

Stand By Your Man: Political Sex Scandals in American Pop Culture

Alison Dagnes, Shippensburg University
addagn@ship.edu
Department of Political Science
1871 Old Main Drive
Shippensburg, PA 17257
717-477-1754

For presentation at the Western Political Science Association Conference
Las Vegas, Nevada April 1-4, 2015

Abstract

The political sex scandal has a definite and detailed place in our 24-hour news cycle, but the topic also rears its head in popular culture. Specifically, the politician-as- is a recurring character on television and in popular fiction for obvious reasons: He is a powerful figure who has done wrong, and he brings with him ancillary victims who can mine the emotional subtext of popular entertainment. This paper examines the ways politicians, wives, and mistresses are characterized in popular culture through the specific lens of the political sex scandal.

Political sex scandals capture national attention for a wide variety of reasons, mostly because sex sells and regular politics is largely viewed as tiresome by much of the American public. Scandal stories are titillating tales combining dirt and Schadenfreude with the already prevalent idea that politicians are corrupt, unethical, crooked people out for their own gain. The stories sell themselves with easily understood narratives: Abuse of power, hypocrisy, and monumental hubris. Additionally, the stories come with straightforward characters, for with the carousing politician comes an obvious victim: the woman whom he done wrong. The demands of a political wife are many; the possibility of her degradation is great. As Connie Schultz wrote in *The Washington Post*: “Politics breeds the sacrificial wife who abandons her dreams for those of her husband but then suffers public humiliation when the honorable member fails to keep it in his pants.” (Schultz, 2008) The wounded wife is often a tool used by philandering politicians as they fight for redemption, the overarching argument being “if she will stay with me, I hope the voters will too.” Rarely in these cases is there a nuanced conversation about marriage, relationships, or sexuality when the narrative is “a politician screwed up.” Also uncommon is an examination of the political consequences of scandal or of the political context in which the scandal occurred. Even more infrequent is the case of a wronged husband of a political woman. Those scandals are so rare as to be nonexistent: really, we are talking about straying men and mortified wives. In sum, these stories hang their hats upon existing understandings of politics where women are

weak, the men are appalling, and the political system is a sham. These narratives do a tremendous disservice to our perception of politics, our ability to feel compassion for our fellow man, and feed on our cynicism about the American political system. When a politician is caught in a sex scandal it is validating to the public. Popular depictions of political scandals only feed upon this phenomenon.

Time and changing social norms have moved the bar on political sex scandals so that what once was jaw-dropping now triggers barely a blip on our cultural radar. The reasons for this shift are myriad and some are glaringly obvious, perhaps most significantly is the wide expansion of our media system that brings an avalanche of information and gossip to us instantaneously. We have, as a nation, become rather inured to the shock of political sex scandals because we hear so much about so many of them, and we hear so much about them because they are entertaining and sell media time. Put simply, the vast majority of the American public does not care about politics at all. So while the few who do care can be specific about their likes and dislikes of politicians, most people only clue into the stories that are diverting and understandable without much prior knowledge needed. For the uninterested public, often their only exposure to politics is through news coverage of scandal or through the fictional depiction of the political process, dramatized for entertainment purposes.

The political sex scandal has a definite and detailed place in our 24-hour news cycle, and because of this it is logical that the topic rears its head in popular culture. Political scandal has always been fodder for fiction, but recently there seems to be a spate of entertainment media that focuses on the topic. The politician-as-hound-dog is a recurring character on television and in popular fiction for obvious reasons: He is a powerful figure who has done wrong, and he brings with him ancillary victims who can mine the emotional subtext of popular entertainment. It is an

easily recognized storyline, one everyone can relate to since the emphasis is always on the personal, the political side being simply the vehicle that drives the sensation. This narrative allows us to feel Schadenfreude, superiority, and because politicians are so demonstrably disliked in our society, scandal reinforces our existing cynicism.

Popular culture is a facsimile of our current customs or a nostalgic look back at a previous time. In that way, popular culture is one effective shortcut that informs the populace about the way we as a society feel about a number of things: Political behavior, cultural norms, the changing nature of personal manners. The shifting disposition of our national ethos is often reflected in popular culture and because we look to pop culture as a way to express our social views, we take these depictions and use them to shape our understanding of politics. Popular culture is especially influential because it is up-to-the-moment: It serves as a snapshot that mirrors our values and exposes the most important discussions of our time. Accordingly, the popular culture depictions of political sex scandals in film, books, and on television not only capture a moment in time, but they have a lasting impact on the way we envision them in real life. As we read novels, watch television and movies we are subject to even more depictions of scandal, the fictional ones added to the news items into a place in our collective subconscious and accordingly they influence the way we think. These fictional representations add to our understanding and our judgments about scandal, survival, and blame.

This paper examines the ways politicians and political wives, politics and marriage are characterized in popular culture through the specific lens of the political sex scandal. I argue that the popular culture reflection of our awareness about scandal shifts our attention away from the substantive, which then reaffirms our political pessimism and distrust of the system.

Changing Coverage and Shifting Standards

We often assign blame to the Clinton/ Lewinsky scandal as the epic political humiliation that changed all of our lives. Certainly, the internet had heretofore never been a factor in the coverage or reporting of political scandal, and thus when Monica Lewinsky says that she was the first woman to be cyber-bullied, she may have a point. But in his new book about the presidential run of former Colorado Senator Gary Hart, author Matthew Bai argues that Hart's scandal was, in fact, the pivot point that changed journalistic standards. (Bai, 2014) Hart was, according to Bai, incapable of seeing why his personal life would be of interest to the electorate and thus woefully underestimated the profound political consequence of his dalliances with Donna Rice. Bai argues that the Hart affair shifted journalistic principles to a point where hard-news reporters began to cover the personal and private matters of political candidates. This shift from the personal to the public was enough to change editorial norms forever, and it happened just at the time the media were expanding on cable and then online (Bai, 2014). Accordingly, our attention to the tabloid news of politics grew and allowed a close peek into the once very private lives of candidates and politicians. Our interest in the personal lives of elected officials swelled and it came about just as we had the ability to ignore politics all together because we had so many media outlets to enjoy, all tailored to our specific interests. Where we were once forced to suffer through the evening news in order to get to "Wheel of Fortune," now there were a growing number of media options that allowed the politically-averse public to eschew the news all together. As the public turned off the news just as there was enough media to choke a horse, politicians had to bend to this new reality to reach an electorate who were able to escape their coverage with ease. The new journalistic standards and expanded media landscape led to politicians, hungry for votes and attention, to open their doors to even greater exposure of their

personal loves. This increasing emphasis on the personal also bled into out entertainment plots, and thus developed story lines in film, one television, and in books about cheating politicians. Accordingly, books such as *Fly Away Home*, *The Senator's Wife*, and *The First Affair*, plus television shows such as *The Good Wife*, *House of Cards*, and *Scandal* have flourished. The idea of fiction “ripped from the headlines” is appealing in its accessibility, especially in the age of Spitzer and Weiner. As people connect fiction to non, the narratives about political sex scandals are enhanced in our collective subconscious, all of which have common themes. These characterizations exist because popular culture reflects our current cultural mood, but they also serve to drive our common conversation about politics, infidelity, marriage and scandal. Two of the most prominent narratives concern separate actors: The first associates the political wife to victimhood, her inevitable empowerment rooted in her persecution; the second concerns the politician-as-rogue, a sweeping indictment of the flawed elected official. Both of these classifications do a disservice to our appreciation of scandal because the causes of and fallout from marital strife are never so clear-cut. Furthermore, as these fictional narratives drive our common conversation into real-world political events, they significantly shorten our understanding of the political process. Tying into Mark Sachleben’s work on the personal and the political (2014), the argument goes that when we focus on the private we end up resting our political awareness on hackneyed themes. The lack of nuance found in these examinations lessens our appreciation of relationships and politics. By feeding into a black or white version of a political system that demands the gray, we bolster a simplistic view of political life and become unable to compromise. In the popular culture examined in this paper, these books and TV shows hang their hats on these worn-out descriptions, the consequence being a flawed understanding of scandal and an even more deeply problematic view of politics.

Narrative #1: Female Victimization as Empowerment

The first narrative focuses on the political wife in her role as the dupe and it makes the clichéd argument that the cuckolded little woman is pathetic. Eventually this pitiful creature is transformed in the wake of the husband's cruelty and almost uniformly the wronged-wife moves from weakness to be viewed as a strong, heroic victim. Implicit in this characterization is that political wives are, by necessity and design, malleable and only when they drop the confines of politics can they become strong. Certainly, someone who is the recipient of bad behavior can be viewed as a victim, but what comes of this victimization morphs into a kind of empowerment once the political is eschewed. As the *USA Today's* editorial review of *Fly Away Home* writes:

If there's one thing worse than a crooked politician, it's a cheating politician who drags his humiliated and betrayed wife into the media limelight of his own embarrassment and misery. Whether they stand by their man (Silda Spitzer) or run him through the meat grinder of public opinion (Elizabeth Edwards), women who've been cheated on make for juicy headlines. And compelling fiction, too. (Memmott, 2010)

It is compelling to watch a woman rise from humiliation to seek vengeance upon her tormentor, especially when in the process the vengeance includes shunning the very vehicle (politics) that drove the betrayal. For these wives to escape persecution, they must reject the political structures that forced them into subservience in the first place. The newly courageous wife becomes a daring woman, able to survive even the most flagrant of humiliation, emerging as a better version of herself when she has left the evil politician (and by association the fraudulent requirements of politics) behind her.

One literary example of this dynamic of victimization/ empowerment by betrayal is found in the character of Sylvie Serfer Woodruff in Jennifer Weiner's *Fly Away Home*. Sylvie meets husband in law school, becomes an "ideal politician's wife," and after thirty years of marriage

has her life thrown into turmoil when the Senator makes national news because of his affair. Certainly the role of the cuckolded is an excruciating one, especially so in the national spotlight. The specific trials and sufferings of the political wife are unique because she plays such a precise role in our politics. She is often in the camera's eye, so public a figure but one who has practically no identity of her own. When her husband betrays her, not only is it a personal unfaithfulness but one that serves the woman to the public for pity, a woman who sacrificed herself and was sand-bagged regardless. From the *USA Today* description of the political wife from *Fly Away Home*:

And so we meet poor, poor Sylvie Woodruff, who joins the "unhappy sorority" of put-upon wives when her husband, Richard, a U.S. senator, has a fling with a woman half his age. Most galling for 57-year-old Sylvie: She has devoted her life to her husband as a man and a politician, even at the expense of her daughters, Diana and Lizzie, and her own self-worth. Sylvie has been Botoxed, liposuctioned, nipped and tucked. Her normally curly hair has been straightened and highlighted and sculpted into the classic political-wife hair helmet. (Memmott, 2010)

And from the *Denver Post* review:

Sylvie has played the dutiful spouse for decades, enjoying the perks that come with being a congressman's wife while fulfilling every tedious obligation along the way. She long ago buried her own ambitions in order to support his career, a strategy that suddenly seems foolish. (Toto, 2010)

Here Sylvie is seen as barely more than a rather silly doll, a passive sucker to be pitied and condescended to because no woman worth her salt would make such personal modifications, especially for a partner so corrupt as a politician. The political obligations are "tedious" and all-consuming which means anyone engaged in such behavior is a fool. Accordingly, the only way to win is by rejecting the role entirely. Sylvie shrugs off the tasks of political wife to become a better woman, someone able to reject the artifice, exploitation, and sleaze of politics (and her oppressively constructed role within the system) all together.

A similar conception of the sad political spouse is found in Sue Miller's book *The Senator's Wife*. Delia is the long-suffering wife of her philandering husband Senator Tom Naughton, a lion of liberal Democratic politics from the 1970s. The 2005 novel takes place in 1992, all the better to examine the politics of scandal during the early Clinton years. While Delia and Tom separate in practice (she boldly goes to France) because of his numerous affairs she continues to play her role well, returning to the home state of Vermont feign support her husband while secretly (yet bravely) being her own woman. Tom is the drag on her life, her acquiescence to the role of political wife the clear hindrance to her own happiness. In one scene, Tom asks guests at a dinner party about the difference between scandal types among partisans:

Do you remember when everyone thought Bush had a mistress too? But she was rumored to be someone wealthy and WASPy, of course. ... The problem here is the goddamn Democrats, who sleep down, you see. They love that white trash. ... And white trash loves publicity, so the Democrats are the ones who get into all the trouble. As opposed to the Republicans. They sleep up. ... Up, where all is Episcopalian and quiet as death itself, and no one ever has to hear a thing about it. (Miller, 2009)

The irony, of course, is that Tom himself is a rogue, someone who flagrantly discusses the liaisons of another in front of his maltreated sucker of wife. The *New York Times* review described the women in *The Senator's Wife* as "hurting, bleeding, lactating heroines." (Warner, 2008) Delia is satisfied not only when she can lose politics, but when her husband is incapacitated by a stroke and has to live entirely dependent upon her care, finally away from the political world. In these books the women are victorious only in the wake of their own injuries, their heroics because they escape the boundaries of politics and the malevolent politicians who drag them into this mire.

Similar themes are found on dramatic television. In *The Good Wife* (CBS) Juliana Margulies plays Alicia Florrick, the titular, martyred spouse of a corrupt and philandering

Illinois State's Attorney. When the series begins, Alicia has returned to the workplace amidst public humiliation thanks to her tragically flawed husband Peter. From this mortification Alicia rises like the phoenix to become heroically impressive, her cool competence revealed in the aftermath of such destruction. At one point early in the show's run, Alicia talks to a colleague about who she was before the scandal hit: "You wouldn't have liked me. I talked a lot about my kids and my weight." (The Good Wife, 2009) As the show wends its way through five seasons and Peter emerges from prison to return to politics, Alicia is portrayed as the benevolent and sympathetic political wife who stays by her husband (hence, the "good") for the sake of his career. At the same time she is portrayed as heroic in her independence and rejection of a real marriage to Peter. Much like in *The Senator's Wife*, the wife in this case establishes her own life while playing "good wife" for the public.

In the most recent season of *The Good Wife*, Alicia contemplates her own run for public office only to be faced with the same kind of moral compromises she hated in her husband's career choice. As she is ready to announce her own candidacy for State's Attorney Alicia asks her husband for his endorsement with this: "I stand beside you at every damned event. You go off banging prostitutes two at a time and I stood beside you like a grinning fool." When her husband pushes back, Alicia responds: "Yes. I may need you, Peter. But you sure as hell need me too." (The Good Wife, 2014) The takeaway from the entire series arc is that politics is nasty, the people involved are even nastier. The men are duplicitous and the women are weak only able to succeed by abandoning politics or by using their victimization to their advantage. If the show's arc continues, the protagonists' "Saint Alicia" status will be lost when she dives into the political world, since (it is implied) there are no saints in politics.

If *The Good Wife* offers viewers a sympathetic heroine in its protagonist, the TV show *Scandal* offers up a consistently heroic victim in Olivia Pope: lead character, top DC political fixer, and Presidential mistress. But the real loser in the series is the wife of President Fitzgerald Grant, a man who openly loves the both the power of his office and (amidst much hand-wringing and office canoodling) Olivia, the best fixer in DC. The relationship between Fitz and Olivia is the one that captures the viewers' attentions and plays at our collective emotional longing for romantic and passionate love. But there's always a catch in romance, and in *Scandal*, the catch is named Mellie. First Lady Mellie Grant is a woman who has made so many sacrifices for her husband she is in the running for beatification. Mellie was raped by her father-in-law (stood by her man), was repeatedly cuckolded by her husband with a bevy of young women (stood by her man) and campaigned valiantly while he was canoodling with Olivia (stood on the stump, by her man, even when the building exploded around her). Mellie falls for the Vice President (no one ever said this was a subtle show) only to have that love possibility wrenched away from her. She is the wronged wife who slowly gains power as she is repeatedly abused by her husband and his affair. She acknowledges her role in increasingly bitter quotes:

To Olivia: I like it when my husband is the President. I worked very hard for it. I've done a great deal to get us here, and you are going to get him across the finish line.

To WH Chief of Staff: It hurts until it doesn't. You think it's going to break you, but it won't. You may not sleep as well at night, but you will be fine. Numb, but numb and fine are the same. (*Scandal*, 2012)

To her Husband: Let's face it, baby. This is all about you. This is the Fitzgerald Grant show starring Fitzgerald Grant. And you just want me to play my part as the costar, the dutiful wife, who smiles and acts proud of you and doesn't eat chicken or wear sweatpants or hang out on graves.

This poor, put-upon wife is the superhuman sufferer of the political system that mandated her costly loyalty and then tornadoed her life into shatters. The viewers are led to believe that if only Mellie could leave politics entirely she would be better off, happier, self-fulfilled and at peace.

The harm in this narrative is that it rests the political wife's entire identity on her victimization and in doing so forces a deeply personal event into a rather cynical storyline. In doing so, the real culprit is politics, a system portrayed as so fundamentally flawed it mandates weak acquiescence from wives who must put up with the egomaniacal jerks who run for office. Implicit in this narrative is the argument that politicians are liars and cheats, and this claim serves to confirm existing ideas which are cynical and mostly off the mark. This leads to the second narrative.

Narrative #2: Politician as Predatory Bastard/ Cad/ Skunk/ Swine

If the political wife is portrayed as a faint victim then the man who brutalized her must be truly despicable, and hence the second narrative of political sex scandals: The political animal who runs for office is so immoral he betrays the most valuable thing on earth, and this is love. The narrative here insists that these men are depraved and corrupt to their core, all of which is faintly understandable because they are politicians and come with these pre-existing definitions. Lost anywhere is a discussion of a relationship that surrounds the affair, either on the part of the man and his mistress or the man and his wife. None of this is to accept infidelity as appropriate, but rather to argue that when the nuances of these relationships are forgone because it is easier to take a bifurcated view that insists on black and white pictures/ good and evil storylines. When the reader and viewer receives plotlines that rest on their established perceptions of politicians, these uncompromising pictures only serve to reinforce existing biases against them.

Inevitably these fictional affairs involve a vulturine older man preying on the innocence of a much younger woman, with the implication that the affair was the result of predatory, lewd intentions and unchecked lust. In all three literary fictions, the politicians have affairs with women half their age which has the two-pronged effect of making the men seem lecherous and their wives seem aged and discarded. In *The Senator's Wife*, the senator's affairs involve inappropriately aged women, a fact that knocks the wind out of his devastated wife. Delia is gazing upon a portrait of a young woman in a Paris museum when the realization hits of this heartbreaking fact: "The flesh, the youth, the beauty, the sex, of another woman as Tom would see her, as Tom would respond to her. The inevitability of his desire for someone else made visible." (Miller, 2009) Delia dissolves in a pool of tears in the museum but it doesn't stop her devotion to her philandering husband. The senator is characterized as such a leech, even when completely incapacitated by a stroke he still is on the make. The event that closes the book on the marriage (and on the story) involves the aged senator lustfully gazing upon the naked breasts of his neighbor/ caretaker only to be caught by his wife who finally ditches him for good. Take a moment to let that sink in: The politician is such a hound dog that even when he is rendered unable to speak or move freely, he still can't keep it in his pants.

The other women in these stories are almost always young and inappropriately so. Half the age of the men with whom they consort, these young mistresses embody both the beauty of youth and the inexperience of it. The book *The First Affair* is a fictionalization of the Lewinsky affair and the authors give readers an inside look at how an intern could worm her way into the Oval Office and into the rather unenviable role as mistress to the leader of the free world. The book does a rather good job of allowing the readers to see a humongous scandal from the perspective of the paramour, which is an interesting angle. Mostly, however, readers get to

remind ourselves of how incredibly young a 22-year old girl actually is. The mistress/ hero, Jamie McAllister, is a recent graduate from Vassar who lands a White House internship where, during a government shutdown, she meets President Greg Rutland. Their affair and the incidents that follow closely mirror the events surrounding's Monica Lewinsky affair with President Bill Clinton. Readers get to feel the histrionics of a young woman who thinks her (married, leader-of-the-free-world) boyfriend is crapping on her by moving her from a decent internship position into an inferior one. Readers are plunged into the investigation, legal case, and fallout from such a high-profile scandal and because we are given the perspective of the young woman, we get to consider events from her immature viewpoint. From Jamie: "Before the media thought they knew everything about me, before a bunch of lawyers at the Office of the Independent Counsel tried to know everything about me, before one man did know everything about me, I was a girl with secrets." (McLaughlin, 2013) Maybe. But those secrets were rather insignificant, especially compared to those that came after she began a relationship with POTUS. President Rutland, the man who preyed upon this innocent, is seen as rapacious, a man with voracious sexual appetites and an inability to care about the destruction he causes by his behavior, all of which easily coincides with his characterization as an unethical and greedy politician. Because of the Lewinsky affair, a politician liaising with a young intern has become short-hand for bad political behavior. It is so widely recognized as exemplary of the dishonesty of politicians that these kinds of affairs are abbreviations. From the film *The Ides of March*, a lead character is talking to a presidential candidate who has engaged in such abhorrent behavior: "You can lie, you can cheat, you can start a war, you can bankrupt the country, but you can't fuck the intern. They get you for that." (Clooney, 2011)

While attraction to young women may be a universal fact, political scandals involving young women are viewed as obvious because of the very nature of the politician. In *Fly Away Home* the other woman is young, in *Scandal* Olivia is young, on *House of Cards* the intrepid reporter who sleeps with the anti-hero Frank Underwood is young, on *The Good Wife* Peter Florrick has affairs with young prostitutes. The youth of the women is a factor that serves to prove a point: The political men who engage in such behavior are predatory, hungering for something that their loving wife cannot give to them: the splendor of youth, the awe-struck adoration of power, the sweet insouciance of the young. These political men are to be seen as vile, predacious men who are (of course) politicians. The job suits someone shady to begin with, and who would impose such destruction on their poor put-upon wives but someone with those tendencies? Put another way: Rarely do we read about a truly shifty pediatrician. We save the villainy for the politicians and members of the mafia, both clubs comprised of men we perceive to be genuinely shady characters.

As pop culture consumers we identify with the most sympathetic of characters and thus we save our sympathy and understanding for the wife and cast our aspersions against the (allegedly) scummy elected official. It is a natural instinct to take sides, but when these sides are chosen in a vacuum of fiction and bleed out to reality, there is a problem where the old-fashioned distinction of a public-private division is obliterated. As an audience and an electorate, our expectations of the human condition are perhaps too bifurcated between good and evil. These fictional depictions of scandal serve to reinforce pessimism with unrealistic expectations or hope for vengeance, whereas the hard task of governing requires coalition building and institutional compromise. These are not ideas that fit neatly into entertainment, which is why the two narratives of good wife/ bad politician serve as easy shorthand.

Conclusions: The Missing Backstory & Consequences

Lost in these two narratives is nuance. Of course infidelity is wrong but marriages are, as we are wont to say in our current era, complicated. There is always a backstory, a series of events that led up to an event, an affair, a breaking down of relationships and communication. Cataclysmic events don't just happen: Life doesn't work that way. It is easier for us to discuss these matters, however, in stark terms of right and wrong since it makes us feel safe to think that if we are good, then bad things will not happen to us. There is a danger to that kind of absolute thinking since it means we are not seeing a bigger picture. When we examine serious topics such as marriage, fidelity, and love a more textured consideration of difficult subjects is warranted.

More harmful than the lack of nuance in these narratives about marriage, however, is the rather direct connection to politics. The storylines make the argument that inherent our deeply flawed political system there are malevolent men with weak-willed wives. These characterizations give focus to our collective disdain for the political, and even more contempt for those who run for office and serve as our representatives. The institution of congress has an approval rating that hovers in the single digits and fictional depictions are the entertainment versions of this derision. As we load our plates with stories about cheating politicians who betray their vows and the public's trust, we underscore our existing opinions about our elected leaders. The Gallup organization released its annual poll about the least trusted professions in America and once more at the bottom were members of congress and lobbyists. (Gallup, 2014) It is incredibly disheartening that we put such little faith into the people whom we trust with the future of our country, but as we ignore substantive coverage of policy for the entertaining attention to scandal it should not be surprising. Our national attention to the Weiners, the

Spitzers, and the Sanfords are indicators that we love dirt. This will, inevitably, leak into our collective subconscious and then our popular culture because the best stories are ones that we can understand and appreciate. But the harm comes when this fiction reinforces the negative, amplifying our cynicism while lessening our optimism.

The good news is that this is preventable. *New York Times* critic A.O. Scott recently wrote a piece about our culture as it is portrayed on television, taking a hopeful stand that modern television is serving up progressive portrayals and storylines. Scott addresses the declining patriarchy on television today, arguing that the cultural norms demand a dismantling of male domination which is reflected in pop culture depictions:

TV characters are among the allegorical figures of our age, giving individual human shape to our collective anxieties and aspirations.... In suggesting that patriarchy is dead, I am not claiming that sexism is finished, that men are obsolete or that the triumph of feminism is at hand. I may be a middle-aged white man, but I'm not an idiot. In the world of politics, work and family, misogyny is a stubborn fact of life. But in the universe of thoughts and words, there is more conviction and intelligence in the critique of male privilege than in its defense, which tends to be panicky and halfhearted when it is not obtuse and obnoxious. The supremacy of men can no longer be taken as a reflection of natural order or settled custom.... But television, the monument valley of the dying patriarchs, may be where the new cultural feminism is making its most decisive stand. (Scott, 2014)

This kind of growth, Scott argues, can be seen time and again as women rise to power both in fact and in fictional representations. Since our popular culture informs our understanding of life

as it also reflects it, these positive portrayals are significant. If feminism can be accepted on television and in fiction, perhaps we can accept it in everyday life as well.

Unfortunately, the growth Scott refers to does not seem to transcend our sustained dislike of political figures -- yet. We still see our politicians as duplicitous crooks and the more we depict them as such in fiction the greater possibility for this to bleed into our understanding of reality. But change is possible, and if we begin to see our elected officials in a positive light in fiction, perhaps we could lose our reflexive suspicions and begin to view the political world as a positive one. The power of fiction is that it can inspire and transform the way we look at the world. Our understanding of politics can use such a transformation.

Works Cited

- Bai, M. (2014). *All the Truth Is Out: The Week Politics Went Tabloid*. New York: Knopf.
- Clooney, G. (Director). (2011). *Ides of March* [Motion Picture].
- Gallup. (2014). *Honesty/Ethics in Professions*. Retrieved November 4, 2014, from Gallup.com:
<http://www.gallup.com/poll/1654/honesty-ethics-professions.aspx>
- Gay, V. (2009, September 18). *Julianna Margulies is on the case in 'The Good Wife'*. Retrieved October 23, 2014, from Newsday: <http://www.newsday.com/entertainment/tv/julianna-margulies-is-on-the-case-in-the-good-wife-1.1460253>
- McLaughlin, E. a. (2013). *The First Affair: A Novel* . New York: Atria Books.
- Memmott, C. (2010, July 13). *Jennifer Weiner's 'Fly Away Home': Unflappably fun read*. Retrieved October 23, 2014, from USA Today: http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/life/books/reviews/2010-07-13-weinerrev13_ST_N.htm?csp=34
- Miller, S. (2009). *The Senator's Wife*. New York: Vintage.
- Scandal* (2012). [Motion Picture].
- Schultz, C. (2008, January 20). *A Public Servant*. Retrieved October 23, 2014, from Washington Post:
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/01/17/AR2008011702737.html>
- Scott, A. (2014, September 11). *The Death of Adulthood in American Culture*. Retrieved October 23, 2014, from The New York Times: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/14/magazine/the-death-of-adulthood-in-american-culture.html>
- The Good Wife* (2009). [Motion Picture].
- The Good Wife* (2014). [Motion Picture].
- Toto, C. (2010, July 25). *Book review: Life unravels around cheating politician in "Fly Away Home"*. Retrieved October 23, 2014, from The Denver Post:
http://www.denverpost.com/books/ci_15580550
- Warner, J. (2008, January 13). *Stand by Your Man* . *New York Times*, p. Sunday Book Review.