

ALMEIDA THEATRE

'Patient Zero' by Monica Lewinsky

The Speech

- Watch the speech, delivered by Amanda Abbington

<https://www.speech.almeida.co.uk/speech/patient-zero>

Duration: 12 minutes 13 seconds

- Discuss students' initial reaction

Context

Monica Lewinsky is an American activist, public speaker and writer. While interning at the White House from 1995 – 1996 she had a sexual relationship with President Bill Clinton. The media onslaught following the exposure of the relationship portrayed a skewed version of events which Lewinsky has more recently reclaimed.

She is an anti-bullying activist, a contributing writer for Vanity Fair magazine and recently joined the team of producers on American Crime Story: Impeachment a drama focusing on their relationship and the President's subsequent impeachment.

- Ask students to research the media's reporting of the relationship between Monica Lewinsky and Bill Clinton.
- Ask students to come up with examples of contemporary celebrities who face ridicule and public shaming by the media. To what extent do they feel things have changed in the last 20 years?
- Discuss whether students agree that we have to some extent become desensitised to such trolling and public humiliation.
- What options do people have in responding to this type of treatment from the press?

Content

- Watch the speech again.
- Ask students which of the following components of the speech is most prominent and to explain their choices.
 - Vindicating herself after experiencing decades of humiliation
 - Presenting a model of responding to adversity with courage
 - Warning about the importance of compassion in an age that rewards shaming others
 - Encouraging others to define their own identity and narrative and to take it back from those who would belittle it

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Language and Structure

- Ask students to read a copy of the speech and explore the language and rhetorical devices used. **A transcript of the speech is included at the end of this document.**
- Ask students to find examples within the speech where Lewinsky uses language that is familiar to her audience. Ask them to consider to what extent the impact of the speech depends on her use of commonplace language.
- Despite the register of the speech being informal Lewinsky engages the audience with a range of persuasive devices. Ask students to complete the table below with examples of each device, commenting on the effect of these.

Language/ Structural Device	Example	Effect
Language – register, use of alliteration, onomatopoeia		
Types of repetition e.g. repetition of a single word or repetition of a phrase or repetition of an idea		
Pathos – the emotional appeal of the speech		
Anecdotes		
Contrasts		

Discussion

- Watch the discussion between Amanda Abbington and the Almeida's Young Artists.
Duration: 3 minutes 44 seconds
<https://www.speech.almeida.co.uk/reaction/patient-zero>
- Discuss with students whether they think a news story of this kind would be reported in a different way now.

Extension Task

- Ask students to write an apology to Monica Lewinsky on behalf of the press.

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Useful Links

Websites

[TED Talk](#) – A variation on the original speech by Monica Lewinsky

[Bill Clinton's Impeachment](#) – Article exploring the events that led to the impeachment

[Signs of Progress](#) – An article exploring how public discussions of sexual harassment have changed

[American Crime Story: Impeachment](#) – Article with information about Lewinsky's role in producing the TV series

[The Decade We Reclaimed Our Stories](#) – Vanity Fair article by Monica Lewinsky

[Me Too Movement](#) – Official website of the movement supporting survivors of sexual violence

[The Shameful Trend of Public Shaming](#) – A Q&A with Jon Ronson, author of the book *So You've Been Publicly Shamed*

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PATIENT ZERO

Monica Lewinsky | 25 June 2015

The speech by Monica Lewinsky given at the Ogilvy & Mather Seminar during the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity in Cannes, France.

If you were a brand, what brand would you be?

That's a question I was asked in an interview - a job interview just several years ago. Let me tell you, when you're Monica Lewinsky, that's a loaded fucking question.

You're familiar with what it means to nurture, grow and shape a brand. Can you imagine what it is like when the brand is you? You personally. Your likeness, your name, your history, your values, your soul? That's what happened to me in 1998. You're looking at a woman who was publicly silent for a decade due in part to a brand crisis, or rather how I was branded, by whom and for what purpose.

I gave my first public talk at the Forbes 30 Under 30 Summit. Fifteen hundred brilliant people, all under the age of 30. That meant that in 1998, the oldest among the group were just 14 years old, and the youngest were 4.

The night of my speech a surprising thing happened. At the age of 41 I was hit on by a 27-year-old guy. Crazy, right? He was charming, and I was flattered. And between us, I thought about it for a second, but I did decline. What was his unsuccessful pickup line? That he could make me feel 22 again. I realised later that night I'm probably the only person over 40 who does not want to be 22 again. At the age of 22, I fell in love with my boss, and at the age of 24, I learned the devastating consequences.

Who has ever made a mistake that they've regretted?

Like me, a few of you may have made your mistake at 22. You may also, like me, have taken wrong turns and fallen in love with the wrong person, maybe even your boss. Unlike me, though, your boss probably wasn't the President of the United States of America.

Not a day goes by that I'm not reminded of my mistake, and I regret that mistake deeply. In 1998, after having been swept up into an improbable romance, I was then swept up into the eye of a political, legal and media maelstrom like we had never seen before.

It was the first time traditional news was usurped by the Internet. A click that reverberated around the world. I was patient zero of losing a personal reputation on a global scale almost instantaneously. Around the world, this story went. A viral phenomenon. News sources plastered photos of me all over to sell papers, banner ads online and to keep people tuned to the TV. I was branded as a tart, slut, whore, bimbo, floozy and, of course, "that woman." I was seen by many but truly known by few.

When this happened to me 17 years ago, there was no name for this. Today we call it cyberbullying and online harassment. In 1998, I lost my reputation and my dignity. I lost almost everything, and I almost lost my life. The public humiliation was excruciating.

I was on the phone with my mum in September 2010, and we were talking about the news of a young college freshman from Rutgers University named Tyler Clementi. Sweet, sensitive and creative Tyler, who played the violin and rode a unicycle sometimes simultaneously had been secretly webcammed by his roommate when he was intimate with another man. When the online world learned of the incident, the ridicule and cyberbullying ignited. A few days later, submerged in the shame and humiliation, Tyler jumped from the George Washington Bridge to his death. He was 18.

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My mum was beside herself about what happened to Tyler and his family. While we were both upset, she was gutted with pain in a way I couldn't quite understand.

Eventually, I realised she was reliving 1998, reliving a time when she sat by my bed every night, reliving a time when she made me shower with the bathroom door open, and reliving a time that both my parents feared I would be humiliated to death, literally. There were moments for me when it seemed like suicide was the only way to end the ridicule. And in this tiny respect, the blaring headlines were actually a blessing. My parents knew what I was going through because there was no mistaking it and no escaping it. But today, too many parents haven't had the chance to step in and rescue their loved ones. Too many have learned of their child's suffering after it was too late.

What shocked me was that in research published last year - humiliation was a more intensely felt emotion than either happiness or even anger. Cruelty to others is nothing new, but the shift in the power of humiliation, given the breadth of the Internet, the reach is something altogether different.

Millions of people, often anonymously, can stab you with their words. Can you imagine for a second what that pain feels like? Name calling, hate speech and online threats are weaponised words. Even as I'm talking to you now, this is happening to someone online.

Gossip websites, paparazzi, reality programming, politics, news outlets and sometimes hackers all traffic in shame. It's led to desensitisation and a permissive attitude online to cyberbullying, harassing and threatening.

This violation of others is raw material, efficiently and ruthlessly mined and packaged and sold at a profit.

How is the money made? Clicks. The more shame, the more clicks. The more clicks, the more advertising dollars. And the more advertising dollars-well, we can all see where this is going-the more of what sells: shame.

Now we're in a dangerous cycle. The more we click on this kind of gossip, the more numb we get to the human lives behind it, and the more numb we get, the more we click. All the while, someone is making money off the back of another's suffering.

We don't stop to think that with a click on click-bait, we are entering the online Coliseum. With every click, we make a choice, myself included. The more we saturate our culture with this kind of shaming, the more accepted it is, the more we will see behaviours like cyberbullying, trolling and online harassment, and some kinds of hacking. Why? Because they all have humiliation at their cores. This behaviour is a symptom of the culture we've created.

Changing this behaviour in our culture begins with evolving our beliefs. We've seen that to be true with racism, homophobia and plenty of other biases now and in the past. As we've changed beliefs about same-sex marriage, we've seen more people being offered equal freedom. Valuing sustainability led to more recycling.

So as far as our culture of humiliation goes, what we need is a cultural revolution. Public shaming as a blood sport must stop. It's time for an intervention on the Internet and in the culture. The shift begins with something simple, but it's not easy. We need to return to a long-held value of compassion, compassion and empathy. Online, we've got a compassion deficit, an empathy crisis.

I've seen some very dark days in my life, and it was empathy and compassion from my family, friends, professionals and strangers that helped me get through. Even empathy from one person can make a difference. Compassionate comments help abate the negativity. I am, after all, on Twitter.

We talk a lot about our right to freedom of expression, but we need to talk more about our responsibility to freedom of expression. We all want to be heard, but let's acknowledge the difference between speaking up with intention and speaking up for attention.

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In the past year, the question I've been asked the most is, "Why?" Why now, why was I sticking my head above the parapet? The top-note answer was, and is, because it's time. Time to stop tiptoeing around my past, time to stop living a life of opprobrium and time to take back my narrative. It's also not just about saving myself. Anyone who is suffering from shame and public humiliation needs to know one thing: You can survive it.

I know it's hard, and it may not be painless, quick or easy, but you can insist on a different ending to your story. Have compassion for yourself. We all deserve compassion and to live both online and off in a more compassionate world.

Building a more compassionate society is going to be a bilateral exercise between individuals and the brands that represent their aspirations, their values and their truths. People make brands. If people are compassionate, brands will be compassionate in return.

All of the most vibrant, creative minds in the world are here. You are the creative engines that will drive forward our culture.

Will you help me?

And so, I end where I began. If you were a brand, what brand would you be?