

Peepshow: Media and Politics in an Age of Scandal



The line dividing public life and private behavior in American politics is more blurred than ever. When it comes to questions about sex, substance abuse and family life, anything goes on the political desk in many newsrooms, including uncorroborated hearsay disguised as news. But some stories still never make it into print or on the air. What are the rules for politicians and journalists in the aftermath of Washington's biggest sex scandal? Peepshow looks behind the scenes at news coverage of political scandals, analyzing what gets reported, what doesn't, and why. The authors talk with top news editors to get a fix on what will make the evening news and what we're likely to read about in the next campaign season. The costs of today's politics-by-scandal are mounting, with disaffected voters, discouraged candidates, and a news corps distracted from policy issues and substantive debate. But the forces driving Oath journalism have as much to do with voters and candidates as they do with what the press is organized to report. Peepshow offers an alternative view of the prurient side of election coverage, helping newsroom decision-makers and campaign managers see through the inevitable scandals of election year 2000 and gain insight into presenting a politics of public trust. CASE STUDIES include: _ South Carolina Governor David Beasley's denial of an unsubstantiated extramarital affair; _ Georgia gubernatorial candidate Mike Bowers admitted affair with his secretary; _ Reporting on rumors sparked by Texas Governor George W. Bush's admission that he was once Oyoung and irresponsible;O _ Congressional affairs involving Representatives Barr, Burton, Chenoweth, Hyde and Livingston; _ The divorces of Bob Dole and John McCain; _ The outing of Arizona Rep. Jim Kolbe's and the sexuality of other members of Congress and candidates; _ Mississippi

Governor Kirk Fordice's off-again, on-again divorce; _ Coverage of Colorado Governor Roy Romer's affectionate relationship with a top aide and adviser. _ Speaker Newt Gingrich's relationship with a Hill committee aide; _ Coverage of once and possible first ladies and the children of political figures, including Chelsea Clinton and Sarah Gore; _ Reporting on unfounded rumors about Representative Bill Paxon's retirement.

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