

Amy E. Black and Jamie L. Allen

Tracing the Legacy of Anita Hill: The Thomas/Hill Hearings and Media Coverage of Sexual Harassment

Many anecdotal accounts suggest that the Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill hearings had an important effect on the politics of sexual harassment allegations. This research examines one part of this phenomenon, reporting the results of content analysis of articles published in major newspapers the month after reports of allegations against Bob Packwood and Bill Clinton. Our data analysis provides a preliminary look at the continued significance of the Hill/Thomas case today and how it affects public discourse about sexual harassment, providing strong evidence that Anita Hill has indeed found a place in modern American political history as a symbol for the sexual harassment issue. Clearly, the hearings have significantly impacted the ways in which the media and the public view allegations of sexual harassment brought against political figures.

Anita Hill's dramatic testimony during Clarence Thomas' Supreme Court nomination hearings in October 1991 brought the issue of sexual harassment to the forefront of public dialogue and debate. The intense public scrutiny transformed Ms. Hill from a relatively unknown law professor to a virtual feminist icon. This research seeks to examine the role of the Thomas/Hill hearings in media coverage of subsequent sexual harassment cases.

Since the Thomas/Hill hearings, several prominent politicians have faced public allegations of sexual harassment or misconduct. In each case, the Thomas/Hill hearings appear important to public discussion and debate. In order to examine the significance of the Thomas/Hill hearings in media coverage of other sexual harassment cases, this article reports results from an analysis of major newspaper articles published the month following the initial allegations against Bob Packwood and the allegations against Bill Clinton brought by Paula Jones and Kathleen Willey. By comparing and contrasting the frequency, tone, and content of media reports, this

Amy E. Black is Assistant Professor of Government at Franklin and Marshall College, Lancaster, PA. She is currently serving as a 2000-2001 APSA Congressional Fellow.

Jamie L. Allen is a senior government major at Franklin and Marshall College.

research addresses the following questions: How often and in what context do media reports mention Anita Hill or the Thomas/Hill hearings? How does the coverage in various papers compare and contrast?

Impacts of the Hearings on Sexual Harassment

In the minds and hearts of Americans, the name of Anita Hill often evokes strong feelings about sexual harassment and the Clarence Thomas Senate confirmation hearings. Indeed, the social and political landscape of America today is still reacting to the ramifications of the Hill/Thomas hearings. In addition to creating a national climate of awareness highlighting the importance of sexual harassment, the hearings have significantly influenced public perception of this issue. The hearings began a national conversation and stimulated greater public reflection on the definition and treatment of sexual harassment in American society. This increased public awareness continues to transform discussions of sexual harassment and public reaction to both accusers and those accused of impropriety.

The increased salience of the sexual harassment issue has also significantly impacted the development of sexual harassment law in the 1990s. Although such unwelcome conduct became illegal under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits workplace discrimination on the basis of sex, most legal scholars date the term "sexual harassment" only to the late 1970's. As one commentator explained, "millions of working women experienced sexual harassment before we knew what to call it" (Rosen 1992, 23). It was only in the early 1980's that the Equal Economic Opportunity Commission created specific guidelines to define sexual harassment. According to the EEOC, an incident qualified under Title VII if it met the following conditions:

Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal and physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when (1) submission to such conduct is made explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment, (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis of employment decisions affecting such individual or (3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment. (1988, sec.1604.11; as excerpted in Hicks and Glenn 1996, 218-19)

Thus, by this definition, a successful claim needs to demonstrate that the behavior was unwelcome and either involved a "quid pro quo" exchange or created a hostile work environment.

The original Civil Rights Act offered limited remedies for proven cases of sexual harassment. Courts could only order employers to pay victims lost wages

and order companies to stop harassment. Propelled in part by the public controversy of the Thomas/Hill hearings, Congress passed a new civil rights law in 1991 that expanded the scope of possible remedies available to victims who prove sexual harassment and increased the maximum amount of monetary damages to \$300,000 for large companies (Ross 1995, 228-29). In addition, the court adopted a “reasonable woman” standard for defining a hostile work environment in the 1991 *Ellison v. Brady* decision.

Although many legal issues remain undefined, additional court cases decided since the Hill/Thomas hearings have significantly strengthened and refined sexual harassment law. The decisions in *Faragher v. Boca Raton* and *Burlington v. Ellerth*, both from the 1998-1999 Supreme Court term, set more stringent standards for determining liability in sexual harassment. In the case of *Faragher v. Boca Raton*, the Court held that employers are responsible for harassment if they do not take care to prevent supervisors’ harassing behavior. The 7-2 decision in *Burlington v. Ellerth* adds yet another dimension to the law, holding employers liable for an employee’s actions, even if the harassing behavior did not result in tangible harm to the victim’s job. To vindicate themselves from liability under the *Ellerth* standard, employers must show they meet a standard of exercising “reasonable care” to prevent harassment.

These cases and others illustrate the importance of the Thomas/Hill hearings in the development of sexual harassment law by propelling sexual harassment to a higher position on the list of public priorities. Prior to the hearings, the law only vaguely defined what constituted sexual harassment, and the penalties for infractions were relatively light. In the aftermath of the hearings, court cases have begun to move towards more specificity in penalties and a clearer definition of sexual harassment.

In addition to impacting sexual harassment law, the Hill/Thomas hearings have also driven the issue of sexual harassment to the forefront of public debate. References to Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas are common in discussions of sexual harassment, and Hill, in particular, has become a heroine of the women’s movement and prominent spokesperson on sexual harassment issues. Even a casual mention of either Hill or Thomas provokes conversation, as most people invariably have an opinion to share about whose side they believe or how they feel about the broader issue of sexual harassment itself.

Just as Anita Hill has become a common symbol in debates over sexual harassment policy, so have the media capitalized on the hearings as a reference point when discussing current issues surrounding sexual harassment. Media accounts of recent high-profile sexual harassment cases illustrate the importance of the Hill/

Thomas case not only in increasing awareness of sexual harassment but also in changing the way the public perceives subsequent cases. Analysis of news coverage of sexual harassment allegations against prominent public officials will help demonstrate the impact of the hearings on media framing and public perception of the current debate on sexual harassment. Analyzing the frequency and content of references to and discussion of the Thomas/Hill hearings in a few recent cases will help us better understand the continued impact of the hearings on public discourse about sexual harassment.

Sexual Harassment Case Studies

Having briefly traced the development of legal definitions of sexual harassment, the following section compares and contrasts four different sexual harassment allegations against prominent public officials. For each case, we will present the basic chronology of events and the specific allegations of the accuser before analyzing newspaper coverage of the events.

Igniting the Spark: Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill

The Supreme Court nomination of Clarence Thomas was extremely politicized from the start. Months before the firestorm of the sexual harassment charges moved the reports of the nomination battle onto news headlines around the world, leaders of several prominent interest groups publicly opposed President Bush's nominee to fill the seat vacated by Thurgood Marshall. Kate Michelman of the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) was the first feminist leader to denounce publicly the Thomas nomination (Phelps and Winternitz 1992, 18). Within the month following Bush's announcement of his nominee, the National Organization for Women (NOW) and the Women's Legal Defense Fund joined the growing campaign in opposition to the Thomas nomination, citing their concerns about his record on women's rights issues (Phelps and Winternitz 1992, 20-21).

In September and October of 1991, as the Senate Judiciary Committee was completing the initial Thomas hearings, reporters Timothy Phelps of Newsday and Nina Totenberg of National Public Radio uncovered allegations of sexual harassment against Clarence Thomas. A combination of leaks and investigative work led them to Anita Hill, a law professor at the University of Oklahoma and a former assistant to Judge Thomas who reluctantly came forward with her allegations. Although committee members were made aware of Hill's charges against Judge Thomas, the committee did not consider the sexual harassment charges in the original hearings. Once the story leaked to the press, however, intense public pressure (in-

cluding strong demands from feminist organizations for an open hearing) led the members of the Judiciary Committee to agree to hold public hearings to address Professor Hill's allegations. Between October 11 and 13, 1991, an estimated 27 million Americans watched the now legendary Hill/Thomas hearings (Rucinski 1993, 576).

Allegations. In the hearings, Ms. Hill testified that Clarence Thomas sexually harassed her when he was her boss at the Department of Education and when he directed the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission. According to Hill's statement, Thomas repeatedly asked her on dates despite her consistent refusals. In addition to the unwanted sexual advances, Hill testified that Thomas "began to use work situations to discuss sex" including discussions of scenes from pornographic films and tales of his sexual ability. Hill testified of her discomfort in many work situations in which Thomas often refused to shift the conversation from sexual topics, even when she attempted to change the subject. Decrying the hearings as a "high-tech lynching," Clarence Thomas vehemently denied Hill's allegations, closing any possibility that both he and Hill could be telling different versions of the same true story. Scores of witnesses testified in support of both Thomas and Hill.

Response to the hearings was quite mixed. Instantaneous opinion polls reported that a slim majority of Americans believed Thomas was telling the truth. Prominent women in Congress, leaders of women's organizations, and many other observers denounced the hearings and the all-male Senate Judiciary Committee's treatment of Professor Hill. In the midst of the controversy on October 15, 1991, the Senate voted 52-48 to confirm Clarence Thomas.

Comparison Case Study #1: Bob Packwood

In November 1992, Bob Packwood, Republican Senator from Oregon, was running for his fifth term. Widely recognized as an ardent supporter of women's rights, Packwood earned repeated endorsements from NARAL and other women's rights groups. A proponent of the Equal Rights Amendment, family leave, and abortion rights, Packwood was one of the first Senators to sign the Capitol Hill Women's Political Caucus's sexual harassment policy.

The Allegation. The story of the sexual harassment allegations against Senator Packwood broke in a front-page Washington Post article on November 22, 1992. The result of a lengthy investigation, the more than 4,500 word article told the stories of 10 women, four of whom agreed that the Post could print their names, who alleged that Packwood made unwelcome sexual advances. The reporters described the women's accounts of the Senator's actions: "Several said he was abrupt, grabbing them without warning, kissing them forcefully and persisting until they made clear that they were not interested or had pushed him away. No one said Packwood

punished her for rejecting him, but several decided to leave their jobs within months.” After the initial story made national news, other women began making public statements; by the end of the investigation 17 women publicly accused Senator Packwood of sexual harassment.

When the story first appeared, Packwood’s chief of staff responded with categorical denials, deriding the claims as “politically motivated” and a “witch hunt”. Shortly thereafter, Packwood apologized for inadvertently causing anyone harm and said he was seeking treatment for alcohol abuse.

The Senate Ethics Committee began investigating the allegations in December 1992. The following year, the committee learned that Packwood kept personal diaries that would provide supporting evidence for the harassment allegations. As the investigation continued, many women’s rights groups demanded open hearings. The committee members refused these demands, holding closed hearings in June of 1995. September 7, 1995, the day after the Senate Ethics Committee voted unanimously to expel Packwood, the Senator resigned.

Comparison Case Study #2: Bill Clinton and Paula Jones

Following the printing of a story in the *American Spectator* that accused President Bill Clinton of a sexual dalliance with a woman named Paula, a former Arkansas state employee, Paula Jones, publicly accused Clinton of making unwanted sexual advances to her in 1991. Saying she wanted to salvage her reputation, Jones made her allegations public on February 11, 1994. About three months later, Ms. Jones filed a lawsuit against Bill Clinton and former Arkansas state trooper Danny Ferguson, claiming a violation of her constitutional rights.

Allegations. Ms. Jones, then an employee of the Arkansas Industrial Development Commission, maintained that while she was working at a state-sponsored conference, then-Governor Clinton sent her a message to meet him in his hotel room. A state trooper escorted her to Clinton’s suite and subsequently left Jones and Clinton alone. Clinton told her that he was friends with the director of the agency for whom she worked and then fondled her and made sexual advances, including requesting her to perform oral sex. Ms. Jones said she refused his advances, tried to change the subject by talking about Clinton’s wife, and left the hotel suite. According to an article published in the *Boston Globe* on 7 May 1994, as she left, Jones says Clinton warned her to “keep this between ourselves.” She says she followed this advice out of fear she might lose her state job.

In March 1998, David Brock, the reporter who wrote the original *American Spectator* story that sparked Ms. Jones’ complaint, published a letter to President Clinton in *Esquire* magazine. In the letter, he apologized for writing the article whose

reference to a woman named Paula led to the Jones lawsuit. Brock explained that partisan zeal had driven his reporting more than a concern for upholding journalistic standards and called for an end to the intense media scrutiny of politicians' private lives (Brock 1998).

On April 1, 1998, District Judge Susan Webber Wright granted Clinton's attorneys' request for a motion of summary judgment and dismissed the Jones case. Wright argued that even if Jones proved her allegations against the President, the case did not constitute sexual harassment. Ms. Jones did not provide sufficient evidence of either physical harm nor damage to her career to prove any violation. After attorneys for Paula Jones appealed Judge Wright's ruling, Clinton and Jones agreed to an \$850,000 settlement that officially ended the case in January 1999.

Comparison Case Study #3: Bill Clinton and Kathleen Willey

While preparing their case, Paula Jones' attorneys investigated any women they believed might provide evidence to help depict President Clinton as a sexual predator. During the investigation, the lawyers heard rumors about a possible encounter between the President and Kathleen Willey, a former White House volunteer.

Allegations. Kathleen Willey, a Democratic party volunteer and Clinton supporter, accused the President of making unwanted sexual advances when she approached him with a desperate situation. Ms. Willey made national news when Kenneth Starr called her to testify before the grand jury investigating the Monica Lewinsky allegations. In the days following her testimony, Paula Jones' lawyers released to the media excerpts from Kathleen Willey's deposition in the Jones lawsuit. In an effort to confront the media scrutiny, Willey agreed to describe her version of the events in an interview on the CBS news magazine *60 Minutes*.

When asked why she had never publicly told her story before, Willey is quoted in a *Washington Post* article on March 16, 1998, stating: "Who do you file a complaint with anyway, when it's the president? Where do you go?" According to Willey's account, her husband was facing severe financial troubles, so she requested a meeting with Bill Clinton to ask for a paid job at the White House. The *Los Angeles Times* on March 14, 1988 quotes Willey, who states that during this meeting Clinton invited her to the study off of the Oval Office, hugged her, placed her hand on his groin, attempted to kiss her, and admitted that "he had been wanting to do that for a long time." Willey said she resisted the sexual advances.

Although admitting he likely comforted Ms. Willey with a platonic hug, Clinton vehemently denied any sexual relationship. To support Clinton's denial, the White House released documents to demonstrate that Willey maintained a cordial relationship with the President even after the alleged harassment. As one news account

published on 21 March 1998 in the *Houston Chronicle* explained: "The White House adroitly avoided calling Willey a liar, but its release of Willey's letters clearly implied it. She asked for jobs, an ambassadorship and an invitation to the White House Christmas party. She signed some letters: 'Fondly, Kathleen.' And in one, she called herself his 'number one fan.'" By releasing these letters, the White House implicitly argued that a woman who was truly sexually harassed would not maintain such cordial correspondence.

Willey did not file any charges nor did she take any formal legal action against the president. Even though the Willey allegations created an initial public stir, the story quickly moved out of the news headlines as other aspects of the continuing investigation of the Monica Lewinsky scandal attracted more of the media and public attention.

Comparing Media Coverage

Many anecdotal accounts suggest that the Hill/Thomas hearings had an important effect on the politics of sexual harassment allegations. This research examines one part of this phenomenon, comparing and contrasting the importance of the Hill/Thomas hearings in media coverage of other sexual harassment cases. Specifically, we compare the volume and content of major newspaper coverage of the allegations to answer: To what extent and in what ways did the media reference the Hill/Thomas hearings? Did the media portray Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas in a positive or negative light? What factors explain the variance in the amount of coverage of each of the cases? Do the media references to the Hill/Thomas hearings vary in politically relevant ways?

To begin to address these questions, we compared the quantity of media coverage of the various cases by measuring the number and timing of news stories about each sexual harassment case. In addition, we analyzed the content of the articles, testing several hypotheses about media references to Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas.

We began the analysis with the expectation that discussion of Hill and Thomas would most likely appear in articles that supplement the straight news story detailing the allegations and developments related to each case at hand. Newspapers often cover major news stories in multiple articles in a single day, presenting the newest developments in a primary straight news piece and providing additional background and supplementary material in sidebar articles. Given these trends in news reporting, we hypothesized that the articles referencing the hearings would, on average, be longer, less likely to appear on the front page, and more likely to focus on the issue of sexual harassment than the specifics of the case allegations.

The norm of objectivity constrains reporters to focus straight news stories on the general facts and new developments related to the subject of the story, but editorialists face no such constraints. Indeed, columnists are expected to draw broader connections and probe beyond the facts of a case. Because the subjective format of editorial reporting offers writers much greater latitude in choice of subject matter and emphasis than does the format of a straight news piece, we expected editorials to reference the Thomas/Hill hearings more often than news stories.

We tested one final hypothesis about the characteristics of the newspaper coverage in the three case studies. Because of the gendered nature of many discussions of sexual harassment, we hypothesized that female reporters would be more likely than their male counterparts to draw connections to the legacy of Anita Hill in their coverage of subsequent allegations against public officials.

Data Collection

In order to investigate these and other questions about media coverage, we conducted a content analysis of articles retrieved from the Lexis-Nexis General News Topics database. For each of the cases, we retrieved all of the articles appearing in the Major Newspapers database the month immediately following the initial press reports of sexual harassment.¹ Three of the four cases concerned one accuser; in each of these cases we searched the database for the number of mentions of the alleged harasser and the accuser in the same story. Because the Bob Packwood case involved multiple accusers, the searches for this case study included the keywords “Bob Packwood” and “sexual harassment”.

The two principal researchers coded all of the stories, using a coding sheet pre-tested and revised in a cooperative effort. To decrease the likelihood of coding effects clouding the data, each coder had primary responsibility for coding an entire case study. At frequent intervals, we tested inter-coder reliability on randomly selected samples of articles, averaging 94 percent consistency between the two coders.² The coding scheme included basic information about the length, placement, headline, and source paper for each story. In addition, we coded the number and source of outside quotations, references to individuals and organizations, and the overall themes and tone of each piece.

Results

Before analyzing those stories that reference Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas, we first compared the number of stories published in major newspapers for each sexual harassment case study.³ Table 1 presents the results. The amount and scope

Table 1
Number of Articles in Major Newspapers

Case Study	Total
Hill/Thomas	1213
Bob Packwood	137
Clinton/Jones initial allegations	6
lawsuit filed	94
Clinton/Willey	203

Source: Lexis-Nexis Universe searches.

of media coverage of Anita Hill's allegations against Clarence Thomas far surpasses that of any of the other cases. The database included more than 1,200 articles on Hill's allegations, more than nine times as many stories than ran the month following the Packwood allegations. Paula Jones' initial allegations of sexual harassment, in contrast, were reported in only six stories in major newspapers. The filing of Ms. Jones' sexual harassment lawsuit three months later generated much more news coverage, with major newspapers running 94 stories almost evenly divided between straight news accounts and editorials.⁴

In addition to counting the number of stories printed in the first month after the initial reports, we also measured the longevity of stories. Of the cases compared, the initial Paula Jones story lasted the shortest time—the few stories mentioning Jones' allegations all appeared within one week of her announcement. Of the widely reported stories, Kathleen Willey's allegations were the most fleeting: two-thirds of the major newspaper stories appeared within one week of Ms. Willey's story making national news. The first week of coverage on Anita Hill's allegations included almost exclusively straight news reports; less than 5 percent of the editorials and opinion pieces written in the month following the Hill/Thomas case appeared in the week following the publication of the initial story on the allegations.

Media Emphasis on the Hill/Thomas Hearings

To what extent did major newspaper coverage of each set of allegations reference Anita Hill or Clarence Thomas? The next two tables provide summary data to compare the prevalence and characteristics of articles published in the month fol-

lowing the allegations for each case study. Table 2 reports the percentage of articles that reference Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, or both. Although the initial Packwood allegations surfaced less than a year after the Senate hearings, only one of four articles in our dataset (25.2%) mentioned Hill or Thomas. The percentage of articles referencing either person increased in the news coverage of the Paula Jones lawsuit; two of five major newspaper stories made some mention of the Senate hearings. Articles recounting Kathleen Willey's accusations were the least likely to discuss the controversy surrounding the Justice's nomination, as only about one of eight articles in the Willey database (12.1%) referenced Thomas or Hill.

Although most of the articles in all three databases that discuss the hearings mentioned both individuals, the Packwood database has the most singular references to Clarence Thomas. Singular mentions of the Justice were eight times more common than sole mentions of Anita Hill. In contrast, articles in the Jones and Willey databases that only mentioned one of the parties were more likely to reference Hill than Thomas.

We tested several hypotheses about the nature and presentation of articles that reference the Hill/Thomas hearings. Table 3 presents the results, comparing characteristics of those articles in each database that mentioned Hill or Thomas with those articles that made no reference to either person.

We expected that the articles mentioning Hill or Thomas would be longer than the average article that did not mention the Senate hearings or aftermath. The data support this hypothesis for both the Packwood and Jones case studies, as articles referencing Hill/Thomas are 78 percent and 46 percent longer, respectively, than those stories that make no mention of the allegations against Thomas. The data reveal a slightly different pattern in the media coverage of the Willey case, however. The average story referencing the hearings is 617 words long, compared with the average 695-word story that makes no mention of Thomas or Hill.

We also hypothesized that the stories mentioning Hill or Thomas would be secondary stories, more likely to be sidebar or editorial pieces providing more de-

Table 2
Prevalence of Articles that Reference Hill or Thomas
 (as a percentage of entire database)

Case Study	Total	Reference		
		Hill	Thomas	Both
Packwood	25.2%	0.7%	5.9%	18.5%
Clinton/Jones	40.2	3.3	1.1	35.9
Clinton/Willey	12.1	2.2	0.0	9.9

Source: Lexis-Nexis Universe Searches

Table 3
 Characteristics of Articles that Reference Hill or Thomas

Case Study	# Words	Length and Placement		Article Type			Female Author
		% Front Page	% Front Section	Editorial	News	Letter	
Packwood							
Refs. Hill/Thomas	871.6	20.6%	52.9%	50.0%	50.0%	0.0	41.2%
No References	488.8	9.9	79.2	18.8	72.3	8.9	12.9
Clinton/Jones							
Refs. Hill/Thomas	836.4	0	35.1	59.5	29.7	10.8	32.4
No References	572.7	0	38.2	38.2	52.7	9.1	7.3
Clinton/Willey							
Refs. Hill/Thomas	617.2	0	45.5	45.5	54.5	0	22.7
No References	694.5	10.6	35.6	22.5	75.6	1.9	21.9

Source: Lexis-Nexis Universe Searches

tail and reflection to complement the primary news story about the case in question. Again the data provide mixed results. Contrary to our expectation, one in five front-page articles in the Packwood database (20.6%) reference Hill or Thomas, about twice as many articles as those without mentions of the Supreme Court Justice. The front-section placement of Packwood articles is more in line with the hypothesis, however. Slightly more than half (52.9%) of the stories that discuss Thomas or Hill appear in the front section, compared with almost four of five (79.2%) of the articles without references to the hearings. None of the articles about Ms. Willey's allegations that reference Thomas or Hill appeared on the front page, compared with one of 10 (10.6%) articles that made no mention of the confirmation hearings. The placement of articles covering the Jones case is roughly the same regardless of their mentions of Hill and Thomas.

The data from all three case studies generally confirm our hypothesis that references to the Thomas/Hill hearings will appear with greatest frequency in editorials. The Packwood articles that mention Hill or Thomas are evenly divided between editorials and straight news stories; whereas, the articles that do not reference the hearings include three times as many news articles than editorials. Editorials outnumber news stories by a two to one ratio among the Jones stories that reference Hill or Thomas, a trend opposite that found in the other Jones articles. The Willey database conforms to the same general pattern: three of four articles that did not discuss Hill or Thomas (75.6%) are straight news pieces, compared with only a slight majority (54.5%) of the articles that do mention the hearings.

The content analysis of the three case studies confirmed a final hypothesis about article characteristics: we expected higher percentages of female journalists to reference the Hill/Thomas hearings in their stories. In the Packwood dataset, women wrote four of 10 of the articles that referenced Hill or Thomas, but female journalists wrote only one of nine (12.9%) of the stories that made no mention of the case. Following a similar pattern, women wrote approximately one-third of the Jones articles that discuss Hill and Thomas, yet women wrote only 7.3 percent of the stories that did not discuss the hearings. The differences were insignificant in the Willey database—22.7 percent of the articles with female authorship mentioned the Hill/Thomas case, compared with 21.9 percent of the articles without any such reference.

Hill and Thomas in Context: Evaluating the Content of References to the Hearings

A general comparison of the format and characteristics of the articles in each of the case studies only begins to answer questions about the role of the Hill/Tho-

mas hearings in media coverage of subsequent sexual harassment cases. This next section considers the context and significance of references to Hill and Thomas in each set of articles.

General Themes. What themes and ideas do journalists raise in their coverage of the various sexual harassment cases? To answer this question, we coded the recurring themes included in each article. Although a few articles had only one central focus, almost all of the reporters examined the subject from multiple vantage points. Table 4 displays the most common ideas included in the stories that referenced Anita Hill or Clarence Thomas.

As would be expected, the most prevalent theme of the articles for all three case studies was a discussion of the facts or events surrounding the allegations. Because of the high proportion of editorials, more than half of the Jones stories (54.1%) and more than four of 10 of the Packwood and Willey stories (41.2% and 45.5%, respectively) included the author's opinion or reaction to the event or phenomenon discussed in the article. More than half of the Packwood stories (52.9%) included reactions from outside observers, typically other Senators or staff members commenting on the allegations. Although the Jones and Willey stories were somewhat less likely than the articles on Packwood to include others' reactions, some of the articles included reactions from Anita Hill. Although none of the Packwood stories quoted her, two of the Jones stories and five of the Willey articles included quotes from Ms. Hill.

About a third of the Packwood stories referencing the Hill/Thomas case included some discussion of the possible impact of the current allegations on sexual harassment. This theme was much less common in both the Jones and Willey databases, as less than one of ten articles (8.1% and 9.0%, respectively) discussed the specific impact of the charges against Clinton on public awareness and interpretation of sexual harassment.

More than half of the articles in the Jones database (54.1%) criticized feminist leaders for an apparent double standard in their treatment of the allegations against Clarence Thomas and Bill Clinton. As one angry letter to the editor of the *Arizona Republic* on 19 May 1994 complained: "When the sexual harassment charges were brought against Clarence Thomas, members of the National Organization for Women fell all over themselves to circle the wagons in favor of Anita Hill. . . So where are NOW and all those other feminist organizations that came to the aid of Anita Hill?" The Willey database also included some strong reactions against perceived feminist hypocrisy; more than three of 10 articles criticized the differences in feminist reactions to Jones and Hill. Although the response was not as swift as the reaction to Anita Hill's allegations, feminist organizations did denounce Packwood, often with

Table 4
Most Common Themes in Articles Referencing Hill or Thomas

Packwood		Clinton/Jones		Clinton/Willey	
Case Facts	70.6%	Case Facts	81.1%	Case Facts	95.5%
Others' Reactions	52.9	Author's Reaction	54.1	Author's Reaction	45.5
Author's Reaction	41.2	Feminist Hypocrisy	54.1	Others' Reactions	40.9
Impact on SH	32.3	Partisan Hypocrisy	32.4	Feminist Hypocrisy	31.8
Feminist Hypocrisy	14.7	Others' Reactions	32.4	Political Impact	22.7

Note: Due to multiple responses, numbers can add to more than 100%.

very strong language. In large part reflecting this difference in response, only 14.7 percent of the articles on this case raise the issue of feminist hypocrisy in responses to Packwood and Thomas.

Feminist leaders are not the only group accused of hypocrisy in their reactions to sexual harassment allegations. Although the number of references is smaller, at least a few critics raise allegations of partisan hypocrisy in all three of the case studies. Only 6 percent of Packwood stories and slightly less than one of 10 Willey articles (9.1%) mention the theme of partisan hypocrisy, but almost one-third of the stories referencing Hill or Thomas and the Jones case (32.4%) raise this critique. Authors note that many of the same Republicans who were quick to defend Clarence Thomas against Anita Hill's allegations became much more sympathetic to the accuser when she was raising an accusation against the Democratic president. As syndicated columnists Jeff Cohen and Norman Solomon opined in the *Seattle Times* on 14 May 1994: "Given a green light by the Paula Jones case to pontificate about the president's genitals and alleged indecent conduct, right-wing pundits have finally found a sexual harassment claim worthy of outrage."

Specific References to Hill and Thomas. The previous discussion compares and contrasts the characteristics of the articles and the general themes the various news accounts address. But questions remain about the extent and focus of the references to the Hill/Thomas hearings in each of the specific case studies. The remaining analysis evaluates each case study to trace transformations in the media use of Hill and Thomas in the three different news stories.

In order to analyze patterns in media discussion of the Hill/Thomas hearings, we conducted additional content analysis of the news stories that referenced Hill or Thomas. We divided such stories into three groups: those that made only a passing reference to Hill or Thomas, those that devoted at least a few sentences to the hearings, and those that had a central focus on comparisons with the Hill/Thomas case.

The earliest references to the Hill/Thomas hearings occur in the coverage of the Packwood case, a story that broke 13 months after Clarence Thomas' confirmation to the Supreme Court. More than half (56%) of the mentions of either Anita Hill or Clarence Thomas were passing references to the case, most simply reminding the reader that Packwood voted against the confirmation of Clarence Thomas. Only one of the stories in the database focused primarily on comparing the Packwood and Thomas cases.

Among those stories that discussed Hill or Thomas in a paragraph or more, most focused on the role of the hearings in raising national awareness of the sexual harassment issue. Characterizing the events of October 1991 as the "episode that changed American politics forever," an editorialist in the *Louisville Courier-Journal* on December 17, 1992 explained the impact of Hill's testimony: "Until Anita Hill, sexual harassment wasn't high on America's agenda. One effect of her testimony was that women began to talk about sexual harassment. There hadn't been a lot of public discussion about it before, because few women had come forward with complaints." Other authors went even further, describing the hearings as changing the mind of Senators and increasing awareness of the potential electoral fallout of ignoring women's concerns. A *Houston Chronicle* editorialist opined on December 10, 1992 that "the Thomas-Hill hearings have changed the minds of the Senators, if not their hearts. They realize that something terrible is happening in the country. Women are beginning to vote in their self-interest; that is to say, against men who treat women cheap."

The references to Hill and Thomas in the Jones database are much more pronounced. Less than a third of the articles give only passing mention of the hearings, whereas almost seven of 10 articles (69.4%) devote at least a few sentences or more. Even more striking, comparisons between the Jones and Hill allegations are the central focus of one in four of the articles that reference Hill or Thomas.

The articles with extended discussion of the Hill/Thomas hearings generally fall into one of two categories—those stories comparing the facts of the two cases and those articles discussing perceptions of feminist and/or partisan hypocrisy in the reactions to the two accusers. Describing the similarities in the two high-profile cases, in a *Houston Chronicle* column on May 10, 1994, Clarence Page notes what he calls the "unavoidable comparisons" between the two sets of allegations. Indeed, many articles offer point-by-point comparisons of the Jones and Hill cases.

Much of the extended discussion of Jones and Hill analyzes the differences in how women's groups, Republicans, and/or Democrats have characterized the two accusers. Perhaps conservative Mona Charen's syndicated column on May 12, 1994 published in the *Denver Rocky Mountain News* goes the farthest, arguing that the

media have shown their own brand of hypocrisy in the extent and tone of their coverage. After chiding conservatives and Republicans for coming quickly to Ms. Jones' aid after having all but ignored Ms. Hill, Charen lashes out against liberals and the media:

At the same time, some liberals have behaved like perfect hypocrites in all this. The *Washington Post* has devoted thousands of words to analyzing why Packwood was such a disaster as a human being, even scrutinizing his failed marriage. During the Hill-Thomas affair, the paper practically served as a press office for Anita Hill. But when the Jones accusations surfaced, the editors were seized with pangs of conscience over how stuff should be handled. "We didn't know what to make of the story," explained *Post* columnist Richard Cohen on C-Span. But when Hill made the charges with even less substance, the *Post* knew what to make of them—front page news.

Although few other critiques used such stark language, more than half of the Jones articles referencing the hearings included some discussion of the apparent feminist double standard, just as a third of the articles raised issues of partisan hypocrisy.

Similar to the Jones case study, most of the discussions of Hill or Thomas in the Willey articles (82%) are substantive references. Only two of the 22 articles, however, make the comparison with Anita Hill the central focus of the story.

The articles that discuss the Hill case have two common themes: partisan and/or feminist hypocrisy and feminist responses to the Willey allegations. Many of the stories quote female Senators and prominent feminist leaders. Carol Mosely-Braun, Patty Murray, and Barbara Boxer—all three of whom used the Thomas/Hill hearings in their Senate campaigns in 1992 as a symbol for the need for institutional change—granted interviews or issued statements responding to the Willey allegations. In contrast to the Jones case, some prominent feminists did go on the record with measured defenses of Ms. Willey. Patricia Ireland, president of the National Organization for Women, was noted in the *Tampa Tribune* on March 16, 1998, "It's not just sexual harassment. If it's true, it's sexual assault." Kate Michelman of the National Abortion Rights Action League expressed similar sentiments. Anita Hill and Gloria Steinem, in contrast, viewed the allegations very differently as shown in a *San Francisco Chronicle* article on March 23, 1998:

Anita Hill says the case against Clarence Thomas is different from charges made against President Clinton and urges women to consider the bigger issue of the administration's policies toward women before judging his personal behavior. Hill also joined feminist leader Gloria Steinem yesterday in saying that Clinton's alleged advances to Willey, while improper and crude if true, did not constitute sexual harassment.

As these examples demonstrate, feminist leaders did not speak in a unified voice in reaction to the Willey allegations, and the media were quick to note this pattern.

Perhaps due in part to the diversity of opinions expressed by feminist leaders,

discussions of a possible feminist double standard in attitude towards Clarence Thomas and Bill Clinton appeared in only about one of three articles in the Willey database. As in the Jones case, however, media observers noted discrepancies in how feminists and partisans reacted to the allegations against Thomas and Clinton. Even some foreign newspapers entered the controversy. Johnathan Freedland in the *Guardian* on March 18, 1998 recalled the response to Republican Senators who derided Ms. Hill for not confronting Clarence Thomas when she worked for him: "feminist activists immediately denounced them as sexist dinosaurs. They coined a phrase, which stuck. Men who doubted Professor Hill's claim of harassment by Thomas 'just didn't get it.' And so now the very women who once championed Bill Clinton have either to eat their words or declare that Clinton himself 'just doesn't get it.'"

Tracing The Legacy

Having compared and contrasted the media use of the Hill/Thomas hearings in their coverage of other sexual harassment cases, what can we conclude? What does this study explain about the nature of media references to Anita Hill?

First and foremost, the analysis of these case studies provides strong evidence that Anita Hill has indeed found a place in modern American political history as a symbol for the sexual harassment issue. Instead of finding only a few fleeting moments of fame, Hill has become not only an accepted name to invoke in discussions of sexual harassment, but she has also become an important political and social commentator sought by journalists. Never directly quoted in the initial month of Packwood coverage, Hill gradually became accepted as an expert, playing an important role in media coverage of the allegations against President Clinton.

Our analysis of the characteristics of the media references to the Hill/Thomas case provides some evidence in support of our hypotheses and some mixed results. Newspaper stories that reference Hill or Thomas are not necessarily secondary or supporting articles, as indicated by the mixed results testing hypotheses about the placement of stories. We did find much evidence, however, to confirm the expectation that references to the hearings were more likely to appear in editorials than in straight news pieces. Additionally, with the exception of the Willey database (which found no significant difference), we found that articles discussing Hill or Thomas were more likely to have female than male authorship.

When comparing the specific content of the stories, more interesting patterns emerge. As a group, the articles referencing the Thomas case are subjective, often including commentary from the author him or herself as well as outside observers.

Most of the articles in the Packwood case focus on sexual harassment more generally, whereas the references to Thomas and Hill in the Jones and Willey cases are more likely to comment on the apparent double standards in public reactions to the new allegations.

Analysis of media references to Hill and Thomas provides important information about how our society views sexual harassment. In addition to seeing the ways people are talking about the issue since the 1991 hearings, our data analysis provides a preliminary look at the continued significance of the Hill/Thomas case today. Clearly, the hearings have significantly impacted the ways in which the media and the public view allegations of sexual harassment brought against political figures. Memories of the public reactions to the Hill/Thomas hearings and Anita Hill's accusations continue to affect evaluations of politicians, interest group leaders, and other prominent media figures.

Further research should expand on this work, analyzing media coverage in a variety of sources such as broadcast news programs, interest group press releases, and articles in news magazines. Additionally, further work should examine coverage over a longer span of time to provide more valuable insights into the characterization of sexual harassment. As we study the media coverage of prominent sexual harassment cases, we can trace the evolution of the politics of sexual harassment to learn more about how this issue impacts the lives of Americans.

Notes

1. The specific searches were (1) Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill, October 6 - November 6, 1991, (2) Bob Packwood and sexual harassment, November 22 - December 21, 1992; (3) Paula Jones and Bill Clinton, February 12, 1994 - March 11, 1994 (the month following the initial public allegations), and May 6, 1994 - June 5, 1994 (the month following the filing of the lawsuit); and (4) Kathleen Willey and Bill Clinton, March 11, 1998 - April 10, 1998 (the month following Ms. Willey's appearance before the Starr grand jury).

2. The inter-coder reliability percentages varied from a low of 92.2% to a high of 96.9%.

3. The list of newspapers included in the Lexis-Nexis General News database did change slightly over the years in question and the content and circumstances of each case are unique. For these reasons, one should not interpret these data as a perfect or definitive comparison of the frequency of articles published for each of the cases. Instead, we offer these data to show the general (and very marked) trends and differences in the amount of media attention paid to the different cases. A direct comparison of the papers included in the database for each case study is available from the authors upon request.

4. For the purpose of the comparison in this paper, we will focus on the media reports following the filing of Ms. Jones' lawsuit. The American press did not consider the initial allegations serious enough to warrant media coverage. After the filing of the lawsuit, however, the media began to report the allegations as a newsworthy event. We believe that the day Ms. Jones announced filing her lawsuit is the best point in time to demarcate the first significant public allegation of harassment.

References

- Breggin, Peter R. 1992. *Abuses of Privilege*. Tikkun Vol. 7, Number 1: 17-22
- Brock, David (1998). *Letter to the President*. *Esquire* Vol. 129, Number 4: 60ff
- Bystrom, Dianne G. 1996. *Beyond the hearings*. In Sandra L. Ragan, Dianne G. Bystrom, Lynda L. Kaid, and Christina S. Beck (Eds.), *The Language of Lynching*. (pp. 260-282). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Danforth, John C. 1994. *Resurrection*. New York: Viking Penguin.
- Fox-Genovese, Elizabeth. 1997. *Rethinking Sexual Harassment*. *Partisan Review* Vol. 64, Number 3: 366
- Hicks, Darrin and Patrick J. Glenn. 1996. *The Pragmatics of Sexual Harassment*. In Sandra L. Ragan, Dianne G. Bystrom, Lynda L. Kaid, and Christina S. Beck (Eds.), *The Language of Lynching*. (pp. 260-282). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Hill, Anita F. and Emma C. Jordan. 1995. *Race, Gender, and Power in America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mayer, Jane and Jill Abramson. 1994. *Strange Justice*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Morewitz, Stephen J. 1996. *Sexual Harassment and Social Change in American Society*. San Francisco: Austin Winfield.
- Phelps, Timothy M. and Helen Winternitz. 1992. *Capitol Games*. New York: Hyperion.
- Rosen, Ruth. 1992. *Sex, Lies, and Vulnerability*. Tikkun Vol.7, Number 1: 22-24.
- Ross, Susan Deller. 1995. Sexual Harassment Law in the Aftermath of the Hill-Thomas Hearings. In Anita F. Hill and Emma C. Jordan (Eds.), *Race, gender and power in America*, New York: Oxford.
- Rucinski, Dianne. 1993. Rush to Judgment? Past Reaction Polls in the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas Controversy. *Public Opinion Quarterly* Vol. 57, Number 4: 575-592.