

Case Study Anthony Weiner Texts His “Anthony”

There are many reasons why Americans don't trust, don't like, and don't want to put up with the arrogance that resonates among members of Congress. One, in particular, was a Democrat with a long face and huge ego, who hailed from the borough of Queens, New York.

Anthony Weiner, the congressman from Queens, was an up-and-coming Democrat star. A protégé of New York Senator Chuck Schumer, himself the most self-servingly successful publicity-seeker this side of Donald Trump, Weiner distinguished himself in 11 years in Congress as one of Washington's most savvy purveyors of public relations.

The combative and charismatic congressman was a familiar face on cable TV, even including the dreaded Fox News, where Weiner was a lone liberal willing to mix it up with antagonistic conservative hosts. Weiner was one of the only Democrats with nerve enough to battle with Foxcasters Don Imus or Megyn Kelly. And he gave as good as he got.

Weiner was also ambitious. Not content with the life of a low-clout, albeit highly recognized, congressman, Weiner had his sights set on replacing Michael Bloomberg as mayor of New York City in 2013.

Suicidal Sexting

But Congressman Weiner's talent led to unbridled arrogance, which, coupled with his failure to face reality and the unforgiving pervasiveness of the Internet, resulted in a fall from grace that was unprecedented in its velocity.

One day at the end of May 2011, Representative Weiner issued a strange announcement via Twitter. Weiner tweeted that his Twitter account had been hacked and a sexually suggestive photo sent in his name to a young woman in the Northwest. The photo, of someone's crotch, was removed from Congressman Weiner's Twitter account immediately. Nonetheless, reporters were intrigued.

But when they tried to follow up, the normally effusive congressman was uncharacteristically circumspect and more characteristically combative. He insisted his account had been hacked and attempted to deflect the conversation to “issues of much greater importance to our nation.” When reporters pressed, he punched back, labeling one CNN journalist a “jackass” for refusing to desist in pressing the sexting issue.

Typical of Weiner's response to the controversy he couldn't quite get rid of was his tête-à-tête with ABC's Jonathan Karl.

Karl: “Is it inappropriate for a member of Congress to be following young women on a Twitter account?”

Weiner (snarling): “That's outrageous. Ya know, that's really outrageous. The implication is outrageous. Your question had a pretty charged supposition, ‘Do you think there's anything wrong with following young women on Twitter?’ Do you really think that's a fair question?”

Rep. Weiner evidently failed to understand that to a reporter in the 21st century, no issue is of “greater importance” than sex. He suggested to reporters that he had hired an Internet securities

attorney to look further into the case. Nonetheless, the congressman made no calls to authorities; nor did he report the alleged account tampering, as was required by Congressional rules.

Despite his repeated attempts to change the subject, not only couldn't Weiner shake the controversy, his curious attempts at deflection served only to attract more journalistic interest.

Smile, You're on Stranded Camera

Within days of his staunch denials, Anthony Weiner started backtracking from his original story. His comments were less certain and more cagey, as if there might have been more to the story.

Within a week of the first revelation, the “more” of the story was announced by combative conservative blogger Andrew Breitbart, who claimed to have additional photos of women sent from the congressman's Twitter account; these photos were saucier than the original. Not only that, Breitbart had names of the women to whom the snapshots were sent. And he named them.

The truth, said Breitbart, was that Anthony Weiner, himself, had sent the suggestive photo—in fact, a *lot* of suggestive photos—for several years to a healthy list of female Twitter pals. It didn't help matters that the congressman had recently married a well-liked official in the Hillary Clinton State Department.

The next afternoon, Anthony Weiner staged a hastily called 4 p.m. press conference to set the record straight. The surreal press conference was one for the ages.

It began with Andrew Breitbart—yes, *that* “Andrew Breitbart”—taking the stage prior to the congressman arriving. Breitbart answered questions from the media about his role in the scandal. Weiner's aides evidently rushed to tell the congressman that his press conference was being hijacked by his accuser. Once Weiner arrived, he and Breitbart uncomfortably shared the stage for a stretch.

When Representative Weiner finally got a chance to make a statement, he broke down in tears, confessing that he had sent explicit photos and messages to at least six women and blatantly lied about it to anyone who asked. He apologized over and over to his wife and the women he had tweeted and took full responsibility for making “terrible mistakes” (Figure 12-8).

And, oh yes, he steadfastly refused to resign.

Rather, said Weiner, he would seek help for whatever it was that afflicted him, get cured, cooperate with any ethics investigation his colleagues thought appropriate, but then return to the House to complete the important business for which his constituents had sent him to Washington.

Not So Fast, Tweetie

Maybe Anthony Weiner saw no problem in returning to congressional action. But others had other ideas.

In the days following the press conference, news outlets and Websites began to report on other racy and explicit messages and photos from Weiner's online accounts to other women. The BigGovernment.com Website that published the first crotch shot



FIGURE 12-8 Don't cry for me, Anthony Weiner.
The final press conference. (Photo: John Angelillo/UPI/Newscom)

came up with another photo from another woman of a man's shirtless torso. (Guess who?) RadarOnline.com reported that a Nevada woman claimed to have 200 explicit messages from Weiner via a Facebook account. Other sites leaked photos they claimed to be Anthony Weiner's genitalia.

Finally, three weeks after the emergence of the telltale tweets, Anthony Weiner called yet another press conference at a senior

*For further information, see Andrea Canning, "Rep. Anthony Weiner's Sexting Scandal: Why Did He Do It?" ABCNews.com, June 6, 2011; Raymond Hernandez, "Weiner Resigns in Chaotic Scene," *The New York Times*, June 16, 2011; and "Rep. Weiner Admits to Sending Lewd Twitter Photo, Acknowledges Other Explicit Conversations," FoxNews.com, June 7, 2011.

center in his Queens district. The press conference—interrupted yet again by a Howard Stern confederate screaming "pervert"—lasted all of four minutes.

Rep. Weiner made the following statement:

I am here today to again apologize for the personal mistakes I have made and the embarrassment I have caused. I am announcing my resignation from Congress, so my colleagues can get back to work, my neighbors can choose a new representative and most important so that my wife and I can continue to heal from the damage I have caused.

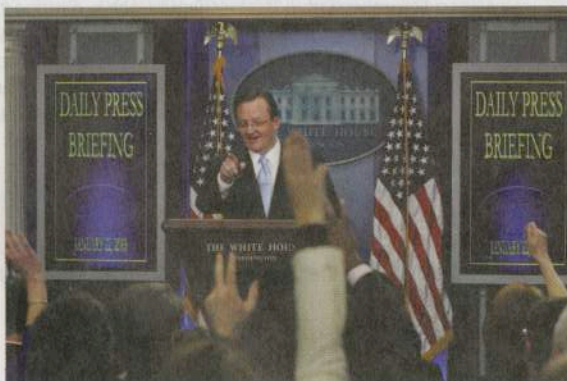
And with that, mercifully, Anthony Weiner was gone.*

Questions

1. Had you been Anthony Weiner's public relations advisor, what would you have counseled him prior to going public about the tweets?
2. What general advice relative to social media communicating would you offer anyone in the public eye?
3. Do you think Anthony Weiner can make a political comeback? If he came to you with that question, what would you advise him?

From the Top

An Interview with Robert Gibbs



Robert Gibbs served as senior advisor to President Barack Obama during the 2012 reelection campaign. Earlier, he was named the nation's 28th White House Press Secretary in January 2009. An experienced political public relations counselor, Mr. Gibbs was communications director for Senator Obama, for whom he had worked since 2004, and

for Senator Obama's 2008 presidential campaign. Prior to that, Mr. Gibbs served as press secretary of Senator John Kerry's 2004 presidential campaign. He also served as communications director for the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee and for four individual Senate campaigns, including those of Mr. Obama in 2004 and Fritz Hollings in 1998. Mr. Gibbs was also press secretary for Congressman Bob Etheridge. (This interview was conducted after Mr. Gibbs' first 100 days as press secretary in the White House.)

How would you describe your job?

This is the most fun I've ever had in a job in my life. It is the best job that you could have.

What do you consider your primary mission as press secretary?

I am the primary representative for the President with the White House press corps. I help them get access to the information and facts they need to cover what the President does each day.