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Fox Is Lonely Exception to Networks Recycling Hillary's Tales of Woe With No Trace of Fact-Checking

Acolytes of the "Candid" Gospel of Hillary

Journalists love to pretend to be hard-boiled and spout slogans like "if your mother says she loves you, check it out." This motto does not extend to any tale told by Hillary Rodham Clinton. An astonishing number of media accounts of Hillary's new book, *Living History*, have treated her "gulping for air" version of Monicagate as the definitive truth, with no need for typical journalistic scrutiny. Are these people America's diviners of truth, or are they Simon and Schuster publicists?

Mrs. Clinton implausibly claims that after seven months of fighting in the trenches against the Lewinsky probe, she was utterly "dumbfounded" when her husband told her on August 15, 1998 that the story was true. Only FNC's Brit Hume seemed to do fact-checking. The others recycled:

ABC: Yesterday, *Good Morning America* co-host Charles Gibson relayed: "Overnight, Hillary Clinton's new book bombshell: Bill's confession made her gulp for air, cry, and yell at him, 'Why did you lie to me?'" The show ran a Bill Ritter report slavishly recounting the book's claims with no attempt at interpretation or rebuttal. Last night, Barbara Walters strangely claimed her interview was the first time Hillary had discussed Lewinsky (ignoring the "vast right-wing conspiracy" interview with Matt Lauer in 1998). Walters did more blatant plugging on today's *Good Morning America* and *The View*.

CBS: Yesterday's *Early Show* read the juicy quotes without analysis. On last night's *Evening News*, reporter Byron Pitts recounted "the wounded wife's account of her husband's in this case not-so-secret sins. Just days before President Clinton made this confession to the nation...he choked back tears and confessed to his wife he'd also lied to her."

By this morning's *Early Show*, co-host Hannah Storm was asking not whether the tale was true or false, but whether the book publicity could elect President Hillary: "Look, if she generates this goodwill and this enormous wave of popularity is it possible we could see her jump into the presidential race earlier than expected, maybe even in 2004?"

NBC: On Wednesday's *Today*, Katie Couric began: "Hillary's heartache. Senator Clinton reveals how she learned the painful truth about her husband and Monica Lewinsky." Couric later vouched for Hillary: "she's very candid about a very personal matter." News anchor Sara James added: "Mrs. Clinton writes candidly about the moment her husband admitted he's been unfaithful."

Last night on *Nightly News*, Tom Brokaw began: "The former First Lady reveals her pain and suffering over the Lewinsky affair." He claimed "she's a lot more candid about her personal life and feelings than many had expected." After all the "candid" chatter, this morning, *Today* substitute co-host Lester Holt applied a little skepticism, asking former Hillary aide Lisa Caputo: "A lot of folks have

[a] hard time believing that, that would be the first time she would know, given the evidence: the dress, the tape recordings and the phone calls."

CNN: On *Inside Politics* and *NewsNight*, reporter Jonathan Karl simply dramatized Hillary's spin as truth: "Mrs. Clinton believed him, and famously went on national television, unwittingly repeating his lies and denouncing the reports about Lewinsky as the product of a vast right-wing conspiracy." Unwittingly?

FNC: On *Special Report*, Brit Hume pointed out that Hillary's account of frosty marital bitterness over a Martha's Vineyard vacation after he admitted the Lewinsky affair in August 1998 did not match the bantering-partners account in the new book by Clinton aide Sidney Blumenthal. But National Public Radio reporter Mara Liasson said she had "no problem believing" what Hillary wrote about her "complicated" marriage. — *Tim Graham and Brent Baker*

TV Networks Ignoring Their Own Reporting

"Politician, strategist, lawyer, protector — in a marriage that friends say is based on brutal honesty and unconditional love....Close friends say she knew everything from Day One and still went on NBC in January to deny all." — NBC's Andrea Mitchell, August 14, 1998 *Nightly News*.

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