

Leeza Meets Thomas Shepard:
Confessional Dialogues in the Salvation Culture

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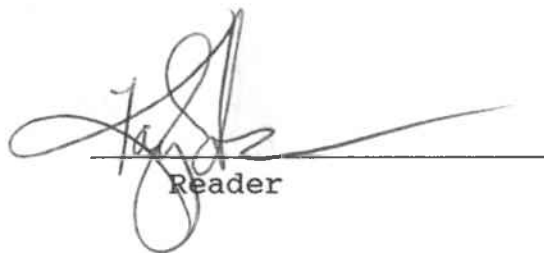


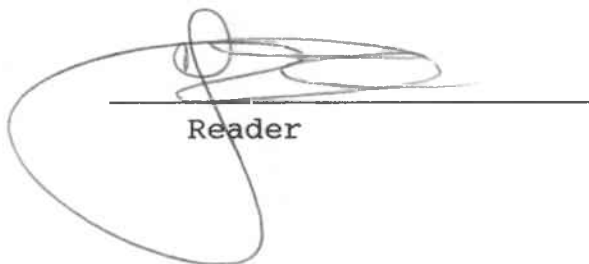
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For Debra Bernardi
and all those who have
ever challenged me to test
the boundaries of my mind

The notions of salvation and its intended function in society were deeply imbedded in the identity of America's second colonial people, the Puritans. The first Puritan colony was established in 1620 with the view that they were God's chosen, carrying out His "special appointment" in the wilderness of New England (Bercovitch). Being chosen by God was the equivalent of being "saved," which is both an indication of entering Heaven after death and of attaining social acceptance and status in the Puritan community. This dual definition of salvation has changed little since its Puritan conception. Both concepts of salvation still exist in modern society, yet they are less inextricably intertwined. Also the attainment of societal acceptance has come to be of more secular emphasis rather than having religious values and implications.

From its colonial beginnings, American culture has centered around the attainment of salvation. Inherited from our Puritan ancestors, this focus on salvation has not diminished with the growth of America into an independent nation. It can be seen at work in cliches like "keeping up with the Joneses," which exemplifies our drive to fit into society through material success. It is so pervasive that it has come to be incorporated

into the basic social codes structuring our society, in order to facilitate its attainment.

The extent to which salvation has influenced the evolution of American culture has inspired me to dub it a "salvation culture." The term salvation culture signifies any culture where the achievement of success is the achievement of salvation. The culturally founded ideas of success, and the social code which frames them are very explicit. This creates an established path to salvation, which is the fulfillment of this culture's goal. This also means that there is little room for alternative modes of behavior in this form of society, because to go outside of the social code would be to challenge the accuracy of the chosen path, and the definition of salvation itself.

The salvation culture perpetuates itself cyclically by creating the need within its participants for constant reassurance of one's salvation. This need to be reassured of one's salvation then creates a desire for and a dependency upon the empowerment and affirmation of the social norms which accompany this cycle. The salvation culture relieves this desire through the channels of self-disclosed public testimony found in events as diverse as the Puritan confessions, modern talk shows, and the recent Clinton/Lewinski sex scandal.

The idea of confession as established by the Puritans became a ritualized practice involving a specific rhetoric and format. Beneath the surface layers of rhetoric and format lay the heart of the confessional discourse itself. A confessional discourse is established within the relationship of a discloser, or the person who is confessing, and the person or group of people to whom that person is confessing. Once in this relationship, it is the duty of the discloser to self-disclose, or initiate "verbal behavior through which individuals truthfully, sincerely, and intentionally communicate novel, ordinarily private information about themselves to one or more addressees"(Priest-Dominick). The addressee, or listener, hearing the confession has the responsibility to judge and pronounce sentence upon the confession and the discloser. The private and often sensitive nature of the information disclosed makes the discloser vulnerable and subordinate to the opinions of the listener, while it places the listener in a position of dominance and advantage over the discloser. According to Michel Foucault in his study of confessional discourses, the roles enacted in this discourse create a relationship of power dynamics specific to the confessional dialogue. He writes that the confession is:

...a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile (Foucault, 62)

This power relationship is essential to the purpose of the confession as a means of attaining or receiving salvation. It is necessary because salvation can only come from a superior source, that is to say, from a source superior to the seeker of salvation. By locating power on the side of the listener via established roles, the listener is in the position to grant salvation to a subordinate discloser. It is this salvation which is the goal of the discloser and the reward of that person's confession. Confession and its discursive relationship then become "the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, [that] produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him and promises him salvation"(Foucault 62).

Modern America is as much a salvation culture as the Puritan culture was. Today's society still carries the same definitions of success and salvation established by the Puritans, and uses rituals like the confession which enforce the societal tenets of the

salvation culture. Of course there are some differences, and these are mainly seen in the changes that have arisen in the format of confession and in the goal of self-disclosure.

One of the most accessible examples for evaluating modern confessional format and self-disclosure is found in American talk shows. The talk show replicates the confessional format used by the Puritans, except that there is often more than one discloser, and the goals of the discloser(s) are focused on a more abstract end. Instead of primarily seeking an immediate tangible result, like entrance into the church, disclosers tend to seek a broad social acceptance by enlightening the public about themselves through their self-disclosing testimony.

As a culture steeped in the desire for salvation and accustomed to following the paths of social codes and rituals that have been established for the attainment of salvation, Americans are attracted to the public confessionals of the talk shows. While being forums for dialogue and potential social change, they confirm established social codes more than they challenge them. Equally important, public testimony also serves as a source of empowerment for the listeners by enacting the power relationship inherent in all confessional relationships. Thus by simply turning on

the television, it is possible to confirm one's social mores and to feel empowered (if only for the duration of the talk show).

Recent politics have afforded another scenario for examining confession and its operation within the salvation culture. Almost as lurid as Jerry Springer, the investigation of president Clinton's affair with intern Monica Lewinski has generated more than just public disgust. It has produced an intricate dialogue of confession, invoking the salvation culture's ritual of confession and its established roles on several levels. Also it demonstrates the complex nature of power within a salvation culture and how no one--regardless of their wealth or status--is immune to its fluctuations and relocations.

In the following pages, I would like to explore the machinations of the salvation culture as it was developed in the Puritan society and as it continues to function in modern American society. In doing this, I will use examples of confession from both cultures to illustrate the cycle of salvation and to demonstrate how members of each culture come to participate in and perpetuate this ritualistic pattern.

The Puritans

The Puritans rooted their identity in the idea that they were "a company of Christians not only called but chosen, and chosen not only for heaven but as instruments of a sacred historical design"(Bercovitch 1978, 7). This special selection by God marks the Puritans as a people who have attained the salvation of the Lord, and thus they called themselves saints. They held a special relationship to God as His chosen, that acted as a covenant which placed the Puritans and their God in a mutually binding relationship. This idea of a covenantal relationship meant that "they had pledged themselves to God, and He to them, to protect, assist, and favor them above any other community on earth"(Bercovitch 1978, 3). As a mutually binding agreement, the covenant also required that the Puritans live in solidarity with their God by pursuing a Godly life as prescribed in the edicts of the Bible. The consequences for not fulfilling their end of the covenant would be that "at their slightest shortcoming, for neglecting the 'least' of their duties, He would

turn in wrath against them and be revenged"(Bercovitch 1978, 3).

With the guarantee of Puritan salvation being based in their ability to fulfill their end of the covenant, there was much anxiety in the Puritan community over the possibility that human iniquity placed their salvation in jeopardy. Examples of iniquity appear as common themes of sermons, such as the evil of succumbing "to carnal lures, lean[ing] toward profits and pleasures, [and] permitt[ing] their children to degenerate"(Bercovitch 1978, 4). The focus on human short-comings is a product of not only the anxiety produced by their knowledge that "should the [Puritans] fall prey to such temptations, God would surely withdraw their "special appointment," weed them out, pluck them up, and cast them out of His sight"(Bercovitch 1978, 4), but also the importance that the Puritan culture places on salvation.

Being saved or chosen is the central idea in the Puritan community's self-concept. It is so important that one cannot even be considered a member of the church until it has been determined that one actually has been chosen by God to be saved. For the Puritans, salvation carried a double meaning. First, it signified God's spiritual preference and assured one's entrance into heaven. Second, it meant the temporal

representation of God's favor in signs of material success and social status. In other words, it was understood as a saved member of the Puritan church, that one would go to Heaven after death, and this assumption was reassured by tangible signs of economic and social success during one's life on earth.

The importance of the role of salvation in Puritan culture elucidates the prevalent anxiety over the desire to know whether one was saved or not saved. In order to diminish some of this anxiety, the Puritans established a highly selective means of determining God's elect. The rationalization for the elitism of this process was centered around the idea that as God's people, the Puritans were specially appointed, and therefore given access to the privileges of that appointment. Because God's appointment or selection was not available to just anyone, membership in the Puritan church (which signified being God's chosen, and therefore saved) should not be available to just anyone.

The mechanism by which the Puritans selected their members was the confession. The Puritan confession took place in the meeting house in front of the congregation and pastor. However, before the person making the confession even entered the meeting house, a process of selection had begun. Pastors like Thomas Shepard chose persons who "demonstrate[d] visible

sainthood"(McGiffert 1972, 136) in their lives to be eligible to apply for membership. Michael McGiffert, who has studied the confessions of Shepard's congregation, also writes that "we know these were not impromptu performances; they had been practiced at home, coached by the minister, and vetted by senior saints. The confessors tell us, too, that they had sometimes shared their spiritual problems with other ministers, relatives, and friends"(1972, 137).

In the case of Thomas Shepard's congregation, the selected applicants were encouraged not to "heap up all the particular passages of [their] lives wherein [they] have got any good; do not parade your knowledge of the Bible or your recall of sermons..."(McGiffert 1972, 137). Shepard specifically encouraged applicants to speak simply of things that "may be of special use unto the people of God, such things as tend to show, Thus was I humbled, then thus was I called, then thus I have walked, though with many weaknesses, since: and such special providences of God I have seen, temptations gone through, and thus the Lord hath delivered me, blessed be his name, etc."(McGiffert 1972, 137).

McGiffert calls these suggestions Shepard's "formula" for a successful confession, and indeed his suggestions are seen to become rhetoricized throughout the examples of actual confessions. The conversion of

Shepard's suggestions into rhetoric, along with other words or phrases found to be helpful, was due to the seriousness with which the Puritans took their opportunity to become saved. They were not going to take chances with their salvation. If the minister said that these phrases were important to their success, or if it was found that a certain expression was key to a person's acceptance, those became the expressions that were used (and repeatedly used) because those were the ones that worked.

The prescribed format and the use of specified rhetorical words and phrases in the confessions established the confession as a ritual both within the Puritan church and also extended it out into the Puritan society. This sense of ritual surrounded "certain rites of passage [like entrance into the church], express[ed] a conception of community, and provide[d] patterned roles that lay people knew exactly how to play"(Hall 1989, 19-20). The ritual of confession and its cultural pervasiveness created a means of social and communal cohesion. This can be seen in the participation of Puritan people in the devices of the ritual, and through this, their subscription to and perpetuation of the social mores which the ritual imparts.

The accounts of various confessions as recorded by Thomas Shepard illustrate the extent to which Puritans

incorporated the ideals behind the ritual into their lives. The foremost of these ideals articulated in the ritual of confession is the importance of salvation. If it were not for this, Puritans would not have put themselves through the ordeal of making confession. Thus the ritual of confession came to play an important role within the Puritan society because it became "a crucial task...to erase the taint of sin, to cleanse the self and the body social and renew covenantal obligations"(Hall 1989, 167) in order to achieve salvation. The importance of salvation and the ideas of cleansing oneself of sin and renewing one's covenant are seen in the confession of Alice Stedman. She speaks of herself as being in the sinful "condition [of] finding myself unable to believe and to walk as I should"(McGiffert 1972, 186), and she continues by describing her successive attempts and failures at achieving a solid faith. Eventually she experiences a situation symbolic of the renewal of her covenant with God, where "the Lord came in much by those words. And so was much confirmed, and many times since the Lord hath spoken to me to help me"(McGiffert 1972, 189).

A corollary to the importance and need for salvation were the anxiety and pain that accompanied one's search for salvation. Throughout all of the confessions, "doubts pervade these stories; worries

abound. The confessors have been running--are still running--a broken course that zigs and zags from anxiety to assurance and back again. Their anxieties stand out sharply; their pain is evident. Their assurance, by contrast, seems transient and incomplete..."(McGiffert 1972, 140). This constant anxiety makes itself evident through the catalogue of transgressions that shows up in literally every confession. For instance, Joanna Sill says in her confession that "her heart went after the world and vanities, and the Lord absented himself from her..."(McGiffert 1972, 160). Francis Moore speaks of his guilt in "other relapses he finds, as security and sloth and sleepiness and contenting himself in ordinances without the good of them"(McGiffert 1972, 151).

These catalogues of sins are always accompanied by the certainty that God was acting in the disclosers' lives, making them aware, as discloser Robert Browne says, of their "vileness and wretchedness"(McGiffert 1972, 219). It is necessary to show assurance that God acts in one's life because one of the tasks of the discloser is to prove one's appointment by God for salvation. This would be seen in the acting presence of God in their lives. In their references to God as a guide toward a more righteous life, Puritan disclosers demonstrated one of their few moments of assurance, and

even this was given amidst a self-deprecating list of sins.

Just as the confessions portrayed the ideals of salvation and its attending anxiety, they enacted a pattern which is repeated throughout the confessions and further demonstrates the ritual characteristics of the confession. Following almost exactly Thomas Shepard's prescription for a good confession, almost all of the confessions begin with a list of spiritual and moral struggles accompanied by various pertinent sins. Examples of this are seen in the testimonies of Edward Collins and George Willows. Collins speaks of his "secret lust" and says that he "thought if Christ was to be had upon no other terms but to part with every lust, then [he] thought [he] should never have Him, it was so hard"(McGiffert 1972, 179). Willows speaks of his trials saying, "the more he did strive against corruption, the more he was overcome by corruption"(McGiffert 1972, 154) and then proceeds to recount sins such as his inability to comply with ordinances.

The next movement in the progression of the prescribed confessional format was to relate how God was gradually making himself known to the discloser. Phrases like "God had let me see," "the Lord stirred up my heart," and "Lord revealed himself"(McGiffert) were

commonly used throughout the confessions to show how the Lord was working in the lives of the disclosers. The relation of God's participation was especially important because it showed that God was an active part of the discloser's life, and that the discloser was attempting to fulfill a covenantal relationship with God. Revealing the presence of God in one's life through this form of guidance was one of the crucial prerequisites of being eligible for sainthood.

The final prerequisite consisted in showing how the Lord's guiding actions lead the discloser to acts of grace, or signs of His grace. These acts of grace signified God's fulfillment of His covenant with that individual, and because of this, they offered proof that the confessor qualified for sainthood. Confession builds to the revelation of grace by moving through the previous stages of recounting struggles and showing God's guidance, and usually concludes a speaker's final testimony of how God has acted in the discloser's life. John Stedman concludes his testimony by revealing God's grace when he says that "God spake to me as if I had told him and so found my hardness of heart subdued in some measure. And since have been carried through many fears and doubts"(McGiffert 1972, 173). Nathaniel Eaton's confession also concludes on the note of grace when he says "the Lord hath awakened me and hath not

suffered me to relapse but to rise again, etc., and persuaded me that the seeds cast upon me shall last unto eternal life"(McGiffert 1972, 165).

The ritual of confession, with all its emphasis on ideals and established patterns of behavior, served yet another purpose within the Puritans' salvation culture. The confession in "regards [to] assurance...had a steadying effect, despite the nervousness it roused"(McGiffert 1972, 145). This is because as a ritual, the confession served as a means of cultural cohesion; a way of affirming the collective beliefs and identity of the Puritan culture. According to Sacvan Bercovitch, the term ritual "in its broadest sense...[means] the forms and strategies of cultural continuity"(1993, 30). When applied to confession in this sense, it can be seen that ritual structure served a dual function. It "recapitulated the great cycle of sinning and repentance that men and women passed through as pilgrims on the way to grace--passed through not once but many times in lifelong warfare against sin. Ritual practice had much to do, as well, with these people's sense of corporate identity. Ritual reaffirmed the ideal nature of the body social and protected it from danger"(Hall 1989, 167.)

This quote from David Hall's book Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgement captures the essence of the two

mutually reinforcing cycles that occur within a culture based in salvation. A salvation culture like that of the Puritans functions on both a personal level between individual members of the community, and on a larger socio-cultural level. As I have shown in the case of the Puritans, individuals participate in the salvation culture through prescribed rituals like the confession. This participation in turn allows for the perpetuation of the intricate system of beliefs which constitute the salvation culture of the body social. In other words, the existence of the large scale salvation culture is dependent upon the individuals who reaffirm--and in this sense, re-establish--the validity of its tenets through ritual.

However, just as the people act on their culture by confirming its tenets through ritual practices, so the culture in turn acts back upon the people. The idea of attaining salvation, central to the salvation culture, means that one is attempting to reach an ideal state. In the case of the Puritans, this was a state of heavenly perfection. Yet, as this ideal state does not exist anywhere on earth, it is impossible to realize this goal. For the Puritans, the realization of salvation could only be obtained in the after-life, even though they believed that there were earthly tokens of one's probable eligibility for salvation.

By establishing cultural success as an unattainable ideal for which one must strive, the salvation culture fosters within its members a pervasive sense of personal doubt and insecurity as to whether or not one has actually been saved. It is this sense of insecurity which is the vehicle for the perpetuation of the salvation culture. It drives members of the culture to participate in rituals like confession, because it is through these rituals that the participant can gain at least a momentary sense of assurance, and therefore relieve that oppressive anxiety. Of course, their participation in the rituals reinforces the culture's tenets, allowing the cycle to continue.

At the heart of this mutually reassuring cycle is a continual fluctuation of power between the contingent parts that participate in and make up a salvation culture. The ultimate authority in a salvation culture would come from that culture's ideal state, which has already been established as being unattainable by human beings. Because of this no one person, organization, or institution can be located as the sole source of power within a salvation culture. This is not to say that there were not powerful families in Puritan New England, or that the Puritan church as an institution within that community did not possess a large amount of power. Instead, this signifies that as a salvation culture, the

power structure of the Puritan community operates by what Foucault defines as a

multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them;...and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallizations is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, [and] in the various social hegemonies. (1978, 92)

This definition has two primary implications for the functioning of power within a salvation culture. The first of these implications is that power is a transient, constantly shifting its residency from one location to another. This characteristic is further complicated because it also includes a constant shift in quantities of power. Types or forms of power are also capable of shifting to one of its many forms. (Foucault, for example, writes about how the power of sexuality shifts between several locations like the family or the individual couple.) This means that not only is there more than single source of power, but that the holder of power changes, as do the kinds and quantities of power held.

The second implication lies in the idea that all of these fluctuations of power can be seen by restricting them to a specific "sphere in which they operate." Despite power's slipperiness, it is possible to examine it when isolated within a certain relationship or

scenario, as in the case of the Puritan confession. Once isolated, power's various maneuvers become apparent.

It is important, then, to recognize that this work's discussions of power refers to the power dynamics occurring within an isolated relationship (specifically that of the confession). It would be incorrect to suggest that, for example, a person who is in the position of the discloser is utterly powerless. Instead, it is only within the sphere of the confessional relationship that the discloser loses power. The power exchange which occurs in that relationship does not directly affect the power that person might hold in other "force relations."

Returning to the idea of power operating as a "multiplicity of force relations" in continual stages of flux, one can see that the power structure of the Puritan culture was definitely a dynamic one. Of course the rates of power's fluctuations are also variable. For example, the power of the Puritan church takes nearly one hundred years to markedly diminish. Yet when considering the movements of power between individuals in their daily activities, the fluctuation of power becomes much more rapid. A simple example of this can be seen in the power dynamics within the relationships of the typical patriarchal Puritan family:

At first glance, power appears to exist in a stereotypical "top-down" structure, with a wife typically being in a subordinate position to her husband and therefore less powerful in relationship to her husband. When with her children however, she would usually be in a dominant position, and her children would then be subordinates, giving her the power in this relationship.

Though this structuring of power probably occurs with regularity, there are also times when it reverses itself. In these periods, the wife assert her will over her husband and therefore gain power in their relationship. Also, children have been known to gain the upper hand with their parents and in doing so, gain power over them. In these smaller personal relationships as in the cases of larger entities such as institutions or dynastic families, power is transitory, quantitative, and qualitative.

In the society of the Puritans, the ritual of confession exemplifies this fluctuating matrix of power, and exposes its relationship to the community on both its institutional and individual levels. I have previously examined the ways in which Puritans participated in confession, their motivations for doing so, and the results that they hoped to gain from it. In discussing the incorporation of power structure within

the confession, I would like arrive at the essence of confession's role in the salvation culture, revealing how it is grounded in issues of access to power.

In the introduction I mentioned Foucault's assertion that the confession is "a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship"(1978, 61). In a simplified sense, the relationship exists between two parties, that of the discloser and that of the listener. This basic relationship can be complicated for example, by adding additional disclosers or listeners, as in the case of multiple confessions or audiences like the Puritan congregation. In any case, however, the power within the discourse lies primarily on the side of the listener. A discloser has limited power in the sense that they have control of what they choose or do not choose to say and through this they can help to shape the listener's image of them. However, this power is still inferior to that of the listener. The bulk of the power lies with the listener, because it is he or she who directs the course of the discloser's confession through pertinent questions and then judges and pronounces sentence or opinion upon what has been confessed. Conversely, the discloser is at the mercy of the listener throughout the confessional process, and thus assumes a subordinate position to the listener in terms of power.

This lopsided distribution of power in a confessional discourse is crucial to the purpose of the ritual and how it fits into the salvation culture. As stated earlier, people like the Puritans practice confession for the purpose of attaining salvation. Salvation is by nature sacred (whether in a religious sense or because of the weight a culture gives it) and therefore is only capable of coming from a source of power superior to that of the person seeking salvation. In order to obtain salvation through the medium of confession, one party has to have more power than the other.

The requirement that the prescribed roles of the confessional relationship be unequal in power offers an important opportunity for empowerment for those participating in a salvation culture. In other words, participating as listeners allows people to benefit from being in an empowered role by increasing their self-confidence and affirming their position as worthy members of that society. This is important because in a society where possession of power is transitory and one can never be certain of one's status of being saved, there is a deficit of self assurance. This is seen within Puritan culture in their perpetual anxiety over their salvation and in the constant cycle of doubt and reassurance that plays out, both on a personal

psychological level and on a societal level. Participating in the ritual role of the listener provides an outlet for relieving some of this anxiety. The central role that confession plays within a salvation culture makes participating in this role easy and accessible to those who have already obtained "membership." Thus confession offers relatively easy access to empowerment (albeit transitory empowerment) to those eligible for participation. History has proven that communities like the Puritans have taken advantage of such opportunities to access power. This channel continues to be used in modern America in the area of entertainment and politics.

The confessional relationship contains a "built in" chance to feel good about oneself in cultures like that of the Puritans' where self-confidence is not only difficult, but often seen as "sinful." It is this self-assuring quality of the confession which made it not only a popular cultural institution of colonial seventeenth century America, but has assured its continuance in modern times. The subtle psychological addiction to reassurance generated by the ritual of confession also continues to follow us, helping to perpetuate this cyclical salvation culture in contemporary American society.

Modern America and the Talk Show

The legacy of the salvation culture, passed on to us by the Puritans, is still an active part of modern American society. Bercovitch describes this heritage when he says, "the distinctive contribution [of the Puritans] lay in the realm of symbology. The Puritans provided their heirs, in New England first and then the United States, with a useful, flexible, durable, and compelling fantasy of the American identity"(1993, 7). This fantasy of American identity continues to be pursued and played out within the modern parameters of the salvation culture and is show-cased in the talk show.

Talk shows have been described as anything from "pulp pulpits" to freak shows. Yet it is in this open discursive setting that the perpetuation of America's societal values as a salvation culture can be witnessed in action. The talk show offers a place where people can go to share the stories of their trials, and even of their successes; but almost always they go with the hope of receiving sympathy if not social acceptance.

In the interest of ratings, guests appearing on talk shows are usually either famous persons or members of various marginalized groups of our society that "average" America terms freaks or social misfits. In a study done in 1994 on 29 former guests of the Donahue show, Patricia Priest and Joseph Dominick found that "the bulk of the informants represent groups considered deviant to varying degrees by society"(82). Indeed, this "marginalized position earned them invitations to appear on the show....Others in this sample are not members of groups considered deviant by the mainstream but fame stigmatizing responses to a particular facet of their lives"(Priest-Dominick,82). A random selection of talk show themes from a variety of programs on any given day, will reveal that the 29 people who participated in this study represent the overwhelming numbers of guests that can be categorized as members of marginalized groups.

The above study found that the majority of guests, when asked why they felt the need to self-disclose on national television, answered that they experienced a "'calling' to address injustices and remedy stereotypes [which] overrode other considerations such that any hesitancy about disclosure was outweighed by the perceived benefits to society and to the standing of one's marginalized group"(Priest-Dominick,83). Much of

the desire on the part of marginalized groups to correct social images is driven by anxiety over personal suffering and the suffering of others due to lack of societal understanding and acceptance. Thus they apply to society for understanding and acceptance through self-disclosure, which is the modern equivalent of the Puritan application for entrance into the church via the self-disclosure of the confession. In both cases, disclosers are seeking societal confirmation of their eligibility for salvation. Yet where salvation for the Puritan meant the ability to go to heaven signified by entrance into the church, salvation in the modern sense is secured by social acceptance, signified by inclusion into mainstream America. In the talk show format, social acceptance is recognized by acceptance from the audience, which comes to represent a microcosm of mainstream America.

This idea of seeking salvation through social acceptance is further evidenced by the deliberate use of specific rhetorical devices and varied methods of stigma management in the hopes of portraying an acceptable image of themselves and the marginalized group to which they belong. In Priest-Dominick's study of guests of the Donahue show, "respondents seemed to sense which rhetorical themes would be successful to communicate with the public-at-large. They used rhetoric familiar

to and valued by Americans. These included explicit references to such issues as love, family, civil rights, and individual choice"(91). This intentional use of rhetoric which is perceived as belonging to the value system of mainstream America shows an effort on the part of the guests to stress "commonalities the[ir] group share[s] with the mainstream"(Priest-Dominick,91). Establishing shared values is a part of their strategy for attaining social acceptance or salvation.

Stigma management is another strategy used by the guests, and refers to the efforts one makes to control and shape how others perceive one's intentions, character, and personal definitions of situations. Guests use this technique because they are aware that "stereotypes of their group must be addressed before society's boundaries will be adapted to include them"(Priest-Dominick,83). Controlling the manner in which they are perceived helps guests mitigate potential negative responses to their marginalized positions, further increasing their chances for understanding and acceptance.

With the majority of guests seeming to push the boundaries of what is considered mainstream American society, it would appear that talk shows would be considered as centers for the de-stabilizing of American culture and its values. However because the goal of the

disclosers is to attain salvation by gaining entrance into mainstream society, they in fact must confirm mainstream social values to show their eligibility for acceptance. Thus as in the Puritan culture, public self-disclosure becomes a way of creating cultural cohesion by the recognition of commonly held cultural values.

A further vehicle of cohesion is the recognition and usage of the specific ritualized format of the talk show. The talk show is prefaced and surrounded by a series of specific patterns like the selection of the audience, rhetoric used by the talk show host, and even the actual design of the set. All of these patterns establish a ritualistic scenario much like the one which surrounded the Puritans as they made their confessions. I was able to witness this process in action when I attended the Leeza Gibbon show in the summer of 1998.

The selection process begins on two levels. First a booker must find guests to be on the program. These guests are preferably either "celebrities, who can be interviewed either as stars or as 'private people,'...[or more commonly,] guests who are issue motivated, "average" people culled from either the headlines, support groups, or a list of stand-by experts"(Munson, 368). The booker fulfills one of the roles of the Puritan minister in using a set of

criteria to weed out inferior candidates, and select those who would be desirable.

After the guests have been selected to fit the theme of the show, the audience must be selected. Audience selection was less of an issue for the Puritans, because the only people who could attend a confession were members of the church and had already passed the selection process of confession. In the case of talk shows, where there is no readily available membership pool to provide an audience, it is necessary to open the show to the public. This necessitates a selection process in order to regulate the number and quality of people who will participate in the audience.

The selection process begins with the studio's requirement that would-be audience members call the studio to make a reservation for a seat to guarantee ability to see the show. Once at the studio, those who have reservations are separated from those who do not. Then those with reservations are placed in different groups according to how well they are dressed. Each talk show has its own dress code, and informs potential audience participants of this when they call for either information or reservations. The dress code for the Leeza show asked that shorts and t-shirts not be worn. It recommended skirts or dresses for women and long-sleeved tops for both sexes. The conservative dress

code is representative of the television program's image of mainstream America. This use of a more conservative dress code is one of many ways in which the programs like talk shows accentuate the differences between their audiences and their more flamboyant guests. It also serves as a visible demarkation for distinguishing between what members of contemporary culture might see as the "saved" and the "not saved."

After dividing the audience, the ushers began to seat them. They first selected those from the group that was better dressed and had reservations first. These people were placed by the ushers in areas frequently viewed by the camera, and thus the viewing public, in positions such as aisle-ways or (in this show's format) behind the guests. Regardless of which initial group someone had been placed in, no one was allowed to choose their own seat. These precautions concerning dress code and seating would not have been necessary for the Puritans who, as members, would already be participating in the Puritan dress code. Also they would be able to take their familiar seats in the meeting house as camera presentation would not be an issue.

Once the selection process for the audience is accomplished, then the preparation of both the guests and the audience begins. Prior to the show, guests are

interviewed by one of the producers to establish which details will be relevant to the program and to give the producer and the host a more intimate perspective on the person(s) and issues which will be discussed. Unlike the Puritan confessions, talk shows try to encourage some spontaneity, so little rehearsal is required for their guests. However, before making their appearance, guests are given a list of probable questions which will be asked during the show, and an outline which follows the general course of the intended conversation.

On the Leeza show, the audience begins their preparation as soon as they find their seats. On each seat is a piece of chocolate, which is the first indication of the intent behind audience preparation. The goal of "prepping" the audience is to create a happy, receptive and attentive audience. This intention becomes more obvious when, after everyone is seated, the "opener" comes out onto the darkened set amidst flashing lights and blaring fast paced music. The "opener" is a comedian responsible for getting the audience excited about the program. The comedian accomplishes this by putting on a stand up routine which includes audience participation in anything from jokes to an audience-judged dance contest. It is important that the audience be in this enthusiastic and receptive state for two reasons: The eager audience is

commercially appealing and will attract more viewers to the program. Also, being in this state further increases the imbalance of power within the confessional relationship between the audience and the guest(s) by making the former feel more comfortable, thus boosting their feelings of security and confidence in their position.

Once the audience is excited, the opener slows the pace down and information about the show is discussed. The opener tells the audience about the plot of that day's show, and how its guests relate to that plot. The theme of the episode I visited was "Black Widows: Women who Kill their Mates." The opener told the audience who would be appearing on the show and how that person related to the story which we would be hearing. Since that show covered a particular case of a "black widow," her story of marriages, betrayals, and murders were synopsized for the audience by the opener. Also, the opener coached the audience on the most desirable response to certain information. For example, if a particularly gruesome piece of evidence was related, the audience was to show expressive shock. We were warned that segments would have to be re-shot if the audience did not deliver the desired response to the extent which the producers felt necessary to create the correct atmosphere for the show.

During the taping of the show, the audience observed as Leeza asked questions that would draw forth the story of the "black widow." These questions were intended to elucidate both factual knowledge surrounding the story of the alleged murderer and knowledge of her character. Thus, with its mixture of factual evidence and character traits, the story that evolves from this process is similar to the tales which the Puritans told of their own lives during their confessions. As in the case of the Puritans, the information which comes from this questioning combines to allow the audience a personal view of this woman and her life which would not generally be available to the public. In both cases, the audience is given this sensitive information in order to form opinions (concerning morality, legality, or other issues) about this woman and her actions. These opinions will later be used to pass judgment upon the woman, symbolically determining her eligibility for receiving the culturally prescribed form of salvation.

The judgment of the guest is the final element in the ritual format of the talk show. This takes place throughout the last half of the show, when the audience gets a chance to ask its own questions of the guest concerning any opinions that they might have of her and her story. This is similar to the Puritan confessional format, in that audience interaction with

the discloser is not only permitted but encouraged. In both formats, audience questions are used to draw out further information about the discloser's character, past actions, and possible intentions for future courses of action. This information will also be used to determine whether the discloser attains salvation. However, in the case of the Puritans, the minister and the select elders of the church ultimately decide one's eligibility for salvation. In the case of the talk show, the decision lies with the audience. This is not to say that the host does not play an influential role in manipulating the audience's feelings toward the guest. It only emphasizes that, regardless of the host's opinion, the final judgment of the guest is pronounced by the audience.

While my experience on the Leeza show is representative of the confessional model and power structure native to talk shows, it is not representative of the varied styles of talk show formats and audiences. However, while there may be differences between the various programs, they all reflect the confessional discourses of the salvation culture. Some examples of programs that have alternative formats are the Ricki Lake Show and the Mother Love show.

Ricki Lake caters to a younger more casual crowd, both in the case of its audience and its TV viewers.

The probable ages of this audience (by my estimation) range between 16 and 26, while that of the Leeza show were (again by my estimation) 28 to 40. Also, the dress code of the program is more casual than that of the Leeza show, allowing audience members either sex to wear jeans and t-shirts if they choose. Despite these differences, there is great similarity between the issues that both programs address. For example, probable common topics would be issues such as teen suicide or date rape. In exploring these topics, both use the format of the Leeza show. This means that guests disclose their stories and then the audience is permitted to ask questions of the guest. Later, as occurs on Leeza, the audience will pass judgment upon the guests and their stories.

The Mother Love show is directed towards a similar audience as the Leeza show, but the only themes that it deals with are forgiveness and apology. The program also has a different format for guest and audience interaction that emphasizes its choice of themes.

Mother Love brings guests onto the show that want to confess to a past wrong or clarify misunderstandings and then either seek forgiveness of the person involved in these past occurrences or receive an apology from them. This person then has the opportunity to appear on the show if they are willing to forgive the guest. If

they have chosen to do so, they wait behind a door on the show's staging, out of sight of the guest. The guest then has to open the door after making their confession in order to see if the person that they addressed has come to forgive them. An example of a typical Mother Love scenario an episode where a 16 year old girl who had gotten pregnant and then ran away to get married to her baby's father, comes on the show to seek forgiveness of her mother. After relating the circumstances of her story and then asking forgiveness of her mother, the girl must go and open the door to see if her mother has agreed to come on the program and forgive her. In this case, the mother agreed to appear and forgive her daughter. The mother then comes out to the main stage and explains her side of the story and why she is willing to forgive her daughter.

Both before the guest goes to the door and afterwards (regardless of whether there is someone behind it), the audience has the opportunity to ask questions of the guests. However, the amount of time set aside for this is much less than that of the Leeza show. Judgments of the guests are also being made by the audience. This is apparent in the questions that they ask of the guests, as in the case of the above mother and daughter. After the mother had agreed to forgive her daughter, an audience member asked how the

mother was capable of forgiveness after her daughter's disrespectful betrayal.

Despite differences in format or audience, each of these shows exhibits the puritanical ritual of confession and its inherent power dynamics. Talk shows especially reveal these elements at work within mainstream modern America and those who hover on its fringes. However these workings of the salvation culture are not exclusive to these classes alone. The tenets of the salvation culture are practiced by all who participate within that culture, including the members of its upper classes. One of the United States' most vivid examples of this is the investigation of President Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinski. The use of the confession and its power dynamics are manifested throughout the investigation. I will explore the operation of these elements in order to show the extent to which the tenets of the salvation culture permeate modern American society.

President Clinton

The scope of the salvation culture's influence is not bound by class, race, gender, or any other social-cultural distinction that Americans use to delineate and classify each other. It permeates not only mainstream America and its aberrations, as seen in the case of the talk show, but also extends to touch even the most powerful participants in modern American culture. The pervasive nature of salvation culture is yet another inheritance from the Puritans, who required all of their members (even Thomas Shepard himself) to undergo confession. This broad reach has recently come to encompass the White House during the United States' most recent political scandal: the Independent Counsel's investigation into President Clinton's relationship with the infamous intern Monica Lewinski.

The moral and political outrage spurred by this investigation shifted the salvation culture's intricate matrix of power away from the president and into diverse accusatory hands. The three primary places to which this power spread were to the members of Congress, the

American public, and the Independent Counsel, Kenneth Starr. This redistribution of power set the stage for the enactment of the salvation culture's confessional ritual. It did this by placing the president in the required position of inferior power within the specific sphere of the investigation. This means that the president maintained his power in other aspects of his office even though, within the scope of the investigation, he lost much of his power as he was gradually forced into the role of the discloser. The slow leak of the affair's details, leading up to the crescendo of slanderous information catalogued in the Starr Report, solidified the redistribution of power and gave its new holders ammunition to come after the president as his judge and jury. In attaining this new position, the triumvirate of congress, the American public and Starr also stepped into the established confessional role of the listener and proceeded to demand Clinton's confession. This division of the judge's role into three parts is similar to that of the talk show which has two judges, the actual studio audience and TV viewers at home.

This final development formally set into motion the ritual of confession which kept Americans both captivated and disgusted through the second half of 1998. While the investigation of the president and the

events surrounding it evoke the complex pattern of components belonging to confession, these elements are in turn surrounded by a ritualized dialogue that is used to facilitate confession. This dialogue is similar to those used both by the Puritans and talk shows. Other devices such as stigma management and the use of rhetorical themes, seen in the case of talk shows, are used throughout the course of the investigation by both Clinton and his accusers. As I examine the details of this dramatic ordeal, these occurrences which I have briefly listed will become more evident, demonstrating how the functioning presence of the salvation culture works within even the highest reaches of American society.

The roots of the rhetorical dialogue that surrounds Kenneth Starr's investigation into the Lewinski affair began with his appointment as Independent Counsel for the investigation of the White Water and Travel Gate fiascos. While unable to uncover any incriminating evidence against President Clinton concerning either of these two scandals, Starr did discover Paula Jones in 1994. Jones became the first of a string of women to come forward to accuse the president of sexual misconduct. Although her case, like the others, was eventually dismissed, it produced two consequential effects: the definition of sexual relations which

established the rhetorical patterns seen throughout the scandal, and the introduction of Monica Lewinski in the beginning of 1998.

The phrasing of this definition created a frame of rhetoric that would be used throughout the Monica Lewinski case to describe what would be and would not be considered sexual relations. While the investigation of Monica Lewinski posed obvious problems for the president, the definition of sexual relations was a more subtle difficulty that came to create a series of complications throughout Lewinski's case. In a joint effort with Starr, Clinton's legal team defined sexual relations during the Paula Jones case as "contact with the genitalia, anus, groin, breast, inner thigh, or buttocks of any person with an intent to arouse or gratify the sexual desire of any person" (Time, Aug. 24). This rhetorical frame was originally designed to be specific enough to allow the President room to deny Jones' allegations of sexual conduct on the basis of a technicality within the definition. However it came to haunt Clinton in the Lewinski investigation, ensnaring him in a rhetorical web that he eventually could not escape.

One of the first places in which the rhetorical framework of the definition of sexual relations comes into play is in the Starr Report. Starr subpoenaed

Monica Lewinski in order to get her testimony--or confession--about the nature of the affair for his report. In her testimony (which became available to the public in September with the rest of his report) the language of the definition repeatedly surfaces in descriptions of Lewinski's actions with the president and her views of their relationship. In describing her first encounter with Clinton, Lewinski says that "he touched her breasts with his hands and mouth...[H]e put his hand down my pants and stimulated me manually in the genital area...[and then] she performed oral sex on him"(Time, September 21, 1998, pg. 53). The words "genitalia" and "breast" come directly from the definition of sexual relations. Also from this description, the idea of gratifying "the sexual desire of any person" is also evident. Starr has Lewinski use the clinical language of the definition of sexual relations in her testimony to show the affair's qualification as a sexual relationship. This language and other direct references to the definition are used repeatedly throughout Lewinski's account of the affair, which spanned from November of 1995 to May of 1996. The repetition of these terms established a rhetorical frame-work for not only describing the affair, but also the way in which people would perceive the affair. After Lewinski's testimony, there would be little room

for the president avoid the allegations of sexual conduct.

Another rhetorical frame of dialogue was constructed that situated the president in the ritualized position of the discloser as more information was released in early summer concerning the potential sexual nature of the president's relationship with Lewinski. The American public began to place pressure on the president via political poles published in the media to make a statement explaining his relationship. The media, following the public's cue, began to use terms like "confession," "confessor," and "judge" in association with the president's impending explanatory statement.

As the details of his affair steadily leaked out to the public and the president's silence lengthened, the public and congress acquired the evidence--and consequentially, the power--to require a "confession". The president obliged this demand in August with his first confessional statement. Until this point, Clinton had actively denied any form of sexual relationship with Monica Lewinski, as defined by the court-approved definition of sexual relations used in the Jones case. In the president's August confession, he finally admitted to having an affair of a sexual nature with Monica Lewinski. In his admissions

throughout August, he used phrases like "I deeply regret that..." and "I'm having to become quite an expert in this business of asking for forgiveness" (Time, Sept. 14, 1998, pg. 44). This language, while confessional, is evasive in that it prevents Clinton from having to directly apologize and imply that he is guilty of having sexual relations. In other words, Clinton used confessional language in his apologies, but not to confess to what he was accused of. Instead, he tried to re-direct the allegations against him by creating his own rhetorical frame. Thus this evasive language becomes the adoptive rhetoric of the president because it allows him to avoid the rhetorical frame-work that was developed in the definition of sexual relations and later established by Starr through Lewinski's testimony. To use Starr's rhetoric would be to admit guilt and Clinton (at least early in the scandal) was still attempting to suggest his innocence in order to gain the support of the public and congress.

Clinton's evasive rhetoric, however, did not win him the support that he was looking for. Instead, the effect of Clinton's initial admission was a barrage of media coverage including articles with titles like Time magazine's August 24th cover story, "Truth and Consequences." These articles use the language of confession and even discusses its power shifts,

demonstrating the popular situation of Clinton and his scandal in the frame-work of the confessional ritual. The placing of the president within the confessional ritual reveals the failure of the president's attempt to avoid participating in the confessional ritual and escape guilt through creation of his own evasive rhetoric. This is seen in comments like "[the president's] best chance for survival demanded that he declare himself less than we expect a President to be and more like the rest of us after all. The moment Clinton confesses to anything, he loses some magical powers...[and] some actual powers as well"(Time, Aug. 24, 1998).

In this exemplary comment, several examples of salvation culture and confessional rhetoric can be found. First, the statement places Clinton in the position of fighting for social and political survival and implies that this is directly related to the public's inability to continue to view the president as someone who possesses more virtue than the general masses. This correlation signifies that the president is in the position of not only being discredited in the eyes of public, but also in a position of lessened power (by loss of virtue) than the public. In order to recover both favor and power, the president must follow the guidelines of the confessional ritual, adopting the

role of the supplicant confessor to seek out the forgiveness and acceptance of the listener/audience (in this case the public). In other words, Clinton must succumb to the rhetorical framework of sexual relations and guilt being imposed on him and thus take part in the ritual in order to be "redeemed." The use of the word "confession" and the discussion of Clinton's lost powers in the second sentence the quote also serves to support this idea.

The idea of the supplicant president did not diminish as the months passed and the investigation intensified. Clinton continued to resist Starr's rhetoric with his evasive language. Nearly a week after his initial confession of sexual relations, he began what has been called by Time his "apology tour," making visits to members of congress, international political leaders and churches. In each of these visits, the president mentioned either directly or indirectly his admission of guilt and search for forgiveness, using phrases like "I'm having to become quite an expert in this business of asking for forgiveness" and "I have acknowledged that I made a mistake..."(Time, Sept. 14, 1998). However, the President was criticized for his vague language in defining what exactly he was guilty of and his failure to fully apologize (meaning his avoidance of the phrase "I'm sorry"). Then when he

finally uttered the words on September fourth, he was criticized for the seeming insincerity of his apology. However, it was this candid apology that broke the frame-work of Clinton's rhetoric and forced him to participate in the confessional role of the discloser.

Running through the background of the "apology tour" and the media dialogue surrounding it was the recurring use of language referring to ritual confession and religion. This language had been present from the beginning of the scandal, but after the president's September fourth confession of guilt, confessional language became the pattern for discussing the scandal and those in it. Words and phrases like "contrite," "immoral," "testimony," and "public rebuke" are reminiscent of the confessional speeches of the Puritans and serve to draw attention to the attitudes and behaviors practiced in the confessional ritual. Also, the fact that Clinton visited two churches on his apology tour and made public his appeal to the advice of three ministers (J. Philip Wogaman, Gordon MacDonald and Tony Campolo) has emphasized the religious foundations of this confessional process inherited from the Puritans. This was done in the hopes of strengthening the president's situation as a discloser operating within the ritual of confession.

With the president placed in the power depleted

position of discloser, the three empowered entities (Starr, Congress and the public) began to fulfill their roles as listeners and judges. This role is first adopted by Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr. In conducting his investigation, he listened to hours of confession from key players in this scandal ranging from the president and Lewinski to Betty Currie and the Secret Service. He was able to do this "because Starr had two things most career prosecutors never have--an unlimited budget and virtually unbridled power to probe--he was acting as his own judge as well as Clinton's"(Time, Aug. 24, 1998). Signs of Starr's power over the President were his ability to subpoena Clinton's aides, his Secret Service, and even his own lawyers. His ultimate show of power was seen in his ability to finally subpoena the president himself, forcing Clinton to enter into a confessional dialogue.

Starr converted the knowledge acquired in his listener role into judgment form by means of his 445 page report. Through his catalogue of Clinton's sins and transgressions, Starr found the president guilty of perjury, evasion of the truth, sexual misconduct, and abuse of the power of office of president. His case was built towards the goal of assigning punishment in the form of a recommendation to congress for impeachment. The House, who ordered his investigation, took Starr's

report and his recommendation into serious consideration.

Picking up the cue from Starr, congress enacted their share of the roles of listener and judge by using both the regular members of congress and the members of the House and Senate committees specially appointed to review and judge Starr's investigation of the president. Republican members like Tom Delay cried out against the president's immorality and possible perjury, calling early in the investigation for measures as extreme as impeachment. Later, the Republican house majority blocked the ability for congress members to vote on censure, leaving only the option of impeachment. Fearing they would go down with the sinking ship, Democrats turned their support away from Clinton, further weakening his power. Like Republicans, Democrats such as like Dick Gephardt and Joseph Lieberman also criticized Clinton's base behavior. However, they urged a less extreme punishment in the form of censure, but found their hands tied after the Republican's denial of this option. Regardless of the punishment recommended, both parties were showing their power to cast judgment upon the president through this steady stream of criticism, open disgust, and in the ability to determine Clinton's punishment.

Amidst the storm of rage against Clinton emerged an

outbreak of confession within Congress itself. With so much emphasis on immoral versus moral behavior in the air on Capitol Hill, pressure to confess that always exists within a salvation culture exerted itself upon several congress members. The first to come forward was Representative Dan Burton. Burton, who had an affair which produced an illegitimate child while still serving in the Indiana state legislature, made his forced confession along with an extensive apology after discovering that a newspaper was going to release the story in its next issue. Another confession came shortly after Burton's disclosure from Representative Helen Chenoweth. She had an affair of six years with a man who was married at the time. Though using a statement that could have been plucked from a Puritan confession, she "claims that God has forgiven her"(Time, Sept.28) for her actions. She then ran ads touting Clinton's sins during her bid for re-election.

Perhaps the most dramatic of these confessions was the one made by Representative Bob Livingston. Livingston had been elected to replace Newt Gingrich as Speaker of the House at the start of the House's second session. After retaining this position for slightly over a month, Livingston confessed to having had extramarital affairs. Like Burton's confession, this one also came after the media threatened to publicize

his transgressions. However, Livingston took a parting shot at the president by turning his resignation speech into not only an apology but a condemnation of adultery. Livingston then concluded his speech with the blatant advice that Clinton follow his example by doing the respectful thing and resigning.

The fact that most of these confessions were accompanied by immediate public apologies and that many of them preceded Clinton's own apology, made President Clinton appear as if he felt that he was above both guilt and apology. This further weakened his power and status in the eyes of the public and consequentially elevated congress' power as a judge. Adding Bob Livingston's condemning speech to this only served to further discredit President Clinton and reinforce the Republican thrust for impeachment.

Congress also flexed its power against the president by means of the House and later the Senate judiciary committees. It was within these two committees that the official judgment of the president would occur, starting first within the House and then later moving on to the Senate. For now, I will address only the House committee and its performance of its role as listener and judge.

One of the first actions that this committee took while playing these roles was to review the Starr Report

and then decide how much of that damaging information should be released. The committee first took up the role of listener as it reviewed the confessions of the president, Lewinski, and others contained in the report. Then it passed its judgment first on the report, voting to release it in its entirety to the public. Then it used this information to create its four articles of impeachment: perjury in Starr's grand jury trial, perjury in the president's testimony in the Paula Jones case, obstruction of justice, and abuse of power. After much debate, the committee passed its second judgment in December. The vote to impeach President Clinton based on articles one and three, perjury and obstruction of justice. Thus the president's punishment was finally prescribed after almost a year of investigations, allegations and interviews. The decision to judge and prescribe impeachment then moved into the hands of the Senate.

Throughout the House's laboring over the Starr Report and on through the eventual vote for impeachment, the American public also fulfilled its roles as listener and judge. This is first seen in the division of popular opinions. One side felt that the investigation revealed more details than necessary and all that the president should do is apologize and then move on. The other side felt that the explicit nature of the

investigation was warranted and that Clinton should be punished. The multitude of opinion polls taken at that time to assess the public's sentiments revealed that the first group, as presented here, represented the majority of Americans. A Time/CNN telephone poll taken in mid-September showed that 63 percent of Americans approved of the way Clinton was handling the presidency and 67 percent felt that the president should not be impeached. This public support did not flag through out the remaining months of the investigation, nor after the House's vote to impeach. Clinton held a 64 percent approval rating at the time of the House's vote for impeachment and afterwards. These polls were buoys to Clinton's presidential power and, some have argued, that the fear of public electoral retribution that they caused were one of the factors that prevented Republicans from launching a hard line attack on Clinton.

The role of the public as listener and judge is also reflected by comments made in Time magazine like, "after eight months of watching a grand jury a work, we've become one. Court is in session around the dining-room table, at work and at church"(Time, Sept. 21, 1998). This situates the American public in a position nearly identical to that of at home viewers/judges of talk shows. Other representations of

the public's judgments upon Clinton besides polls have been letters written to editorials and congressmen, and even banners displayed outside homes, disparaging Clinton's immorality. Unfortunately, the judicial procedures of the grand jury allow no room for an active representation of the public's opinions. The best that the people could hope for was that their sentiments would be conveyed through their congressional representative. Equally unfortunate is the fact that the House members dismissed the public's sentiments and instead pursued a partisan agenda that ended in what most Americans dreaded: the vote to impeach the president.

Not until the trial reached the Senate was the public voice listened to. After a more abbreviated trial, the Senate voted in February of 1999 to drop the impeachment charges against the president. The final act of judgment upon the president was completed. Clinton and his career were saved. Congress began the yielding up of power back to the president while Senators lined up in front of the cameras of the evening news. They lined up in front of C-SPAN's cameras to deplore Kenneth Starr and the lengthy and nauseating nature of this case. Then they congratulated themselves and their fellow Senators for finally bringing the scandal to an end. Another commonly

proclaimed sentiment was the desire to move on from the Lewinski episode and repair the damage that it had done to the image of the United States, both at home and abroad. Also after the issue of whether Clinton would be convicted on the House's charge of impeachment had been cleared, influential Democrats began to re-board the once sinking ship, showing their support once again for the president, and making official Clinton's return to a position of power.

The restoration of President Clinton to his former level of power completes the final step in the cycle of transgression, confession and redemption that constitute the mechanisms of the salvation culture. By taking part in this ritual Clinton, like talk show participants, is re-enacting the cultural heritage of confession that has been bequeathed to contemporary society by its Puritan ancestors.

The Clinton scandal and talk shows are both conspicuous examples of the workings of the salvation culture in modern America. However, the salvation cycle extends through all levels of American society, reaching even the smaller and more subtle levels where individuals operate within their personal relationships and communities. This is true whether it is in the search for material wealth and success, social acceptance, or religious salvation because Americans

have been enculturated in the need to attain salvation in any of its various forms.

This drive to attain salvation is directly connected to the desire to reach a cultural concept of the ideal that is located within the idea of salvation or in being saved. This ambition has been the impetus for socio-cultural concepts like "the American Dream" which has permanently marked the character of America.

With the "ideal" always out of reach, Americans are left forever in pursuit of their goal of salvation. Thus the goal of salvation ties Americans to the cycle of confession and its fluctuating power dynamics so that they may come closer to their unattainable goal of salvation.

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