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Talk scandals

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Political scandals are recurrent phenomena in modern democracies. There seems to be a never-ending stream of politicians whose sexual affairs, financial wrongdoings or abuse of power are revealed in public. A growing body of literature clearly shows that there is much to learn about the function of democracy, and the changing relations between media and politics, by analyzing the preconditions and characteristics of different types of political scandals (Lull and Hinerman, 1997; Thompson, 2000; Tumber and Waisbord, 2004).

As Tumber and Waisbord (2004) argue, the intervention of mass media, and more precisely the development of investigative journalism, has played an important role in making scandals a significant part of the political culture in Western democracies. A dominant perspective understands media and journalism as a driving force in the scrutinizing and publishing of political wrongdoings that originally took place in secrecy, behind the public arena (Chalaby, 2004; Tumber and Waisbord, 2004). However, a scandal published in the media is not only about disclosure (and investigative reporting), but is also about dramatization, storytelling and attractions. An important criterion for an event to become a scandal is, according to Lull and Hinerman (1997: 13), that it must be 'effectively narrativized into a story which … inspires widespread interest and discussion'. Political scandals fit perfectly into a news and media culture in which the offering of what is shocking, spectacular, sensational and abnormal is the most fundamental strategy for attracting and fascinating presumptive audiences (Ekström, 2000).

In *Political Scandal*, one of the most important theoretical works in this area, Thompson argues that scandals are mediated events 'because they are

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events which are *constituted* in part by mediated forms of communication' (2000: 61, italics added). Scandals are closely related to what Thompson describes as the increased visibility of political leaders. Political power and reputation have become increasingly dependent on new forms of mediated visibility, primarily controlled by media producers and characterized by extensive reach, scope and penetration. This visibility is a double-edged sword. It can be used by politicians to gain power, but it is also a threat. A political scandal is perhaps the most significant example of how visibility can damage reputation and symbolic power.

The most common categorization of political scandals singles out three types: sexual scandals, financial scandals and power scandals (Thompson, 2000; Tumber, 2004). Common to all these scandals is that the person in question can be accused of having transgressed norms and codes in a context in which they were enjoying strong social support. What distinguishes the three scandal types from one another is the area in which this transgression of norms has occurred. Thompson (2000) argues that in all cases these transgressions originally occurred in areas of secrecy and concealment. The media scandal concerns the disclosure of already existing (but not public) transgressions.

In this article we will argue that previous conceptualizations fail to spot one significant type of scandal in media society, which we prefer to call the *talk scandal*. Talk scandals, not analyzed or noted in the literature, are quite frequent. However, most importantly they represent a new step in the mediatization of scandals because they are not only communicated and dramatized in the media, but also in most cases originate in the media. There are not necessarily original actions outside the media; the disclosure of back-stage actions outside the media is no longer a general characteristic of political scandals. The overall aim of this article is to develop the concept of the talk scandal, and in so doing to also provide a contribution to the theory on mediated scandal, first and foremost developed by Thompson (2000).

The concept *talk scandal* refers simultaneously to mediatized talk's central significance for modern political scandals as well as their origins, dynamics and dramatization. We propose that media talk forms scandals in three respects. First, what we (inspired by Thompson, 2000) call *first-order talk scandals*, by which it is the talk itself that constitutes the scandal – the norm transgression itself. The scandal's origin and core consist of speech events staged in the media. Second, talk scandals can constitute what Thompson calls *second-order transgressions*. In this case, the scandal originates in one of the three types of norm transgression analyzed earlier in the literature, but, during the media's review and revelation to the public, statements are made that in themselves are assigned an aura of scandal. Third, we will show how staged talk is more generally used in the *dramatization of scandals*, regardless of scandal type.

Staged talk and interaction constitute the basic components in many different media formats – talk shows, TV and radio news, radio call-in programs,

debates, interview programs, etc. (Clayman, 2006; Clayman and Heritage, 2002, Ekström et al., 2006a; Hutchby, 2006; Tolson, 2006). In the press, quotations play a corresponding role as techniques for presenting or representing others' voices. Talk is communicated in text. In journalism, methods have been developed in order to make political talk newsworthy. Through different quoting techniques, utterances are manipulated to fit into headlines and dramatized news stories (Ekström, 2006; Kroon, 2006). Hidden cameras are used to produce sensational and public political utterances (Economou and Svensson Limsjö, 2006). At the same time, talk is the main vehicle for political performance in the arenas available in the media public sphere. Today, talking in the media is a significant part of politics. Politicians are known, evaluated, criticized and celebrated partly in relation to this. It is in this context that we find the preconditions for talk scandals as particular forms of transgressions.

This article's primary ambition is to develop the conceptualization of political scandals; for illustration, we most often present examples from Swedish political scandals. There is, however, no reason to believe that these scandals are unique as regards the aspects they are used to illustrate.

First-order talk scandals

According to Thompson (2000), a scandal is an action with the following five characteristics: (1) it includes the breaking or transgression of norms or moral codes; (2) actions occurring behind closed doors are revealed and become known to someone; (3) the actions arouse offense and indignation among those who learn of them; (4) one or more individuals choose to express their disapproval by publicly revealing the transgression; and (5) the revelation and the publicly expressed criticism pose a threat to the reputation of the individual who committed the transgression. In Thompson's theory, all five of these points are necessary conditions for an action to be considered a scandal.

Talk scandals have the same necessary characteristics, except one: the transgression is not necessarily committed behind closed doors, but is usually instead an action that occurs in the limelight of the media. The conflict between the suspect politician's interest in concealing and journalism's interest in revealing does not embody talk scandals at all in the same way as it does sex, financial and power scandals. However, as we shall see, relationships between back-stage and front-stage behavior can nevertheless be an important part of the staging of talk scandals.

As with other scandals, the core of a talk scandal is an *action* that (according to enough people) constitutes a *transgression* of norms, rules or moral codes. The basic difference between various types of scandal concerns which type of actions are in question and which norms are transgressed. To clarify this, in Table 1 we have integrated talk scandals into a revised version of a figure developed by Thompson (2000).

TABLE 1
Types of scandal

Characteristics	Talk scandal	Sexual scandal	Financial scandal	Power scandal
Type of action	Speech acts	Sexual acts	Financial acts	Political acts
Codes transgressed	Discursive	Sexual	Financial	Political
Likelihood of legal infringement	Low	Variable	Moderate to high	High

Source: Revised from Thompson (2000: 122)
Note: Thompson's original figure also includes the aspect *forms of power*. As we do not address this here, we have chosen to omit it from the figure.

Talk scandals originate in speech acts – that is, utterances and talk – and it is discursive norms and codes that are transgressed. The central question is what people in a certain position are allowed to say and how they should behave in public talk and discourses. With leading politicians' actions in the media limelight becoming increasing important for their careers, and the essence of their activities moving from what Corner (2003: 73) calls 'the sphere of political institutions' to 'the sphere of public and popular', the risk of talk scandals increases. Just as politicians can transgress norms in the financial sphere and in their private sex lives, they can also transgress norms concerning how one should behave in the public sphere. In this case, one acts foremost through talking. We will soon explain this and present a typology of various types of first-order talk scandals, but allow us to first make some clarifications.

Thompson (1995: 140) uses the concept of gaffes to describe a situation in which a politician mistakenly says something in public that he/she should not have said and that can lead to negative attention in the media. Thompson distinguishes between gaffes and scandals. We share his conclusion that it is hardly reasonable to see every mistaken statement, every embarrassing or otherwise failed public utterance as a scandal, just as all economic irregularities do not develop into economic scandals. Other qualities characteristic of a scandal must also be present (as already mentioned). Like financial acts, speech acts must, with the media's active assistance, be able to awaken such an extensive and general discontent that it seriously threatens a politician's reputation and career. This, in turn, is heavily dependent on norms and values in the culture and society in which the event occurs. It is hardly meaningful to try to determine the exact boundary between gaffes and talk scandals; it is rather a question of degrees of difference.

Another important difference between talk scandals and other types of scandal is that the risk of legal consequences in the former case is virtually nonexistent (see Table 1). What significance the illegality of politicians' actions has

for the dynamics and consequences of scandals is an important question in itself, which we will not expand on here. Meanwhile, the occurrence of talk scandals shows, perhaps more clearly than in any other case, that a politician's reputation and career can be seriously threatened without the risk of any legal consequences whatsoever.

The revelation of sexual, financial and power scandals has likely had great significance for the reputation and legitimacy of journalism, in its role as a relatively autonomous institution with far-reaching authority to investigate and hold accountable those in power (Ekström et al., 2006b). Here, investigation and revelation constitute the core of journalism's activities. Thompson (2000: 73) argues that a mediatized scandal does not begin with the transgression itself, but instead with the activities through which the transgression is revealed and made public. He uses the concept of the *pre-scandal phase* to describe the part of the scandal that consists of journalists' investigation and search for information. Even on this point, talk scandals differ from other scandal types. In talk scandals journalism is not concerned with uncovering something that is hidden, looking for currently unknown transgressions, but is instead a matter of staging events, producing media talk and recontextualizing utterances (see Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Ekström, 2001, 2006; Tolson, 2006). Naturally, this should not be construed to mean that talk scandals are created without the involvement of politicians, or that the politicians should then not be held responsible for their public utterances. However, media and journalism put a great deal of work into creating conditions in which such scandals could occur, preferably in front of the photographers' cameras so that they can be shown live. The central focus of the media's involvement changes from the revelation to the staging of transgressions.

We will now introduce and briefly illustrate a typology containing five types of first-order talk scandals.

Type 1: The disclosure of observed back-stage utterances

This is the type of talk scandal closest to the traditional definition of scandals. It is constituted by a collapse between the front and the back regions, which many scholars understand as the core of a scandal (Jiménez, 2004; Thompson, 2000). A poorly chosen utterance is made in the back region, and information of what was said leaks to the front region where the media reveals the utterances. Discussions at dinner parties, in cabs or in other kinds of private or semi-public arenas where no journalists are present, or when the politician thinks no one is listening, can be made public by persons who leak them to the media. And from this point on the scandal can move on to counter-allegations, denials, further investigations and so on.

Improper utterances in such contexts can develop into major media scandals and might haunt a politician for a long time. However, they have a weaker

potential of being a threat to the politician's public image compared to other talk scandals. This is mainly because statements made outside the media can be questioned when they are published. They can be denied, or it might be claimed that quotations in the media are taken out of context, or simply misunderstood. Since there is no recording (visual or audio) confirming the disparity between private and public statements, the threat of these utterances is weaker.

This was the case, for example, in 1992 when Stig Malm, chairman for Sweden's largest trade union and, for a time, minister in the Social Democratic government, was said to have used the word, '*fittstim*' (English 'school of cunts', making a play on 'school of fish') when he expressed his opinion of feminists in politics during a taxi ride. This utterance has pursued Malm and has without doubt affected his reputation, but he has consistently refused to apologize as he claims that it was actually the taxi driver and not he himself who used this word.

Type 2: Accidental collapse of back- and front-stage utterances

This type of talk scandal originates in norm-transgressing utterances that are committed without the knowledge that the action is being documented with a tape recorder and/or camera. The person in question makes a statement, believing him/herself to be back-stage; the statement is not intended to be public, but it is made public, as a camera or tape recorder happens to be present. When the utterance is then shown in the media, it can be described as a statement of principle, independent of its back-stage context. Here, accidental collapse refers to the fact that the tape recording/filming (which means that the utterance is saved and can be played live) has also not been planned by the documenting actor.

In fall 1999, Swedish Minister for Industry and Trade Björn Rosengren was interviewed by *Aktuellt*, a national public service news program. The reason for the interview was negotiations between the state-owned telecommunication companies Telia (in Sweden) and Telenor (in Norway). The plan was to accomplish a fusion between these two companies, but the talks were difficult. There was a great deal of discussion in the media, in both Norway and Sweden, about the consequences of the fusion. Accusations were heard from both parties about who was winning and who was losing in the fusion, and the media in both Sweden and Norway were giving voice to nationalistic stereotypes. At a press conference in December 1999, the governments of the two countries declared that the fusion plans had been cancelled.

In the interview mentioned above, a major talk scandal arose from a statement by Minister Rosengren. After the interview, the minister continued to make small talk with the journalist, not realizing that the cameraman had not switched off his camera. Rosengren is frustrated concerning the negotiations with the Norwegians and says:

> You know, the Norwegians are really a last Soviet state. It is so nationalistic, everything is politics.

The news program decided to show the recording and Rosengren's description of the Norwegians, and when the utterance was published in other media in Sweden and Norway it was extracted and recontextualized, and the focal point shifted (cf. Clayman, 1995; Ekström, 2003). In the television interview, it is quite obvious that the minister and journalist are making small talk. In the tabloids the following day, however, the story is framed as if Rosengren made a public statement about the national characteristics of Norwegians. Reactions from Norway were strong (at least in the media). Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson demanded an explanation from Rosengren, who apologized for what he had said in the tabloid *Aftonbladet* the following day.

Compared to the first type of talk scandal, accidental collapse means that the audience can see and hear the transgression live on television. It therefore leaves no possibility to deny statements that were made, even if politicians will probably claim that they are presented out of context.

Type 3: Produced/purposive collapse of back-stage and front-stage utterances

If the accidental collapse of back-stage and front-stage utterances has a great portion of randomness, the produced and purposive collapse does not. This type of talk scandal is the result of the journalist's effort to find a talk scandal. This is the same type of logic legitimizing undercover investigative journalism. Using a hidden camera or microphone, the journalists try to find proof of concealed truths, of opinions that politicians would not dare express in public but that are uttered when they believe they are not heard or seen in the media.

In the Swedish national election campaign 2002, a team of investigative journalists at the public service company SVT planned a purposive revelation of norm-transgressing utterances. The context of their work was the debate on immigration politics during the election campaign. It is a long tradition among Swedish political parties to build small cabins and place them on city squares. Local politicians spend a great deal of time in these cabins during the campaign, allowing citizens to meet them and talk about politics. The reporter team therefore decided to visit election cabins and talk to politicians, and see if they stood up for democracy. Would they defend democratic values and reject xenophobic opinions when they met citizens voicing these opinions?

Carrying a hidden camera and a microphone, one of the reporters visited election cabins posing as a citizen with strong xenophobic opinions. Hardly any of the politicians in the cabins wanted to debate, while some politicians made xenophobic statements themselves in front of the hidden camera. A number of the politicians expressing intolerant opinions were interviewed by

another of the journalists afterward. In this interview, the politicians expressed tolerant views on immigration and immigration politics. The journalist then confronted them with what they had said when they thought they were talking to a voter. In the narration, the technique of cross-cutting open interviews (front region) with content from the hidden camera (back region) was used systematically. And when the journalist ended the open interview by revealing that the politicians had been on 'candid camera', it dramatically shows the collapse of the distinction between front and back regions. The politicians refused to admit to having uttered any xenophobic statements whatsoever, or claimed they did not remember.

The results of these hidden interviews were shown on a prime-time investigative television show (*Uppdrag Granskning*, Engl. 'Mission investigation') five days before election day, and were recontextualized and published widely in the print media the day after the show. As local politicians from the Conservative party had made the most intolerant statements, the rest of the election campaign was a disaster for that party. The scandal dominated the last days of the campaign, and therefore the Conservative party had to put all its effort into crisis management. Though the impact of the scandal should not be overrated, the election results for the Conservatives were the poorest since 1976 (Johansson, 2006).

In the first three types of talk scandals, different forms of breakdown between front-stage and back-stage actions are staged. The two types we will now describe are distinguished from these in that the events have occurred in the media limelight already from the beginning.

Type 4: Transgression of norms in the public sphere

A particular type of first-order talk scandal occurs when politicians (or others) transgress norms and codes regarding how one should behave in public. Politicians appear in a number of different talk situations, not least in the media. Debates, interviews, press conferences and talk shows include norms that can possibly be broken. In a debate, passionate argument and hostile speech acts can be completely within the bounds of what is acceptable and expected. There are limits, however, and a transgression of these creates a breeding ground for a talk scandal. This type of scandal is probably not especially common; those in the public eye quickly learn to behave in the media in a way that does not create offense or public indignation. The example we will describe here, however, shows how transgression of norms in the media limelight has the potential to develop into what we consider a talk scandal.

In December 1999, Sweden's Finance Minister Bo Ringholm arranged a press conference to comment on extensive political discussion concerning the continued appointment of the director of the Swedish State Audit Institution, Inga-Britt Ahlenius. In Sweden, this appointment is made by the government,

a practice which has been politically controversial. A conflict had arisen between Ringholm and Ahlenius (the details of which we will not go into here), and there was reason to believe that the government would not extend Ahlenius's directorship. Critics, mostly from the political opposition, asserted that the government's power over the appointment of the institution's director was a threat to the institution's independence regarding the government. They were of the opinion that Ahlenius should be allowed to keep her position. Media interest in the press conference was extremely high.

The press conference began with the Finance Minister reading a message stating that Ahlenius herself had expressed interest in another assignment, and that the government had promised to investigate the possibility of granting her wish beginning in the new year. The journalists gathered there, however, had reason to suspect that Ahlenius had been fired, but that the government wanted to give the impression that she herself had chosen to resign.

Through a number of questions, the journalists tried to get Ringholm to comment on whether it was actually Ahlenius herself who wished to resign, whether the government had confidence in her, etc. The Finance Minister, however, chose a strategy of not answering questions with anything except a repeated statement that it was Ahlenius herself who wanted another assignment.

This brought extensive criticism in the media for a number of days, and had the character of a political scandal in which Ringholm's reputation and career were seriously threatened. It concerned, first and foremost, his behavior during the press conference. The Finance Minister had gone against a norm, that of being accommodating and at least giving the impression of trying to answer the journalists' questions. In large headlines and extensive articles, he was criticized for having repeated the same answer, regardless of the question. In one tabloid, a large photograph of Ringholm was published with 18 speech bubbles added, all containing the same statement: 'Inga-Britt Ahlenius has expressed interest for another assignment'. The Finance Minister was ridiculed and presented as a parrot, repeating the same phrase over and over. The media also gave expression to the public's dissatisfaction. The TV news talked about 'the Swedish people heaping their wrath on the Finance Minister'. Established debaters described Ringholm as 'the biggest idiot I've ever seen' and 'a rhetoric invalid'. So-called media trainers described his actions as 'completely grotesque' and 'the most deplorable thing I've seen'.

Type 5: Unsuccessful utterances in journalistic interviews

During the 1900s, the interview developed into a central method in journalism. It became a symbol for journalism's increased power and extensive authority to investigate, not least, politicians' activities. Just as precisely this form of institutionalized conversation developed into the dominant form for politicians' appearances in the media, it simultaneously became increasingly

less legitimate for leading politicians to refuse an interview. The interview has given journalism access to a set of techniques for pressing people in positions of power, holding them responsible and placing them in difficult situations. The interview has had enormous significance for the production of the statements and quotes used regularly in the construction of news (Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Ekström, 2001; Ekström et al., 2006a).

It is against this backdrop that we choose to consider unsuccessful utterances produced in journalistic interviews a specific type of talk scandal. Politicians who are interviewed almost daily run a considerable risk of making a statement at some point that is not only less than successful – a blunder – but can also form the breeding ground for a scandal. The extent of this risk is related partly to journalists' ability to ask pressing and difficult questions, but also to the relationships that develop between journalists and politicians.

In the 1998 Swedish election, Prime Minister Göran Persson made a statement in a live TV interview that received a great deal of attention. With regard to a new reform that would mean lowered costs for daycare placement, the journalist asked why an equivalent amount of monetary support could not be given to parents who chose to stay home and care for their children themselves. Persson's answer was at first somewhat evasive. The journalist continued to press him, and asked him to explain the justice of certain parents (those who place their children in daycare) receiving subsidized childcare while other parents do not. The Prime Minister then answered that those who place their children in daycare make a contribution to society, that they are helping to develop the entire community. This comment could be construed as Persson saying simultaneously that parents who stay home with their children do not contribute to society. When the statement was displayed as headlines in the media, one way it was presented and reformulated was that the Prime Minister had said that these parents 'are a burden on society'. This reformulation was used in order to make it more dramatic. Persson's comment was the main news item in the press, on the radio and on TV, where public discontent was described, with news bills relating that families with children were 'raging' against the Prime Minister. It is doubtful, however, that this had any lasting consequences for his reputation. The occurrence should rather be seen as a borderline case, somewhere between a blunder and talk scandal.

A more obvious talk scandal came about, however, when London's mayor Ken Livingstone answered a question from a journalist from the *Evening Standard* outside City Hall in February 2005. Livingstone, who had attended a party, apparently felt that the journalist was pushy and perhaps aggressive. In the interview situation that came of this, Livingstone compared the journalist to, among other things, a 'concentration camp guard', which was naturally extra remarkable since the journalist in question was Jewish. This occurrence led to a highly extensive debate in the media, and Livingstone was eventually suspended from his position for four weeks due to the comments he had made during the interview situation.

Second-order talk scandal

A person's behavior during a talk scandal can be a scandal in itself. Thompson (2000) uses the concept of the *second-order transgression*, referring to those events that are created as a result of the revelation and making public of the information that the scandal includes. Thompson also asserts that the consequences of these second-order transgressions often become more serious than those of the original transgression. Attempts to hide the scandal or intentional lies can be seen as more threatening to a politician's reputation and legitimacy than the original subject of the scandal.

In agreement with Thompson, we assert that such second-order transgressions often belong to the dynamics of the more extensive scandals, and we wish to point out that these transgressions are mainly of the type that we call talk scandals. Like the fourth and fifth types of first-order talk scandals mentioned earlier, they concern improper utterances made in the media, often in connection with interviews with journalists. Examples of talk that creates new norm transgressions in various ways in relation to the original scandal are intentional lies or the attempt to hide the truth, trivialization or statements that reveal the ignorance of the person in question. In these second-order talk scandals, the media's attention is transferred from the original event to speech acts that arise as part of the course of events. It is then that the question of a demand for accountability and the media's investigation come more into focus. The question is not only whether someone has done something improper, but also how accountability for this transgression is demanded and, above all, how this is answered by the person in question.

A Swedish example of a second-order talk scandal can be found in one of the biggest Swedish political scandals of recent decades. Before the election of new party leaders for the Social Democrats, it was revealed that in October 1995 cabinet member Mona Sahlin had misused the bank card she had been issued for business use by buying items, renting cars for personal use and withdrawing cash. At a press conference, Sahlin explained that she was going to take a time-out from politics, but a number of weeks later she resigned and issued a statement that she was withdrawing her candidacy for the position of Prime Minister.

Articles containing allegations about Sahlin's misuse of her bank card were published for a number of days, but it was not until the front page of the newspaper *Expressen* read 'Sahlin Lied' (12 October 1995) that the scandal truly exploded. During the following weeks, reporting of the news in the Swedish media was dominated by the Sahlin scandal. She was constantly confronted with new information about alleged misuse of her bank card as well as other improprieties concerning her private financial affairs. Sahlin's communicative behavior during the scandal – how she answered journalists' questions and the strategy she chose for handling the situation – thereby became a dominant theme.

The Sahlin scandal was not a first-order talk scandal, but rather a second-order talk scandal in the highest degree. Sahlin's behavior toward the media – her alleged nonchalance and trivialization before the scandal exploded, information suggesting that she had evaded the issue or lied when confronted with new information, and even her silence – were important ingredients in the media's reporting. Her statements in the media became the focus for journalism's investigation and demand for accountability. More and more attention concerned how she had failed to account for how she had handled her finances and bank card, rather than what had actually happened. Her guilt was verified and mistrust for her as a person was strengthened when she failed to convincingly comment on the information she was confronted with in the media. Interestingly enough, in 2007 Sahlin was replacing the former Social Democratic Party leader Göran Persson. Although accused and demolished at the time, a comeback was not impossible.

There are many potential relationships between a second-order talk scandal and the original transgression. Speech acts can *verify* a suspicion of guilt and a mistrust that an original transgression has created. They can *intensify and expand* the scandal's extent and even constitute *the last straw*, the event that finally forces a politician to capitulate. The opposite is true when a second-order talk scandal serves as merely a *sidetrack*. However, a second-order talk scandal can also *overshadow and marginalize* the original transgression. The later phases of the Sahlin affair contain such features. At its base, the scandal naturally concerned the misuse of a bank card, but accusations concerning lies, smokescreens and denials often overshadowed the main issue – whether the bank card had been used improperly.

Talk and quotes in the dramatization of a political scandal

Activities from two sides are required for a political scandal to come about. From the politician's side, actions that overstep strongly held norms or moral codes in a society are necessary, and from the media's side, particular forms of publication are necessary (Lull and Hinerman, 1997). But, at the same time, in the construction of media scandals the media also contributes to establishing the moral codes and the border line between what is acceptable and not. A scandal is not merely something that is *revealed* but also something that is *shown, reported*, *staged* and *kept alive* day after day. In this section we will argue that the media's particular way of staging and quoting utterances and conversation forms a central aspect in this context. A media scandal takes place largely in the form of media talk of various types. This has been partially noted in the past by Thompson (2000), but has not been analyzed more deeply. Our ambitions here are to present six aspects of a media scandal in which staged talk and quoted utterances play a decisive

role, completely independent of whether the first-order scandal is a talk, sex, financial or power scandal.

Showing or reconstructing the original transgression

The advantage of many first-order talk scandals is, with regard to dramatization, that the original norm transgression is preserved on tape and can be shown live. But financial and sexual norm transgressions seldom unfold in front of the photographer's camera. The possibility of showing the event are thus limited. Norm transgressions must therefore be reconstructed and shown indirectly, using various techniques. Pictures of the place where the event took place can be combined with archive pictures of the person in question and with descriptions of what he/she is guilty of. An important way to reconstruct an event, however, is to publish and quote witness descriptions from someone who was involved in the event or is familiar with it for some other reason (Ekström, 2001: 572; Tumber, 2004: 1126).

Staging the main actor's reactions to the revelation

A political scandal places the politician's character and public personality in focus. It demands that the politician make a statement and give interviews to journalists, even if this is not always to the politician's advantage. The person's reactions, comments and attempts to explain him/herself constitute an important element in the dramatization of a political scandal. Interview situations are shown, and the politician's statements are quoted.

Two Swedish financial scandals can serve to illustrate completely different reactions from the people in question. Common to these two scandals, however, is that well-chosen statements in both cases became major headlines and left their mark on the reporting of events. In November 2002, it was revealed that Swedish Minister for International Development Cooperation Jan O. Karlsson had received a double salary (one salary as minister and retirement pay of an equal amount from an earlier EU allowance). Karlsson was depicted as arrogant and unsympathetic when confronted with criticism. In an extensive article in one tabloid (*Expressen* 5 November 2002), we see the minister saying: 'What I do with the money is my business!' Some months later the leader of the Left party, Gudrun Schyman, was accused of having claimed a deduction on her income tax statement for expenses her employer had paid. According to the headlines in the press, Schyman (in contrast to Karlsson) immediately admitted that she had done wrong: 'There is no defense for what I've done' (*Expressen* 24 January 2003); 'I was in a hurry', 'My intention was not to deceive' (*Aftonbladet* 23 and 24 January 2003).

Establishing a moral standard

Talking heads and quotes also form perhaps the most important technique for establishing the moral standard and public discontent that, according to Thompson (2000) and Lull and Hinerman (1997), comprise the scandal's necessary conditions. Moralizing discourses are established in relation to which transgressions appear to be demoralizing.

> … for a scandal to emerge, at least some of the opprobrious discourse of non-participants must assume the status of public speech-acts: that is, it must be uttered (or otherwise produced) in a way that can be heard (or otherwise received) by a plurality of others.… Since scandal presupposes the public articulation of opprobrious discourse, it lends itself with particular ease to the use of communication media. (Thompson, 2000: 21)

In their reporting, the media use various techniques to establish the standard necessary for an event to become a scandal. Naturally, the media cannot construct a moral standard from nothing; it must be anchored in common values. However, as Ettema and Glasser (1998) have shown, the media actively work to help establish the line between right and wrong that every transgression presupposes. Ettema and Glasser describe what they call 'the objectification of moral standards' as follows:

> In this process reporters attempt to make good on their claim that they make news judgments rather than moral judgments; that is, they attempt to transform moral claims into empirical claims so that ultimately the evaluative standards used to appraise the transgression appear as empirically unambiguous as the evidence used to document its existence. By the logic of this process moral order is made fact, and fact can be reported by detachment. (Ettema and Glasser, 1998: 71)

One way to establish these moral standards is allowing people to speak. All the scandals we have studied contain quoted voices from, above all, the public, and from other politicians who in various ways state that the behavior of the person in question is morally reprehensible. The media scandals are built partly with these statements. Statements that take another direction, trying to play down what the person has done, occur very seldom or not at all. With well-chosen discursive techniques, the general discontent is staged as a central element in media scandals.

Twisting the knife yet again

When the event has been made public and a moral standard has been established, the media scandal is a fact. However, much can be done to criticize and ridicule the politician's behavior further. A particular way to achieve this is to dig in the archives and find other statements from the politician that show

how bizarre and inconsistent his/her behavior is. In the financial scandal mentioned above concerning Minister Karlsson's double salary, the tabloids found (among other things) the following statements by Karlsson from two years earlier, which were naturally newsworthy in this context. The quotations were presented in speech bubbles in pictures of Karlsson.

> The EU Commission has presented a powerful program for fighting economic improprieties. We must now put this into practice.

> I was born in the Labor Movement and have learned two principles there: agreements should be kept and one should do one's part.

This technique in the dramatization of scandals, placing the behavior of the person in question next to contrasting statements from the person him/herself earlier on, or from someone they have been associated with, seems to be widespread, occurring not only in the Swedish scandals we have studied. In 1993, under John Major's leadership in Great Britain, a minister was involved in a sex scandal. This was placed against the backdrop of a number of statements Major had made regarding the importance of family values (Tumber, 2004: 1128). Major was thus dragged into a scandal around one of the ministers working for him.

Keeping the scandal alive

Big political scandals are distinguished by the fact that they take place in the media not only during the space of a couple days, but rather a longer time. They take on a dramatic character, with new occurrences every day (Lull and Hinerman, 1997). This happens partially through revelations in the form of new facts, but an important driving force (in many cases, the most important) is all the comments that are made public daily. In connection with political scandals, the media is filled with comments from all possible directions – bosses, colleagues, those who stand in opposition to the person in question, family, etc. These comments allow for discussion of not only the scandal's moral content but also its concrete effects. One of the most common questions discussed in the media is whether or not the politician should be allowed to retain his/her post.

Letters to the editor, news interviews, debates and discussions in various forms keep the scandal alive. New comments, statements and demands are in their turn commented on by others. Certain staged statements are more newsworthy than others; in the tabloids' subjective and emotional discourse, the voices of the family have particularly high value. An alleged utterance made by the accused minister Jan O. Karlsson's wife formed the headline: 'Jan needs to go to the doctor', while his sons were claimed to have said in another: 'Resign,

Dad'. In the scandal surrounding the Left party's leader mentioned above, it was her mother who was allowed to comment on her daughter's health: 'My daughter could have collapsed.' In addition to this there are all the opinions communicated in the form of journalists' own analyses. News about political scandals often contains substantially more discussion about the scandal than reports of new facts. The talk in the media contributes to a scandal's character of public discussions and negotiations regarding the general morals in society (Lull and Hinerman, 1997).

Quoting in forms of confessions, apologies and regret

A central part of the political scandal's narrative is the confession of the person in question (cf. Ekström, 2003). The confession can be seen as a part of what we have described in the previous point, but it is so central that it is worth looking at it separately. The confession can be in the form of an apology, but can also be explanations of how the person in question has experienced what has happened. Contrasts between heated critical attacks and emotional stories with the potential to draw sympathy are not seldom part of the dramatization.

Swedish Minister for Industry and Trade Björn Rosengren, who above exemplified the type of talk scandal we call 'Accidental collapse of backstage and front-stage utterances' apologized in many headlines and news articles: 'Sorry, sorry, sorry, Norway' (*Aftonbladet*, 24 September 1999), 'It was wrong, I was tired' (*Dagens Nyheter*, 24 September 1999). These admissions played a part in the scandal's dramatic solution. A tabloid published the farewell letter the former leader of the Left Party (Gudrun Schyman) wrote after being forced to resign. The headline read: 'I hope you believe me – it was never my intention to cheat'. Through staged confessions and apologies, the media simultaneously legitimize their own work. The struggle between the accused politician and the investigating media is concluded with the former apologizing for the wrongs that have been committed.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to develop the concept of the *talk scandal* and, with the help of this concept, to examine what part media talk in its various forms plays in the origin and development of political scandals. Thompson (2000) has developed what is undoubtedly the most ambitious theory regarding the media's role in political scandals. According to our understanding, however, Thompson does not extract the full consequences of his theoretical argumentation. He points out that mediatized scandals are 'constituted in and by the media' (Thompson, 1997: 49), but at the same time maintains that

scandals are always about activities that have originally been performed behind closed doors, away from the media's stage. With the concept of talk scandals, we highlight political scandals, which more consistently are created in the media. The concept concerns scandals that in many cases have completely moved into the media.

Previous research has identified three main types of first-order political scandals – sex, financial and power scandals. We consider the talk scandal a fourth type of scandal, whose significance has grown along with leading politicians' activities being transferred more and more to what Corner (2003: 73) has described as 'the sphere of public and popular'. Talk scandals originate in speech acts, i.e. statements and discussions, and it is discursive norms and codes that are transgressed. At stake is the question of what people in a certain position are allowed to say and how they should behave in public discourses.

This article identifies five types of first-order talk scandals, i.e. scandals that originally concern talk/statements and breaks with discursive codes: (1) disclosure of documented back-stage utterances, (2) accidental collapse of back-stage and front-stage utterances, (3) produced/purposive collapse of back-stage and front-stage utterances, (4) transgression of norms in the public sphere and (5) unsuccessful utterances in journalistic interviews.

Inspired by Thompson (2000), we have also developed the concept *second-order talk scandals*. What distinguishes these scandals is that the utterances and statements in the media during a scandal that originates as a sex, financial or power scandal develop into a scandal in themselves. That norm transgressions often take the form of public speech acts is due to the fact that the situations the person in question faces, as well as the strategies the person has at his/her disposal in connection with a scandal, mainly concern talk and interaction in the media. But for these utterances to function as scandals, it is also necessary that they are presented in a particular way in the media. Talk scandals are intimately connected to the media's way of working and to their particular forms of making things public – not least interview forms, quotation techniques and various ways of staging others' voices.

Lull and Hinerman (1997) are among those researchers who have argued that reporting techniques and dramatization are not side issues, but are instead main issues, in media scandals. The last part of this article has investigated how staged discussions and statements are used, and how they figure in the dramatization of political scandals, regardless of type. Six parts of this media dramatization are noted: (1) showing or reconstructing the original transgression, (2) staging the main actor's reactions to the revelation, (3) establishing a moral standard, (4) twisting the knife yet again, (5) keeping the scandal alive and (6) quoting in forms of confessions, apologies and regrets. In our opinion it is an important task for future research to develop and modify these conceptualizations in relation to empirical research on talk scandals in different political and cultural contexts.

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