Understanding Our Own Cassandra: The Construction of Public Opinion and the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas Hearings

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Initially, fast-reaction public opinion polls conducted in the wake of the hearings seemed to show immense support for Clarence Thomas both from the general American public and more specifically from African Americans. Why did the public view Thomas in a much more favorable light than Professor Hill? Why did the American public not believe Hill?

An analysis of 223 articles published during the week of the trial (October 6 –13, 1991) found evidence for bias in media coverage of the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas Hearings. Overall, Thomas received more frequent and more favorable coverage compared to Hill during the period in question. These disparities were found to be greater in regional papers than in national publications and if the story's author was male. Additionally, two public opinion polls conducted by Gallup during the week of the trial were analyzed using SPSS revealing newfound conclusions. This study analyzes the role persistent media bias might have had in distorting public opinion data and constructing dominant narratives about the hearings.

Keywords
Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, Public Opinion, Polling, Gender, Attitudes, Supreme Court, Political Science

Disciplines
American Politics | Gender and Sexuality | Social Influence and Political Communication

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Understanding Our Own Cassandra:
The Construction of Public Opinion and the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas Hearings

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Dr. Nancy Hirschmann, Advisor

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Political Science with Distinction
University of Pennsylvania Philadelphia, PA
March 30, 2016
To those women who could not keep silent...
To them we owe our praise and thanks.
Understanding Our Own Cassandra: The Construction of Public Opinion and the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas Hearings

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Disciplines
Political Communication  |  Gender Studies  |  Political Science
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Chapter I: The Puzzle

Introduction

Twenty-seven years after Professor Anita Hill testified under oath before the Senate Judiciary Committee, twenty-seven years after Judge Clarence Thomas was confirmed to the Supreme Court, and twenty-seven years after Professor Anita Hill inspired thousands of women to come forward to report workplace sexual harassment, this chapter in our nation’s past continues to resonate. The hearings were called revolutionary and monumental, historic and groundbreaking. Even the blue suit Hill wore during her testimony has become iconic. The Smithsonian Museum recently attempted to acquire the now legendary suit from Dr. Hill but she responded to the request saying she wasn’t ready yet to part with it (see Image 2 in Appendix I). More than just a person, Hill has become a symbol for those who stand up to power. As Julianne Malveaux describes in the foreword to The Legacy of the Hill–Thomas Hearings, Hill “has become more image than individual, more noun, verb, pronoun, adjective, and catalyst than person.” Hill remains a subject of political interest. A documentary titled Anita was released in March 2014, and a new HBO TV movie is marked for release in 2016, twenty-five years after the hearings occurred.

For many Americans, Professor Hill’s experiences represented a “microcosm of the way women were being treated all across our country.” The hearings provided the opportunity for

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3 Stolberg, “Standing by Her Story.”
5 Hill and Coleman Jordan, The Legacy, xiii.
survivors to come forward and share their experiences with workplace sexual harassment and brought the subject into the national conversation. As Noah Feldman of Harvard Law School explained, “[the hearings] broke a kind of a barrier, which I think previously could have been thought of as a barrier of silence or a barrier of public politeness, quite possibly both.”

The significance of the hearings continues to evolve for each new generation. As Nina Totenberg, the National Public Radio (NPR) reporter who broke the story, has stated: “Today we think of the Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill hearings as a watershed in American political and social life,” but at the time “[people] had no notion of what those hearings would come to mean.” The hearings have become “one of the most important events in modern American history.”

Many have credited the Hill–Thomas hearings with advancing women’s representation in Congress and raising awareness of sexual harassment in the American workplace. Anita Hill’s testimony ushered in the “Year of the Woman,” and in the year after her testimony, the number of sexual harassment claims filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) nearly doubled; they had nearly tripled by 1997 and kept growing until 2001. Overall, the number of sexual harassment cases rose from 6,127 in 1991 to 15,342 in 1996. It is also noteworthy that during this same period, awards to victims under federal laws rose from $7.7 million to $27.8 million.

The hearings also motivated changes in Congress. Many Americans were disturbed by the events of the hearing: a group of white men interrogating a Black woman about highly personal and traumatic experiences on national television. Before 1991, women had made some

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8 Hill and Coleman Jordan, The Legacy, xiii.
10 Totenberg, “Thomas Confirmation Hearings Had Ripple Effect.”
inroads in elected office, but these achievements were almost exclusively at the lower levels.\(^{12}\) The hearings have also been credited with inspiring women to run for public office and the American public to turn out and elect them.\(^{13}\) Some women, such as Senator Carol Moseley-Braun, cited Anita Hill in explaining their motivations to run.\(^{14}\) Some, such as Eleanor Norton, one of the Congresswomen to march on the Senate, went so far as to credit Hill with the election of the first African American woman to the Senate.\(^{15}\) In 1991, there were just two female senators in the United States, but after the Thomas–Hill hearings, nearly a dozen women secured major party nominations to the U.S. Senate, and five were elected (see Image 1 in Appendix I).\(^{16}\) Racial minorities also gained increased representation in the aftermath of the hearings. The first Puerto Rican woman was elected to the House of Representatives along with six other women of color, almost tripling their representation.\(^{17}\) Overall, the number of women in Congress went up from twenty-nine to forty-eight, a dramatic shift in representation in the election following Hill’s testimony.\(^{18}\) The 1991 hearings also had an impact on the composition of the Senate Judiciary Committee. Since then, the Committee has not been composed solely of men, and every subsequent confirmation hearing has included a closed-door session in which senators can ask questions about personal matters in an FBI file.\(^{19}\)

In addition to changes within the public sector, a number of changes can be noted in the private sector. The Thomas–Hill hearings of 1991 have been credited in the redoubling of efforts by grassroots organizations and non-profits to advocate for a variety of women’s issues.

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\(^{12}\) Reed, “A Brief History of Sexual Harassment in the United States.”

\(^{13}\) Hill and Coleman Jordan, The Legacy, 245.

\(^{14}\) Hill and Coleman Jordan, The Legacy, 245.

\(^{15}\) Totenberg, Thomas Confirmation Hearings Had Ripple Effect.

\(^{16}\) Totenberg, Thomas Confirmation Hearings Had Ripple Effect.

\(^{17}\) Hill and Coleman Jordan, The Legacy, 245.

\(^{18}\) Hill and Coleman Jordan, The Legacy, 245.

\(^{19}\) Hill and Coleman Jordan, The Legacy, 245.
Organizations such as NOW, The National Women’s Political Caucus, Emily’s List, and the Women’s Campaign Fund increased efforts to fund and lobby for women’s interests after the Hill–Thomas hearings. Emily’s List, for example, quadrupled its donations over 1990 and increased membership from 3,500 to 24,000 members.\(^{20}\) In the two months after the hearings, 13,000 new members joined the National Organization for Women, 9,000 more than its average 4,000 members for a two-month period.\(^{21}\)

Additionally, the Thomas–Hill hearings had an incredible impact on feminist political scholarship. The hearings resulted in an influx of scholarship on the topics of sexual harassment and the intersection of race and gender.\(^{22}\) Every year the “I Believe Anita Hill Party” is held on the anniversary of the hearings in South Carolina, which brings together scholars and activists to discuss the continued impact of Hill’s testimony. The hearings created groundbreaking new understandings of the impact of intersectionality, highlighting the subversive ways race, class, gender, and power function vis-à-vis intersectional theory to create the very narratives we now draw from the hearings. While nearly twenty-five years have passed since the Hill–Thomas hearings of 1991, the echoes of Hill’s testimony continue to shape modern society. Despite the huge impact Hill would have in the years after her testimony, it is a sad reality that the American public largely did not believe Anita Hill in October of 1991 when she took the stand in her now-iconic blue suit and pearls. The Hill–Thomas Senate Judiciary hearings of 1991 provide a puzzle for feminist and political scholars alike.

Gallup/CNN conducted a national public opinion poll on October 14\(^{th}\), 1991, after both Thomas and Hill had testified. The poll’s findings were startling. CBS News found that 54% of


\(^{22}\) Hill and Coleman Jordan, The Legacy, xiii.
Americans believed Thomas’s account of events, whereas only 27% of Americans believed Hill.\textsuperscript{23} Twice as many Americans remarked that their impressions of her were “very unfavorable” rather than “very favorable.”\textsuperscript{24} In contrast, Thomas received high favorability ratings from the American public. Sixty-two percent of Americans remarked that they had either “favorable” or “very favorable” impressions of Judge Thomas. Why was the public so doubtful of Hill’s account of events? Why did the public view Thomas in a much more favorable light than Professor Hill? Why did the American public not believe Hill?

The Senate Judiciary hearings of October 1991 artfully masked and revealed political power. During the hearings, Hill exemplified a “modern-day Cassandra.”\textsuperscript{25} Cassandra, a maiden in Ancient Greek lore and legend, ignored Apollo’s sexual advances only to be punished by the God with a curse: that no one would believe her prophecies.\textsuperscript{26} In a very similar way, Hill’s account of workplace sexual harassment by Thomas appeared to not be believed by a large majority of Americans in October of 1991. Across the board, when polled, very few Americans reported believing Hill.

Feminist political scholars have unpacked the 1991 hearings, asking, “what were the political forces at play that caused Americans to doubt Hill’s testimony?” What has been the focus of scholarship is a complex interaction between race and gender. Scholars such as Jane Mansbridge and Katherine Tate have argued that “public opinion was decidedly against [Hill]” during the hearings due to a phenomenon in which the race of Clarence Thomas trumped Anita Hill’s gender.\textsuperscript{27} Both scholars artfully dissect polling statistics among the African American

\textsuperscript{24} Gallup/CNN poll, “Courts Crime.”
\textsuperscript{26} Yarbrough and Bennett, “Cassandra and the ‘Sistahs,’” 627.
community to make this point. Their theory, termed the “Race Trumping Gender Hypothesis,” highlights the subversive way Hill’s identity as an African American was erased and her gender identity heightened in order to portray Thomas as the victim of the hearings, not Hill. Other feminist scholars, such as Yarbough and Bennet, have also sought to address the puzzle of public opinion in the Hill–Thomas hearings by investigating the long history of African American women’s voices being discredited and silenced. These scholars argue that Hill’s racial identity was caricatured into ugly, falsified stereotypes of African American women in order to discredit her testimony. Yarbough and Bennet argue that all Black women are Cassandras; Hill’s lack of credibility was not a function of her accusations, but rather it was a function of her race and gender. That is, the outcome was predetermined. Altogether these theories are important to understand the way power, sexuality, and race functioned during the trial, but they do little to investigate how this dominant narrative—that Hill was disbelieved—came to be.

To date, most scholarship examining the Hill–Thomas hearings has largely focused on the Senate Judiciary Committee’s biased treatment of Professor Hill and the way her race and gender figured in the discrediting of her testimony. Scholars have pointed to biased lines of questions, such as Senator Heflin’s famous series of questions—“Are you a scorned woman?” “Are you a zealoting civil rights believer?” “Do you have a militant attitude?” “Do you have a martyr complex?”—all of which were asked to undermine the credibility of her testimony.

While it is incredibly important to note the insidious power politics of the Senate Judiciary Committee in weakening Dr. Hill’s credibility, what has not been examined sufficiently is the

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28 Mansbridge and Tate, “Race Trumps Gender,” 488.
29 Yarbrough and Bennett, “Cassandra and the ‘Sistahs,’” 627.
30 For example, scholars have pointed to biased questioning, such as Senator Heflin’s famous series of questions—“Are you a scorned woman?” “Are you a zealoting civil rights believer?” “Do you have a militant attitude?” “Do you have a martyr complex?”—which scholars have indicated likely undermined Hill’s credibility.
role media coverage played in shaping public opinion and the dominant narratives that emerged in the wake of the hearings. To understand the Senate Judiciary hearings of 1991, we must acknowledge that the narratives we tell about events reflect political power. To get at the heart of the question “How did this narrative come to be?” one must examine the institutional power of the media.

One of the most unique features of the 1991 Hill–Thomas hearings was the way in which they mesmerized the nation; the hearings were projected on nearly every media platform after Hill’s accusations were leaked by the press on October 6th, 1991. The presence of journalists and reporters at the hearings reciting the details of Hill’s accusations caused a buzz, creating accusations that American politics had been corrupted by an orchestrated “circus,” arguing it was not appropriate to discuss something as ugly as sexual harassment in a Senate Judiciary hearing. Yet Americans continued to watch and read and listen. The intense media presence during the 1991 hearings provides a valuable case study to examine the way that the institutional power of the media can influence public opinion. Much like the inherent bias present in the institution of the Senate Judiciary Committee and the individuals who serve on it, the way media depicts certain events has an important role to play in shaping public opinion. Scholars have long known that the language journalists use to describe events can influence public opinion by “masking and revealing political power and its manipulations.”

Newspaper, radio programs, and television networks, stations and programs, need not deliberately contrive to make absent certain narratives by presenting others; it is unnecessary that the work of (or on behalf of) power go on via conspiratorial agreement or arrangement. Such work goes on because the media, along with other public and private entities (including institutions, churches, schools, families, and civic

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organizations, among others), constantly make available certain narratives and not others.\textsuperscript{33}

That is, the narratives we draw from the hearings reflect power.

In this essay, I will examine one of the hearings’ dominant narratives: that the American public overwhelmingly sided with Judge Clarence Thomas and doubted the testimony of Dr. Anita Hill. Part 1 of this study will analyze media coverage during the week of the Hill–Thomas hearings (October 6\textsuperscript{th}–13\textsuperscript{th}, 1991) and existing differences in how the coverage portrayed Thomas and Hill. I will examine whether Thomas and Hill received the same amount of coverage (as measured by the number of name mentions, direct quotes, and photos of Hill and Thomas, respectively) as well as the quality of news coverage (as measured by the number of references to Hill’s and Thomas’s respective professional titles, the quality of adjectives used to describe them, the size of the images depicting them, and how images of them were placed). It is hypothesized that biased journalism could have been a factor that influenced public opinion about the hearings. Part 2 of this study will use SPSS to examine two public opinion datasets collected by Gallup during the week of the hearings as the findings from these polls were frequently cited in news coverage.

\textbf{Research Methodology}

\textbf{Part 1: Analysis of General Media Coverage}

The subjects of inquiry for this project were all articles published by \textit{The New York Times}, \textit{Washington Post}, \textit{Atlanta Journal}, and \textit{St. Louis Post-Dispatch} between October 6\textsuperscript{th}, 1991, and October 13\textsuperscript{th}, 1991, the last day of the hearings. During this time frame, \textit{The New York Times} published 59 articles, the \textit{Washington Post} published 67 articles, the \textit{St. Louis Post-Dispatch} 67

\textsuperscript{33} Lubiano, “Black Ladies,” 329.
articles, and the *Atlanta Journal* 30 articles related to the Hill–Thomas hearings, respectively. Overall, 223 articles were analyzed, capturing both national and regional coverage of the Hill–Thomas hearings.

The date range of October 6th–13th was selected because October 6th, 1991, was the date Professor Hill’s accusations were leaked to the public, and October 13th, 1991, was the last day of the public hearings. This date range was chosen to capture the most extensive coverage of the Hill–Thomas hearings although it should be noted that coverage continued long after the hearings’ conclusion. *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* were selected due to both newspapers’ high circulation and their extensive coverage of the events. Additionally, two regional papers, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and *Atlanta Journal*, were chosen to survey regional coverage in the South and Midwest. I included Reuters articles, opinion editorials, and articles published by newspapers’ editorial boards in my sample. I also included wire service articles in my analysis of regional papers. Multi-author pieces, editorial board articles, and Reuters articles were *not* included in my examination of gender difference because, in these cases, authors’ genders could not be determined; however, these articles were included in all other forms of analysis. Direct transcripts of the Hill–Thomas hearings were not included in this analysis since these pieces can be considered primary sources that do not reflect any additional bias on the part of a news agency or an article’s author.

All articles were accessed in the academic database LexisNexis. Articles were coded based on the following criteria: gender of the article’s author, length of article, number of references to Thomas, number of references to Hill, reference to Thomas’s title as a judge or Supreme Court nominee, references to Hill’s title as a professor of law or lawyer, number of direct quotations from Hill, and number of direct quotations from Thomas. Quotations were
counted as any statement in which Hill or Thomas was quoted from another source. A single sentence with multiple quoted words or phrases was counted as a single quote for coding purposes. Adjectives describing both individuals were documented to aid in understanding the media characterization of both Hill and Thomas. These adjectives were analyzed for frequency using the website Word Frequency Counter. Adverbial phrases were converted to adjectives—a description of Hill “speaking calmly,” for example, was recorded as “calm.” Photographs of Hill and Thomas were similarly analyzed for differences in frequency, size, and placement. *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* published a total of 103 photographs between October 6th and October 13th, 1991. Photographs were categorized according to both subject and size—small, medium, and large. Small photos were coded as those 1.5 inches by 1.5 inches or smaller, medium photos were coded as those larger than 1.5 inches by 1.5 inches but smaller than four inches by four inches, and large photos were considered to be any that were larger than four inches by four inches. It is theorized that these differences in print media coverage could be factors that influenced public opinion during this time period.

Based upon these factors, conclusions were determined as to the extent and character of coverage regarding Hill and Thomas. It is theorized that these differences in coverage could be factors that impacted public opinion surveys conducted during this time period.

**Part 2: Analysis of Media Coverage Regarding American Public Opinion**

Of the 126 articles published by *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* during October 6th–13th, 1991, four articles dealt exclusively with reporting American public opinion based on public opinion surveys. These four articles will be examined in light of the public datasets collected during the trial. Two Gallup datasets, respectively from October 10th and October 14th, 1991, were analyzed using IBM’s program SPSS Statistic Version 23. Gallup’s
polls were chosen due to the company’s position as the industry standard for survey research and logistical issues regarding what datasets were made accessible to the public. All data sets were accessed using Roper Center’s iPoll Database. All data analyzed were weighted according to the U.S. Census. Margin of error calculations were performed using Langer Research’s margin of error calculator. Based upon an in-depth analysis of public opinion polls, it is theorized that misleading claims were made to the public regarding the state of American public opinion.
Chapter II: Theoretical Approaches to Understanding Public Opinion

Overview: The Quest to Accurately Access Public Opinion

The study of public opinion dates back to Ancient Rome, but its development into a legitimate field of social science inquiry is relatively new. While the phrase “public opinion” was coined in the eighteenth century during the Enlightenment period, the term *vox populi* referring to the voice of the public was a concept in common usage in Ancient Greece and Rome.\(^{34}\) Particularly in Ancient Greece, public opinion was a valued dimension of the political sphere.\(^{35}\) Aristotle had great hopes that the collective mind of the public could serve to improve society. Aristotle noted how the general public was a better judge of joint pronouncement than any one individual.\(^{36}\) Even then public opinion research was considered a valuable realm of study.

The decades leading up to the French Revolution in Europe are often noted as the most important transformational period in the development of public opinion research. In the decades preceding the French Revolution, the concept of “conversational public opinion” took hold, the idea being that some sort of measure of public sentiment could be measured from attending public hot spots, such as coffee shops and taverns, where the public gathered to discuss politics. With the advent of the printing press and a general increase in literacy, Europeans were becoming much more educated about local events occurring in their cities and townships. These “public hot spots” came to “symbolize the emergence of the ‘public sphere’—an arena for free expression apart from the court and outside of the domestic realm.”\(^{37}\) These spaces for political discourse allowed for political fervor to develop throughout Europe. With the advent of the printing press, print increasingly became a force to transmit public sentiment. Throughout the

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eighteenth century, the opinions of the public gained prominence and legitimacy, fermenting into action that would ultimately lead to a series of revolutions throughout Europe. In the wake of these revolutions, the idea that government must respond to the *vox populi* became increasingly important. Many of the Federalists noted the importance of American democracy in responding to public sentiment. For example, James Madison famously noted that “public opinion sets bounds to every government, and is the real sovereign in every free one.”38 This said, the Federalists also warned of the dangers of public opinion in corrupting democracy, specifically factions in compromising the public good.

In the United States, the development of representative democracy went hand-in-hand with the development of what we now call public opinion research. “Counting heads and opinions fit a growing democracy perfectly,” and citizens were eager to poll among themselves and send these figures to local newspapers regarding various political opinions.39 The nineteenth century was a period of “tremendous quickening in the quantification of public opinion in the United States, in part because of the increasing intensity and partisanship” in the U.S. inspired by exciting elections such as the 1896 race between McKinley and Bryan in which the famed “Cross of Gold” speech was delivered.40 In the wake of the Industrial Revolution, public opinion research received a boost from a general interest among the American populace in how to accurately quantify and measure data.41 With the explosion of print media and an ever-increasing interest in politics, the standards were set for more methodologically sound ways to study public opinion.

40 The Cross of Gold speech was delivered by William Jennings Bryan, a former United States Representative from Nebraska, at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago on July 9, 1896. In the address, Bryan supported bimetallism or “free silver,” which he believed would bring the nation prosperity. The speech is considered one of the greatest political speeches in American history.
The first attempts to systematically understand and research public opinion were taken on by George Gallup in the 1930s, with his experimental use of quota sampling to draw up representativeness of the United States regarding general elections. Gallup and his American Institute of Public Opinion used quota sampling from 1936–1944 to correctly pick the following three presidential winners, which resulted in him gaining a great deal of attention from the media and public. That was until Gallup wrongly announced Dewey beating Truman in 1948 due to a number of factors that undermined the representativeness of his model. Flaws with quota sampling drove academic researchers to reassess the way public opinion data were collected and analyzed. The new concept of probability sampling, developed by Gallup, set the stage for even more precise polling, which improved upon the previous method. The methods of probability sampling were found to be far more accurate than the quota-sampling techniques used previously.\textsuperscript{42} To this day, probability sampling remains the primary survey method used by social science researchers to analyze public opinion although this might be changing as increasingly social scientists are experimenting with online polls that cannot be conducted using the standard probability polling method.\textsuperscript{43}

In recent years, public opinion polls have faced a challenging reality—at no time in American history has more weight been given to public opinion polls, and yet at no time are public opinion polls harder to conduct. The New York Times recently published an article titled “What’s the Matter With Polling?” written by renowned pollster Cliff Zukin describing the challenges faced by modern pollsters. “The problem” the author explains, “is simple but daunting. The foundation of opinion research has historically been the ability to draw a random

\textsuperscript{42} Earl Babbie, \textit{The Basics of Social Research: The Logic of Sampling}, 4\textsuperscript{th} ed. (Belmont: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009), 189.
\textsuperscript{43} Online polls have recently drawn a great deal of attention for their ability to reach large populations of Americans in a day and age in which few Americans are willing to take phone polls.
sample of the population. That’s become much harder to do.”\textsuperscript{44} As Zukin articulates, two trends are driving the increasing unreliability of election and other polling in the United States, and they are the growth of cell phones and a decline in people willing to answer surveys.\textsuperscript{45} Public opinion polling has historically been conducted on landline telephones. Both the popularity of cell phones and a decreasing number of Americans who use landlines have made polls much harder to conduct. As of 2016, probability polls conducted solely of landline users would miss three-fifths of the American public, resulting in an unrepresentative poll. There are also a number of barriers to reaching Americans that use cell phones. The 1991 Telephone Consumer Protection Act has been interpreted by the Federal Communications Commission to prohibit the calling of cell phones through automatic dialers. This forces pollsters to contact these individuals manually. This means that in order “to complete a 1,000-person survey, it’s not unusual to have to dial more than 20,000 random numbers…” and this has increased the cost of conducting public opinion surveys exponentially.\textsuperscript{46} The other significant problem that pollsters face is response rates. In the 1970s, telephone response rates were typically around 80%, but “by 1997, Pew’s response rate was 36 percent, and the decline has accelerated in recent years. By 2014 the response rate had fallen to 8 percent.”\textsuperscript{47} Not only do low response rates raise concerns regarding representativeness, but they also significantly increase the costs of conducting social science research.

Despite these two significant challenges, polling continues to be of chief political importance. In recent years, “public opinion surveys have become an important part of the process by which newsmen and political leaders appraise the public’s sense of social

\textsuperscript{45} Zukin, “What’s the Matter with Polling.”
\textsuperscript{46} Zukin, “What’s the Matter with Polling.”
\textsuperscript{47} Zukin, “What’s the Matter with Polling.”
Additionally, political polls have become a form of entertainment in their own right. This year, a great deal of attention has been focused on the republican presidential primary with regard to political polling. Polling numbers have determined which candidates have been eligible to participate in main stage G.O.P. debates.\textsuperscript{49} Polls have also been used to construct narratives of which candidates have the best shot at the White House. Despite statisticians cautioning against drawing wide-ranging implications from public opinion polls, polls continue to be a big part of how the American public assesses public opinion. Despite news organizations emphasizing caution in extrapolating conclusions based on national polls (\textit{The New York Times} even stating that “national polls are of dubious value at this stage”), this has not stopped journalists from creating narratives of winners and losers.\textsuperscript{50} In and of itself political polling does not seem to serve a particular democratic ill; instead, it appears to serve worthy democratic aspirations: gauging the will of the public, capturing public sentiment at a certain moment in time, and even helping politicians make decisions that are of paramount importance to the public. The challenge is that public opinion research can pose a unique threat to democracy when data are misrepresented or, perhaps even more dangerous still, when polls construct reality.

\textbf{Public Opinion as a Threat to Democracy}

One of the first social scientists to ominously warn of the dangers of accessing public opinion was Walter Lipmann in 1922. Lipmann warned of a day in which “mass media elites manufacture the public attitudes they desire,” and polls are used as a tool in this process of


“manipulating public opinion.”\(^{51}\) Lipmann, during his life, realized how easy it was to manipulate public opinion, leading him to disavow the sentiment that “the public is always right.”\(^{52}\) Lipmann argued that people “cannot experience most aspects of reality directly” but “live partly in a real world and partly in a fabricated one that we construct from what others tell us: from stories, pictures, newspaper accounts, and the like.”\(^{53}\) Lipmann further articulated his theory that what each man does is based not on direct and certain knowledge but on pictures made by himself or given to him.\(^{54}\) These “pictures,” which I call narratives for the purposes of this project, inform the way we understand world events. One modern example can be seen in the recent Ebola crisis in the fall of 2014 that made headline news in the United States. Despite the reality that Ebola was not a new illness, and that the risk of contracting it was minute, the disease became a very real fear for many Americans who were inundated with profuse coverage of the epidemic in parts of Africa. After being polled, 61% of Americans said they were either “very” or “somewhat” concerned about Ebola and believed the U.S. Government had a duty to do something about it.\(^{55}\) Before coverage, fears of Ebola were not listed among top concerns of Americans polled. This example illustrates the persuasive power of media and public opinion polling in creating narratives—this narrative being that Ebola was a deadly disease, a significant threat to the U.S. that was not being taken seriously enough by politicians. The narratives we tell about news stories matter because of their ability to distort reality. Not only may these narratives, or as Lipmann puts it “pictures,” drive the action (or inaction) of politicians, but they may impact the way the American public thinks.


\(^{54}\) Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 16.

To understand public opinion and how narratives can be created, it is valuable to look at the fallibility of political polls. Public opinion is an imperfect science; many of the flaws found in other social science domains can also infiltrate public opinion research. Probability polling is subject to two types of error, which I will broadly categorize as methodological error and structural error. Methodological error has to do with the way polls are executed. Methodological flaws in probability polling have been studied at length. Probability polling, which relies on random selection to calculate the representativeness of a whole country, is still subject to sampling error as the result of flaws in sample size, diversity of the population polled, and confidence level. Methodological errors can also be more surreptitious. Since public opinion surveys rely on people, a whole variety of factors can affect how individuals answer survey questions, providing room for the skewing of data. Researchers have found, for example, that the race of an interviewer can impact the answers of an interviewee on a phone survey. A similar gender-of-interviewer effect has also been noted. Additionally, the way questions are worded can affect the way people answer survey questions. Public opinion researchers have termed this phenomenon the “social desirability effect.” That is, “on certain kinds of survey items, individuals react in part to the social pressure of the interview situation and tend to respond

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57 The authors postulate that even in interviews conducted over the telephone, where participants cannot see their interviewer, respondents are able to identify their interviewers race through accent, speech pattern, name, and other verbal cues to infer racial identity.
based on their expectations of the interviewers’ preference.” In conducting surveys, researchers must be aware of these outside factors that may impact public opinion survey results.

The second form of error, “structural error,” has to do with broader underlying political forces that impact statistical data. That is, statistical data, the seemingly most “objective” form of social science, are not immune to the same forces that other types of research are subject to. There is a long history of social scientists and politicians manipulating statistics in order to tell narratives that benefit power. Khalil Muhammad in *The Condemnation of Blackness* poignantly argues that statistics, seemingly the most objective mode of analysis, have been influential in criminalizing African American men. Muhammad presents a compelling narrative of the way statistics on crime were distorted in order to sway public consciousness about African Americans, creating the guise of a so-called “negro problem.” These social undercurrents that reflect power operate in a way that affects the way the public thinks and responds to survey questions. These factors are hard, if impossible, to account for and must be acknowledged in the pursuit of social science research. This tendency is formidable. As noted by Bogart, “The public opinion survey method requires that these elusive currents be treated as though they were static…once this is done, and done over and over again, it is easy to succumb to the illusion that the measurements represent reality rather than a distorted, dim, approximate reflection of a reality that alters its shape when seen from different angles.” Understanding these “elusive currents” is an important task for social science researchers and a quest that leads one to think about the factors that impact public opinion.

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64 Bogart, *Silent Politics*, 15.
Finally, it is important to note the synergy of newspapers, pollsters, and government. There has long been a relationship between publishers, pollsters, and government. The relationship between journalists and pollsters becomes especially visible during election season in the United States, when public opinion polls are front-page news. Interesting poll results fuel the creation of interesting news, which the public can digest and then be further polled about. A curious relationship exists in which polls can both illustrate but also influence public opinion. This relationship has been called dangerous by some social scientists. Michael Wheeler, author of the seminal text *Lies, Damn Lies, and Statistics: The Manipulation of Public Opinion in America*, highlights how “the breadth and intensity of modern public opinion polling is matched by its influence” both in influencing policy makers and American citizens alike, which he documents at length in his book. The relationships between pollsters and government officials can be harder to see at first glance but do exist and have been studied by political scientists. In a piece titled *Presidential Manipulation of Polls and Public Opinion: The Nixon Administration and the Pollsters*, political scientists Shapiro and Jacobs highlight the way Nixon’s administration influenced polls to benefit the agenda of his regime. The conclusion the authors draw is that “despite this monitoring of today’s polling, the disturbing story that has emerged from the Nixon archives forces us to wonder about what influences politicians or other interested parties exert on today’s poll questions and results.” These relationships potentially create conflicts of interest that are important to be aware of when analyzing public opinion.

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Chapter III: Public Opinion on the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas Hearings

Overview

Hill’s accusations in the fall of 1991 very nearly never came to light. The allegations that a woman, later revealed to the public to be Dr. Anita Faye Hill, had been sexually harassed while working under Judge Clarence Thomas were nearly dismissed in the proceedings that led up to the appointment of Thomas to the court. Judge Clarence Thomas, a conservative African American lawyer and graduate of Yale Law School, was nominated to the bench by President George H.W. Bush to succeed Thurgood Marshall’s seat. Anita Hill, a law professor at the University of Oklahoma, originally informed the Senate Judiciary Committee of her charges in early September, but her allegations resulted in little inquiry into their veracity. Only at the eleventh hour did the Senate Judiciary Committee submit to pressure, both from the American public and, notably, from seven democratic congresswomen who marched up the Capitol steps to the Capitol room of the Senate, to delay confirmation in order to consider Dr. Hill’s claims (see image in Appendix I).

The allegations were leaked to the public on October 6th, 1991, by Nina Totenberg, a reporter with NPR, who stated, “these were charges that, true or not, could not be ignored.”67 Totenberg later stated that she felt compelled as a journalist at NPR to break the story after she realized Hill’s allegations were not inciting further investigation. Totenberg noted:

The chairman of the committee, Joseph Biden, had not pursued the charges at all initially—had not even talked to Anita Hill, on the grounds that if she was not willing to go public, he would not investigate. Only at the eleventh hour, with the first round of hearings over, did Biden finally succumb to pressure from Democrats. But the investigative step he took was minimal: he asked the White House to have Hill and Thomas each interviewed by the FBI. There was no follow-up, no further investigation. Nothing, And on the day the committee was to vote on the Thomas nomination,

committee members were given a copy of the affidavit Hill sent Biden outlining her charges…I began to smell a rat.\textsuperscript{68}

After the story broke, Hill’s allegations that she was sexually harassed, on numerous occasions, while Thomas was her supervisor at the Department of Education and the EEOC became public knowledge that transfixed the nation. Hill ultimately was called to testify under oath on October 11\textsuperscript{th}, 1991, about the harassment she had experienced during her time as Thomas’s assistant. Hill testified that Thomas had asked her out socially many times and, after she refused, had used work situations to discuss sexual subjects.\textsuperscript{69} When asked about her decision to come forward, Hill said, “it would have been more comfortable to remain silent…but when I was asked by a representative of this committee to report my experience, I felt that I had to tell the truth. I could not keep silent.”\textsuperscript{70}

In response to Hill’s accusation, Clarence Thomas vehemently denied Hill’s charges, arguing that her testimony was an attempt by the liberal left to carry out a “high-tech lynching for uppity blacks.” Thomas categorically denied all of Hill’s accusations in what Totenberg reported as “a fiery rage that impressed the audience and shrank the Democrats into sniveling submission.”\textsuperscript{71} Thomas’s supporters questioned Hill’s credibility, “claiming she was delusional or had been spurned, leading her to seek revenge.”\textsuperscript{72} To undermine her credibility further, senators cited the time delay of ten years between the alleged behavior by Thomas and Hill’s

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{68}] Totenberg, “Introduction,” 6.
\item[\textsuperscript{69}] Miller, The Complete Transcript, 24.
\item[\textsuperscript{70}] Miller, The Complete Transcript, 26.
\item[\textsuperscript{71}] Totenberg, “Introduction,” 6.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
decision to come forward with her accusations.\textsuperscript{73} Senators also pointed to numerous phone calls made by Hill to Thomas in order to raise doubts about the veracity of her statements.\textsuperscript{74}

Hill’s testimony, given in her iconic blue suit while flanked by her legal team and large family, has now become symbolic of an individual speaking truth to power. One writer noted, “the senators took turns interrogating Hill and making charges that time and again betrayed their ignorance of sexual harassment’s effects, she remained calm.”\textsuperscript{75} Thomas’s witnesses testified to her mental instability, obsession with pursuing men, and devotion to Thomas even after being sexually harassed.\textsuperscript{76} Famously, Orrin Hatch, a republican senator from Utah, accused Hill of drawing from the film \textit{the Exorcist} in crafting her testimony.\textsuperscript{77} Witnesses for Hill testified to her “quiet intelligence, good teaching, and politically unbiased legal work.”\textsuperscript{78} Notably, several women were willing to testify before the Senate Judiciary Committee that they had also experienced workplace sexual harassment while working for Thomas, but they were ultimately not allowed to testify before the Committee. The democrats, in what they now admit was a tactical error, yielded to republican pressure and decided not to call Angela Wright, one of these women willing to testify, before the committee.\textsuperscript{79}

Despite “the fact that Hill took and passed a lie detector test, the two sides were no match for each other.” Totenberg, who extensively covered the hearings, commented that Thomas’s forces were “frantic but unified” and “marched together to a strategic tune composed by Thomas and Danforth and orchestrated by the White House.”\textsuperscript{80} Ultimately, after extensive debate, the

\textsuperscript{73} Despite the fact that Hill says she would have preferred to stay silent, they put her on the committee, which imposed a particular obligation on her.
\textsuperscript{74} Wikipedia contributors, “Anita Hill.”
\textsuperscript{75} Vavrus, \textit{Postfeminist News}, 38.
\textsuperscript{76} Vavrus, \textit{Postfeminist News}, 39.
\textsuperscript{77} The Complete Transcript, 156.
\textsuperscript{78} The Complete Transcript, 156.
\textsuperscript{79} Totenberg, “Introduction,” 8.
\textsuperscript{80} Totenberg, “Introduction,” 7.
United States Senate confirmed Thomas to the Supreme Court by a vote of 52–48 on October 15th, 1991, the narrowest margin since the nineteenth century. Thomas has continued to serve on the Supreme Court since his confirmation in 1991. He remains one of the most conservative members of the Supreme Court and one of the most silent justices.

**Media Response**

The Hill/Thomas Hearings of 1991 received unprecedented media coverage. Political scholars Black and Allen commented: “the intense public scrutiny transformed Ms. Hill from a relatively unknown law professor to a virtual feminist icon.” Mary Douglas Vavrus comments in her book *Postfeminist News: Political Women In Media Culture* that the subjects of the trial “were perfectly situated between news and melodrama, and they worked well to satisfy the dictates of each.” Coverage of the hearings was extensive. One study reported that 1,213 articles were published regarding the trial during the three-day hearings. The majority of Americans reported having followed the coverage of the trial closely; one poll put the number as high as 77% of Americans.

Media coverage of the trial was also notable in that it was the first of its kind. The incendiary nature of the trial’s subject matter only made the hearings more unique to the American public. Previously, “the nomination of a justice to the U.S. Supreme Court had little public opinion relevance,” and the “American public tended to acquiesce in Court appointments.” The highly scandalous nature of the hearings’ subject matter and the media circus that surrounded the hearings increased the hearings’ visibility enormously. Public

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81 Wikipedia contributors, "Anita Hill."
84 Black and Allen, "Tracing the Legacy of Anita Hill,” 42.
85 Gallup/CNN poll, “Courts Crime.”
attention to news media regarding the trial was “focused with unusual intensity,” creating what political scientist Dan Thomas calls “political spectacle.” In response to intense interest in the trial, print journalism covered the hearings extensively. The New York Times featured the trial as a repeated front-page feature under the heading “The Thomas Nomination.” Major newspapers across the country, along with a number of popular magazines such as People, chose to feature the hearings as front-page news. In doing so, journalists set the political news agenda.

Public Opinion Response

As both Frankovic and Gelb note in Public Opinion and the Thomas Nomination, it has only become a recent phenomenon to poll the American public regarding their preference for a certain justice. The few times that the American public was polled regarding Supreme Court Justice appointments, it was largely done to affirm decisions already made rather than to provide input into the decision-making process. This was not the case in the Thomas–Hill hearings of 1991.

Before Hill’s allegations became public, Americans were largely in favor of supporting the nomination of Thomas to the court although Thomas was largely unknown to most citizens. Both Black Americans and women supported the nomination, and no reported gender gap was noted. Upon Hill’s allegations becoming public knowledge, Americans began to tune into the coverage of the hearing. Pollsters found that “Americans said that if Hill’s allegations were true, Thomas should not be confirmed”; however, by better than two to one, they said that the charges

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89 Frankovic and Gelb, "Public Opinion and the Thomas Nomination," 482.
were “probably not true,” and by a similar two-to-one margin, they said Thomas should be confirmed.”

At first glance, public opinion in regard to the hearings appears to be clear-cut. A number of opinion polls conducted in light of the hearings appear to confirm strong support for Thomas and distrust with the testimony of Dr. Hill. This relationship is even starker when looking at differences between poll results among white and Black Americans. According to polls, Black support for Thomas appeared to increase by nearly five points in the wake of the trial, raising questions about a possible race effect. Black Americans were also much more likely than white Americans to report that Thomas had been the victim of institutional racism.

The particularly strong support for Thomas from the African American community prompted a number of theories by prominent feminist scholars as to a race-gender mechanism at play during the trial.

One such scholar, Margaret Burnham, in a chapter of Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power, characterizes the trial as a crisis within the African American community. She postulates that Black Americans might have doubted Thomas’s testimony but nonetheless believed he should have been confirmed. “Certainly” she states, “a significant number of blacks believed that even though guilty as charged, the man [Thomas] should not be denied a Supreme Court seat.” Kimberlé Crenshaw explains this phenomenon, noting that “the advancement of other African Americans” namely Thomas, “was embraced under the wings of racial solidarity; and a black woman, herself a victim of racism, was symbolically transformed into the role of a would-be

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90 Frankovic and Gelb, "Public Opinion and the Thomas Nomination," 482.
white woman whose unwarranted finger-pointing whetted the appetites of a racist lynch mob."\textsuperscript{94} That is, during the Thomas–Hill Hearings of 1991, Hill’s intersectional identity as both Black and female was erased. Hill’s status as a Black woman was largely ignored, while Thomas’s identity as a Black male was heightened. Thus, Hill was marginalized as the result of antiracist politics that came at the consequence of recognizing her gender. In other words, “race and gender politics often end up being antagonistic to each other and both interests lose.”\textsuperscript{95} In the case of the Thomas–Hill hearings of October 1991, Hill “lost” according to public opinion polls. Or did she?

Despite the abundance of polling data pointing to strong public support for Thomas, a number of factors seem to contradict this conclusion. First, Anita Hill’s testimony caused strong and angry reactions among many women; in the two months after the hearings, 13,000 new members joined the National Organization for Women, 9,000 more than the reported average.\textsuperscript{96} Immediate anger from the American public in response to Hill’s allegations being silenced was a motivating factors in Biden’s decision to delay confirmation and lengthen the Thomas hearings. Louise Slaughter, a United States Congresswoman present during the trial, highlighted the “grassroots uprising that the hearings sparked,” which had lasting impact.\textsuperscript{97} If public opinion was so decidedly against Dr. Hill, why did the hearings provoke such a strong and impassioned response from the American public? Why did public opinion polls change so dramatically in the aftermath of the hearing? How did a political narrative of Hill not being believed get constructed?

\textsuperscript{95} Crenshaw, “Whose Story Is It, Anyway?” 405.
\textsuperscript{96} Vavrus, \textit{Postfeminist News}, 41.
Chapter IV: The Hypothesis: Causal Mechanisms

Part 1: Hypothesis

Given that (1) a large majority of Americans reported to have closely followed media coverage of the Hill–Thomas hearings, and (2) numerous studies have demonstrated correlations between media bias and public opinion, this study seeks to examine whether differing coverage of Hill and Thomas could have influenced public opinion. This project will examine whether the quality and quantity of media coverage, portraying Hill and Thomas during the October 1991 hearings, differed based on a number of set criterion defined in this study. I will also analyze any existing differences in coverage and the potential impact this could have had on public opinion in response to the hearing. Several hypotheses are put forth as to expected differences between the media coverage of Hill and Thomas during the 1991 hearings and how they could have impacted public opinion.

Hypothesis 1. It is hypothesized that Hill received less coverage than Thomas during the period of October 6–13th, 1991. Evidence for this hypothesis would include fewer direct quotes, fewer name mentions per article, and fewer images of Hill than of Thomas.

Hypothesis 2. It is hypothesized that the coverage of Hill was less favorable than that of Thomas during the period of October 6–13th, 1991. Evidence for this hypothesis would include fewer references to Hill’s honorifics as compared to Thomas’s and also fewer favorable descriptors of Hill compared to Thomas.

Hypothesis 3. It is hypothesized that both hypotheses 1 and 2 will be exacerbated by the gender of the author’s article. That is to say, male authors will be more likely to give Hill less coverage and for that coverage to be less favorable.

Hypothesis 4: Finally, it is hypothesized that hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 will be exacerbated in regional papers compared to national papers. That is to say, regional papers will be more likely to give Hill less coverage and for that coverage to be less favorable than that in national papers.

Part 1: Results

Hypothesis 1: Results

An analysis of the 223 articles collected from The New York Times, Washington Post, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, and Atlanta Journal confirmed that Judge Thomas received more frequent coverage compared to Professor Hill. Overall, Thomas received more direct quotes per article than Hill although this effect was marginal; Thomas received 16% more direct quotes than Hill (see Table 1). This effect was more dramatic in The New York Times than in the Washington Post; The New York Times quoted Thomas 15% more than Hill, while the effect was not observed in the Washington Post. The St. Louis Post-Dispatch published direct quotes from Thomas nearly 30% more often than they published direct quotes from Hill.

Thomas received significantly more name mentions per article compared to Hill. Overall, Thomas’s name was mentioned 17% more than Professor Hill’s in all articles sampled. This effect was more significant in the Washington Post and St. Louis Post-Dispatch than in The New York Times, although all papers displayed differences in the number of times Thomas’s name was mentioned compared to Professor Hill’s. Overall, the margin of error was 6.5 points, making these differences significant.
In some ways, these findings are not surprising. Given that Thomas was the Supreme Court nominee, it is to some extent to be expected that he would receive the majority of news coverage compared to Hill, who had raised allegations against said nominee. But this does not undermine the effect of this disparity on readers. Research has shown strong correlations between name recognition and support for a certain political figure. For example, an experimental study conducted by Cindy Kam and Elizabeth Zechmeister for the *American Journal of Political Science* (2013) found compelling evidence that name recognition can affect support for different political candidates.\(^9\) It is possible that more frequent coverage of Thomas could have led to increased name recognition and, as a result, public support.

**Table 1: Hill–Thomas Frequency of Direct Quotes & Name Mentions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Direct Quotes Thomas (%)</th>
<th>Direct Quotes Hill (%)</th>
<th>Name Mention Thomas (%)</th>
<th>Name Mentions Hill (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Articles from WP, NYT, LP, AJ*</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>58.5</td>
<td>41.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Results were rounded up to one decimal point, +/-.5.

Photographs were similarly analyzed for differences in frequency and size between Hill and Thomas. *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* published a total of 103 photographs between October 6\(^{th}\) and October 13\(^{th}\), 1991. In the coverage of the hearings, Hill and Thomas received nearly the same number of photos, but Thomas received nearly *double* the number of large photographs compared to Hill. Thomas also had many more photos of family members than Hill. Hill had in total three photos of her and her family; in comparison, Thomas and his

wife, Virginia, received seven photos, four of which were solely of Virginia Thomas weeping (see image in Appendix I).

Over the past two decades, political scientists have analyzed how photographs can influence public perceptions of political figures.\textsuperscript{100} While definitive conclusions cannot be drawn from differences in the photographic coverage of Hill and Thomas, it is plausible that these disparities in coverage could have influenced the perceptions of Americans viewing these images. In general, a great deal of scholarship has noted that visual images of political figures can influence voter perceptions.\textsuperscript{101} Studies from a variety of disciplines have uncovered evidence that images can influence people’s attitudes and perceptions of individuals, events, and issues.\textsuperscript{102} Barrett and Barrington’s study (2005) on newspaper photograph selection found “strong evidence that the newspaper photograph selection process is biased” and uncovered strong and statistically significant results supporting the argument that disparities in visual representations of political candidates can influence voter perceptions.\textsuperscript{103} It is not a dramatic conclusion to draw that newspapers’ photo selection of political figures, such as Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill, could have influenced the American public as it likely did. One feminist political scholar went a step further than Barrett and Barrington. Lubiano argues that photographs are “representations of gendered power relations,” pointing to the way photographs and their arrangements can be “signposts for a successful set of narrative constructions.”\textsuperscript{104} Lubiano points to specific photographs that construct certain narratives about the hearing. For example, a photograph series

\textsuperscript{101} Barrett and Barrington, “Bias in Newspaper Photograph Selection,” 609–18.
\textsuperscript{103} Barrett and Barrington, “Bias in Newspaper Photograph Selection,” 614.
\textsuperscript{104} Lubiano, “Black Ladies,” 327.
published in *The Times* of Thomas being comforted by various senators. This narrative, Lubiano argues, is one of Thomas in the presence of power being comforted by it, “reinforcing the narrative of a hurt and suffering Thomas.”

All of the various narratives constructed based on images have the potential to influence the public’s conception of the 1991 Senate Judiciary hearings.

### Table 2: Hill–Thomas Image Frequency and Image Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMAGE</th>
<th>Small Photographs (1.5&quot; × 1.5&quot; or Smaller)</th>
<th>Medium Photographs (1.5&quot; × 1.5&quot;–4&quot; × 4&quot;)</th>
<th>Large Photographs (4&quot; × 4&quot; or Larger)</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anita Hill</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarence Thomas</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Thomas</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hill and Family</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas and Family</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Hypothesis 2: Results**

An analysis of the 223 articles collected from *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Atlanta Journal*, and *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* confirmed that Thomas received more favorable coverage compared to Hill based upon this study’s criteria. Overall, Thomas received much more frequent reference to his title compared to Hill. Honorifics such as “Judge Thomas” were much more frequently used for Thomas than similar honorifics for Hill (see Table 3), who was frequently described as “Ms. Hill” rather than “Professor Hill.” In fact, Thomas’s title was

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mentioned 27% more frequently than Hill’s. This difference was statistically significant. Overall, of mentions to job titles, 63% of such references went to Thomas and 37% to Hill. Several articles did not acknowledge Hill’s academic title or position as a tenured faculty member at the University of Oklahoma at all. This effect was present in all newspapers surveyed although the effect was more strongly present in the Washington Post than in The New York Times. It was also more severe in regional papers compared to national papers. On average Thomas’s position as a judge was noted 4.7 times in each article compared to Hill’s 2.7 times. Several articles surveyed did not mention Dr. Hill’s academic or professional title at all.

**Table 3: Frequency of Mentions of Hill–Thomas Titles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Articles from WP, NYT, LP, AJ*</th>
<th>Mentions of Thomas’s Title</th>
<th>Mentions of Hill’s Title</th>
<th>Mentions of Thomas’s Title (%)</th>
<th>Mentions of Hill’s Title (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1038</td>
<td>603</td>
<td>63.3</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Results were rounded up to one decimal point, +/-6.5.

It is presumed that references to honorifics, such as Hill’s law degree or Thomas’s position as a judge on the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, would increase the public’s perception of credibility. Political psychologists have found that under experimental conditions, individuals with higher credentials are perceived as more credible than those without credentials. It is hypothesized that less frequent references to Hill’s credentials as a professor of law would serve to undermine her credibility in the eyes of the American public.

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In addition to assessing the frequency of references to Hill and Thomas, descriptors were evaluated. All descriptions of Thomas and Hill were noted in the 223 surveyed articles from *The New York Times, Washington Post, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, and Atlanta Journal*. The most common descriptors are noted in Table 4. In general, descriptions of Thomas focused on his emotions, emphasizing his rage and passion during his testimony. By contrast, Hill was described as being less emotional and more reserved. Hill’s most common descriptors included words like “quiet” and “calm.” Other words that were used to describe Hill included “reserved,” “conservative,” and “dignified.” Thomas, in turn, was described as “fiery,” “gritty,” “defiant,” and “outraged” (a complete list of descriptors is included in Appendix II).

Considering these various descriptors, it is important to look at the narratives that they construct. Thomas’s descriptors emphasize his emotional nature and Hill’s her more reserved nature. For example, several articles reference Hill’s demeanor as being “reserved” and “calm” under pressure. What is interesting is that these descriptions go against common societal stereotypes that women are emotional and men rational. These stereotypes have often been used historically as evidence of men’s superiority over women. For example, these claims have been made as reasons to not elect women to executive office or combat positions in the military. Curiously, though, during the hearings, Hill’s rationality and Thomas’s emotion produced the exact opposite effects, undermining her testimony. For example, Senator Specter, one of the members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, posed a number of questions regarding the legitimacy of Hill’s claims based upon her emotional response to her experiences with workplace

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sexual harassment. Specter asked, for example, why Hill would remain working under a boss who causes her so much emotional distress.\textsuperscript{109} The underlying argument is that if Thomas really sexually harassed Hill, she would have been distressed enough to leave her place of work. Not only does this highlight stereotypes about how victims should behave, but also this line of questioning is sexist. The question — “Why did she not quit?”— assumes a narrative of women as unable to stand up to men’s sexual power rather than acknowledging a whole range of reasons women choose to not leave their place of work. During the course of the Senate Judiciary hearings of 1991, a number of articles subtly pointed to Hill’s “calm” testimony as evidence that her claims were less credible. For example, an editorial published in the \textit{Washington Post} suggested that Hill’s testimony could have been part of a democratic effort to thwart the republican nominee. As evidence, the author presents Hill’s demeanor as raising questions of credibility; he points to her manner and presentation seeming “self-assured.”\textsuperscript{110}

A number of studies have been conducted on how the emotional quality of testimony impacts viewers’ perception of credibility. One such study conducted by psychologists Geir Kaufmann and Guri Drevland for the journal of \textit{Applied Cognitive Psychology} looked at the testimony of rape victims and found that credibility judgments were strongly influenced by the emotions displayed, not by the content of the story. When video watching was compared to reading a transcript of a victim’s testimony, results indicated that perceived credibility was reduced when the witness displayed neutral or incongruent emotions.\textsuperscript{111} This study surmised that there is a huge stake in appearing “earnest” in order for the public to believe testimony. This finding is interesting in light of the media’s intense focus on Hill’s unemotional, more reserved

\textsuperscript{109} \textit{The Complete Transcript}, 61.


nature. It is plausible that the media’s intense focus on Hill as reluctant, reserved, and quiet undermined the publics’ trust in the veracity of her statements.

**Table 4: Frequency of Descriptors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Frequent Descriptors of Thomas</th>
<th>Most Frequent Descriptors of Hill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>angry (12), sensitive (8), integrity (5), straight (5), forceful (4)</td>
<td>calm (12), quiet (7), dignified (7), with/having integrity (6), reluctant (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is also interesting to note that Thomas was frequently described by journalists as pained or on the verge of tears. These sorts of descriptions were not used by journalists when describing Hill. The impact of these sorts of statements is hard to quantify but nonetheless is important as scholars unpack public perceptions of the hearings. These frequent descriptions of Thomas’s suffering could have increased public sympathy and justified his argument that he was being “lynched for being an uppity black man.” Not applying these same descriptors to Hill undermines her argument that *she* was a victim at the hands of Thomas at the EEOC. Instead, readers would perceive Thomas as the one being emotionally and physically in pain, not Hill.

In addition to these primary findings, my examination of print media coverage during the time period in question revealed a tendency on the part of journalists to frame the hearings as particularly onerous to the senators involved in questioning Hill and Thomas. Several articles chose to focus exclusively on the “political torment” endured by senators who were “shaken” as a result of participating in the process. Similar coverage was noted that fixated on Thomas’s

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112 Miller, *The Complete Transcript.*
anguish.\textsuperscript{114} Articles frequently described Thomas as being in a position of great vulnerability and discomfort, and several articles described Thomas’s sleeplessness and the fact that he lost fifteen pounds during the course of the hearings.\textsuperscript{115} Hill’s suffering tended to not be a dominant focus of coverage.\textsuperscript{116} In choosing to focus on the discomfort of the Senate Judiciary Committee members conducting the hearings and Thomas, a narrative is put forward about who is deserving of victimhood and sympathy, which would be an interesting subject for future research.

**Hypothesis 3: Results**

Disparities in coverage – both in terms of the frequency of coverage and the favorability of that coverage – were stronger if a reporter was male compared to if a reporter were female, validating Hypothesis 3. Overall, in the 223 articles surveyed, male journalists tended to quote Thomas more frequently than Hill (see Table 5). This difference was present but not significant for female journalists. No significant difference was noted between male and female journalists regarding the frequency of name mentions. With regard to favorability, male journalists and female journalists both referenced Dr. Hill’s credentials as a professor of law less than they referenced Thomas’s credentials, but this difference was larger among male journalists than among female journalists; that is, while both male and female journalists tended to refer to Dr. Hill’s credentials less frequently than Thomas’s, this tendency was much more likely among male journalists. This finding was significant.

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\textsuperscript{116} Some went so far as to include quotes from coworkers of Thomas, who described him as “a teddy bear” who “wants to be cuddled, wants to be lovable.” Lynne Duke and Sharon LaFraniere, “Hill: ‘I Intend to Cooperate’ with Inquiry; Friends of Thomas, Accuser Perplexed,” \textit{Washington Post}, October 9, 1991.
Table 5: Gender Difference in Honorific Usage for Hill–Thomas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reference to Thomas’s Title</th>
<th>Reference to Hill’s Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male/Female Journalists</td>
<td>63.3</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Journalists</td>
<td>63.2</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Journalists</td>
<td>59.7</td>
<td>40.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Results were rounded up to one decimal point, +/-10.8.

Differences between male and female journalists regarding choice of adjectives to describe Thomas and Hill were not observed. Both male and female writers described Hill with terms such as “calm” and “quiet” and Thomas with terms such as “angry,” “victim,” and “sensitive.” A more extensive survey would need to be conducted to establish a relationship, if any, between author gender and descriptors used to describe Hill and Thomas.

Hypothesis 4: Results

An analysis of a regional effect on Hypotheses 1 and 2 was noted. Overall, the 223 articles were broken down into regional and national papers and examined for difference in frequency/favorability of coverage. In general, the two regional papers analyzed, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and Atlanta Journal, showed stronger disparities in both frequency and favorability of coverage for Hill and Thomas compared to those effects seen in the two national papers examined (see Table 6).

Table 6: Regional Frequency/Favorability Difference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Direct Quotes Thomas (%)</th>
<th>Direct Quotes Hill (%)</th>
<th>Name Mentions Thomas (%)</th>
<th>Name Mentions Hill (%)</th>
<th>Reference to Thomas’s Title (%)</th>
<th>Reference to Hill’s Title (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Articles</td>
<td>68.1</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>60.6</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall, regional papers gave Thomas more frequent coverage than Hill and also referenced Thomas’s title much more frequently. Not only were differences in coverage between Hill and Thomas significant, but the effect sizes of these differences were larger in regional coverage compared to national coverage (see Table 7). Regional papers had nearly a 14% greater difference in the number of quotes attributed to Thomas compared to Hill and a 12.5% difference in the number of times Thomas’s title was mentioned compared to Hill’s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Direct Quotes Thomas (%)</th>
<th>Direct Quotes Hill (%)</th>
<th>Name Mentions Thomas (%)</th>
<th>Name Mentions Hill (%)</th>
<th>Reference to Thomas’s Title (%)</th>
<th>Reference to Hill’s Title (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total National</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles (WP &amp; NYT)</td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>39.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Regional</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles (AJ, LP)</td>
<td>68.1</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>60.6</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Δ Regional</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles vs. National</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>-13.9</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>-3.2</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>-12.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This difference in effect size between regional and national papers could be attributed to a number of factors. It is possible that in the local climate of St. Louis, Missouri, and Atlanta, Georgia, there was a more favorable climate for Thomas than Hill. This is highly likely in Georgia, where Thomas grew up. It is also possible that regional papers are more susceptible to
bias than national papers. It is possible that local context and local pressures impact regional papers to a greater extent than national papers.

**Conclusion**

Survey data of coverage during the week of October 6th, 1991, show the presence of observable differences regarding frequency of coverage and the quality of that coverage between Hill and Thomas. Differences in coverage have been tied by social scientists to differences in public opinion. That said, it is very possible that these differences in news coverage had an effect on public opinion and the forming of narratives regarding the Hill/Thomas hearings of 1991.

**Part 2: Hypothesis**

Coverage of public opinion polls was of great interest during the Thomas–Hill hearings of 1991, and many have drawn conclusions based upon polling analytics released by numerous news agencies. It has also been postulated by social scientists that given the highly controversial nature of the trial, politicians took cues from public opinion polls as to how they would vote regarding Thomas’s nomination to the Supreme Court. For example, Carol M. Swain notes that many southern senators concerned about reelection “made their decisions on the basis of public opinion polls that showed popular support for Thomas among Blacks.” Given that politicians took elite cues from public opinion polls, it is necessary to go to the source, the opinion polls themselves, and analyze how these polls were presented to the public.

To do this, I will evaluate the claims made by *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* regarding survey data by analyzing two Gallup datasets available from the Roper Polling Center. The chief claims put forward by the two newspapers are as follows:

- **Claim 1.** The majority of Americans believed Thomas and disbelieved Hill’s testimony.

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Claim 2. African Americans, particularly, disproportionately believed Thomas and disbelieved Hill’s testimony.

Claim 3. Women, more than men, believed Hill and disbelieved Thomas.

It is theorized that some of the claims made to the public regarding the state of American public opinion were misleading.

Part 2: Results

Claim 1: Analysis

The analysis of Gallup datasets conducted during the Hill–Thomas hearings of 1991 found that, indeed, more Americans reported believing Thomas’s testimony over Hill’s. When asked, “From what you’ve seen, heard, or read, do you think Clarence Thomas harassed his former aide, Anita Hill, or not?” A total of 37.6% of Americans reported no compared to 24% who reported yes in Gallup’s October 10th, 1991 poll (see Table 8).

Table 8: Belief in Thomas vs. Hill*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don’t Know/Refused</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>37.60%</td>
<td>38.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>169</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Drawn from the October 10th, 1991, Gallup poll: “From what you’ve seen, heard, or read, do you think Clarence Thomas sexually harassed his former aide, Anita Hill, or not?”

A second survey conducted on October 14th, 1991, asked a variant of this same question: “Anita Hill charges Clarence Thomas with sexually harassing her when she worked for him in the early 1980s. Thomas denies the charges. From what you’ve heard, or read, who do you

118 Gallup/CNN poll, “Courts Crime.”
believe more—Anita Hill or Clarence Thomas?” Of respondents, 54.5% reported believing Thomas and 27.2% Hill (see Table 9).\textsuperscript{119}

A conclusion one can draw from these polls is that during the process of the Hill/Thomas hearings, more Americans were persuaded to believe Thomas. It is important to note though that one curious phenomenon unites both datasets. Just as in the first study, 18% of Americans chose a third category instead of professing belief in Thomas or Hill (either refusing to answer or responding that they did not know who to believe or that they believed neither person’s testimony).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hill</th>
<th>Thomas</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Don’t Know/Refused</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>54.50%</td>
<td>7.80%</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>212</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Drawn from the October 14\textsuperscript{th}, 1991, Gallup poll: “Anita Hill charges Clarence Thomas with sexually harassing her when she worked for him in the early 1980s. Thomas denies the charges. From what you’ve heard, or read, who do you believe more—Anita Hill or Clarence Thomas?”

It is perplexing that articles published during the time of the hearings did not highlight, and most did not even include, statistics regarding the high percentage of Americans who reported that they \textit{did not know} whether to believe Hill or Thomas. A \textit{New York Times} piece titled “Sexual Harassment at Work Is Pervasive, Survey Suggests,” which reports on the above data, did not include “don’t know” responses at all, presenting the misleading impression that Americans believed Thomas over Hill. Nearly 270 Americans, or 38.4% of the sample population in the first survey, responded that they “did not know” or were “unsure” as to whose testimony they believed more, and nearly 20% reported the same in the second survey conducted

\textsuperscript{119}Gallup/CNN poll, “Courts Crime.”
on October 14th, 1991. Notably, in the first survey, the number of people who reported that they did not know whom to believe was larger than the number of people who responded that they believed Thomas. From this analysis, it is misleading to report that Americans did not think Thomas harassed Hill; a more accurate representation of the data is that Americans were sharply divided about whom to believe, with nearly 40% of respondents unclear in their assessment.

The reality that more than a third of Americans did not know whose testimony to believe can be said to reflect the context of the United States in the late twentieth century. Few Americans were familiar with the term “sexual harassment” or how to define it. It is important to note that Cornell University activists coined the term sexual harassment only in 1975 despite harassment having been an intrinsic part of women’s experiences in the workplace at least since the beginning of industrialization at the turn of the twentieth century.120 At the time, few were familiar with the term “sexual harassment” or how to define it.121 This lack of familiarity is also reflected in polling data. When surveyed, 30% of Americans said they did not think “sexual remarks or jokes” in the workplace constituted sexual harassment, and more than 20% did not consider displaying overtly sexual pictures in the workplace as sexual harassment.122

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122 Gallup/CNN poll, “Courts Crime.”
This confusion regarding what constitutes sexual harassment is a reflection of the concept being new to the American populace.

In addition, scholarship on sexual harassment was still developing in the twentieth century. It was only in the 1970s that scholars began to examine the phenomenon of sexual harassment in American society. Previously, social scientists had not focused extensively on the topic even though, as Dr. Catherine MacKinnon of Yale dryly noted, “[social scientists] study everything that moves.”123 Those who study the subject of sexual harassment note that understandings of the concept were very limited in the 1990s. For example, Kristen Yount in *In the Company of Men: Male Dominance and Sexual Harassment* comments on the need to update the scholarship of the 1990s that simplified sexual harassment to an issue solely of patriarchy that can be fixed by changes in bureaucracy. Yount calls for a need to “expand the thesis asserted

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by feminists nearly thirty years ago” in order to present a more complete and complex picture of the problem.\textsuperscript{124}

Although on paper Title VII protected women from sex discrimination in the workplace, the reality was far more complex.\textsuperscript{125} Even with the passage of legal protections for women against sexual harassment, there was a strong reluctance to consider the seriousness of sexual harassment and the economic and psychological harm it caused.\textsuperscript{126} Many still believe sexual harassment is a harmless crime that does not require harsh punishment. It was only in the late twentieth century that harassment began to be viewed as an injustice and a social problem, not a private concern of “overly sensitive women.”\textsuperscript{127} Only after Hill’s testimony did a surge in sexual harassment suits occur and the number of successful suits increase.\textsuperscript{128}

Claim 2: Analysis

The analysis of two Gallup datasets conducted during the Hill–Thomas hearings of 1991 found that, indeed, more African Americans than white Americans reported believing Thomas compared to Hill. A Gallup survey conducted on October 10\textsuperscript{th}, 1991, found that 54\% of African Americans did not think Judge Thomas harassed Professor Hill. By contrast, only 14\% believed he had. The October 14\textsuperscript{th} survey conducted by Gallup revealed similar results. The report found that 61.4\% of African Americans reported believing Thomas had not sexually harassed Hill, and 19.3\% believed he had (see Table 10).

\textsuperscript{124} James E. Gruber and Phoebe Morgan, \textit{In the Company of Men: Male Dominance and Sexual Harassment} (Boston: Northeastern Press, 2005), xi.
\textsuperscript{125} Gruber and Morgan, \textit{In the Company of Men}, xi.
\textsuperscript{126} Zippel, \textit{The Politics of Sexual Harassment}, 13.
\textsuperscript{127} Zippel, \textit{The Politics of Sexual Harassment}, 13.
\textsuperscript{128} Reed, “A Brief History of Sexual Harassment in the United States.”
Table 10: Black vs. White Belief in Testimony*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hill</th>
<th>Thomas</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Don't Know/Refused</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>28.50%</td>
<td>53.50%</td>
<td>7.90%</td>
<td>10.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>194</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>19.30%</td>
<td>61.40%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>12.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Drawn from the October 14th, 1991, Gallup poll: “Anita Hill charges Clarence Thomas with sexually harassing her when she worked for him in the early 1980s. Thomas denies the charges. From what you’ve heard, or read, who do you believe more—Anita Hill or Clarence Thomas?”

While these conclusions are fascinating, an examination of the raw data reveals the methodological shortcomings of these surveys. The October 10th, 1991, survey interviewed a population of 50 African Americans, nearly 32% of whom reported that they did not know whether Thomas had or had not harassed Hill. The second survey mirrors this effect. Gallup surveyed only 57 African Americans for the October 14th, 1991, poll, and nearly 20% of the respondents either reported that they did not know whose testimony to believe or said they believed neither Hill nor Thomas. Researchers who have studied the 1991 Hill–Thomas hearings have largely ignored this flaw in the survey data. Caution must be taken when considering the extensive conclusions drawn from data that would not meet modern survey research standards. Concern about sample sizes in public opinion polls conducted during the Thomas–Hill hearings have been raised by prominent scholars.129 Largely, these concerns have been ignored.

At first glance, when considering the favorability ratings of Thomas and Hill, a similar race effect appears to be at play. When asked, “What is your impression of Anita Hill?” 22.8% of African Americans reported “very unfavorable” compared to 12.2% of white Americans. While only 6.9% of white Americans responded “very favorable” to the question, a mere 1.8% of

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African Americans responded the same. By contrast, when asked, “What is your impression of Clarence Thomas?” both Black and white Americans responded similarly: 21.1% of Black Americans responded “very favorable” compared to 19.7% of white Americans (this difference is statistically insignificant). The same relationship is present among those who responded “very unfavorable.”

A number of conclusions can be drawn from these data, and reminiscent of arguments made previously, the way one interprets data and draws conclusions is influenced by power. Many journalists looked at the data described above and drew conclusions that African Americans had negative impressions of Hill and favorable impressions of Thomas. But when one looks more critically at the raw data, it is much more difficult to draw definitive conclusions. The 1.8% of African Americans who reported “very favorable” impressions of Hill turned out to represent one African American. Additionally, the 22.8% of African Americans who had “very unfavorable” opinions of Hill reflected the opinions of thirteen individuals. It is wise to be cautious when drawing conclusions from these survey data, which are inconclusive at best and statistically unsound at worst.

### Table 11: Favorability Hill*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Favorable</th>
<th>Favorable</th>
<th>Unfavorable</th>
<th>Very Unfavorable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White Americans</td>
<td>6.90%</td>
<td>28.90%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>12.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>47</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Americans</td>
<td>1.80%</td>
<td>26.30%</td>
<td>35.10%</td>
<td>22.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Drawn from the Gallup October 14th, 1991, survey: “What is your impression of Anita Hill?”
Table 12: Favorability Thomas*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Favorable</th>
<th>Favorable</th>
<th>Unfavorable</th>
<th>Very Unfavorable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White Americans</td>
<td>19.70%</td>
<td>42.90%</td>
<td>17.30%</td>
<td>8.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>134</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Americans</td>
<td>21.10%</td>
<td>50.90%</td>
<td>10.50%</td>
<td>5.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Drawn from the Gallup October 14th, 1991, survey: “What is your impression of Clarence Thomas?”

Claim 3: Analysis

The analysis of Gallup datasets conducted during the Hill–Thomas hearings of 1991 found that both men and women reported believing Thomas more than they believed Hill although the size of the effect was smaller for women than for men: 31% of women reported believing Hill compared to 50.5% of women who believed Thomas. The margin of error for the October 14th, 1991, survey was 10.8 points, a sizable margin of error that reflects women only marginally supporting Thomas. Nearly 18% of men responded that they did not know whom to believe compared to nearly 20% of women.

A mild gender effect appears to be at play, with slightly more women than men tending to believe Hill. Explanations for this phenomenon are extensive and at heart intuitive. Explained by Louise Slaughter, “the indifference that many of our male colleagues in the House and Senate showed toward Ms. Hill was a microcosm of the what women were being treated all across our country.”[130] Women, unlike their male peers, were more familiar with sexual harassment and more familiar with the challenges women still faced in the workplace as the result of their gender.

Of all individuals surveyed on October 10th, 1991, by Gallup, nearly 15% of women reported having personally experienced workplace sexual harassment, and nearly 40% reported knowing someone who had been sexually harassed in the workplace.\textsuperscript{131}

Additionally, the analysis of both Gallup datasets revealed a correlation between an individual knowing a person who had experienced workplace sexual harassment and their belief in the veracity of Hill’s testimony. Of those who reported they knew someone who had experienced sexual harassment, nearly 60% believed that Hill’s decision to report was “appropriate.” By contrast, 35% of those who reported not knowing anyone who had experienced workplace sexual harassment believed Hill’s actions were appropriate, and 51% reported they thought her actions were inappropriate.\textsuperscript{132} Nearly twice as many people thought Hill’s decision to testify was appropriate if they had a personal connection to a victim of sexual harassment.

### Table 13: Personal Connection to Sexual Harassment and Belief That Hill Acted Appropriately

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes*</th>
<th>No*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Has someone you know personally ever been a victim of sexual harassment?” … Yes</td>
<td>59.30%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Has someone you know personally ever been a victim of sexual harassment?” … No</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Drawn from the Gallup October 10th, 1991, survey: “Anita Hill’s decision to accuse Thomas…Thinking about the controversy over the sexual harassment charges against Clarence Thomas do you think the following actions were appropriate or not?”

**Conclusion**

\textsuperscript{131} Gallup/Newsweek poll, “Courts Crime.”

\textsuperscript{132} Gallup/Newsweek poll, “Courts Crime.”
According to scholars such as Leo Bogart, public opinion polls can be dangerous and troublesome not only when they are done badly or dishonestly but also when they are done well and taken too literally. One huge methodological flaw of public opinion polls is the nature of the subject matter that they focus on. As Bogart expresses in *Silent Politics*, “[polls] deal with subjects of transitory interest that are unfamiliar to most people.” While the public opinion polls conducted during the October 1991 Hill–Thomas hearings have not proven to be of “transitory” interest, it is correct to note that the subject matter the surveys covered was very new to Americans in the early 1990s. Sexual harassment was an unfamiliar topic to most women and men in the 1990s; the added complexities of race, gender, and power only complicated an already complicated subject.

Another concern in drawing conclusions from Gallup’s datasets is the way they were conducted. The most famous critical response published by Dianne Rucinski in *The Public Opinion Quarterly* criticized the methodology of public opinion polls conducted on the Thomas–Hill hearings. Noting the quick transformation of public opinion in the months after the hearings ended, she asks, “Did the year-after polls reflect a real change in public perception of Anita Hill’s charges? Or was the initial support for Thomas really ‘soft’ or illusory—based on uncrystallized opinions?” In her piece, Rucinski not only questions the methodology of the surveys but also the purported accuracy of polls that were “conducted under enormous time pressure in a highly charged and fluid environment.”

Rucinski cites a number of factors that might have resulted in flawed methodology. “The Hill–Thomas polls,” she writes, “often involved substantial departures from probability sampling due to selection methods employed and constraints on callbacks” in response to enormous time

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133 Bogart, *Silent Politics*, 197.
pressure. The gender and race of the interviewer, factors that have been shown in communication research to influence respondents, were not controlled for. Finally, Rucinski comments on the very nature of the questions themselves, highlighting the tendency of questions to have leading answers and the ordering of questions that might have biased responses. Another issue Rucinski acknowledges, but does not delve into, is flaws in sample size. These methodological flaws in fast reaction polling present one explanation for the dramatically different results in the months after the Thomas–Hill hearings. Rather than reflecting a dramatic shift in public opinion, it is possible that public opinion polls conducted after the hearings with more traditional survey methodology reflect more accurate polling data.

Chapter V: Conclusion and Implications

Summary of Findings

This study found differences in newspaper coverage of Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill during the period of October 6th, 1991, and October 13th, 1991. Differences were observed both in the frequency and character of coverage of Thomas and Hill. These differences included Thomas receiving more coverage than Hill both measured in name mentions and image frequency. Thomas’s coverage was also noted as more favorable than that of Hill based upon a number of criteria, including references to professional title, descriptors, and image size. This study also reanalyzed two public opinion datasets conducted by the Gallup organization with newfound conclusions. While the American public, and African Americans in particular, extended greater support to Thomas than to Hill, a sizeable portion of the American public was unsure of whether to believe Hill or Thomas. Concerns were raised about the methodology of fast-reaction polls conducted in the wake of the hearings and conclusions drawn from potentially flawed data. It is hypothesized that the convergence of biased journalism and flawed analysis of public opinion polls could have been factors in the construction of narratives about the hearings.

A number of potential causal relationships are presented, as summarized in Figures 1–4. It could be that societal influences (including inherent tendencies, prejudices, etc.) influence the way journalists and data scientists write about and analyze data. In turn, these favorable outputs inform public opinion, as illustrated in Figure 1. It could also be that favorable public opinion in turn results in more favorable coverage, as depicted in Figure 2. This relationship could be exacerbated, for example, by journalists desiring to write information that aligns with their readers’ views. It is also possible that there is a mediating variable, some unknown third factor, as depicted in Figure 3 and Figure 4, that is causing the effect. For example, perhaps favorable
journalism and data analysis inspired more African American men to sympathize with Thomas through protest in Washington D.C., which in turn resulted in favorable public opinion in favor of Thomas.\textsuperscript{137}

Figure 1:

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
    \node[shape=rectangle,minimum height=3cm,minimum width=3cm,draw] (a) {
    \begin{tabular}{c}
    Favorable Journalism/Favorable Analysis of Public Opinion Polls
    \end{tabular}
    };
    \node[shape=rectangle,minimum height=3cm,minimum width=3cm,draw, right of=a] (b) {
    \begin{tabular}{c}
    Favorable Public Opinion
    \end{tabular}
    };
    \node[shape=rectangle,minimum height=3cm,minimum width=3cm,draw, below of=a] (c) {
    \begin{tabular}{c}
    Favorable Public Opinion
    \end{tabular}
    };
    \node[shape=rectangle,minimum height=3cm,minimum width=3cm,draw, below of=b] (d) {
    \begin{tabular}{c}
    Favorable Journalism/Favorable Analysis of Public Opinion Polls
    \end{tabular}
    };
    \draw[->,thick] (a) -- (b);
    \draw[->,thick] (b) -- (c);
    \draw[->,thick] (c) -- (d);
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

Figure 2:

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
    \node[shape=rectangle,minimum height=3cm,minimum width=3cm,draw] (a) {
    \begin{tabular}{c}
    Favorable Public Opinion
    \end{tabular}
    };
    \node[shape=rectangle,minimum height=3cm,minimum width=3cm,draw, right of=a] (b) {
    \begin{tabular}{c}
    Favorable Journalism/Favorable Analysis of Public Opinion Polls
    \end{tabular}
    };
    \node[shape=rectangle,minimum height=3cm,minimum width=3cm,draw, below of=a] (c) {
    \begin{tabular}{c}
    Favorable Public Opinion
    \end{tabular}
    };
    \node[shape=rectangle,minimum height=3cm,minimum width=3cm,draw, below of=b] (d) {
    \begin{tabular}{c}
    Favorable Journalism/Favorable Analysis of Public Opinion Polls
    \end{tabular}
    };
    \draw[->,thick] (a) -- (b);
    \draw[->,thick] (b) -- (c);
    \draw[->,thick] (c) -- (d);
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

Figure 3:

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
    \node[shape=rectangle,minimum height=3cm,minimum width=3cm,draw] (a) {
    \begin{tabular}{c}
    Favorable Public Opinion
    \end{tabular}
    };
    \node[shape=rectangle,minimum height=3cm,minimum width=3cm,draw, right of=a] (b) {
    \begin{tabular}{c}
    Variable
    \end{tabular}
    };
    \node[shape=rectangle,minimum height=3cm,minimum width=3cm,draw, right of=b] (c) {
    \begin{tabular}{c}
    Favorable Journalism/Favorable Analysis of Public Opinion Polls
    \end{tabular}
    };
    \node[shape=rectangle,minimum height=3cm,minimum width=3cm,draw, below of=a] (d) {
    \begin{tabular}{c}
    Favorable Public Opinion
    \end{tabular}
    };
    \node[shape=rectangle,minimum height=3cm,minimum width=3cm,draw, below of=b] (e) {
    \begin{tabular}{c}
    Variable
    \end{tabular}
    };
    \node[shape=rectangle,minimum height=3cm,minimum width=3cm,draw, below of=c] (f) {
    \begin{tabular}{c}
    Favorable Journalism/Favorable Analysis of Public Opinion Polls
    \end{tabular}
    };
    \draw[->,thick] (a) -- (b);
    \draw[->,thick] (b) -- (c);
    \draw[->,thick] (c) -- (d);
    \draw[->,thick] (d) -- (e);
    \draw[->,thick] (e) -- (f);
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

Figure 4:

\textsuperscript{137} This has not been documented and is a mere hypothetical.
While the direction of causality cannot be determined definitively, it is an important thought experiment to consider the question of whether public opinion informs journalism or whether journalism informs public opinion or some combination of the two.

An internal flaw in the above causal arguments and in proving causality is that objective public opinion as a construct is incredibly challenging to measure. Especially given the limitations described in this essay in measuring public opinion accurately, it is challenging to know whether public opinion was actually more favorable toward Thomas or whether methodological flaws created the appearance it was more favorable. This internal flaw aside, the majority of scholars drew the conclusion from the data that public opinion was decidedly in support of Thomas. Even putting aside the question of whether the public’s support for Thomas was an objective truth, scholars must acknowledge that the appearance of strong support for Thomas may have had extensive implications that are worthy of consideration.

Influence of Public Opinion on the Confirmation

It is challenging to speculate as to the impact public opinion polls had on the outcome of Thomas’s confirmation. It cannot ever be known conclusively if the outcome of the hearings would have been different had journalists and pollsters reported different numbers. While no definitive answer can be given, scholars nevertheless have speculated as to the influence of public opinion polls during the hearings, which were, very likely, a factor in how senators voted regarding Thomas’s confirmation. Given the number of senators who were up for reelection, and
scholarship regarding the impact of public opinion polls on the voting patterns of congressmen, there is great room for speculation.

A groundbreaking study by political scientists from Columbia University and Princeton University found conclusively that greater home-state public support in public opinion polls does significantly and strikingly increase the probability that a senator will vote to approve a nominee, even controlling for other predictors of roll call voting.\(^{138}\) The writers commented that “These results establish a systematic and powerful link between constituency opinion and voting on Supreme Court nominees.”\(^{139}\) This finding draws a powerful connection between public opinion polls and the direct effect they can have on the voting habits of senators. A number of other studies have found that public opinion can similarly sway politicians’ stances on issues as diverse as Vietnam and the Lewinsky scandal.\(^{140}\) Politicians, it appears, are heavily swayed by the opinions of their constituents, especially in competitive election seasons. These findings suggest there is reason to believe public opinion polls could have swayed how senators voted in Thomas’s confirmation.

Given the abundance of research demonstrating a correlation between public opinion polls and the voting habits of senators and congressmen, it is interesting to analyze a possible causal relationship between public opinion polls regarding the Thomas confirmation and the voting of senators in the confirmation. Carol M. Swain, a professor of political science and law at Vanderbilt University, has pointed to public opinion as a significant influence on how senators voted regarding Thomas’s confirmation. In order for Thomas to be confirmed, republicans


\(^{139}\) Kastellec, “Public Opinion,” 767–84.


needed the votes of thirteen “swing” democrats. Five of these “swing” democrats were up for reelection in 1992 and needed sizeable African American support to win these elections. Notably, four of the other “swing” democrats, from Louisiana, Georgia, Alabama, and South Carolina, had sizeable African American populations at home whom they represented. Swain writes that “these senators, all southerners, apparently made their decisions on the basis of public-opinion polls that showed popular support for Thomas among Blacks.”

Swain comments, “for southern democrats, African-American voters are far more crucial to their reelection prospects than women’s groups” that supported Dr. Hill. The role that public opinion played on Thomas’s confirmation is speculative. Still it is fascinating to think what would have happened had public opinion polls shown different results in 1991. With new, higher standards for public opinion science, it is highly unlikely that the sweeping claims made by pollsters and journalists in 1991 would be made today.

Would this have made a difference in the outcome? Would the Senate Judiciary Committee have rejected Thomas’s confirmation? Would this have resulted in the construction of completely different narratives about the hearings? That, of course, would depend on what results better polling would have shown as well as a variety of other factors, including the influence of upcoming elections on senators involved in the hearings. But the evidence I have presented here certainly suggests such a possibility. In light of the new evidence provided here, we must reconsider old narratives told about the Senate Judiciary hearings of 1991. Was it as U.S. Representative Eleanor Norton put it that “[Hill’s] persona proved so deeply and abidingly credible that although she disappeared from view, she haunted the public imagination after the

hearings until people conceded they had been wrong.\textsuperscript{143} Or was the reality, in fact, much more complex than this—that the Senate Judiciary hearings of 1991 were influenced by powerful political voices and interests that might have been contrary to those of Anita Hill? As Americans continue to struggle to understand the Senate Judiciary hearings of 1991, scholars must unpack the tired, old political narratives of the past. We must acknowledge the way political power amplifies certain voices and silences others, particularly the Cassandras in our society.

\textsuperscript{143} Hill and Coleman Jordan, \textit{The Legacy}, 244.
Appendix I: Supplementary Images

Image 1:

*The Five Democratic Congresswomen Elected in the Aftermath of the Thomas–Hill Hearings of October 1991*

![Image 1](image.png)

Image 2:

*Anita Hill testifying before the Senate Judiciary Committee*

![Image 2](image.png)
Barbara Boxer Leading Congresswomen to the Senate Side of the Capitol to Seek a Delay in the Vote on the Thomas Nomination
Image 4:

*Anita Hill Testifying Before the Senate Judiciary Committee*

![Anita Hill Testifying Before the Senate Judiciary Committee](image4)

Image 5:

*Thomas Testifying with Wife, Virginia, Behind Him*

![Thomas Testifying with Wife, Virginia, Behind Him](image5)
Image 6:

*Virginia Thomas Crying During Testimony*
### Appendix II: Coding

#### Overall Newspaper Results

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<th># Famil</th>
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<th># Mention</th>
<th># Mention To</th>
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|        | barely able to contain his anger, disgust, powerful testimony, anguished, angry, rage, painful, decent, angry, unforgiving, "on a roll", stern and stony front, flat and forceful, innocent and hurt, indignant and outraged, steely, respected black man, wounded, embattled native son, inexperienced, straight arrow, never never acted improperly, straight-faced, passionately attacked, powerful opening statement, unshakeable, reluctance, credible, passionate and indignant, calm, believable, not a night person, e waent a bar person, aboveboard, very respectful, sensitive, integrity, ability, his integrity and his character, integrity, hard-working, serious, no-nonsense kind of guy, who didn't have time for that kind of frivolity, man of honor and dignity, beleaguered, friendly, but always professional, well-respected, fine resume, humble, real American success story, traitor, back-stabber, real sense of humor, womanizer, sexual harasser, caring, sensitive and fair-minded boss, compassion, caring, inappropriate, caring, sensitive and fair-minded boss, emotion, looking grim and sounding hurt and angry, bristling with indignation, very powerful man, unfit, well-spoken and handsome, quiet, deep tones of anguish, eloquent, upbeat, his strength, who he is, his values, and his righteous indignation, emotional denial, anger bubbling. |

Thomas

graduate, impeccable character, calm, well-known, calm, forceful, bitter, selfish, poise, dignity, self-assured, authoritative, integrity, highest integrity, compassion, thoughtfulness and spiritual substance, inconsistent, suspect, calm, not credible, "gut's grammar and grooming," cultured, pained, pretty face, well put-together, attractive, articulate, credible, sincere, inconsistent, sincere, inconsistent, victim, villain, private, determined, realist, tired, leader, role model, popular, conservative lifestyle, really hard working person, very intellectually stimulating, a provocative thinker, incomprehensible, credible, lonely, courageous, calmly, quiet, grace under pressure, poised and unflappable, tired, depressed, she feels beaten, wrung, unsuited, unpaid, calmly, anxious, alone, reluctant, stamina, joy, dryness, stamina, credibility, quiet, retiring, convincing, credible, poised, disappointed, frustrated, spiritual, integrity, quiet, calm defiance, confidence, reluctant, activist, activist, activist without rancor, reluctant, her demeanor impressed friend and foe, tense, but measured, organized way, sincere, tense, nervous, unsettled, exhausted, victim, credible, high intellect, credible, integrity, trust, fine person, intensely private, enigmatic, rigidly moral upbringing, naïve, honorable, virtuous, quiet, prosperous, pragmatic, realistic, formal, reserved, approachable, dignified, wonderful, special, sweet, super person, a step above, straight, strong, nest, reliable, competent, expert, professional, slight, genuine, earnestness, reluctance, reserve, calm, persuasively, moving, quiet, dignified, cool, dispassionate, 'factual attraction' type, calm, compelling, courageous woman or a calculated liar, looking so credible and dignified, respectable, conservative, religious black woman, respected black woman, desperate, anything, but Judge Thomas's victim, protecte, colleague, honest, not the type to throw a fit, reticent, reserved, determination, she can stand up to stress, excited, flattered and gushing with enthusiasm, calm, eloquence, measured and earnest, dignified and strained, "no kook," bright, compelling, intelligent, determined, credible and poised, appealing, careful, cool, correct, credible, gentle, mature and unshaken, brave, uncomfortable, Rosa Parks, strongly, credible, silenced, resolute, integrity, typical bratty, dedicated egg-head type, highest integrity, compassion, thoughtfulness and spiritual substance, super achiever and an ideological soul mate of many of Thomas supporters, calmly, good, hard-working, honest people, intelligent, brightest, gifted, considerate, a person of substance, smarter, capable, credible, unstable, courage, credible, dignity, courage, so credible, so impressive, looked serious and spoke in businesslike cadences, credible, calmly, persuasive, demurely dressed woman, calmly, painfully, changed, believable, so darn credible, eloquent, credible, deluded, fantasizing and scorned woman.
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10/12/1991 FIRST SECTII John E. Yang

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USCBS.102914.R53.

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Dionne Jr., E. J. “Grace, Grit and Gutter Fight; Never Has Country Seen a Hearing Like This.”


