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# Bill and Monica: Memory, Emotion and Normativity

## in Clinton's Grand Jury Testimony

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## **Bill and Monica: Memory, emotion and normativity in Clinton's Grand Jury testimony**

### **ABSTRACT**

We examine links between factual recall, emotion and constructions of normativity in narrative accounts, using as an empirical case President Clinton's descriptions of his relationship with Monica Lewinsky. We analyse those accounts in the sequences of talk in which they occurred, under Grand Jury cross-examination. Clinton's accounts of Lewinsky were part of how he attended to issues alive in court concerning himself, including his possible exploitation and abuse of power in an asymmetrical relationship; his motives, sincerity, credibility and intentions; and, indirectly, his fitness for office as President. Analysis focuses on how Clinton's portrayal of Lewinsky accomplished a *reflexive* portrayal of himself, not as mendacious and exploitative, but as caring, responsible, sincere, rational and consistent, while reducing the scope and implications of their admitted sexual relationship. This study is linked to a broader discursive psychology of factual description, memory, mental and emotional states, and their relevance to the larger business of insitutional settings.

## INTRODUCTION: Psychology and Accountability in Legal Settings

This is a study of personal narratives and descriptions in discourse. We focus on how person and event descriptions categorize and imply mental states and psychological characteristics of various kinds, both of the actors in events, and of the current speakers. That is to say, it is a study in discursive psychology (DP). In DP, psychological states and characteristics feature as talk's categories and concerns rather than its causes – that is, as topics for analysis in the discourse under examination, rather than as theories or explanations offered by the analyst for why people say the things they do. This general approach is common to a variety of studies that use the label DP (e.g., Billig, 1997; Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Potter, 1992a; Harré & Gillett, 1994), and to related (and sometimes contrasting) studies rooted in ordinary language philosophy and ethnomethodology (e.g., Coulter, 1986; Button et al., 1995). What we are examining is the common sense appeals to, and ways of implicating, psychological states, studied as part of the social actions performed in talk.

Anthropological studies (e.g., Lutz, 1988; Rosaldo, 1980; White, 1990) have shown that emotion discourse is important in how social accountability is produced. More specifically relevant to this study, Buttny (1993) and Edwards (1997, 1999) have looked at emotion discourse in settings such as relationship counselling and therapy. Buttny shows how emotion concepts such as *angry* or *upset* are used in narrative accounts to imply that the circumstances in which those emotions occur are problematic or out of the ordinary. Edwards shows how emotional states are invoked in everyday discourse, in opposition to rational thought but also in making narrative sense of sequences of understandable actions, and in providing ways of characterizing actors' general dispositions (character) and accountability.

Another context for the present analysis is a range of conversation analytic and ethnomethodological studies of courtroom testimony and legal cross-examination. The most

relevant of these focus on how factual accounts are constructed and defended, and blame and mitigation provided for or undermined, particularly under cross-examination (e.g., Drew, 1992; Lynch & Bogen, 1996; Travers & Manzo, 1997; Pollner, 1987; Pomerantz, 1987; Watson, 1983). These studies, while mainly oriented to sociological themes of institutional order and interaction, provide a rich resource for exploring how psychological themes such as perceptions, memories and causal explanations of persons and events are closely tied to the situated actions that talk performs when event descriptions are produced and countered in everyday settings (cf. Edwards & Potter, 1993).

This study develops previous work in discursive psychology by (1) linking previously separate analytical themes such as scripts, emotions and blame allocation; and (2) developing the neglected theme of *speakers' reflexivity* beyond earlier treatments of it in studies of causal accountability (Edwards and Potter, 1992a). We examine how speakers make limited claims to knowledge of reported events, and the rhetorical uses of such claims; attribution of psychological characteristics and emotional states; and the use of psychological descriptions and implications in apportioning responsibility and blame. A further development stems from the choice of materials for analysis, which is President Clinton's cross-examination testimony to the Grand Jury concerning his relationship with White House intern Monica Lewinsky. We investigate the various discourse themes and linkages in the context of a broader issue to which those materials pertain, but which is not explicitly addressed by the participants – the President's fitness for office. This permits some initial discussion of the relevance of wider contexts of action and setting, for analysing specific stretches of talk.

We show how Clinton's descriptions of Lewinsky attend to a range of concerns that are alive in the discourse context for which they were produced, including issues of blame, exploitation, fact, stake, motive and perjury. The article's main title "Bill and Monica", in its informal use of first names, problematically neutralizes the issue of asymmetry and

exploitation. We have to call them something, and it is an unavoidable feature of word choices, indeed a foundational theme of the kind of analysis offered here, that they imply evaluations and judgements, whether by aligning with asymmetries (e.g., Clinton and Monica) or by neutralizing them (e.g., Monica and Bill). We shall refer to them henceforth by surnames, as Clinton and Lewinsky. However, the analysis offered here neither endorses nor opposes any particular version of their relationship but, rather, examines Clinton's descriptions within a specific discourse setting, for the kinds of interactional and rhetorical work that those descriptions perform. That 'work' is performed locally by the details of talk, but attends to general concerns of the interaction as a whole, which are those that concerned the Grand Jury inquisitors, and of course Clinton himself. For example, Clinton's testimony was produced in relation to the Paula Jones case, in train both prior to and subsequent to the Lewinsky business, involving similar issues of trust, sexual exploitation and possible perjury, and it was during testimony for that trial that news broke of the Clinton-Lewinsky relationship.

The issue of power and exploitation has been picked up by many interpretative commentators including the following: "quite apart from the fact that she [Lewinsky] ended up on her knees, she also bought into all the common place illusions of romantic love which rendered her emotionally vulnerable and ultimately powerless within the relationship" (Jackson, 1999: 251). Interestingly, Jackson's notion that Lewinsky was "emotionally vulnerable", linked directly to being "powerless", is not merely denied and countered in Clinton's testimony, but figures as a descriptive resource by which he softens his own accountability for what happened between them. One of the pragmatic virtues of emotion concepts, in everyday talk, is their surprising flexibility in managing causation and blame for actions (Edwards, 1997, 1999).

Key issues cutting across Clinton's cross-examination, apart from the possibly exploitative nature of his relationship with Lewinsky, also included perjury and witness tampering. That is to say, was his current testimony consistent with previous denials of a sexual relationship with Lewinsky? Did he attempt to influence her testimony, and ask her to perjure herself? It was during Clinton's engagement with these Grand Jury themes that, in the data examined here, he produced descriptions of Lewinsky's actions, intentions and motives over the course of their relationship. The important thing about those descriptions, for this analysis, is how they featured as items in discourse: not as free-floating beliefs or opinions that Clinton may or may not have held about Lewinsky, but rather, as descriptions performing discursive work of various kinds in the contexts of their production.

## **METHOD**

The materials used in this study were the commercially released video recordings (ISBN 0-7694-0618-1) of the Grand Jury testimony of US President William Jefferson Clinton and the lawyers from the Office of Independent Counsel prosecutors which took place on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1998. The transcripts are based on those provided by the Federal Document Clearing House and made available on the internet,<sup>1</sup> augmented here with reference to the videotapes, using conventions established for conversation analysis by Gail Jefferson (see Atkinson & Heritage, 1984), which are summarized in Appendix 1.

The transcript was read repeatedly in conjunction with the video data, and sections were identified and coded as pertaining to one or more of three emerging topical themes in Clinton's talk: (1) his claims to both certain and limited knowledge, based on what he could definitely remember; (2) his normalizing of potentially problematic narrative scenarios and conduct; (3) his portrayals of Lewinsky's emotional dispositions and motives. The following

analysis explores how Clinton handled these themes in ways that managed various interactional matters at issue in providing his testimony.

## ANALYSIS

The three themes provide a way of organizing the analysis, but it is difficult to keep them strictly separate. The reason for that is that the speakers treat them alongside each other and in relation to each other, so that all three are somewhat alive in most extracts that we examine.

### Theme 1: The use of limited claims to knowledge and memory

Prior to extract (1), Q (the Grand Jury questioner at this point) has noted that the witness list for the upcoming Jones trial, with Lewinsky's name on it, was published the day before an emotionally eventful visit by Lewinsky to the White House. General themes broached in the cross-examination include whether Lewinsky's testimony might be a danger to Clinton, and whether he attempted to influence that testimony, or Lewinsky's willingness to provide it.

Extract (1) Clinton testimony, p. 31.<sup>2</sup>

- 1 Q: Now on the morning of the sixth (0.5) Monica  
2 Lewinsky uh came to the Northwest gate (0.8)  
3 and found out that (.) uhh you were being  
4 visited by: (.) uh Eleanor Mondale at the time  
5 (0.5) and had an extremely angry uh reaction.=  
6 You know that sir now don't you.  
7 (5.0)  
8 C: I hav- (.) I hav- I know that Monica Lewinsky  
9 (0.6) came to the gate (.) on (.) the sixth,  
10 (0.5) and uh (.) apparently directly (.) called  
11 in and wanted to see me (.) and couldn't, (.)  
12 and was angry about it.

13 (0.9)  
 14 C: I know that.  
 15 (1.0)  
 16 Q: A:nd she expressed that anger to: (.) uh Betty  
 17 Currie over the teleph<sup>o</sup>ne isn't that correct sir.  
 18 C: That- Betty told me that.  
 19 Q: A:nd she then later expressed her anger to you  
 20 (.) in one of her telephone conversations with  
 21 Betty Currie is that correct?  
 22 (3.5)  
 23 C: You mean did I talk to her on the pho:ne?=  
 24 Q: =Monica Lewinsky that da:y, before she came in  
 25 to visit in the White House.  
 26 (12.0)  
 27 C: Mister Wisenberg ((C raises an index finger at  
 28 Q)) I remember that she came in to visit that  
 29 day, (0.5) I remember that she was very upset.  
 30 (2.5)  
 31 C: I don't recall whether I talked to her on the  
 32 phone before she came in to visit, (.) but I  
 33 may well have.= I'm no- not denying that I did.  
 34 I just don't recall that.

The narrative 'orientation' item (Labov, 1972) "on the morning of the sixth" (line 1) provides the relevance of events and actions that day, that they are to be told and heard in the narrative-causal context, established by Q, of the recently published list of witnesses called to testify in the Jones trial. In that made-relevant context, what were Clinton and Lewinsky so concerned about, that they got emotionally "angry" and "upset" with each other? The narrative details provided in Q's initial turn (northwest gate, Eleanor Mondale's visit) are interesting, not because of any intrinsic significance they may have, but rather for the way they signal a concern for the precise factual accuracy and specificity of the events that Clinton is being called upon to recount (cf. Edwards & Potter, 1992b). Q's prompt in line 6 formulates what Clinton *should* know, or be unable to deny (note the emphasis on 'know').

Clinton's response treats the events in question as somewhat problematical for reliable, accurate recall. The long pause before answering (line 7), the twice cut-off and then revised opening of his turn, focusing on what he can confirm that he definitely *knows* (again with emphatic "know", line 8, and the repetition in line 14) orients nicely to Q's expressed concern for factual accuracy. Clinton's disclaimer "apparently" (line 10) further defines his knowledge as limited and somewhat indirect, while at the same time reflexively displaying him as a reliable and truthful witness, careful to assert only what he knows to be correct, and on what basis. This and other features of Clinton's cross-examination are comparable to the testimonies of Ronald Reagan and Oliver North in the Iran-Contra hearings, as examined by Lynch and Bogen (1996). Memory limitations feature as a rhetorical resource, in avoiding accountability for forgotten actions, in reflexively displaying concern for strict accuracy, and in providing for 'plausible deniability' should disconfirming details subsequently emerge (Bogen & Lynch, 1989).

Clinton's cut-off, and the content of his repair in line 18 ("That- Betty told me that"), further display this concern for accuracy in recall, and for the sometimes indirect and therefore not fully accountable basis of what he knows. Clinton continues in this vein in lines 18-34, establishing as subject to limitations of memory and indirect knowledge whatever he is able precisely to say or confirm of events that day, as put to him by Q. The main bone of contention is the phone call prior to Lewinsky's visit: whether it took place, who spoke to whom, what was said, what was upsetting about it. The delicacy of this ostensibly mundane and inconsequential matter stems from the call's timing with regard to Lewinsky's being called to testify, along with the possibility that Clinton tried to influence that testimony. Q's question in lines 19-21 is unclear with regard to who was supposedly saying what to whom, and Clinton orients to that difficulty in lines 22 (the pause) and 23, in which he seeks clarification. The thing at issue here is what Lewinsky could have been so upset about, even

before seeing Clinton. The phone call may be the key: was she upset because of what he said to her, relevantly to the events that day, and her impending testimony?

Clinton's handling of this matter of the phone call, in terms of what he can reliably remember, links to another major concern in our analysis, his construction and rhetorical uses of Lewinsky's emotionality. To the extent that Lewinsky's heightened emotional state may have been prior to her talking to Clinton, then Clinton would not be directly, and at that time, accountable for it. It would say something about her, not him. It would break the implied linkages being assembled by Q, between Lewinsky's excessive anger (line 5), the timing of it (line 1) given her inclusion on the just-published witness list, and Clinton's possible efforts to interfere with her testimony (lines 23-25). Without such links, Lewinsky's heightened emotional state would remain contextually unaccounted for, and potentially available for inferences about her as an emotional kind of person, rather than as reacting to manoeuvres by Clinton. Those further inferential possibilities take us beyond the content of extract (1), but we pursue them through other data extracts, including extract (2) below, which is taken from earlier in Clinton's testimony.

Extract (2) Clinton testimony, p. 13.

1 Q: You mentioned that uh you discussed (0.7) her  
2 subpoena in the Paula Jones case. (1.0) Tell us  
3 (.) specifically what did you disc[uss]  
4 C: [No ] sir I I-  
5 that's not what I said.= I said (0.4) my  
6 recollection is, (2.0) I knew by then of course  
7 that she had gotten a subpoena, and I knew that  
8 she was uh (.) therefore was slated to testify.  
9 (1.5) And she: mentioned to me:, (1.3) and I  
10 be<sup>↑</sup>lieve it was at this (.) meeting she mentioned  
11 I- (.) I I remember a conversation about the  
12 possibility of her testifying. I believe it must  
13 have occurred (.) on the twenty eighth. (3.0) um  
14 (1.5) She mentioned to me: that she did not want  
15 to testify. (3.0) And so I- so that's how it came  
16 up. Not in the context of "I heard you have a

17 subpoena, (0.8) let's talk about it."= She: (0.3)  
 18 raised the issue with me:, (0.3) in the context  
 19 of (0.8) uhh (0.5) her (.) desire to avoid  
 20 ↑testifying.  
 21 (1.0)  
 22 Which (0.6) I certainly underst<sup>↑</sup>oo:d (...)

Again framing his remarks within the limits of his “recollection” (line 6, and in lines 10-13), Clinton rejects Q’s “you discussed...” (line 1) in favour of “she: mentioned to me:” (line 9, also lines 14, 17-18), a version that places onus and motive on Lewinsky for raising the topic of the subpoena and her forthcoming testimony. This revised formulation, of who raised the topic, is a crucial feature of Clinton’s rejection of any implication that the meeting was occasioned by a motive on his part to influence what Lewinsky’s testimony might be. He goes on to deny that explicitly (lines 16-17). Indeed, any motivation to avoid giving testimony, or to reduce the scope of that testimony, was Lewinsky’s. She had a “desire to avoid testifying” which Clinton, rather than prompting or encouraging, “certainly understood” (lines 19-21). It emerges from Clinton’s testimony that, within the limits of what he can recall, the major, driving motivation and responsibility for events surrounding that crucial meeting with Lewinsky were basically Lewinsky’s.

The everyday categories ‘remember’, ‘recall’, ‘forget’, and so on, are not merely references to inner, psychological processes, but coins of verbal exchange that have a public, discursive use in managing accountability (Coulter, 1990; Lynch & Bogen, 1996). Clearly we are not looking simply at recall on Clinton’s part, in the sense of pure memory at work<sup>3</sup>, but at testimony produced under cross-examination – at memory as a participants’ discourse category, as a social psychological phenomenon (Middleton & Edwards, 1990). Potentially threatening implications are worked up by Q and handled, re-worked, or warded off in Clinton’s responses. This echoes findings from a variety of close studies of courtroom

dialogue, including Bogen and Lynch (1996), and also Drew's (1990, 1992; cf. Atkinson & Drew, 1979) demonstration of how questions and responses in court re-work descriptive content and implications for culpability. As Drew shows, it is in the details of lexical choice, and how this orients to and re-works the content of prior turns at talk, that the important courtroom business of what happened and who is to blame gets worked out.

## **Theme 2: Normalizing actions and events**

Accounting for actions involves locating them with regard to a normative backdrop, itself discursively definable, in terms of which specific actions (also as defined) can be identified as typical, usual, conventional, or else abnormal and requiring a special account. Connected to normative legal issues such as sexual impropriety, perjury and witness tampering, one of the major themes of public, press, and Grand Jury interest in Clinton, was the suggestion of an inappropriately asymmetrical, exploitative relationship between the President and a junior intern in his employment. Concern with these themes was pervasive; extracts (1) and (2) have already included accounts by Clinton that build Lewinsky's responsibility for troublesome events, along with his own grasp of what was true, honest and proper.

In Extract (3) Q's question is directed at Clinton's responsibility for requesting the same meeting discussed in extracts (1) and (2), immediately following the publication of the witness list for the Jones trial.

Extract (3) Clinton testimony, p. 12.

- 1 Q: And you actually: req<sup>u</sup>ested<sup>d</sup> ↓this meeting is  
2 that not correct?  
3 (4.0)  
4 C: I don't remember that Mr Bittman but it's quite  
5 possible (1.0) that I invited her to come by: uh-  
6 (.) before she left town, (1.0) but u- usually

7           when we met she ↓requested the meetings.= And (.)  
9           my recollection is that in nineteen ninety seven,  
10          (0.6) she asked to meet with me several times  
11          when I could not meet with her and did not do so,  
12          (1.0) but it's quite possible that I s- that (.)  
13          because she had given me a Christmas gift, a-  
14          (1.0) and because she was leaving that I invited  
15          her to come by the White House, a:nd uh (0.4) get  
16          a couple of gifts, (.) and- uh before she left  
17          town. (.) I don't remember who requested the  
18          meeting though I'm sorry I don't.

The contrastive emphases in line 1, on “you” and “requested”, signal Q’s points of concern here, that the fateful meeting was instigated by Clinton rather than Lewinsky (you rather than her), and “requested” rather than, say, a meeting that happened to take place at that time. Clinton’s response is framed once again in terms of the limits of his memory (cf. Extracts 1 and 2, and Bogen & Lynch, 1989, on the ‘plausible deniability’ functions of not remembering), and he accedes to the possibility that he requested the meeting. But he works to routinize it. This is a robust rhetorical pattern, where the notion that one is specially accountable for an action or situation, such that a motive or account is required, is resisted by defining that action as commonplace, normal, or ‘scripted’ (Edwards, 1994, 1995, 1997; cf. Sacks, 1992). In this case, Clinton defines the meeting as part of a recognizable, normatively understandable routine of gift exchanges and partings.

Again, note various significant details in Clinton’s talk. The invitation, if indeed he issued it, would have been to “come by before she left town” (lines 5-6). The expression “come by” suggests something casual and brief, while “before she left town” (repeated in lines 16-17) provides the occasion for it (in contrast, say, to the recent publication of the witness list). Indeed, it was usually Lewinsky who requested their meetings rather than him (lines 6-7). Note the way “usually” is cut off and then corrected with emphasis, “u- usually” (line 6), and the contextual information provided by Clinton, that Lewinsky was trying to get

to see him more often than he was available (lines 10-11). The picture, then, is of a series of meetings generally instigated by Lewinsky, with Clinton a less enthusiastic or available participant, but with the possibility that Clinton may indeed, exceptionally, have requested this particular meeting in order to perform two friendly social rituals that were due – a reciprocal Christmas gift exchange (line 13) and a parting (line 14). These are the kinds of normative reasons for a meeting that anybody might be expected to recognize. Even the expression “get a couple of gifts” (lines 15-16) plays down any special significance his gifts to her may have had, reinforcing their routine, seasonal, reciprocating status.

Although Clinton’s move to normalize or routinize the meeting provides a counter to any other motive he may have had (e.g., witness-tampering), such a move need not succeed in closing the issue. In Extract (4), Q pursues Clinton’s theme of gift exchange, questioning its routine nature on this occasion, and therefore its motives.

Extract (4) Clinton testimony, p. 13.

- 1 Q: You have given Ms Lewinsky gifts on other  
2 occasions. Is that right mister President?=  
3 C: =Yes I have.  
4 (0.5)  
5 Q: This thou:h was uh (.) you gave her the ↑most  
6 gifts that you had ever given her in a (.) single  
7 (.) uh ↑day. Is that right?  
8 (4.0)  
9 C: Well that’s probably ↑true: = >it was sort of like<  
10 a going away present, and a Christmas present as  
11 well, and (1.0) she had given me a particularly  
12 nice (0.8) book for Chistmas (0.7) uhh an antique  
13 book on (.) presidents, (.) uh she knew that I  
14 collected old books, and it was a very nice thing,  
15 (0.5) a:nd um (1.0) I just thought uh I ought to  
16 get up a few things and give them to her uh (0.5)  
17 before she ↑left.

Q suggests that the gift-giving event in question was not merely the routine sort, even for Clinton, but something unusual and excessive, in fact emphatically and extremely so – “the ↑most gifts that you had ever given her in a (.) single (.) uh ↑day” (lines 5-7). As Pomerantz (1986) shows, ‘extreme case formulations’ are used in rhetorical environments of this kind, in making contested events accountable. Recall Clinton’s “get a couple of gifts”, which we remarked on in extract (3), which contrasts both in agency (who does the giving or getting), and in how the importance of the event is built up or played down. Q’s implication is that this particular gift giving may have had a special motivation over and above the socially routine. After a long, 4-second delay<sup>4</sup> Clinton accounts for the apparent excess; it was two occasions rolled into one, both Christmas and a going-away present, and also a reciprocation of a “particularly nice” present given him by Lewinsky (lines 10-12). So again, contrasting motives are made relevant by Q and Clinton, using the practical logic of how exceptional actions require special motive accounts, whereas routine ones do not.

Appeals to the normative, routine nature of events or action sequences is part of how actors’ mental states and character traits are evidentially grounded (see Edwards, 1995, 1997, on ‘script formulations’ and ‘dispositions’). This has a reflexive element, in that characterizations of a person in relationship to the speaker are available for, and may be designed for, their implications about the speaker. In extract (5) we see how Clinton’s portrayal of himself, as a normatively understandable actor, motivated by care and consideration for the vulnerable Lewinsky, runs parallel to how he constructs her mental and behavioural dispositions. Again, Clinton’s accounts and descriptions of himself and Lewinsky are analysable for how they handle Q’s cross-examining formulations of his conduct and motives.

Extract (5) Clinton testimony, p. 17.

1 C: (...) I certainly never encouraged her (0.6) not to  
2 comply lawfully with the subpoena.  
3 (0.7)  
4 Q: Mister President if your intent wa:s (.) as you  
5 have (.) earlier testified (.) you didn't want  
6 anyone to know about this re<sup>l</sup>ationship, (1.0)  
7 you had with Miss Lewinsky, (0.5) why would you  
8 feel comfortable, (.) giving her gifts, (.) in the  
9 middle, (0.2) of (.) discovery, in the Paula  
10 <sup>↑</sup>Jones case.  
11 (3.5)  
12 C: Well sir, (.) for one ↓thing, (1.0) there was no  
13 (0.5) existing (0.5) improper (.) relationship.  
14 (0.6)  
15 At that time.  
16 (1.0)  
17 I ha:d (1.0) for (0.5) nearly a year, (1.0) done  
18 my best (1.0) to be a friend to Miss Lewinsky. (.)  
19 To be a counsellor to her (0.5) to give her good  
20 advice, (.) uh and to help her. (.) She had, (0.8)  
21 for her part, (1.0) most of the time,  
22 (0.5) accepted. (1.0) the changed circumstances.  
23 (0.8)  
24 >She talked to me a lot about her< life, (0.5) her  
25 job (.) ambitions, (0.5) and she continued to give  
26 <sup>↑</sup>me (.) gifts.  
27 (0.7)  
28 And I felt (1.0) uh (.) that it was the right thing  
29 to do: to give her gifts back. = I have always given  
30 a lot of people gifts. (0.5) I have always been given  
31 gifts. (0.4) I do not think there is anything  
32 improper, (.) about a man giving a woman a gift (.)  
33 or a woman giving a man a gift (...)

Lines 1-2 provide an immediately prior context for the participants, and therefore for us as analysts, to hear the import and relevance of Q's turn starting at line 4. Q is attending to Clinton's prior denial of witness tampering. Q's point is that, whatever actual motives Clinton may have had for giving gifts to Lewinsky at that time (which Clinton has already

dealt with – see extracts 3 and 4), why was he not worried about what it might *look* like (for instance, bribery or ingratiation)? Why risk damaging inferences, concerning his motives for those gifts, just when Lewinsky had been called to testify in a trial over his alleged sexually exploitative conduct with another woman, given that Clinton has admitted wanting his relationship with Lewinsky to remain outside of public knowledge (lines 5-6)? Note Q’s use of the kind of appeal to normativity that Clinton himself has deployed – why *would* (line 6) he (or anybody) feel comfortable giving gifts in such a context? Clinton’s subsequent description of his role in Lewinsky’s life at that time is a response to Q’s challenge.

Clinton responds first by re-stating (lines 12-15) that the “improper relationship” had ended, which is to say that there was, factually, nothing improper to hide. He then attends to motive, to why he would nevertheless do things that risked public *perception* of impropriety. It emerges that his conduct was indeed motivated, but by an alternative set of perfectly proper considerations. He was acting out of concern for Lewinsky, in the context of a quite different and more proper kind of relationship (lines 17-25), and also out of the kind of normative reciprocity, involving gift exchanges, that he has already recounted (see extracts 4 and 5a).

Again there are significant detailed features of how Clinton constructs these alternative motivational accounts. In depicting his no longer improper relationship with Lewinsky, the image we are given of her is that of an emotional, difficult person, needful of care and counselling, with problems in her life outside of her relationship with Clinton.<sup>5</sup> Thus, “she talked to me a lot about her life” (line 24) suggests things that Clinton would need to be told about, rather than difficulties with him. The categories “friend” (line 18) and “counsellor” (line 19), along with their category-relevant activities of giving “advice” and “help” (line 21), contrast with various relevant alternatives, some of which are used and implied by Q (lover, employer, President, defendant in the Jones trial). The expressions “for nearly a year” and “done my best” (lines 17-18) convey a sense of Clinton’s having to make

*efforts* at being friend and counsellor in the face of difficulty or resistance. The context for such efforts was the new, changed relationship that Lewinsky merely “accepted” (line 22), given that it was instigated by Clinton rather than her (see also extract 3, lines 17-22), and accepted “most of the time” (line 21), which is to say not all of the time, nor with full conviction. Again, as we saw in extracts (4) and (5a), Clinton’s gift giving is ‘scripted’ as routine rather than done on this particular occasion for special motives. In contrast, it was a normative act of reciprocity, “the right thing to do” (lines 28-29), something he has “always” engaged in (lines 29-30), something done not only with special persons but with “a lot of people” (line 30), and something that is quite normal and proper not merely for him and Lewinsky personally, but for them via their general category memberships “a man” and “a woman” (lines 32-33). Those are offered as the relevant categories for understanding Clinton’s actions – a man and a woman exchanging gifts.

### **Theme 3: Emotion and blame**

We focus now on a theme which emerges closely from the prior ones, which is Clinton’s reflexive depiction of his own motives and emotions. He does this as part of managing two related interactional and rhetorical concerns: (1) displaying himself as caring and concerned for Lewinsky’s and others’ feelings and welfare (rather than, say, harbouring selfish, licentious and exploitative feelings and motives towards her); and (2) acknowledging a normatively expectable worry that anybody might have, for having their dirty linen washed in public (rather than, say, wanting to cover up misdemeanours, commit perjury, and encourage Lewinsky to do the same). In portraying Lewinsky as irrational, emotional and motivated by personal problems, Clinton reflexively defines himself, in contrast, as rational, behaving properly (eventually, at least), and concerned for the welfare of others, including her.

Extract (6) follows soon after (2), with Q pursuing Clinton's, rather than Lewinsky's, motives for not wanting her to testify.

Extract (6) Clinton testimony, p. 14.

1 Q: And (.) ↑you ↓didn't want her to testify did you?=  
2 You didn't want her to:: (.) disclo:se the:se (.)  
3 embarrassing facts of this inappropriate intimate  
4 relationship that you had.= that correct?  
5 C: Well (1.0) I did not want her: (0.7) to have to  
6 testify and go through that= >and of course< I huh  
7 I had I- I didn't want her to do that.= Of ↑course  
8 not.

Clinton's response (lines 5-8), including the expression of concern for Lewinsky, can be examined for how it deals with Q's pointed challenge. Q is pursuing the issue of possible witness tampering and, more specifically, whether Clinton told Lewinsky, most probably at this meeting (on 28<sup>th</sup> December 1997), to lie about their relationship. A feature of Q's questioning, here and elsewhere, is the repeated use of words directly quoted from Clinton's prior testimony – the “embarrassing”, “inappropriate”, “intimate relationship” (lines 3-4). This puts Clinton's own descriptions back to him in a way that restricts any scope for denial or reformulation.<sup>6</sup> Rather, what Clinton does is to offer two bases for a less damaging view of what he might be concerned about. First, he did not want Lewinsky to have to endure the ordeal of testifying about it, to have to “go through that” (line 6). Second, possibly starting to address his concerns for his own interests (“I huh I had I- I...”, lines 6-7), though still not explicitly, there is an appeal to what *anyone* might feel or wish in such circumstances, done with an emphatic “of ↑course not” (lines 7-8). Again, as Theme 2 showed, accountability for an action or motive is handled by referring it to a recognizable, common sense social norm.

Extract (7) follows soon after extract (1). Having discussed Lewinsky's anger that day at the White House, Clinton is invited to confirm that *he himself*, and his secretary Mrs Currie, were "very irate" with Lewinsky.

Extract (7) Clinton testimony, p. 32.

1 Q: A:nd Mrs Currie and yourself were: very i:rate  
2 (. ) that (0.3) Ms Lewinsky had overhea:rd (0.7)  
3 uh tha:t you were in the oval office with a  
4 visitor. (. ) On that day. (. ) Isn't that correct  
5 that you and Mrs Currie were (. ) very irate  
6 about that.  
7 (4.5)  
8 C: We:ll (1.0) I don't remember (. ) all that (. ) uh  
9 what I remember i:s that she was very um (0.7)  
10 Monica was very upset= she got upset from time  
11 to time, (0.8) a:nd u:m (3.5) and I was (0.4)  
12 you know (0.4) I couldn't see her I had- (. ) I  
13 was doing as I re<sup>u</sup>member u:m (0.7) I had some  
14 other work to do that morning, (. ) and sh sh  
15 she had just sort of showed up and wanted to be  
16 let in, and wanted to come in at a certain  
17 ti:me, (. ) and she wanted everything to be (. )  
18 that way, .hh and we couldn't see her.= Now I  
19 did arrange to see her later that da:y. (0.5)  
20 And I was upset about (. ) her conduct. (0.3) I'm  
21 not sure I knew (1.0) or focused o:n at that  
22 moment (1.0) exactly the question you ask.=  
23 I remember I was- (. ) I thought her conduct was  
24 inappropriate that day.

Q twice invokes Mrs Currie (lines 1 and 5), along with Clinton, as being emphatically, "very irate". Again, this makes Clinton's emotions not merely his own to report or deny, but something public, to which Mrs Currie (as well as Lewinsky) could possibly independently attest. Clinton's delayed (line 7) and equivocal (line 8) response is again a disavowal of memory. Having avoided description of his own emotions, Clinton shifts the attribution to Lewinsky. What he *can* recall is how "upset" *she* was (lines 9-10).

Not only was Lewinsky memorably upset on that occasion, but we are immediately informed, parenthetically before continuing (lines 10-11), that “she got upset from time to time”. This formulates Lewinsky as getting upset not just on the one occasion in question, but repeatedly. There is a common sense logical trajectory to this kind of generalization, which has been explored in work on causal attribution (e.g., Jones & Davies, 1965) and in discursive psychology (Edwards, 1995). Doing something repetitively, across situations and occasions, provides grounds for dispositional inferences about the actor. It is implied that Lewinsky was perhaps *prone to* getting upset, such that any pursuit of the reasons for her getting upset, on any particular occasion, might look to reasons within her, and not only to local causes such as what (in this case) Clinton might have done or said to provoke her.

Note the detail in Clinton’s formulation, the emphasis on the stative “got upset” (line 10), with its absence of causal agent – she just got upset occasionally. This is a particularly important rhetorical move on Clinton’s part, deflecting inquiry away from the proximal causes of Lewinsky’s emotions, and towards her dispositional tendencies (cf. the analysis of ‘script formulations’ and dispositional attributions in Edwards, 1994, 1995). That depiction of a person prone to getting upset, prone to irrationality, is enhanced by the description of her unreasonable conduct and expectations. Note Clinton’s implied difficulty with comprehending how Lewinsky “just sort of showed up and wanted to be let in” (lines 15-16), where the items “just” and “sort of” depict her actions as somewhat puzzling with regard to reasonable expectations. Again, in expressing such difficulty in understanding Lewinsky’s behaviour, Clinton reflexively indexes himself as rational and sensible.

In contrast to Lewinsky’s dispositional and situationally puzzling actions and emotions, Clinton was “upset about her conduct” (line 20), which was “inappropriate that day” (line 24). Rather than being prone to getting upset, Clinton emerges as understandably reactive to specific circumstances, which in this case were Lewinsky’s unreasonable demands

and reactions. Clinton reformulates Q's description of his emotions, from Q's emphatic "very i:rate" (lines 1, 5) to the less extreme, and contextually sensible, "I was upset" (line 20). Further, the expression "we couldn't see her" (line 18), in contrast to the earlier "I couldn't see her" (line 12), defines the prospective meeting with Lewinsky as a kind of formal meeting, a matter for arrangement with his secretary, rather than any kind of intimate or clandestine tête-à-tête. The implication is that there is nothing to hide here, nothing important or culpable, just people getting upset, in Lewinsky's case unreasonably, at a failed effort to schedule a meeting.

In addition to his dispositional account of Lewinsky's emotionality, Clinton includes other references to her character. In extract (8) he is responding to Q's pursuit of the nature of their relationship at the crucial time that Lewinsky was called to testify in the Paula Jones case. Q evidently has access to a romantic card that Lewinsky had sent Clinton after seeing the movie *Titanic*, at a time when Clinton now maintains that their sexual, "inappropriate contact" was over. Clinton has been asked why Lewinsky kept sending him notes and letters that professed romantic feelings towards him.

Extract (8) Clinton testimony, p. 19.

1 C: Well my recollection↓ is that she um (4.0) that  
2 (. ) maybe because of changed circumstances in her  
3 own life, (0.7) in nineteen ninety seven= after  
4 there was no: (2.0) more inappropriate contact  
5 that she sent me more things in the mail.  
6 (1.0)  
7 And that there was sort of a dis↓connect sometimes  
8 between what she was saying, (0.5) and the plain  
9 facts of our relationship.  
10 (0.7)  
11 A:nd I don't know what caused that, (0.8) but it  
12 may have bee:n (1.5) dissatisfaction with the rest  
13 of her life I don't know- I- you know it- (1.0) uh  
14 (0.5) she had from the time I first met her talked  
15 to me about- (1.0) the rest of her personal life,

16           and uh (1.0) it may be that- that- there was (.)  
17           some reason for that= it may be that (0.2) when I  
18           (0.2) did the right thi:ng and made it stick that  
19           (4.0) in a way she felt (.) a need to cling more  
20           ↑closely or try to get ↓closer to me even though  
21           she knew nothing (.) improper was happening, or was  
22           going to happen.= I don't know the answer to that.

Clinton works to downgrade or remove any continuing responsibility that he might have, for Lewinsky's feelings and actions. Sending him romantic notes at a time when he claims their "inappropriate contact" had ended, is treated by both Q and Clinton as a motivational puzzle or contradiction, and therefore an accountable matter (cf. Pollner, 1987, on the common sense resolution of 'reality disjunctures'). According to Clinton the contradiction is resolved, not because their intimate relationship had not ended, but rather, by suggesting various foibles in Lewinsky's personal nature and private life. A vague reference to "changed circumstances in her own life" (lines 2-3), with contrastive stress on "own", invokes a causal role for Lewinsky's life outside of their relationship, while introducing no specific details about it that might then be available for cross-examination or checked against other testimony (cf. Edwards & Potter, 1992a, on the rhetorical uses of 'systematic vagueness').

The one second silence (line 6), in which Q does not respond, leads to further elaboration. Clinton introduces (lines 7-9) the notion of a "disconnect" between Lewinsky's words and the reality of their relationship, where the "plain facts" correspond to his version of things. In contrast, Lewinsky's words and actions tell only of her own personal, psychological difficulties in a subjective world disconnected from reality, and outside of their no longer intimate relationship, located somewhere in "the rest of her life" (lines 12-13).

Note some of the detailed ways in which Clinton portrays this separation between Lewinsky's thoughts, words and responsibilities on the one hand, and his own conduct and

grasp of plain factual reality on the other. For example, the word “sometimes” (line 7) again offers Lewinsky as prone, repeatedly and not just on this one occasion, to these kinds of disconnections. Similarly, “from the time I first met her” (line 14) dates Lewinsky’s personal problems prior to, rather than caused by, her relationship with Clinton (cf. Edwards, 1995, 1997, on the use of different start-points for contested narratives in relationship counselling). Further, the uses of “I don’t know” (lines 11, 13, and 22), and “it may be that...” (line 17), which frame or preface a series of suggestions about what was going on in her life and mind, convey a sense of Clinton making careful, conservative projections from limited personal knowledge, concerning Lewinsky’s puzzling behaviour. Reflexively the impression Clinton provides is that of a careful, considerate observer and explainer of events. Clinton projects himself as a person of some integrity who, in spite of Lewinsky’s needs and involvement, was the one who ended the inappropriate relationship, and with the best motives – he “did the right thing and made it stick” (line 18). Lewinsky’s efforts to continue the intimacy beyond that point are depicted as irrational, being based in “a need to cling...” (line 19), despite what “she knew” (lines 21-22) to be the case.

## CONCLUSIONS

We have approached the roles of memory, emotion and normativity in personal relationships from the perspective of discursive psychology. This entails examining conversational and textual materials in which psychological characteristics of the actors in narrated events, and of the current speaker, are handled as part of the actions that talk performs. Concepts of emotion and motivation, and other common sense psychological concepts including an ability or inability to remember something, have a role and nature in social life (cf. Mills, 1940, on motives) that can be explored by examining the details of situated talk. In examining those

details we set aside our own concerns about truth, accuracy, error, and sincerity in the testimony under analysis, and leave those notions for participants to deal with. Our task has been to examine how they do it. Motives, emotions, thoughts, memories, and the detail and normativity of events to which they are attached, are studied for how they are invoked as part of talk's conceptual repertoire and interactional work.

The analysis has brought together a range of discourse devices that are not restricted to memory, emotion and motive talk, nor even to personal narratives, but are part of the general currency of talk and text, and revealed by the analysis of talk's detailed lexical choices and sequential organization. These devices included a variety of forms of everyday practical reasoning, such as:

(1) how particular actions can be described or worked up in narrative as either normative or exceptional, where exceptional actions require special motive accounts, and routine ones do not (cf. Sacks, 1992; Smith, 1978). Clinton deployed that kind of descriptive-explanatory reasoning with regard to motives for meetings and gift exchanges.

(2) Actions can be descriptively built as either exceptional or typical of the actor, and therefore stemming either from circumstance or from disposition or character (cf. Jones & Davies, 1965; Edwards, 1995). Clinton used the typical-dispositional link to depict Lewinsky's volatile emotions as stemming from her character, rather than being understandable reactions to things he did.

(3) Discursive uses of psychological categories (*know, believe, recall, feel, etc.*) are clearly not simply a matter of referring to private mental states but, rather, are part of how actions and actors are made publicly accountable. Their rhetorical uses are a feature of recent work in discursive psychology (e.g., Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Potter, in press). The extracts examined here are rich in psychological categories, and

we focused on just a few of these, such as Clinton's rhetorical uses of *know* and *remember*, and his constructions of Lewinsky's disposition towards *anger*.

(4) Descriptions of persons in relationships and interactions are reflexively available for what they imply about the other persons in those relationships, and for the speaker (cf. Watson, 1983). Thus, Clinton's depictions of Lewinsky carried reciprocal implications about his own emotions, goals and motives. The examination of such reflexive implications, in the details of a corpus of 'live' talk-in-interaction complete with reactions, uptakes, reformulations, shows how they are a systematic feature of the interactional, rhetorical work that the talk is handling and managing. Speaker's management of these kinds of reflexive implications of their talk is a largely neglected but potentially far-reaching theme in discursive psychology, following the initial promotion of the idea in Edwards and Potter's (1992a, 1993) 'Discursive Action Model' of factual and causal-attribitional accounts.

(5) There is a range of other devices, echoing work in conversation analysis on basic conversational processes, through which narrative description, accountability, blame, innocence, motive, sincerity, truth-telling, and so on, are interactionally produced and rhetorically orientated. These include 'repairs' in which speakers correct themselves and select alternative descriptions (Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks, 1977); constructive 'formulations' of what they or another person has said so far (see the discussions of extracts (2) and (4) in particular, and Heritage & Watson, 1979); and 'membership category' relevancies (friend, lover, counsellor, etc. – see extract 5) that are used to provide normative and motivational bases for narrated actions (Sacks, 1992; Hester & Eglin, 1997; Watson, 1983).

We highlighted in particular on the *reflexive* work done by Clinton's portrayal of Lewinsky's personal dispositions, motives, and emotional states. This was an important part

of managing blame and responsibility for his own part, both in the events narrated, and in the production of credible and consistent testimony. In producing stories and descriptions that built a picture of Lewinsky's problematic conduct and character, Clinton attended simultaneously to his own motives, actions and limited culpability, these matters being what was primarily at stake in this presidential cross-examination. Lewinsky's disposition toward irrationality and heightened emotions, together with the same vulnerability that threatened Clinton's presidential reputation in having an affair with her, provided the basis for various alternative accounts he was able to offer, of key and controversial events and readings of events. Rather than exploiting a young and vulnerable White House intern, and persuading her to lie on his behalf under oath, he was helping and counselling an emotionally vulnerable friend with whom he had responsibly ended some regrettably "inappropriate contact". Her long-standing emotional problems predated that contact, and therefore his responsibility for them, such that their continuing relationship was motivated by her clinging vulnerability and his responsible, friendly, counsellor-like concern for her well being, along with a normal routine (especially for him) of exchanging gifts at socially appropriate times. Clinton's accounts of interactions with Lewinsky worked to soften or rebut any notions of perjury and exploitation, while attending to any notion that he was constructing his accounts precisely to those ends.

Finally, Clinton's detailed talk about his involvement with Lewinsky, including all the fine grain invocations of psychological states, their causes and consequences, and their reflexive implications for his own character and motives, were substantially the ways in which he oriented to and handled the major matters at issue in the setting at large. They were the details on which hung, in that legal setting, a potentially mendacious and culpable abuse of his office as president of the United States. Again, along with talk's reflexivity, this orientation of the details of talk, to the psychological business through which a range of

applied settings work (such as court rooms, counselling, education, police interrogations, medical settings, political arenas), is a growth point for further developments in discursive psychology (Edwards & Potter, 2001; cf. Drew & Heritage, 1992).

## NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> Web address: [www.abcnews.com/sections/us/DailyNews/clintontestimony\\_1.html](http://www.abcnews.com/sections/us/DailyNews/clintontestimony_1.html)
- <sup>2</sup> Page references for data extracts are to the publicly available transcripts, which do not contain the various conversation-analytic enhancements and corrections provided in our extracts. ‘Q’ is the cross-examining Grand Jury questioner, and ‘C’ is Clinton. Various different questioners took part in the recorded testimony, but that is not a feature of our analysis.
- <sup>3</sup> We use the notion of ‘pure memory’, unadulterated by pragmatic considerations, rhetorically here. We do not mean to endorse the psychological reality of any such notion.
- <sup>4</sup> Four seconds is a long silence in everyday conversation (Jefferson, 1989), but such silences are a pervasive feature of Clinton’s testimony here. It may have a special significance in this context, of conveying especially careful deliberation, as part of conveying a concern for accurate recall and truthful testimony on significant, controversial, potentially damaging matters.
- <sup>5</sup> Long term emotional problems in Lewinsky’s life outside of and prior to her relationship with Clinton are invoked and hinted at several times in his testimony, perhaps most explicitly on page 43 of the published transcript, where he says she was “burdened by some unfortunate conditions of her upbringing”.
- <sup>6</sup> Although we cannot go into this in any detail here, Q’s many repetitions of Clinton’s own descriptions, often carefully and emphatically enunciated when put back to him, start to sound ironic and euphemistic, pointing up the rhetorical nature of Clinton’s carefully articulated testimony.

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## APPENDIX: Transcription Symbols

These are derived from the system developed mainly by Gail Jefferson for conversation analysis (see also Atkinson & Heritage, 1984).

[ ]	Square brackets mark the start and end of overlapping speech, aligned with the talk immediately above or below.
↑ ↓	Vertical arrows precede marked pitch movement.
Under <u>l</u> ining	Emphasis; the extent of underlining within individual words locates emphasis, but also indicates how heavy it is.
CAPITALS	Speech that is obviously louder than surrounding speech.
°↑I know it,°	Raised circles (‘degree’ signs) enclose obviously quieter speech.
(0.4)	Numbers in round brackets measure pauses in seconds; in this case, 4 tenths of a second.
(.)	A micropause, hearable but too short to measure.
she wa::nted	Colons show degrees of elongation of the prior sound; the more colons the more elongation, roughly one colon per syllable length.
hhh	Aspiration (out-breaths); proportionally as for colons.
.hhh	Inspiration (in-breaths).
Yeh,	Commas mark weak rising or continuing intonation, as used sometimes in enunciating lists, or in signalling that the speaker may have more to say.
y’know?	Question marks signal stronger, ‘questioning’ intonation, irrespective of grammar.
Yeh.	Periods (stops) mark falling, stopping intonation, irrespective of grammar, and of whether the speaker actually stops talking.
bu-u-	hyphens mark a cut-off of the preceding sound.
>he said<	‘greater than’ and ‘lesser than’ signs enclose speeded-up talk.
solid.= We had	‘Equals’ signs mark the immediate ‘latching’ of successive talk, whether of one or more speakers, with no interval.
(...)	This shows where some talk has been omitted from a data extract or from within a turn at speaking.