).

The analysis developed "case" as the dominant key term. This would correspond with the *Post's* systematic approach to the incident, which focused, primarily, on the legal aspects of the case against Kennedy. *Post* reporters made numerous attempts to clarify conflicting statements and the procedures being followed during the investigation.

The Co-occurrence Word Association graph notes a strong concomitance with the key terms "hour" and "report." These terms correspond with the strong focus the *Post* placed on the true timeline of the incident and the initial report that Kennedy filed the following morning.

The *Post* was more vocal than the *Times* in its attempt to get to the heart of the story but with an even hand rather than aggressive pursuit. Writers repeatedly question Kennedy's narrative as well as local official's statements; whatever investigation was conducted was never revealed in detail to reporters. This was a major point of contention for readers as letters to the editor begin to show:

After the accident he stated that he went back to the cottage where he had previously been and asked someone to drive him to Edgartown. Why didn't he notify the people at the cottage of the accident? Didn't they question his being wet or where his car was?

What happened during the nine hours between the time of the accident and the time Kennedy finally reported it to the authorities in Edgartown? Why no alcohol test for Kennedy or the deceased?

It seems to me that the authorities are turning their heads the other way. ~  
W. Herron, Rockville (July 24, p. A18).

The *Post* also quotes Dukes County Prosecutor Walter E. Steele as having interviewed Joseph Gargan and unnamed other partygoers, and was satisfied with their statements as to Kennedy's condition upon leaving the party. The *Post* reported that Esther Newberg specifically recalled "nobody had more than one or two drinks," and that everyone was merely tired from the races. In a later interview, Newberg would not elaborate on any drinking at the party, citing the upcoming court appearance by Kennedy and a need for discretion.

The *Post* reported that speculation and rumor were running rampant, fueled in large part by Kennedy's seclusion and silence in the days following the accident, the ruling of accidental drowning without an autopsy and the findings by local authorities of Kennedy as innocent of any negligence. The *Post* also reported that the local authorities were accusing each other of whitewashing the entire affair:

Officials concerned with the case are accusing one another of amateurism and blundering. There is buck passing over who did or did not decide that it was unnecessary to perform an autopsy on Mary Jo Kopechne....,

There is squabbling in the legal community over the nature of the charge (leaving the scene of an accident) placed against Kennedy. There is disagreement among the natives over whether Kennedy got on to the road leading to the bridge by accident or by design and further disagreement over the performance of the investigators.

The result, as Hough put it, is a Roman holiday of perpetual rumors and confusion in which the horde of reporters and television crewmen are deeply involved (July 25, p. A3).

Despite the circus-like atmosphere of Edgartown, the *Post* took pains to connect readers with the Kopechne and Kennedy, so the key terms of "Mary Jo" and "Edward"

figure prominently, not in a sensationalistic way, but to substantiate or contradict what was being written about them.

Facts to support all the charges and suspicions that were bruited about were thin. There was, for example, never any evidence of a liaison between Kennedy and Miss Kopechne who, from all accounts, was no “swinger.” As one of her friends later said, “She was modest to the point of being prim ...” Anything that hurts her reputation is unnecessary and very unfortunate. She was like Ethel (Kennedy) in that she would grimace if anyone said anything that was dirty or tasteless (July 27, P. A10).

However, the profile of Kennedy by the *Post* is scathing in comparison to the *Times*. The cheating incident at Harvard and the erratic driving violations at the University of Virginia seem minor compared to assertions that he won his Senate seat by virtue of family name. In addition, his peers at Harvard found his academic career “mediocre” and his political vocation to be “virtually non-existent” (July 26, p. A7).

He got his Senate seat in 1962 at the age of 30, not on merit, not on personal achievement, but as a gift from a constituency that would deny the Kennedy’s nothing in a political sense. He had no coherent political philosophy at the time, no sense of political direction, no game plan for his life. (July 30, p. A23)

But the *Post* acknowledges that once ensconced in the Senate, Kennedy thrived and was far better liked than either of his two brothers. And he was considered a shoe-in for the Democratic Party’s nomination in 1972.

Ted was looking forward first to a massive third election victory in November of next year. True, he had done no more than had brother John to reform the Democratic Party in Massachusetts but that he could have another term was beyond question. The Republicans would have to look for a sacrificial victim to oppose him (July 26, p. A7).

The *Post* commented on the various rumors circulating about the accident, including Kopechne being pregnant and nude when she died. Speculation about Kennedy’s private life may have been exacerbated by a *Newsweek* (a *Washington Post Company* subsidiary) blurb which noted Kennedy’s “indulgent drinking habits, his dare-

devil driving, and his ever-ready eye for a pretty face” though no evidence to support any personal relationship between Kennedy and Kopechne ever surfaced and Kennedy had, at that time, a reputation for being a moderate drinker.

The *Post* also may have inflamed speculation by referring to Kopechne as “chic and pretty” and Kennedy as a “Modern Playboy of the Western World” in the same article.

The key term “Party” refers to the Democratic Party rather than the party on Chappaquiddick Island. The *Post* included coverage of the political ramifications Kennedy’s actions had on the Democratic Party in general and the upcoming 1972 presidential election in particular.

But it was the consequences and repercussion of Kennedy’s actions, especially his continued silence, that are at the forefront of much of the *Post*’s political commentary. Phrases such as “melancholy foreboding” and “whispering campaigns” convey both a growing reproachful attitude and darkening outlook among op-ed writers and the *Post*’s editorial board and further articulate the key terms of “Edward,” “Party,” and “political.”

‘With every hour that passes,’ one pro-Kennedy Congressman told us, ‘the situation becomes more ominous.’

Indeed, at this writing, few of the veteran political hands who counseled the two elder Kennedys have been called into the crisis. In their absence and the lack of solid answers to the questions posed by the Senator’s sketchy statement of Saturday, rumors in the political community have run like wildfire. Thus, some pro-Kennedy politicians view the silence as a mistake of doleful consequences (July 24, p. A19).

Perhaps there are no clear answers, or none that the Senator wants to give, in which case the public and the politicians will draw their own conclusions and they will not be kind, in large part because the brief statement the Senator has so far made is not good enough. Worse, there are good reasons to doubt that it is even accurate (July 24m p. A18).

The key term of “statement” refers to both Kennedy’s initial statement to police as well as his televised statement in the two weeks following accident.

Despite the mollification of local authorities about Kennedy and his explanation of the night in question, the *Post*’s editorial board refers to Kennedy’s televised statement as a “contrived mea culpa” among other disparaging phrases, while op-ed writers tended toward a more wait-and-see tone with their take on his statement.

So, inevitably, his performance had some quality of contrivance, some of the marks of a public man maneuvering to preserve his position in public life. By inviting the people of Massachusetts to help him decide whether he should resign, he has doubtless taken his case to the one court of opinion most likely to decide favorably (July 26, p. A12).

Moreover, some politicians in both parties described the Friday night speech as an adept exercise in public relations, making the best of an intolerable situation. Fully six hours before the speech, a leading Republican publicist forecast its outline in uncanny detail—the eulogy of Miss Kopechne, the blanket admission of guilt, the fuzzing of details, the culminating appeal for public support, in the fashion of Richard Nixon’s famed Checkers speech of 1952 (July 31, p. A19).

Letters to the editor also indicate a public at polar opposites on the issue. And despite the weeklong deluge of rumor and speculation, their insights cut to the core of the controversy:

Only Senator Kennedy knows the real truth. But wouldn’t it have been noble if we would have heard a more convincing, unrehearsed statement not drafted by the sycophants of the Kennedy brain trust—after a week of meditation, preparation and weight the political consequences? (July 30, A22) ~ Bob Johnson, Miami, Fla.

The Kennedys have experienced the zenith and nadir in human emotions—yet, through it all, their high moral and spiritual values have remained, or have even intensified. Yet, because Senator Kennedy faltered briefly, as any human being might, under the is most recent additional burden of grief and tragedy, his and his lovely friend’s families have been barraged with a host of accusations (July 31, A18) ~ Dorothy J. Schuffert, Alexandria.

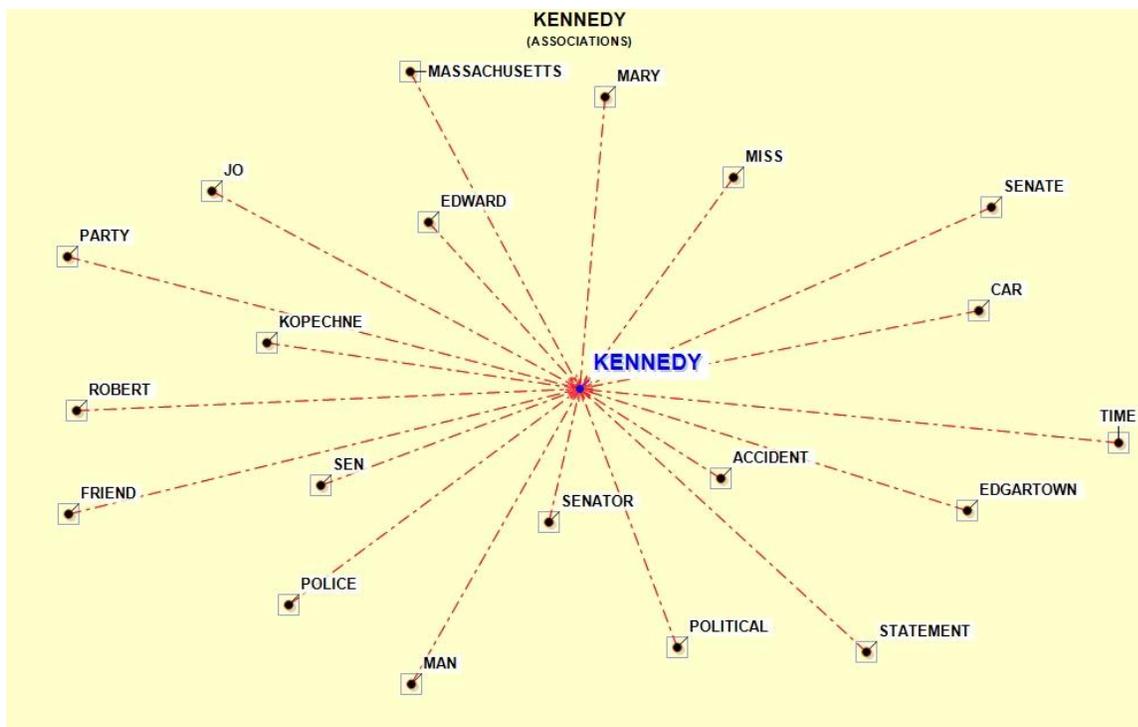


Figure 4-3. *Washington Post*

Table 4-5. Total key term word counts for *Washington Post* coverage of Edward Kennedy July 19 – Aug. 3, 1969. (Excludes wire service articles)

Term	Count	Term	Count	Term	Count	Term	Count
Kennedy	574	Sen.	83	time	73	Edward	65
Senator	175	car	79	Senate	72	Jo	65
accident	159	party	78	police	70	Mary	64
Kopeczne	108	Edgartown	78	man	68	know	63
Miss	105	political	74	people	68	Massachusetts	63

Like *The Times*, the *Washington Post* also used freelance writers (denoted by lack of byline) to cover events outside the District of Columbia metropolitan area and the incident on Chappaquiddick Island was no exception.

In addition, seven wire service stories from the *Associated Press* and *United Press International* totaling more than 2,100 words of copy appeared in the *Post* during the timeframe under consideration.

The articles consisted solely of color and background information including the large number of telegrams being generated in response to Kennedy's nationally televised statement on July 25. In addition, the *Post* ran a copy of a *Times* story concerning Mrs. Kopechne's reaction to Kennedy's broadcast.

The remaining articles gave an account of Kennedy's attendance at a local church mass the Sunday following his statement and a small group that had formed to support his staying in the Senate.

One *Associated Press* wire service story dated July 27 notes that both Paul Markham and Joseph Gargan, the two men who had returned to the scene with Kennedy the night of the accident, had been cleared of any charges with regard to the reporting of the accident.

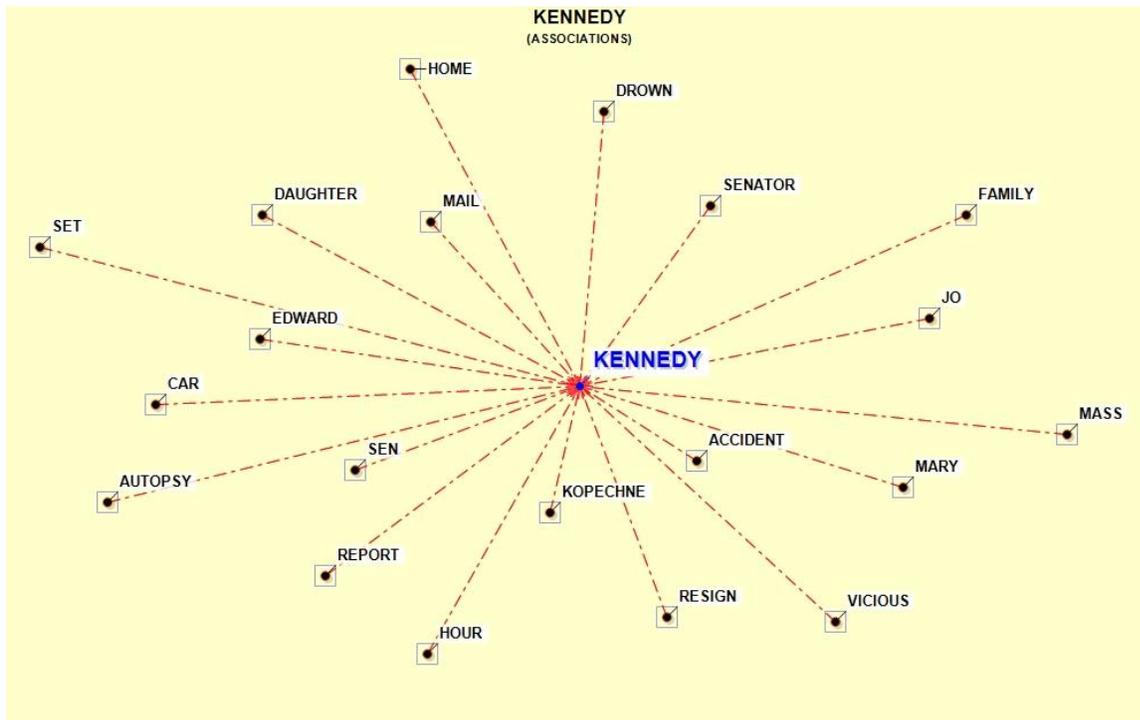


Figure 4-4. Wire service articles published by the *Washington Post*.

Table 4-6. Total key term word counts for wire service articles of Edward Kennedy published by the *Washington Post* July 19 – Aug. 3, 1969.

Term	Count	Term	Count	Term	Count	Term	Count
Kennedy	65	statement	9	Autopsy	8	resign	7
Kopechne	22	daughter	9	Mary	8	Senate	7
accident	19	mail	9	Jo	8	stay	7
Senator	15	Edward	9	Car	7	report	7
Sen.	11	hour	8	Friday	7	vicious	6

### ***Chicago Tribune***

The fiery and conservative editorial stance of the *Chicago Tribune's* earlier McCormick years was evident in the newspaper's coverage of the Chappaquiddick incident. The newspaper let loose its watchdog style of reportage within two days of the accident. And throughout the studied timeframe its editorial board and writers would use rhetoric and pointed speculation to extract answers from officials and prompt discourse from its readers.

Of the *Chicago Tribune's* nearly 40,000 words of text contained within 52 news stories, editorial and op-ed pieces and Letter to the Editor collections published on the Kennedy scandal, the seven dominant key terms of "charge," "Kennedy," "Kopechne," "night," "report," "Senator," and "think." Emerge from the text.

Not surprisingly, *the Tribune's* conservative-minded editorial stance focused intently on the legalities of the case and the local authorities in Edgartown. The Co-occurrence Word Association radial graph also shows a strong correlation with the terms "accident," "car," and "police." This is again substantiated by the *Tribune's* intense focus on the legal machinations of local officials as well as Kennedy and his associates.

In bold contrast to either the reserved stance of the *Times* or the pragmatic tone of the *Post*, the *Tribune's* Page 1 ledes began emphasizing an aggressive viewpoint that cut right to the heart of the issue:

The possibility of a conspiracy of silence loomed today as an element in the mystery surrounding the drowning of a blonde secretary as she was riding in a car driven by Sen. Edward M. Kennedy [D., Mass.] last Friday night (July 24, p. 1).

A Democratic leader on Capitol Hill, giving his analysis of the political future of Sen. Edward Kennedy [D., Mass.], today said, "I don't think he can ever recover from the fact that he left that girl's body in the water for nine hours. That's too much" (July 24, p. 3).

Additionally, and in sharp contrast to the *Times* and the *Post*, the *Tribune's* continual use of the diminutive *Teddy* and *Ted* in headlines reflects an informal and possibly less than respectful attitude toward Edward Kennedy.

The key terms of "Kopechne," "night," and "report" reflect the *Tribune's* continued reference to Kennedy's delayed reporting of the accident, the subsequent death of Kopechne, the timeline of the accident (Friday night), and the delay in the report being filed.

The *Times*, the *Post*, and the *Tribune* had all written much about missing information and the disjointed investigative and prosecutorial procedures of the local officials. Both the *Times* and *Post* had devoted extensive newsprint to details of the accident scene as well. The *Times* took a more pedestrian and factual tone, acknowledging the presence of discrepancies and lack of investigation, but not pressing those same officials for answers. The *Post* took a more measured but direct approach in questioning the official's processes and lack of follow-up on the accident.

In contrast, the *Tribune's* freelancers and press service took an outwardly aggressive posture in its reporting running down even shadowy leads to substantiate the actions—or inactions—of local officials. The conspiracy theme continued:

There was an unconfirmed report today that Steele, or someone from his office, met secretly this morning at the local airport with two Kennedy

men—David W. Burke, the senator’s administrative assistant, and Lemoyne Billings, a long-time associate of the Kennedy family.

[Kennedy press secretary] Drayne confirmed in Washington that both Burke and Billings were on Cape Cod with the senator. He said the pair had been there since last weekend.

Steele insisted today that “we have not a scintilla of evidence to point to any other charge” against Kennedy beyond leaving the scene of an accident (July 24, p. 5).

One *Tribune* wire service story interviewed “sources close to the [Kennedys],” which suggested that Kennedy may not have been in as great a state of shock as he claimed following the accident. One cannot miss the implication that he outright lied to authorities:

Kennedy told police in a statement Saturday morning that he was in as state of shock from the time of the accident until he woke up in Edgartown in the morning. But the sources said he was able to give his friends an account of what happened. He told them he could remember thinking: “I’m drowning. This is incredible” (July 23, p. 2).

Unlike either the *Times* or the *Post*, the *Tribune* uses a far more aggressive voice in its reporting:

You’re the modern day Paul Revere, one telegram said. The Kennedys are coming. Nail them, baby (July 23, p. 2).

While the *Times* and the *Post* coverage gave the impression that Kennedy had the backing of a majority of his fellow senators, the *Tribune* was interviewing Democratic members of the Senate who were more than a bit skeptical of Kennedy’s ability, not to mention his character. *Note: Anonymity was routinely granted to sources within the government, even when the information was not of a sensitive nature.*

I don’t think it would have been too tough for him to recover if it was revealed that he had gotten drunk,” said the leader, who refused to be quoted by name. “A lot of people in Washington aren’t angels.”

Besides complaining of the “heartlessness” it would require to leave a body in a car overnight at the bottom of a pond, one influential Democrat said the indecision shown by the Massachusetts senator would appear to eliminate him from consideration by the party leaders as a serious candidate for President (July 24, p. N3).

Perhaps as much in response to Kennedy’s continued silence as the haphazard actions of officials involved in the investigation, the *Tribune*’s editorials assumed an ever increasingly strident and uncompromising tone in questioning actions and outcomes of those involved. Op-ed writers took an equally inexorable, albeit more eloquently voiced, position after the airing of Kennedy’s statement:

Friends of Sen. Edward M. Kennedy [D., Mass.] are said to be deeply concerned about the effect on his political career of the tragic misadventure in which a young secretary was killed in an automobile he was driving.

We think this concern betrays a callous indifference to considerations that are far more important than the political future of a young man who apparently aspired to the Presidency. First of these is the loss of a young woman’s life. What the American people will want to know is whether they have been told the whole truth about what happened and whether justice in this case will be administered without respect to wealth and family influence (July 22, p. 12).

Perhaps no one will suffer more from the favoritism than the senator. However, no one can benefit when what should be the absolute justice of the community enlightened by reason, rather than preference, is bent either by sympathy or deference to power.

The law and its administration are not perfect. It should be a majestic edifice with one door for the weak and the strong and two exits, one for the guilty and another for the innocent. There should be no escape hatches, although many contrive to make them, and when they do they injure all by licensing the breaking of the common protection (July 30, p. 20).

The *Tribune* randomly polled Chicago-area residents by telephone in an effort to gauge Midwestern reaction to Kennedy’s nationally televised statement. And though the reactions were mixed, nearly all those queried responded with a measure of

conservative restraint; many responses contained a positive note, even when obviously adverse in sentiment:

My wife and I were impressed by the apparent sincerity of the speech, but we were left wondering that if he demonstrated indecision in this incident, what would he do in other situations? ~ Stanley Perosious (July 26, p. N3).

If he was in a state of shock someone should have called the doctor. This is being written more as a political obituary of the girl's death. Just because he is a member of the privileged class this shouldn't make him immune to investigation. If it weren't for the pressure being placed b the newspapers this would have been done ~ Dominic Mattucci (July 27, Section I, p. 1).

The key terms of “Senator” and “think” reflect the extensive amount of Letters to the Editor that were printed during the timeframe, with nearly every response noting the words *think, thinking or thought*. In other words, the writers were expressing their thoughts on the appearance, demeanor, candor, etc., that Kennedy displayed during his televised statement. For example, “My husband and I thought Senator Kennedy...” or “I was thinking he looked...” In what may have been a sign of the times or perhaps just a sign of Midwestern values, Kennedy was always referred to—in both pro and con missives—as Senator.

The *Tribune* printed a far greater number of reader comments than either the *Times* or the *Post*. Of 47 letters received from readers during the timeframe under consideration, 68 percent were of a negative or unfavorable nature toward Kennedy.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The *Times* printed only four (albeit lengthy) Letters to the Editor during the timeframe studied; The *Post* published 28.

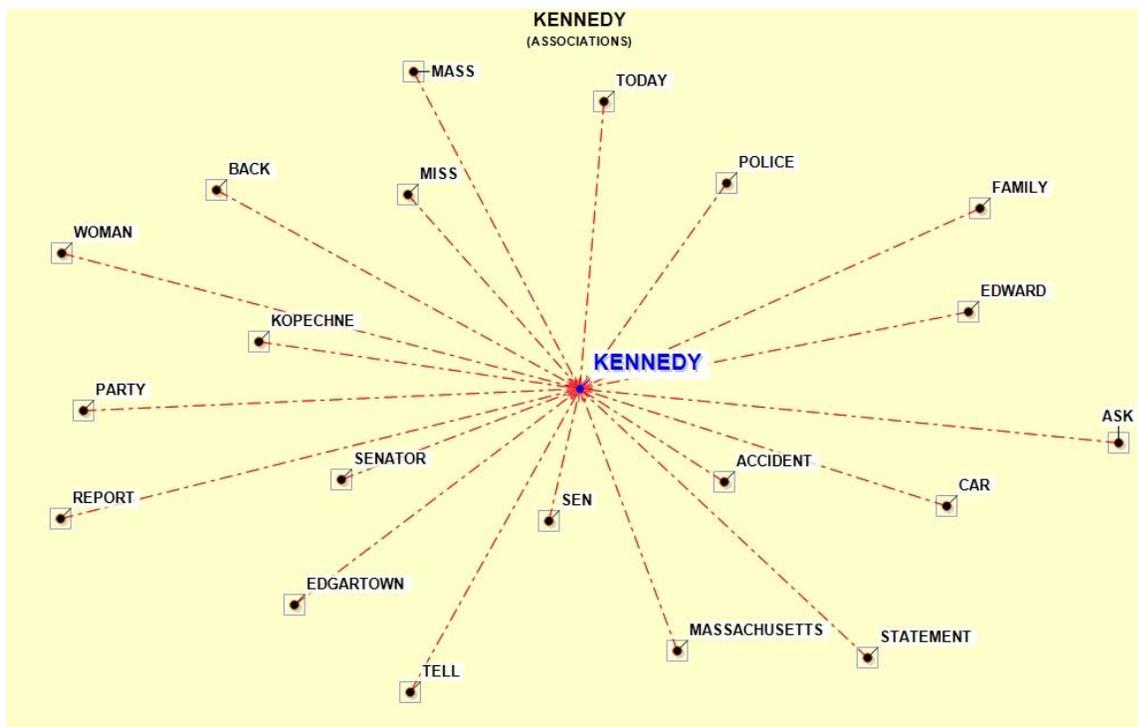


Figure 4-5. *Chicago Tribune*

Table 4-7. Total key term word counts for *Chicago Tribune* coverage of Edward Kennedy July 19 – Aug. 3, 1969. (Excludes wire service articles)

Term	Count	Term	Count	Term	Count	Term	Count
Kennedy	483	Kopechne	91	back	65	family	51
Accident	142	car	82	party	63	woman	51
Senator	111	police	77	Massachusetts	58	ask	50
Miss	110	think	74	Arena	51	report	49
Sen.	93	Edgartown	65	tell	51	man	47

Like the *Times* and the *Post*, the *Tribune* used freelance reporters (denoted as *Chicago Tribune Press Services*) to handle the day-to-day reporting first from Edgartown and then from Boston and Washington, D.C.

The *Tribune* also published 15 AP, UPI and [Thomson] Reuters wire service articles to round out their coverage. Those articles included information ranging from Kennedy’s decision to delay making a statement to the public to the reaction of the long-awaited address on July 25. The wire services also took the liberty of posing a large

number of rhetorical questions regarding the actions of those involved in the incident and official conduct throughout the investigation.

As with the *Times* and the *Post*, the *Tribune's* wire service stories generally provided background information. However, two articles in particular give matching details about Kennedy speaking with the Shiretown Inn desk clerk at 2:25 a.m. fully dressed in pants and jacket, but “somewhat distressed.” Kennedy mentioned this meeting in his nationwide broadcast as well.

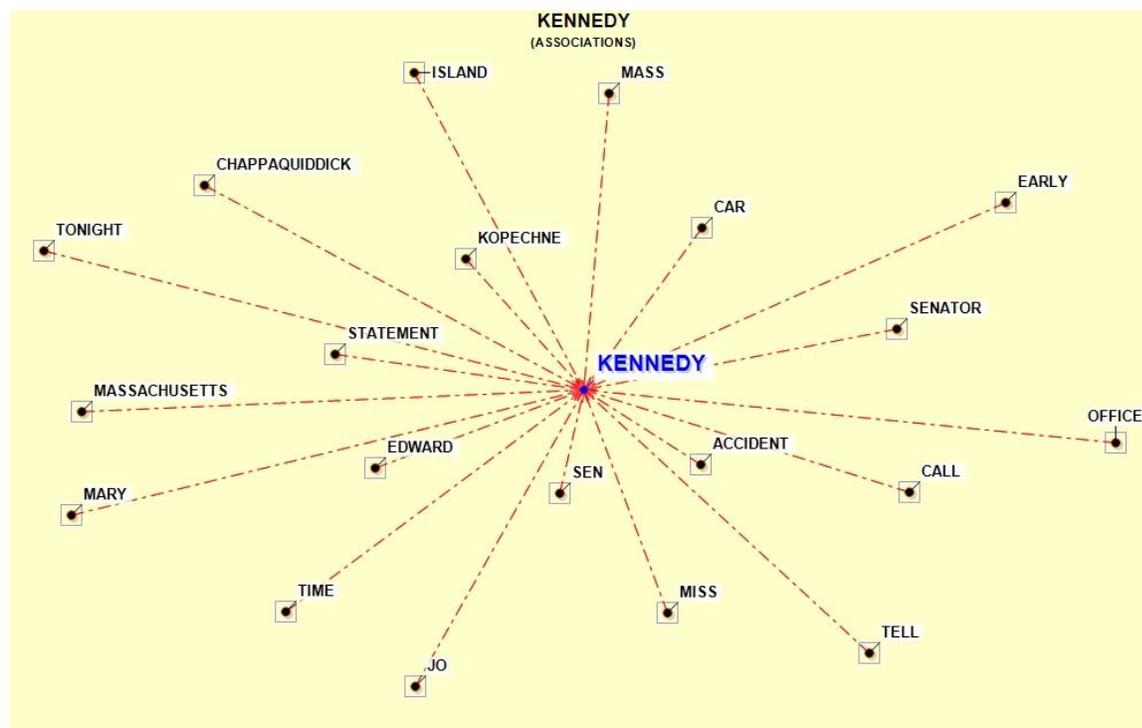


Figure 4-6. Wire service articles published by the *Chicago Tribune*

Table 4-8. Total key term word counts for wire service articles of Edward Kennedy published by the *Chicago Tribune* July 19 – Aug. 3, 1969.

Term	Count	Term	Count	Term	Count	Term	Count
Kennedy	114	statement	24	Dinis	15	autopsy	14
Accident	37	car	21	time	15	police	13
Sen.	34	Edward	19	Massachusetts	15	know	13
Kopechne	31	call	16	Mary	14	tell	13
Senator	30	Miss	16	Jo	14	office	12

## **Gary Hart and Donna Rice; Coverage May 4 - 18, 1987.**

### ***The New York Times***

*The New York Times* coverage of the Gary Hart scandal not only followed the implosion of Hart's presidential campaign, but also heavily debated the growing issue of the media's role in reporting on political figures. Namely, whether the media was correctly addressing the issues of professional rather than personal judgment as a benchmark for assessing the abilities of political figures and whether the latter could or would adversely affect the former.

Emerging key terms from the *Times*' coverage of the Gary Hart scandal shows the first indications of change in the *Times* editorial position. Far from the fact-based, staid news writing of the Chappaquiddick era, the *Times* editorial board and writers took a more vocal, liberal position, calling into question the role of the press in American politics in general and the Hart affair in particular.

The late 1980s were halcyon days for the newspaper industry, and the *Times* generated an incredible amount of copy on the Hart scandal. More than 60 articles, editorials, op-ed pieces and Letter to the Editor collections totaled nearly 58,000 words, the bulk of which was generated in the first seven days of the timeframe under consideration.

Not surprisingly, a tremendous volume of copy was dedicated to profiles and background stories featuring Hart, past and present. The eight dominant terms emerging from the *Times* text are "candidate," "day," "Gary," "Hart," "Herald," "people," "Rice," and "Senator." What is surprising, especially for the *Times*, is an analysis of the lexicon reveals a significant use of words such as *sexual, adultery, behavior, judgment, private, womanizing* and *lies* to articulate the key terms of "candidate," "Gary" and

“Hart.” for the most part an unfavorable array of descriptors not typically associated with the *Times* style of reportage thus far.

Much of the *Times* editorial content focused on the ethical questions concerning the public’s need and or right to know about a political candidates’ private affairs, but also whether the *Miami Herald’s* tactics in gaining the information adhered to the tenets of good journalism or merely a case of the ends justifying the means.

The *Times* editorial board acknowledged that the treatment of scandal had, for many years, followed guidelines that had passed away after Edward Kennedy’s incident at Chappaquiddick and Wilber Mills’ Tidal Basin affair. But it also countered that by asserting the *Herald* had come upon its news as part of regular coverage of a presidential race rather than a follow up to an accident or police report.

While scandal has always been grist for the journalistic mill, there was for many decades an unspoken gentleman's understanding that such things as marital infidelity and alcohol abuse were unsuitable subjects of news coverage for respectable news organizations.

Many journalists say that the new adversarial aggressiveness of journalists in the Vietnam War and, later, with the Watergate affair began to change this courtly climate. They say that the public also began to demand to know more about public figures, which was an attitude born of disappointment in their leaders (May 5, p. B7).

Hart’s own actions prompted the press to ask outright questions about adultery and infidelity in an open forum—a burden that up to now had not been thrust upon a presidential candidate. This follows closely with Benoit’s theory that it is the actions of the individual who finds himself or herself caught in the scandal that directs the actions of the press, and by extension, supporters and the public—in Hart’s case financial supporters and a voting public.

However, both the *Times* editorial board and writers such as William Safire suggest that politicians should not have to answer questions about their personal lives:

Maybe the shallow, insensitive nature of Presidential campaigns would begin to change if one candidate, one day, said: "That is none of your business; that is my private life, and my family's." I think the public would respond to a candidate who said that and stuck to it (May 5, p. A35).

'Have you ever committed adultery?' was the stone some sin-free questioner lobbed at Gary Hart last week. His answer was a temperate "I do not have to answer that question." Mine would have been 'Go to hell.'

Neither the media nor the government has a right to expect an answer to such personal questions. We would all be better off if candidates for office were expected to take offense at such intrusions (May 11, p. A17).

Questions of morality and judgment were apparent early in the *Times* coverage with noted politicians Gov. Mario Cuomo and former vice presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro questioning which was more important: how Hart spent his evenings or his stand on issues such as nuclear arms.

The key term of "Herald" was characterized by the use of such words as *report*, *story*, *reporter*, *editor* and *publisher*. Again, not surprising, given the inordinate amount of discussion about the methods the *Herald* used in obtaining the story. As a note, though Hart initially lashed out at the *Herald* in particular, after the release of its story his narrative quickly blamed the press in general as the cause of his troubles.

The *Times* editorials were questioning Hart's judgment more than the morality of the situation, while op-ed pieces questioned the validity of the coverage and the underlying issues that prompted such reportage:

Reporters once treated candidates' "personal" indiscretions discreetly. No longer, and that's to the good. Beyond the proper, debatable bounds of privacy, the public needs to know as much about a candidate as possible. It is, after all, a person whom the voters elect to be President, not a set of policies. Once in office the policies may change, but the person's intellect,

judgment and character will not. Mr. Hart's judgment was already in doubt. This new episode deepens those doubts (May 5, p. A34).

Gary Hart's strange treatment of his birth date and family name invited attention to his character. I think there are reasons to question his judgment. But "the womanizing issue," as *The Herald* called it, gets special attention for a reason we all know. That is the public's prurient interest in sex (May 4, p. A35).

In addition, noted columnists like Tom Wicker, A.M. Rosenthal, and Anthony Lewis were churning out lengthy articles on two differing tacks: one faction debated how ethical the *Herald's* reporting methods and rush to print were, while the other deliberated whether marital fidelity was even important enough to be an issue in considering presidential candidate coverage. A better question is whether it's worthy of front-page status? Twenty-five years earlier, the answers might have been fairly straightforward.

The key term of "people" can be largely attributed to the vast amounts of poll information and political commentary generated by columnists debating the idea of whether the American people would vote for a man who had committed adultery as opposed to drunk driving or cheating on their taxes. Writers both pro and con noted that marital infidelity was not the underlying problem Hart faced, but rather a growing concern about poor judgment and lack of honesty—qualities the pundits claimed the American people simply would not tolerate in their presidential candidates.

The one idea that seemed to rise above all the discussion was that it was not a matter of morality, or judgment or even ability, but rather a matter of candor—of honesty. One op-ed writer again confirmed what Benoit was asserting in his earliest work on Image Repair Theory: that candor and a forthright approach to the issue is the best for salvaging public image.

What the voters will care about, however, is whether Gary Hart has been honest and forthright in explaining the town house issue. The issue in today's politics is not morality but candor. After giving his "Checkers" speech in the 1952 campaign, Richard M. Nixon learned a lesson he later forgot - that overwhelming public doubts can be turned around with a forthright, head-on confrontation of an issue (May 6, p. A35).

In the view of most politicians, the Hart case was special: It does not necessarily imply a new era of high morality in American politics. But it certainly reinforces the lesson that Americans demand from their political leaders a higher standard of behavior than they do from their friends and neighbors, or even from themselves. And it most certainly demonstrates that character, not ideology and not intellect, is the quality most Americans seek in those who would be President (May 8, p. A1).

The *Times* portrayed Donna Rice as the stereotypical blond-haired beauty queen; a swimsuit-model type who posed bare-breasted and dated a Saudi arms dealers. One cannot help but sense the undertones of unfavorable coverage afforded her. Rice's name faded to the background by May 6 when she refused further interviews.

For Hart, the *Herald* story merely resurrected the rumors of purported promiscuity dating back to the McGovern campaign in 1972. Hart fired back with allegations of moralism, character assassination and "sleazy scandal-mongering" in the days following the *Herald* story. But while he denounced the media for his mounting problems, he was unable to blame anyone but himself. His own words may have been the most prophetic:

As I've said, I don't intend to give up, because the cause is more important than the candidate. The prize is not the Presidency, it's our country's future. We will prevail for one simple reason: because the truth will prevail (May 6, p. B8).

Though there were serious doubts beginning to surface about the *Herald's* story, Hart officially withdrew his bid for the presidency on May 8, 1987, just hours after

receiving word that the *Washington Post* had additional—and substantiated information—about a long-term relationship with yet another woman.<sup>3</sup>

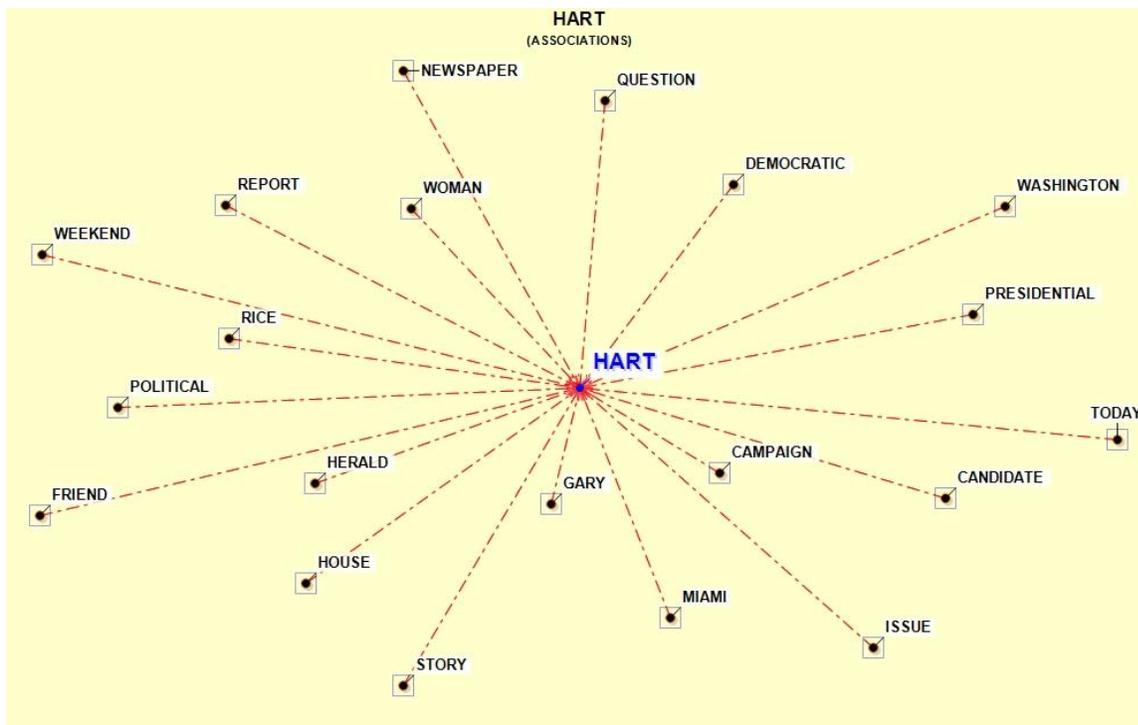


Figure 4-7. *The New York Times*.

Table 4-9. Total key term word counts for *The New York Times* coverage of Gary Hart May 4 – 18, 1987.

Term	Count	Term	Count	Term	Count	Term	Count
Hart	1,058	Rice	164	Democratic	141	People	117
campaign	300	question	158	Miami	129	Report	116
candidate	229	woman	156	house	127	Press	115
Gary	199	presidential	149	issue	123	Newspaper	106
Herald	192	political	148	story	121	Broadhurst	105

### ***Washington Post***

When the *Miami Herald's* story broke on May 4, 1987, the *Post* focused mainly on the political rather than the personal ramifications of the scandal despite the pointed questions being asked about moral rectitude and character. Staff writers immediately

<sup>3</sup> Less than 5 percent of articles appearing in the Times during the timeframe were wire service generated stories. No separate analysis was conducted.

started gauging the reactions of newspaper publishers and editors, while freelancers in Denver and other cities interviewed current and former members of Hart's staff.

The *Post* devoted a considerable amount of copy to the Gary Hart affair, with more than 64 articles and political commentary. In addition, the *Post* included 29 separate columns, profiles, interviews and editorial/op-ed pieces, the bulk of which appeared May 4-10.

The six dominant key terms emerging from the *Post's* text are "aide," "candidate," "country," "Hart," "people," and "press." But the *Post* took on an investigative nature from the very beginning, contacting editors, publishers, staff workers—both current and former—and political insiders to paint as full a picture as possible of Hart as the Democratic front-running candidate. Much of the coverage throughout the timeframe was filtered through Hart's *aides* in an effort to distance the candidate from the press.

The key term "press" figures prominently in all three publications with relation to Gary Hart. His initial backlash from the *Herald's* story evolved into an indictment on the press as a whole, with Hart claiming he was being victimized by a rumor-mongering industry that was acting in concert with his political rivals. Instead, the press debated among themselves the validity of the *Herald's* tactics and the journalistic ethics the press strove to uphold.

By May 5, Hart was facing mounting pressure from the press, culminating in a tense 45-minute news conference to the American Newspaper Publishers Association where he was asked pointed questions about his morality and his marriage. Though attendees polled gave high marks for delivery, Hart's answers and defiant attitude failed to silence his critics:

Hart, who had said in a speech Tuesday that he had done nothing "immoral" with Rice, was asked about his definition of morality, and, specifically, whether it included adultery. He said it did. Asked if he had ever committed adultery, Hart said: "I do not have to answer that question because you get into some fairly fine definitions" (May 6, A22).

The rumors and speculation about Hart had been simmering for nearly 15 years and were well known in the news industry and insider political circles. The *Post* spoke with newspaper editors around the country and found they almost overwhelmingly agreed that the story was worthy of being investigated. The real questions surfacing were about whether marital fidelity was a true indicator of character—and further, how that character was to be gauged:

This Hart story, the womanizing story, presents a terrible dilemma to editors and reporters," said James P. Gannon, editor of The Des Moines Register.

... However, it seems almost unavoidable, if distasteful," Gannon said. "The issue was on the agenda . . . he addressed the issue. Reporters did have an obligation to determine the truth or falseness of those rumors. Truth is an important matter in presidential character (May 5, p.. A6)

It's a dangerous area," said Albert Hunt, Washington bureau chief of The Wall Street Journal. "There is no doubt in my mind that one's sexual habits, particularly if one is married, say something about one's character. The problem is, I'm not sure that we in the press are qualified to analyze precisely what it does say about character (May 5, A6)

*Post* editors said the story was justified not only because the womanizing rumors had been dogging the Democratic front-runner's campaign for weeks if not years, but also because Hart himself had suggested that reporters check the allegations.

Though the *Miami Herald* could not have known at the time it went to press with the story of Donna Rice and the Washington weekend, Hart had already set the stage for a showdown on the "womanizing" issue. The *New York Times Magazine* released its interview with Hart the same day the *Herald* broke its story. In response to the *Times'*

query into rumors stemming from his 1984 campaign, Hart quipped that "If anybody wants to put a tail on me, go ahead. They'd be very bored" (May 5, p. D1).

The key term "people" stems from Hart's character and judgment as a presidential candidate being debated by publishers and editors alike after the American Newspaper Publishers Association press conference. The consensus among these news professionals was that the American people would never believe the story that was being told by the candidate, nor would they support a candidate that attempted to perpetrate such a deception.

Many Hart insiders saw this conduct as a question of character rather than morality, and of poor judgment bordering on foolhardiness, especially in light of the past rumors. The *Post* noted questions were beginning to surface about Hart's judgment and credibility; questions first raised during the 1984 campaign.

There is a catch-me-if-you-can aspect to this that bothers me," said David Garth, a Democratic media consultant not allied with any 1988 presidential campaign (May 5, p. A10).

As they watched his public self-destruction this week, many of the people who went through earlier campaigns with him, especially the one in 1984, were struck by a sense of déjà vu, but this time with a pestering-some said terrifying-final thought: Perhaps they had been wrong to suppress, or silence, their doubts for so long (May 8, p. A1).

The *Post's* coverage included interviews with current and former workers. And though some within the Hart camp condemned the *Herald* story as a personal attack citing shoddy journalism, faulty surveillance reports and lack of corroboration from any of the people involved, others saw it as a culmination of rumors that had circulated for years. Still others saw it as an opportunity for Hart to put the matter to rest once and for all:

There is a sense of real confidence that they have the facts for a sound rebuttal. There is a feeling that this may be an opportunity. Gary Hart was never going to receive the nomination without answering questions about his character, and this is a chance to present a case where they can soundly rebut an allegation (May 5, p. A10).

Hart had literally invited the press to follow him with a 'seeming disregard for the consequences involved' and now lashed back because he didn't like what they had found (May 8, p. A15).

On May 7, reporters at the American Newspapers Publishers Association grilled Hart on the Rice affair. And in an unprecedented move, asked the presidential candidate point-blank if he had ever committed adultery. Later, the *Post* relayed to Hart's campaign administrators in New Hampshire that it had substantiated information about a long-term relationship with yet another woman. The following morning Hart issued a terse statement that he was suspending his campaign indefinitely and flew home to Colorado with his wife.

The *Post* included nearly 30 columns, op-ed commentary, profiles and interviews that chimed in on subjects ranging from Hart's intelligence to his lack of common sense, from his character defects to political shortcomings. One writer included an indictment of the Democratic Party as a whole.

Why, then, did Hart's standing in the polls drop so precipitously after press reports of his dalliance with 29-year-old Donna Rice? Could it be that while millions of Americans won't condemn adultery because they are so busy trying it, they detest people who mess up the game by being stupidly indiscreet, as Hart was? (May 13, p. A23).

The wonder is not that Hart's public, party and financial support were blown away by winds of scandal but how he ever became a front-runner in the first place. The answer is found in a party, after nearly two decades of remorseless internal "reform," structurally unable to project bona-fide leaders (May 11, p. A13).

In addition, the key term listing and radial graph shows a strong correlation with the secondary terms of "Rice," and "campaign." While these words would seem to be of

prominence, the bulk of the coverage focused on Hart's personal character first and his presidential capabilities second.

The *Post* went to great lengths to paint as complete a picture as possible of *Hart* in order to fully articulate the implications of the rumors dating back to 1972. This included previous marital problems, the \$1 million-plus debt from his failed 1984 campaign as well as an ill-timed cruise to Bimini aboard the ironically named "Monkey Business."

Donna Rice emerged not so much as the femme fatale in the affair, but as a hapless bystander, not so much *caught* as *caught up in* the backlash against Hart. While her own story to the press reflected inconsistencies, she retreated to her South Florida apartment to wait out the media storm while she contemplated her possible book options—none were ever realized. Once she declined further interviews on May 6, her name faded into the background as a point of reference only.

Hart's character, and some might say arrogance, may have been apparent in his final speech on May 9. His paraphrasing of Jefferson and the justice of God may well sum up his reason for failure:

Politics in this country, take it from me, is on the verge of becoming another form of athletic competition or sporting match. We all better do something to make this system work or we're all going to be soon rephrasing Jefferson to say: I tremble for my country when I think we may in fact get the kind of leaders we deserve (May 9, p. A11).

By May 10, the *Post's* coverage returned to evaluating the remaining candidates and the Iran–Contra hearings that had previously dominated the political scene. In less than a week, Gary Hart had gone from being the Democratic front-runner to a political

pariah, forever equated to some degree, with the Donna Rice affair, in much the same way that Edward Kennedy would forever be linked to Chappaquiddick.<sup>4</sup>

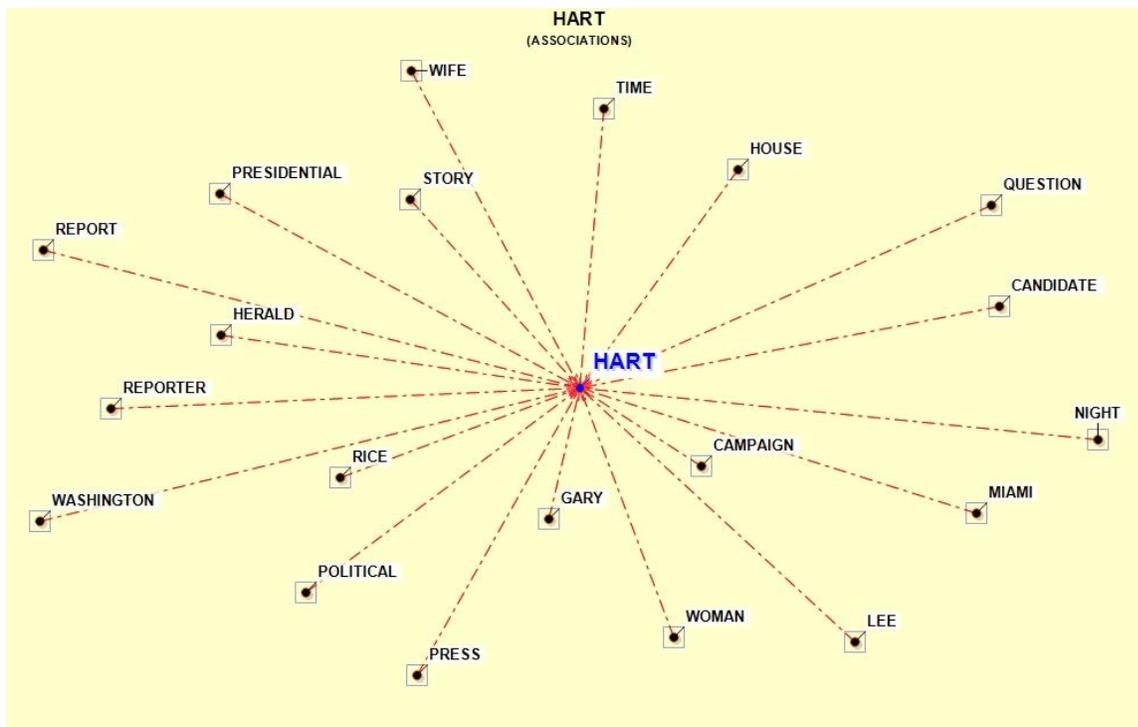


Figure 4-8. *Washington Post*

Table 4-10. Total key term word counts for *Washington Post* coverage of Gary Hart May 4 – 18, 1987.

Term	Count	Term	Count	Term	Count	Term	Count
Hart	1,149	candidate	169	Time	152	Miami	133
campaign	404	political	168	Wife	145	know	133
Rice	241	house	156	People	137	press	131
Gary	208	woman	154	Reporter	137	question	127
story	174	Herald	153	Washington	136	presidential	127

### **Chicago Tribune**

The *Chicago Tribune's* initial coverage of the Gary Hart scandal consisted of a page-3 column by noted humorist Mike Royko and a 644-word wire service story from the *New York Times* buried on page 16; hardly the front-page splash found in the *Times*

<sup>4</sup>Less than 5 percent of articles appearing in the Post during the timeframe studied were wire service generated. No separate analysis was conducted.

and the *Post*. In addition, the *Tribune's* coverage was about 50 percent that of either newspaper.

While the *Post* used a more investigative edge in their reporting, and the *Times* waded heavily into the debate of privacy for political figures versus public accountability, the *Tribune* maintained its conservative posture. It concentrated the bulk of its coverage on the pros and cons of the role news media had in the privacy-in-the-political-sphere debate.

The *Tribune's* coverage of the Gary Hart scandal was considerably less than that of either the *Times* or the *Post* with only 41 news stories, editorial and op-ed pieces. Only two short Letter to the Editor collections are present in the sample frame. An analysis of the text indicates six key terms “candidate,” “character,” “Hart,” “Herald,” “Miami,” and “Rice” correlate with the more conservative stance the *Tribune* took with its reportage. While some key terms may mirror both the *Times* and the *Post*, the *Tribune* took a different tack in its reportage.

The *Tribune* focused a good deal of coverage on the question of the media's role in the political sphere, the Hart affair in particular, but also in the political system's method of electing candidates in general.

*Tribune* reporters spoke with various members at the American Newspaper Publishers Association about Hart's news conference there—the consensus was that as a group they were decidedly underwhelmed and few objected to the *Herald's* pursuit of the story:

He must think we're pretty stupid if he thinks we're going to believe that,” one said, leaving the Waldorf Astoria Hotel ballroom where Hart spoke.

Eugene Patterson, publisher of the St. Petersburg Times, said he wasn't impressed by the speech. He described it as "the classic political answer: 'I have done nothing wrong, and I won't do it again.'"

Asked whether he doubted that the Herald had been scrupulous or fair in reporting the story, Baltimore Sun publisher Reg Murphy said, "No, and I don't believe anyone else here does either" (May 6, p. 15).

While the *Times* and the *Post* outlined the discrepancies of the weekend timeline, the *Tribune* printed a "Rashomon-style" news story featuring four versions of the Friday night in question according to Hart, Rice, fundraiser William Broadhurst and campaign manager William Dixon. The *Tribune* then compared it to the *Herald* story. The discrepancies were glaring.

Many questions were asked of Hart, Rice and the staff, advisers and observers on the periphery of the affair; questions concerning Hart; his relationships, the rumors of womanizing and private versus public information about Hart as a candidate. The *Tribune* devoted extensive copy debating Hart's character and the importance of that aspect in a presidential candidate.

Though Hart at first denied the *Herald's* allegations, he then said that his private life was nobody's business. The *Tribune* took the stance that what Hart failed to realize was that he had invited the scrutiny (long before the *New York Times Magazine* "dare") with his indifference toward the concept of honesty—a quality the American people demand from their presidents. The "I'm serious. If anybody wants to put a tail on me, go ahead. They'd be very bored" taunt was just another instance of what one *Tribune* writer calls the "perennial hypocrisy of politicians" (May 6, p. 21).

Royko, warming to Hart's rapidly tarnishing image, cut right to the heart of the debate with his usual flair for the obvious:

At this point, some readers might be saying that this column is being written as if I accept as fact that Hart had a sexual affair with Miss Rice, although both of them deny it.

Yes, I do accept that as fact, despite their denials. I think it's idiotic to expect people to believe that he was taking a yacht trip with her, burning up the long-distance lines to talk to her, having her fly to Washington while his wife was away—all this while running for president—simply because he thought she was fun to chat with (May 8, p. 3).

The key terms of “Miami” and “Herald,” can be attributed to the *Tribune's* op-ed and editorial board commentary debating the validity and ethics of the *Miami Herald's* May 3 story of Rice's overnight visit to Hart's Washington townhouse.

The *Tribune* aired the consensus that though the *Herald* had blown the stakeout and printed the story without interviewing the people involved (for a number of reasons) the implications were virtually accepted as true by both the press and the public. Moreover, the *Tribune's* editorial commentary about the issue of the press and its overstepping of any lines of privacy was minor when compared to the issues of Hart's overstepping the lines of discretion and judgment.

It was Hart's response to the press hounds nipping at his heels—the denials, the evasions and the shifting of blame—that brought the question of character to the forefront and whet the nib of every political pundit and late night talk show host in the country.

The idea that the American press is rushing headlong toward the Peeping Tom journalism of London's tabloids or the supermarket scandal sheets is the stuff of which scapegoats are made. Politicians always want to blame the messenger who brings bad news about them (May 10, Sec. 4, p. 2).

If you notice, nobody is asking Joe Biden, Paul Simon, Mike Dukakis, Jesse Jackson or any of the other candidates about philandering. They haven't made it an issue, as Hart did for himself (May 11, p. 3).

The *Tribune* posed rhetorical questions about the *Herald's* charges and assertions about Hart, the role of the press in the political process and rumor versus fact in reporting with editorial and op-ed pieces by Ellen Goodman, Raymond Coffey and William Safire which echoed the *Post's* sentiment that a “Did you commit adultery?” press corps had replaced the boys-will-be-boys press club double standard—infidelity was now officially on the record.<sup>5</sup>

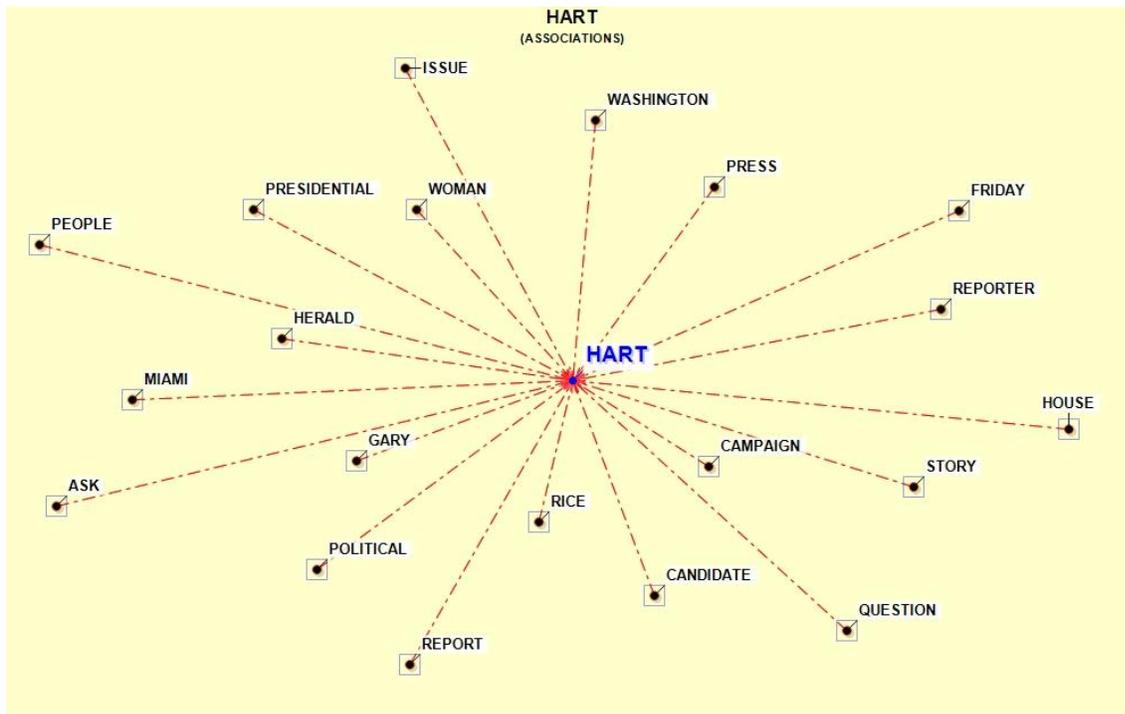


Figure 4-9. *Chicago Tribune*

Table 4-11. Total key term word counts for *Chicago Tribune* coverage of Gary Hart May 4 – 18, 1987.

Term	Count	Term	Count	Term	Count	Term	Count
Hart	526	Woman	100	know	72	question	62
candidate	138	Herald	98	house	67	ask	60
campaign	136	Story	95	Miami	67	Washington	58
Rice	113	Press	90	people	65	report	55
reporter	109	Gary	73	presidential	63	time	53

<sup>5</sup> Less than 5 percent of articles appearing in the *Tribune* during the timeframe studied were wire service generated. No separate analysis was conducted. In addition, four columns appearing in the *Tribune* were re-prints from the *Washington Post*.

## **John Edwards and Rielle Hunter; Aug. 9 – 23, 2008**

### ***The New York Times***

In sharp contrast to the coverage afforded the Edward Kennedy accident, with its assorted speculation and unanswered questions and Gary Hart's not-so-secret womanizing during the 1988 presidential race, the mainstream media remained mum on the John Edwards affair for nearly a year while supermarket tabloids waded into the rumor and speculation.

Analyzing the roughly 13,000-word body of *Times* text, the five dominant key terms of "affair," "Enquirer," "Hunter," "John," and "statement" emerge. The term "affair" is predominant, and a review of the text shows the unfavorable words *sex*, *scandal*, *lie*, *admit* and *deny* weighed heavily on the contextual aspect. This is unusual in that the *Times* has typically used a more objective and neutral tone in its reportage language, using words like *infidelity* and *adultery* when referring to *sex* and *scandal*, as evidenced by the Gary Hart coverage in 1987. Likewise, the key terms of "John (Edwards)" is heavily weighted with words such as *lie* and *narcissism* rather than *deceit* or *character*.

The *National Enquirer* published its first story in October 2006 and then another in December that featured a photo of a pregnant Rielle Hunter and allegations that she and Edwards had had an affair while she was employed by his political action committee. Only Edwards' hometown newspaper, *The Charlotte Observer*, did any follow up into the allegations of an adulterous affair and a 6-month-old "love child" prior to Edwards' public confession.

According to *The Times*' editors, the newspaper wanted to maintain a reputation of "serious purpose" rather than sensational speculation. In stark contrast to the Hart scandal, the *Times* chose not to cover Edwards' affair at the first hint of scandal, though

Edwards had announced his candidacy in late December 2006. A cursory investigation by the *Times* then turned up little credible evidence.

In response to questions about their lag time on the story, *Times* editors reported that when the *Enquirer* story broke in October 2006, the newspaper was not in a position to do a more thorough inquiry.

Times editors said that when the first *Enquirer* story appeared and they could not verify it after fairly cursory inquiries, they left it alone. "I'm not going to recycle a supermarket tabloid's anonymously sourced story," said Bill Keller, the executive editor (Aug. 10, Sunday Opinion Sec. p. 10).

By August 2008, Edwards had dropped out of the presidential race and the country was reeling from the housing market meltdown and rising unemployment. In addition, the newspaper industry, including the *Times*, was still trying to get a handle on the impact the digital transformation was having on traditional print media's bottom line.

Edwards isn't a player at the moment," said Richard Stevenson, who directs the newspaper's campaign coverage. "There are a lot of big issues facing the country. The two candidates are compelling figures, and we have finite resources (Aug. 10, Sunday Opinion Sec. p. 10).

Like much of the mainstream media, *The New York Times* did not pursue the Edwards scandal until after his appearance on the Aug. 8, 2008 broadcast of ABC's "Nightline" news magazine.

The nationally televised interview included a confession of marital infidelity with Rielle Hunter—Edwards was quick to add that he cheated only while his wife's cancer was in remission—and an admission that he had lied about the affair for months. He denied paternity of Hunter's 6-month-old child and claimed that his aide, Andrew Young, was the father. He also could not explain why a campaign contributor would pay Hunter and Young money to relocate to California.

But instead of dispelling the rumors that had been swirling in the tabloids for months, Edwards' public admission of infidelity and lies left many viewers and news professional with lingering doubts about the story as well as the man.

Though still wary of following up on a tabloid-initiated story, the conflicting statements of Edwards, Hunter and the contributor, the money being paid to Hunter and Young and the possibility that Edwards might still be invited to the Democratic National Convention were enough for the *Times* to launch their own inquiry. The information revealed a possible orchestrated cover-up of the affair:

Mr. Edwards said that he carried on the affair for a "short period" in 2006 and that it ended before he could have fathered the baby, who was born Feb. 27. But financial records show that Mr. Edwards's political action committee, One America, made payments to Ms. Hunter's production company into 2007. The committee paid Ms. Hunter's company, Midline Groove Productions, based in South Orange, N.J., a total of \$114,000 in 2006 and 2007 (Aug. 9, p. A1).

The *Times* investigation confirmed the affair had been going on longer than Edwards had admitted to, and that money was being funneled to Hunter from a wealthy donor, although they were still unable to confirm that Edwards knew about the money from either his PAC or his campaign donor:

A longtime financial backer of Mr. Edwards's campaigns, Fred Baron, told The Dallas Morning News on Friday that he had made payments to Ms. Hunter to get her "out of North Carolina" and "into a stable place." She and her baby moved into a \$3 million house in Santa Barbara, Calif. (Aug. 9, p. A14).

The *Times* news coverage, thin to begin with, trickled to editorial and op-ed pieces within four days of Edwards' interview. The DNC announced they would not be inviting Edwards to speak at the convention, and Hunter refused to take a paternity test. Edwards would not publicly admit to being the father until January 2010.

The key term “affair” and the lack of coverage of a political nature, support the assertion that character and behavioral attributes were by far more prominent in the Edwards’ coverage than his official or professional aspects.

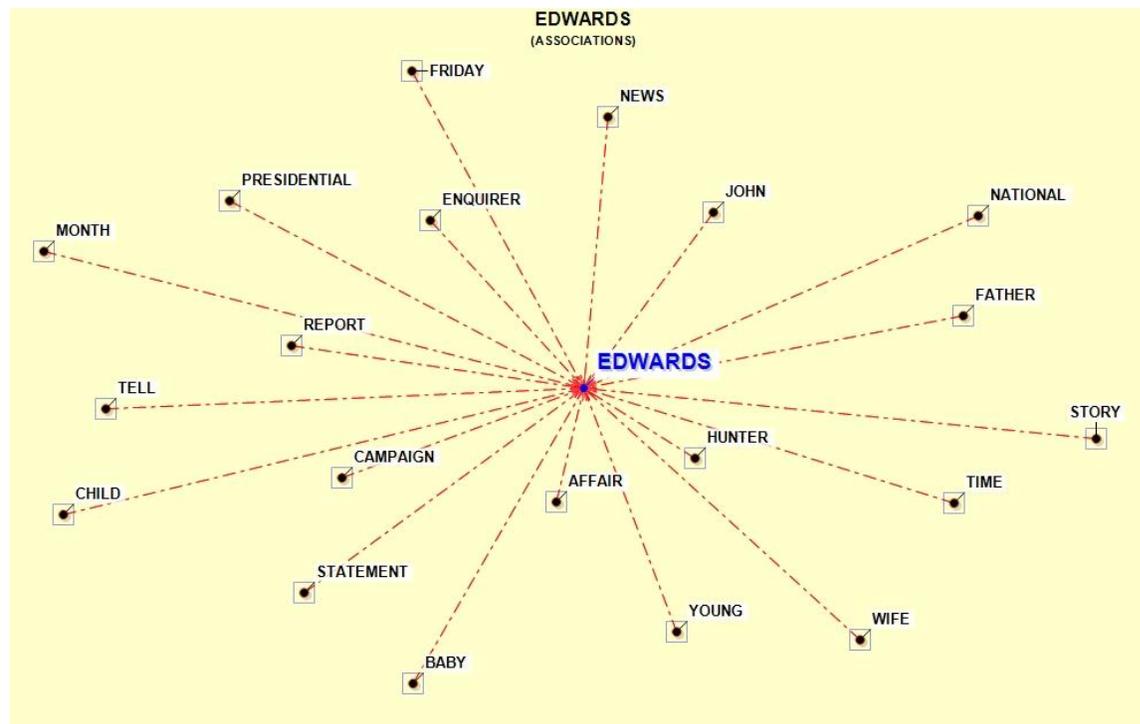


Figure 4-10. *The New York Times*

Table 4-12. Total key term word counts for *The New York Times* coverage of John Edwards Aug. 9 – 23, 2008.

Term	Count	Term	Count	Term	Count	Term	Count
Edwards	198	Enquirer	54	John	35	wife	26
Hunter	110	report	53	tell	31	child	25
time	60	campaign	42	father	29	baby	25
affair	56	news	38	National	27	lawyer	24
story	55	Young	35	New York	26	statement	24

### ***Washington Post***

Like the *Times*, the *Washington Post* devoted considerably less coverage to the John Edwards and Rielle Hunter affair than to either the Kennedy or the Hart scandals, and began reporting on the story only after Edwards appeared on the ABC News

program “Nightline” and publicly admitted to having a liaison with Hunter. The *National Enquirer* had been pursuing the rumors of Edwards’ affair with the videographer since October 2006, including a story in December 2006 that featured a pregnant Hunter. Only the tabloid and a handful of other stories appear before Edwards’ interview on “Nightline.”

The *Post’s* coverage of Edwards’ affair was a fraction of the coverage it had given to the Kennedy and Hart scandals, with only 10 articles total and less than 9,000 words of text. This could be attributed to the fact that the story had already been told, or that generally speaking, newspapers have been getting physically getting smaller. Simply stated, the reduction in coverage could be the result of a diminishing news-hole overall; that is the amount of space available for daily news after the advertising has been placed.

The six dominant key terms found in the text are “child,” “Edwards,” “Elizabeth,” “Enquirer,” “Hunter,” and “love.” Although the *Post’s* news coverage focused mainly on the political aspects of Edwards’ “Nightline” interview and sexual affair with Hunter, the *Post’s* op-ed articles focused on Edwards’ continued denial that he had fathered Hunter’s baby and the press’ reluctance to pursue the story. In light of the information that was surfacing in the financial documents and his continued visits to Hunter, there continued to be speculative commentary that he was the father. The key terms of “child,” “Edwards,” and “Hunter” were clearly articulated by this coverage.

Like the *Times*, *Post* editors said they had looked into the story in October 2006 but could not secure credible evidence. One *Post* writer said that without solid evidence

to bolster their stories, they ran the risk of having their investigations compared to those of the tabloids:

There was also a wariness about the Enquirer, which has broken several major stories -- including a 2001 report on Jesse L. Jackson fathering a child out of wedlock -- but which sometimes pays for information, as Perel said the tabloid did in the Edwards case. The Enquirer also has a lower threshold than mainstream news organizations for publishing information from second-hand source (Aug. 9, p. A1).

The remaining key terms are all supported by the Co-occurrence Word Association graphs and key term counts, which show strong correlations between “Edwards”, his wife, “Elizabeth,” “Hunter,” and the “National Enquirer.”

The *Post* cites sympathy for Elizabeth Edwards’ health as another reason for passing on the story in 2006, but her cancer recurrence was not made public until March 2007. Meanwhile, conservative commentators were accusing the mainstream press—including the *Post*—of being a liberal press that was reluctant to skewer a Democrat. It was only after Edwards’ hometown newspaper printed a copy of the fatherless birth certificate that the mainstream media acted.

Indeed, after the “Nightline” interview, the mainstream media could no longer ignore the story. The *Post*, in keeping with its reputation, focused on the political aspects of the story, namely, Edwards’ political career, both present and future.

The *Post*’s coverage of Edwards’ “Nightline” interview began with Edwards’ declaration that he was ashamed of his actions and blamed them on his success in politics, saying “I started to believe that I was special and became increasingly egocentric and narcissistic.” Not surprisingly, the public mea culpa and “Being 99 percent honest is no longer enough” statement rang hollow to many journalists. The

cover-up implications were obvious and many now saw this moral lapse possibly morphing into a legal case of campaign fraud (Aug. 12, p. A13).

The *Post* noted that Edwards admitted he had lied in the months prior to the interview. He now told the world—or at least those who weren't watching the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics—that he had indeed been having an affair, but that it had been over for a long time; too long, in fact, for him to have fathered Hunter's baby. He insisted that Andrew Young was the father and offered to take a polygraph test. Edwards also denied any knowledge of money paid to either Hunter or Young by his friend and campaign donor Fred Baron.

The *Post's* initial report the day after the interview documented how much Hunter had been paid for her filmmaking, how campaign worker Andrew Young claimed to be the child's father and how money had been funneled to both. Baron claimed Edwards was not told of the payments.

The *Post* limited copy about Young to a couple of paragraphs, while Hunter's life was broadly sketched as a former party girl turned would-be documentary filmmaker. The bulk of their coverage was on Edwards and the fallout of his political life.

Unlike the Hart scandal, the question of privacy for public officials was no longer an issue—for the press that is.

Edwards ignored questions from an Observer reporter after a speech in Washington. "He lost the luxury of being a private person when he ran for president," said Observer editor Rick Thames (Aug. 9, p. A1).

He's a two-time presidential candidate, was the party's nominee for vice president four years ago, and was carrying on with the smitten Hunter -- a fledgling filmmaker paid with campaign funds during his White House run. Do the standards change dramatically the day after you drop out? (Aug 11, p. C1).

In addition, it took the press about a nanosecond to remind the public that it was not the affair itself that was newsworthy, but the lies that for months had been coming from the Edwards camp.

But frankly, the story had already been told and the mainstream press had little more to add, let alone debate. Until a paternity test could determine otherwise, there was no way to know for certain whom the child's father was. And it would be many months before the allegations of campaign fraud would surface.

The lack of key terms relating directly to politics indicates that despite the *Post's* news coverage taking a decidedly political tack, the op-ed commentary overshadowed it, making the overall tone more personal than political.

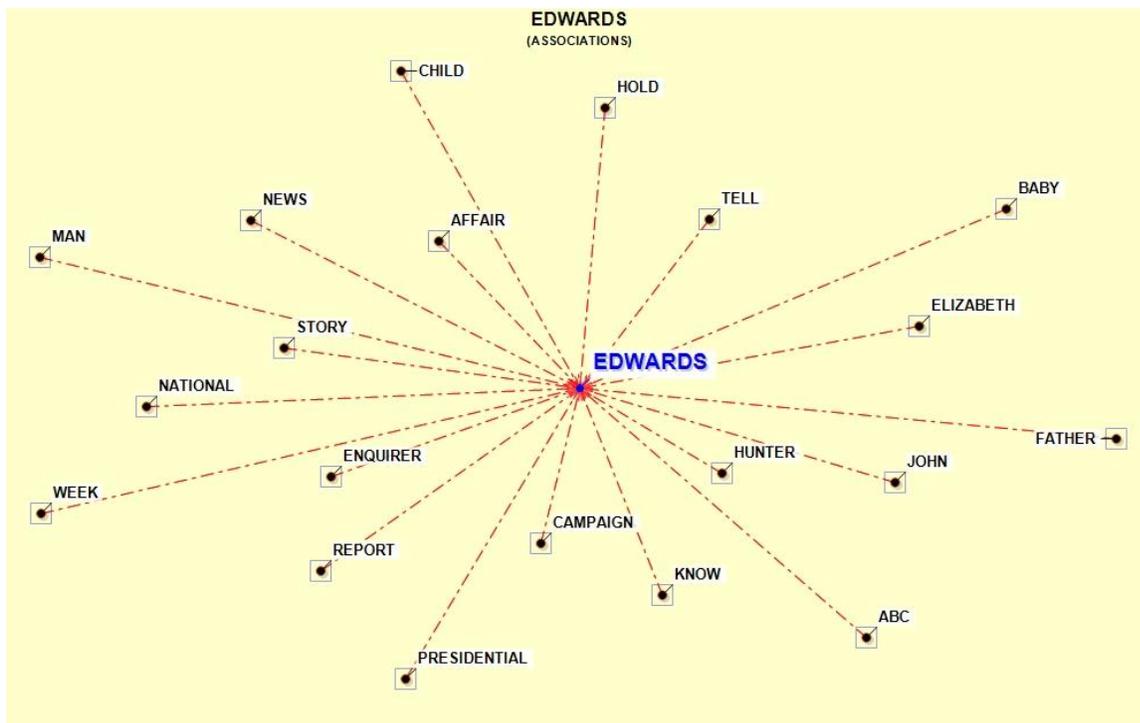


Figure 4-11. *Washington Post*.

Table 4-13. Total key term word counts for *Washington Post* coverage of John Edwards Aug. 9 – 23, 2008.

Term	Count	Term	Count	Term	Count	Term	Count
Edwards	142	know	35	report	31	John	24
Hunter	53	affair	33	story	30	Elizabeth	23
child	49	time	33	tell	29	hold	22
love	44	baby	32	National	25	week	22
campaign	38	Enquirer	32	father	25	news	21

### ***Chicago Tribune***

The *Chicago Tribune* took its usual conservative editorial stance when the John Edwards story broke, though like the *Times* and the *Post*, did not immediately report on the story. The *Tribune's* coverage first referenced Edwards' reputation as a self-made, down-home, family man whose terminally ill wife bravely supported him in his bid for the presidency.

The paper juxtaposed that image to one of Edwards betraying family and staff with his nationally televised admission of a sexual liaison with Rielle Hunter and his months of lies surrounding the affair. The overall effect labeled Edwards a liar and a louse.

In an interview with the *Tribune* last fall while he campaigned in New Hampshire, Edwards said that he next president must be "honest and sincere. We don't need the world's greatest politician as president. We need somebody we can trust."

"Thousands of friends of the senator's and his supporters have put their faith and confidence in him, and he's let them down," said Bonior, a former Michigan congressman. "They've been betrayed by his action" (Aug. 9, p. 3).

The *Tribune's* coverage of the John Edwards scandal was too small for analysis using the T-Lab software. During the timeframe, the *Tribune* produced only about 3,600 words of text. At about 35 words per inch, that is about 100 inches of copy—slightly more than three-quarters of a page—for the two-week period studied.

However, in comparing the Co-occurrence Word Associations and considering the weight the *Tribune* gave to reader's opinions, dominant key terms would have to include "character" and "public opinion" articulated by words such as *affair*, *child*, *lies*, *narcissism* and the continued *indifference* Edwards expressed toward his family, his friends and his constituents.

Democratic and Republican readers and bloggers (the *Tribune* featured a small collection of comments from their website in the Aug. 10 print edition) alike seemed to recoil from Edwards' lack of "moral compass" (Aug. 13, p. 3).

Edwards' actions are classic Image Restoration strategies. According to Benoit, denial (lies) and reduction of offensiveness (he cheated only when his wife's cancer was in remission) only served to exacerbate the situation Edwards found himself in, but his egocentric nature would not allow him to see that.

What is particularly stunning is that Edwards, having to know full well that he would be caught in his lies, represented himself not only as a fine, decent family man—a man of the people—but that he forged ahead with his campaign as damaged goods, even entertaining the prospect until now of being Barack Obama's running mate (Aug. 13, p. 1).

As a Republican, I take no solace in Edwards' sordid situation. I can only feel for his wife who has so valiantly battled cancer. When will men and women also learn how important fidelity in marriage is? A vow does mean something, a something that Mr. Edwards apparently forgot (Aug. 10, p. 1).

The *Tribune's* coverage was very limited, with only one original news story and one wire service article within the studied timeframe. The bulk of its coverage was dedicated to a series of Letters to the Editor, which overwhelmingly cast unfavorable light on the former candidate. The *Tribune's* readers expounded the newspaper's traditionally conservative editorial stance, with both pro and con commentary comparing the press treatment Edwards received to that of John McCain and Bill Clinton. They

overwhelmingly blistered the mainstream media's thumbing of its nose at the *Enquirer's* pursuit of the story; and called out Edwards for his political hypocrisy and crass treatment of his terminally ill wife.

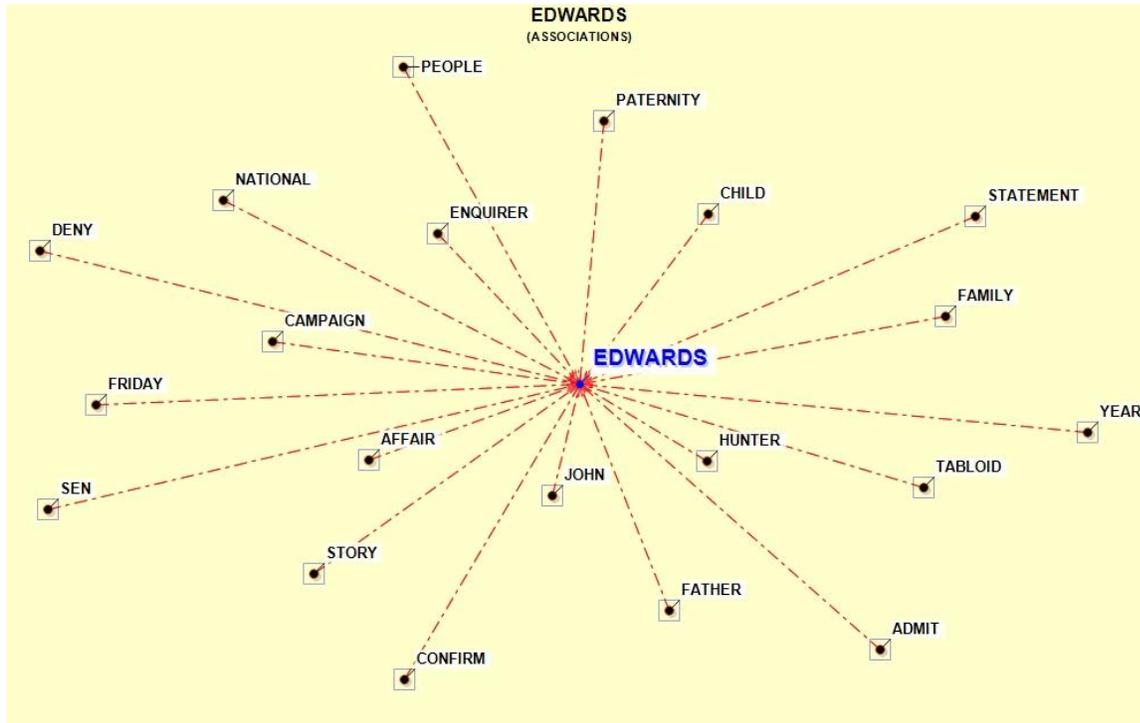


Figure 4-12. *Chicago Tribune*

Table 4-14. Total key term word counts for *Chicago Tribune* coverage of John Edwards Aug. 9 – 23, 2008.

Term	Count	Term	Count	Term	Count	Term	Count
Edwards	72	Affair	15	father	11	Elizabeth	9
Hunter	22	Campaign	14	DNA	11	year	9
John	19	Child	13	family	11	lie	9
Enquirer	16	Tabloid	13	president	11	news	9
test	16	Story	12	wife	10	tell	8

## CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In determining the editorial stance of the three newspapers under consideration, one must look not only on the scandals being studied, but the social norms and world events taking place at the same time. Competing with television in the 1960s, the Internet in the 1980s and the digital transformation in the 2000s, the print news industry could not help but somewhat change its perspective and methods. Sloan (1991) wrote, “Each generation, although it may be influenced by the view of its parents’ time, has its own attitudes and outlooks. Each holds to the views distinctive of its own age” (p. 2).

This study shows that the changes in reportage of political sexual scandal were not in the editorial position but in the language used to express that editorial position. We find that newspapers historically develop an editorial position—a perspective and approach, a flavor if you will—that can waver over time. For example, *The New York Times* moved from the conservative voice of Henry Jarvis Raymond in the mid 1800’s, to the liberal tenor of Arthur Ochs Sulzburger 100 years later.

This study also confirms Benoit’s (1995, 1997, 2001) Image Restoration Theory premise that public actions of self-defense or damage control by political figures directly impact the reactions of the public and the press.

### **What Was The Editorial Approach The News Publications Under Consideration Took In Reporting On Each Of The Three Political Sexual Scandals?**

#### ***The New York Times***

In 1969, *The New York Times* approached the Kennedy scandal from a moderate editorial stance keeping a fair distance from rumor and guesswork. *The Times* reported in a factual straightforward manner, assuming a neutral tone with regard to both the legal and the moral questions surrounding Kennedy and the Chappaquiddick

incident. Though considered one of the most influential newspapers in the country, the *Times* had remained a cloistered, family-owned operation adhering almost rigidly to Adolph Och's information model of newspaper publishing for many years (*New York Times*, Sept. 30, 2012, p. A1). Coverage for the two-week period from July 20-Aug. 3, 1969 was generally neutral to favorable with minimal speculation or backlash appearing in the copy.

But twenty years later, the *Times* had moved toward the more liberal editorial position it was to become known for. As the Hart scandal unfolded, the *Times* published extensive editorial content, both pro and con, on the role of the press in reporting on the private lives of public figures. While the *Times* editorial board questioned the tactics of the *Miami Herald's* surveillance, it agreed in principle with the *Herald* that the information the paper had obtained, and the rumors that had already been in circulation, warranted a more than cursory look into Hart's extracurricular activities during the presidential race.

By 2008, the *Times's* liberal bias was being hotly debated both in and out of its New York Eighth Avenue office. And the Edwards scandal was no exception. Though reluctant to follow a tabloid's lead on the Edwards' affair and possibly have their reporting standards equated with less stringent sourcing methods, the *Times* did mount an investigation into the money being paid to Rielle Hunter and Edwards' aide, Andrew Young, by campaign supporter, Fred Baron. Less than three years later, the *Times* would extensively cover Edwards' trial on conspiracy and campaign fraud stemming from those payments.

One can literally see the change in editorial stance when comparing the reportage of the Kennedy scandal in 1969 and the release of the Pentagon Papers just two years later. In comparing the two, a definitive liberal ideology is seen when reporting on the working of political figures. The line of demarcation was now firmly drawn between the press and politics.

The *Times* would retain this liberal stance in its reportage of political scandal, sexual or otherwise, through Gary Hart, John Edwards and a host of other political figures who found too late that immunity stemming from their political positions could no longer shielded them from public scrutiny.

### ***The Washington Post***

During the Kennedy incident, the *Washington Post* took a more liberal, yet pragmatic editorial stance, harkening back to the days when Phil Graham was at the helm, but tempered news-wise by current editor Ben Bradlee's more moderate bent.

The *Post's* coverage took on a middle-to-upper-middle-class voice, eschewing the elitist detachment of the *Times* in favor of a more intuitive and commonsense approach indicative of the investigative style the *Post* was to become known for in the coming decades. In keeping with its reputation as the leading political newspaper in the country, the *Post* reported from a legal and political position with commentary that leaned toward the assertion that Kennedy received favorable treatment from local authorities because of wealth and a public still awed by the Kennedy name.

The *Post's* liberal editorial stance would see some movement toward a moderate tone in its news coverage in the late 1980s, mostly due to the influence of Bradlee. But during the roughly 40-year time-span under consideration, the liberal editorial position developed under Phil Graham prevailed.

As already noted, the actions of the political figures themselves would come to work in concert with the reportage. Like the Chappaquiddick incident in 1969 and the release of the Pentagon Papers in 1971, the *Post* ushered in a new level of investigative journalism with the exposure of the Watergate scandal in 1972. No longer would the immoral or illegal activities of political elites be swept under the carpet and shielded from the American people.

By the time the Hart scandal broke, the *Post* had moved to a more investigative, albeit still liberal, position editorially, focusing its reportage on the political ramifications of a presidential hopeful who did not grasp the fundamentals of honesty and integrity. The *Post* supported the *Miami Herald's* publishing of the story about Hart's weekend with Donna Rice, despite lingering questions about the surveillance, taking the position that public office trumped privacy and calling into question as a matter of course the character and integrity of any person who aspired to the highest office in the land.

The *Post's* coverage of the Hart scandal could be considered a study of American politics. Political writers from across the country analyzed the factors and causes behind Hart's fall, as well as the changing face of American journalism toward political sexual scandal, which played at least a supporting role in Hart's downfall:

But if much has changed in journalism, it is in tune with the times, with changes in the wider world. Today the country is more accepting of divorce among politicians and therefore less accepting of marital infidelity. The old-boy tolerance of dalliance-men will be men-has been changed by the admission of women into the system: the gentlewoman's disagreement (May 7, p. A27).

The Hart episode will be badly misunderstood if it is taken as justification for indiscriminate assaults on the privacy and dignity of public people in general. It will also be badly misunderstood if it is taken as evidence of some profound flaw in the system whereby we choose our presidents (May 10, p. B6).

What the *Post's* editorial board did write most strongly about is that the scandal stemming from Hart's actions had brought the press into the political process in ways that had not been experienced before. Indeed, op-ed writers were warning that the gentlemen's agreement had been replaced with the gentlewoman's disagreement, and in an age when divorce did not carry the stigma it once did for politicians, the idea of "boys being boys" had gone the way of the dodo.

While the *Post* maintained a strong liberal presence during the Chappaquiddick incident, the Hart scandal proved that investigative journalism need no longer remain in the public sector. The private lives of public officials were now officially fair game.

The *Post* maintained its liberal stance editorially in the wake of the Edwards' scandal. And though Edwards had dropped from the 2008 presidential race by the time the story of his affair with Rielle Hunter broke, the *Post's* commentary emphasized the lack of honesty Edwards had displayed in the months leading up to his "Nightline" interview and examined the political ramifications of such actions.

In doing so, the issues of illegitimate children, extramarital affairs and hush money would now be openly discussed in the mainstream media.

Like the *Times*, The *Post* would extensively cover Edwards' fraud and obstruction trial in 2011.

### ***The Chicago Tribune***

The *Chicago Tribune* was by far the most outspoken of the three newspapers in 1969. Uncompromising and decidedly unfavorable in its treatment of Kennedy, the newspaper took a conservative stance reminiscent of the McCormick years, adopting a watchdog style of reportage that focused on the disjointed investigation and conflicting information being disseminated by government officials.

When the Hart scandal broke, the *Tribune* had moved toward a more centrist view of news reporting, but was still decidedly conservative in its editorial commentary, using the Hart scandal to draw voices into the debate on the right of privacy for public figures.

Much like the *Times* and the *Post*, the *Tribune's* coverage was minimal on the Edwards scandal and contained the same conservative edge to its commentary as it had throughout most of the preceding 40 years. But by 2008, it was no longer the powerhouse news organization it had been in previous years. According to the Audit Bureau of Circulation, by March of 2009, the *Tribune* had dropped from the No. 3 to the No. 8 position in paid circulation among the Top 25 U.S. newspapers.

#### **Did That Approach Change Between 1969 And 2008, With Regard To Tone Or Emphasis?**

While the changes in the editorial positions of *The New York Times*, *Washington Post* and the *Chicago Tribune* were minimal, mostly retaining either a liberal or conservative voice during the 40-year span, the reportage evolved to include language and themes that were increasingly unfavorable toward the political figures in question.

During the Kennedy scandal, the dominant themes or subjects that emerged from the text were the “accident” and the people involved, namely, “Mary Jo Kopechne” and “Edward Kennedy.” These themes were characterized by recurring words such as *car*, *report*, *statement*, and *political*. Little was said about the morality issues of single women with married men or the legalities of not filing a police report when a woman drowns. Though much was written about Kennedy’s political future, the accident and the issues surrounding his actions dominated the news copy.

During the Hart affair, the dominant themes or subjects were “character,” “Donna Rice” and “Gary Hart.” In contrast to the Chappaquiddick incident, these themes were characterized by words such as *adultery, lies, womanizing, sexual, infidelity* and *privacy*. And again, though much was written about Hart’s political prospects, the questions of character stemming from his actions dominated the news copy. Increasingly, the public is being subjected to unvarnished versions of events and language that American society considered as unrestrained, strong and somewhat lowbrow.

Finally, in the Edwards scandal, the public saw a press that was nearly unfiltered in its assessment of political figures. The dominant subject was the “character” of John Edwards and his affair with Donna Rice, illustrated by words such as *lies, narcissism, sex, scandal, affair* and *adultery*.

So to say that the editorial stance of any news publication changed with regard to political sexual scandal is to say that *the way information is disseminated* about political sexual scandal changed in the years between 1969 and 2008. The people and the catalyst—accident, affair, etc.—were still the dominant subjects of the story, but the language used by the press became increasingly unfavorable in nature.

### **Benoit’s Image Restoration Theory**

This study confirms Benoit’s (1995, 1997, 2001) Image Restoration Theory premise that the actions of people, in this case political figures, who find themselves in a position of self-defense or damage control, will employ various strategies in order to repair their reputations, and that these strategies, ranging from denial to evasion to remorse will directly affect the actions of the public and the press. Benoit’s case study of

Edward Kennedy and the Chappaquiddick affair (Benoit, 1988) clearly indicates that the actions of the individual correlate to the actions of the press and the public.

For example, Kennedy first employed evasion of responsibility by secluding himself from the public, then expressed shame and remorse in a televised appeal to his constituency. The public responded overwhelmingly with support for his retaining his Senate seat. In contrast, Gary Hart's denial of all allegations only served to bolster questions of integrity and candor. Likewise, John Edwards' use of minimization and obfuscation are seen in his claim that he only committed adultery while his wife's cancer was in remission and his parsing of words when asked about money being paid to Rielle Hunter during the "Nightline" interview.

So, whereas the sexual peccadilloes and indiscretions of political figures had always lay in the cozy nether world of the press club, the emerging press corps ensured that the covers would now be pulled back and every political official could count on their private lives being publicly scrutinized.

Print news organizations in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century found their actions being directed by a number of political figures who enmeshed themselves in scandalous situations and a public that now demanded accountability for that behavior. In the 40-plus years since, political figures have found themselves being held up for public scrutiny and queried on their personal as well as professional merit. Questions of infidelity, integrity and candor would now be as much a part of the dialogue as policy and program.

### **Conclusion**

The result of the foregoing contextual analysis addresses questions related to the editorial positions of *The New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Chicago Tribune* in

1969, 1987 and 2008, specifically with regard to political sexual scandal. And while there were some shifts in editorial perspective during the timeframe in question, it was more the style and language of reportage that changed.

However, other changes must be noted.

In the Kennedy scandal, suspicion and speculation were on the minds of many people in response to the obvious missing information, especially the 10-hour lapse in reporting the accident, as well as Kennedy's damaging silence in the days that followed. That silence fueled speculation across the country. The scandal was as much about Kennedy's leaving the scene of an accident involving a death as it was his failure to notify police about the accident.

Moving from a legal to a moral perspective, the scandal unfolded in all three newspapers from the premise that the accident was perhaps unavoidable, but leaving the body of Mary Jo Kopechne in the water for more than 10 hours was unforgivable. However, the *Tribune* was by far more outspoken on the moral issue than either the *Times* or the *Post*.

Gary Hart's downfall started long before the *Miami Herald* reporters staked out his Washington townhouse. Rumors of his "womanizing" had been whispered since 1972 and were the main reason the *Herald* pursued the tip about his weekend houseguest. Many a presidential hopeful before him had survived the scuttlebutt of an extramarital dalliance. But, the real problem Hart faced was his reaction to his affair being made public, a fact the American people found disturbing. Questions of judgment, arrogance and lack of character for so blatant an affair were bantered about in the

press. Hart only made matters worse by assuming an attitude of indifference and angry petulance that the press would not let the matter lie.

The issue was more or less a moral one, though not because of the sexual component. The majority of the public and the press accepted that most human failing. The real questions posed by the press focused on the character flaw of a presidential hopeful who could not understand the ramifications of deceiving the public.

The John Edwards scandal was anticlimactic in the sense that the *National Enquirer* had scooped the mainstream press on the affair. Edwards' public confession of marital infidelity and his admission to lying about the affair for months was sensational, but it was his denial of paternity and the contrived parsing of words when asked about timelines and cash payments to his mistress that rang hollow to journalists. The Edwards scandal moved from tawdry moral affair to felony court with questions involving hush money and cover-ups. Months after the study frame, Edwards was indicted on charges of campaign fraud and conspiracy.

The *Post's* editorial coverage consisted of just four op-ed pieces and three Letters to the Editor, most of which focused on the lack of honesty Edwards displayed. But one op-ed writer reiterated the role mainstream media gatekeepers had now that the Internet made the job of news reporting a matter of capturing eyeballs rather than deciding what makes the news:

In the end, the much-derided MSM were superfluous, their monopoly a faded memory. People have hundreds of ways to obtain information in today's instantaneous media culture, and are capable of reaching their own conclusions about what is reliable and what is not (Aug. 11, p. C1).

*The Times* clearly had no taste for the scandal from the beginning, despite Edwards being a presidential hopeful when the *Enquirer* ran its first story. When it did

finally delve into the affair, its coverage was a fourth that afforded the Chappaquiddick incident and a third of the Gary Hart scandal.

The *Post's* coverage of the John Edwards affair, like *The Times*, was a fraction of the coverage it had given to the Kennedy and Hart scandals. Only 10 articles appear during that time, with less than 9,000 words of copy in total. Indeed, four op-ed articles and one Letter to the Editor collection make up nearly 50 percent of the text.

And the *Tribune*, with less than 3,600 words of copy during the Edwards scandal, is now a shadow of the former powerhouse news organization it once was. Industry pressures and declining readerships have taken its toll on the *Tribune*, as with many other former nationally recognized newspapers.

While this decline may be as much about shrinking news-holes and competition from online news sources, it may very well be that that issues such as escalating unemployment, mounting national debt and protracted recession are more relevant in the 21st century than a lying, cheating husband.

The print news organizations studied here represent a mere fraction of today's mainstream media, where information is routinely transmitted in bits per second rather than per copy inch. But the findings of this study can be applied across the board to all facets of media.

Mainstream media, in any and all its components, still acquires an editorial stance—a style and approach that is uniquely its own—that sets it apart from others. And while history, world events and economic pressures may impact that stance over time, it did not in the 40-year span under consideration. What did change during this

timeframe were the people and events that were reported on—specifically the political sexual scandals themselves.

In a world that now allows political figures to tweet their innermost private musings along with their outermost private parts, mainstream media is now ready and willing to make that information public knowledge 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

This follows Benoit's theory of Image Restoration, which asserts that the actions of political figures who find themselves involved in a scandal direct the way that scandal is addressed by the press and perceived by the public. While this study does not look at the politician's messages or actions it does analyze the way those messages are perceived by the press—and the public—and the way the press' coverage was dictated by those messages and actions. For example, Kennedy's lack of detail about the night of the accident and seclusion immediately thereafter, prompted the press to continually question what occurred that night. Likewise, Gary Hart's continued denial only fueled the speculations that had been whispered about his womanizing, which prompted the press to ask the candidate outright if he had committed adultery, a move unprecedented in presidential campaign coverage. Finally, John Edwards parsing of words about the monies being paid to Rielle Hunter and Andrew Young prompted an investigation into the campaign finances.

The editorial position of the mainstream media stretches along a continuum of ultra-conservative right to the far liberal left, with a *mélange* of perspectives in between. And while some may decline to report on political sexual scandal altogether, others will feed the public appetite with any and all information for as long as possible. In an age

where self-restraint is seemingly in short supply, human frailties have become a major commodity.

It is here that we see the real changes in the mainstream media. It is no longer a matter of what is being reported, but how it is shaped for public consumption. And with regard to politics, being a public figure trumps any personal or privacy concerns that may have been in place in years past. As illustrated in the three case studies here, the focus now shifts from external event to internal ethos and the language from reserved to racy.

This study shows that news organizations maintain not only their position editorially on political sexual scandal, but also a proper perspective; that is, a perspective or “persona” that is in line with their current mode of operation, whether that be liberal, moderate, conservative or somewhere along that perspective continuum. And that while the focus and language used to convey that information has become the proving grounds for change, the mainstream media is not slipping back into an era of yellow journalism.

In summation, the expansion of the collective memory of these events—viewing these historical events from the perspective of the individual as well as the news organizations, is invaluable in evaluating mass media development in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. This study illustrates the evolution of mass media from a press club that maintained an almost personal approach to political figures—including their secrets—to a press corps that now asked pointed questions about character and morality as well as political policy.

From an historical perspective, world events during the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century may well have had as much impact on mass media development as did the preceding 250 years. This study demonstrates how mass media more clearly defines its role as news gatekeepers, no longer merely determining for the American public *what* the news is, but *how* that news would be disseminated. And in the case of political figures, the press has forwarded the idea that political candidates should be considered as much for their character and moral fiber as for their agenda and policy.

Not only is the content of the news less filtered and more graphic in nature in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but the language being used to contextualize these events is changing—some might even say “devolving.” This study will expand rather than add to the collective memory of the scandals studied and to the way researchers view political sexual scandal in the future. This study behooves future researchers to consider another dimension to dissemination; that is how the information was presented—the language, the approach, and the social context of the information—rather than just the information itself

### **Limitations**

This contextual analysis specifically excluded various associate aspects of the newspapers and political figures being studied. Those limitations included, but are not limited to, the personal toll of terminally ill spouses, illegitimate children, the character of deceased persons or the financial ramifications of political sexual scandal. Though these associate aspects present a unique perspective for future research, they were regarded as extraneous to the research questions of print media’s editorial stance on political sexual scandal.

While the researcher considered adding additional news organizations to the study including smaller regional newspapers (*New York Post*) or wire service (*Associated Press*) and newspapers outside the Northeast (*Miami Herald* and *St. Petersburg Times*), it was felt that no additional or illuminating information would be gained.

In addition, the researcher considered adding more case studies to the original population (Wilbur Mills and Fanne Foxe (1974), Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky (1998) and Anthony Weiner (2011)) but again felt that no new information would be gleaned from the analysis. In fact, in the case of Bill Clinton, additional associate aspects concerning a sitting president may well have clouded the original intent of the study.

Lastly, the researcher considered adding additional time to the study but felt that the press of the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the best indicator for examining the editorial stances of print news in the U.S. today.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Future researchers might want to look at the way the Internet has affected political sexual scandal reportage in an era where intimate information is more easily accessible than an all-night stakeout.

In addition, though this study disregarded any financial or legal aspects of the operation of the newspapers in question, including electronic publishing, with regard to reportage stemming from political sexual scandal, future researchers may want to study the legal ramifications of libel and reportage of political sexual scandal. Specifically, what are the monetary and or social liabilities for publishing political sexual scandal? And is there a definitive line between public and private?

A study of resources for reporting (i.e.: crowd sourcing, citizen journalism, etc.) whether shrinking or expanding in the wake of the digital transformation is warranted in light of the financial considerations news organizations are facing.

In light of the rapid advancement of technology since 2008, a future study of how sexual scandal is being disseminated digitally is warranted.

Finally, a look at the role of women in the newsroom and how they may have impacted the evolution of political sexual scandal reportage may give insight into the notion that a male-dominated press club had been replaced by a press corps that now included women reporters.

APPENDIX A  
KEY WORD LISTING FOR CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Acceptance, acknowledgement, admission, adulterer, adulterous, affair, amends, apology, assignation, atonement, blameless, calumny, confess(ion), confidence, conscientious, consideration, constituents, corrupt, decent, defend, defense, degenerate, dignity, dirty laundry, discredit, disgrace, dishonor, disreputable, divorce, dutiful, embarrassment, esteem, excuse, exemplary, explanation, extramarital affair, faith, family, fealty, filthy, forgiveness, foul, girlfriend, good, gossip, guilt, high standing, honor, honorable, humiliation, illicit, immoral, indiscretion, innocent, innuendo, integrity, justification, lapse in judgment, liaison, lie, love affair, lover, lying, mea culpa, mistake, mistress, modest, moralistic, moral turpitude, mud, obfuscation, peccadilloes, perversion, popularity, praise, predilections, principled, proper, public, redress, regret, remorse, reputable, respect, righteous, romance, rumor, scrupulous, self-seeking, selfish, sexual encounter, shabby, shame, sin, slander, sordid, sorrow, steamy, torrid, trust, truth, upstanding, vindication, wretched, wrong(s) adulterer, wrongdoing

## APPENDIX B INQUIRY AUDIT QUESTIONS

- How credible are the findings?
- How has knowledge or understanding been extended by the research?
- How well does the evaluation address its original aims and purpose?
- How well is the scope for drawing wider inferences explained?
- How clear is the basis of evaluative appraisal?
- How defensible is the research design?
- How well defended are the same design/target selection of cases/documents?
- How well is the eventual sample composition and coverage described?
- How well was the data collection carried out?
- How well has the approach to, and formulation of, analysis been conveyed?
- How well are the contexts of data sources retained and portrayed?
- How well has diversity of perspective and content been explored?
- How well has detail, depth and complexity (i.e., richness) of the data been conveyed?
- How clear are the links between data, interpretation and conclusions—i.e., how well can the route to any conclusions be seen?
- How clear and coherent is the reporting?
- How clear are the assumptions/theoretical perspectives/values that have shaped the form and output of the evaluation?
- What evidence is there of attention to ethical issues?
- How adequately has the research process be documented?

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