

De-Mystifying the Gender-Based Violence Discourse
A Linguistic Analysis of Public Reception to Historically Prominent Male Perpetrators

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Abstract

This senior thesis project explores the interrelated nature of gendered privilege and Gender-Based Violence through the lens of three historically significant cases from the past century: the William F. Slocum controversy on the Colorado College campus in 1917, the Thomas Clarence (v. Anita Hill) congressional hearing in 1991, and the Brett Kavanaugh (v. Christine Ford) congressional hearing in 2018. An examination of both public official and general public reactions to these three cases at the time of their occurrence, with a focus on characterizations of the three men involved, show a simultaneous upholding of a successful, powerful yet innocent male trope and an outbreak of new confrontations of such male privilege through the emergence of new media. Specifically, themes of misrecognition and narrative authenticity are addressed through an interdisciplinary perspective that draws on feminist, media studies, and linguistic anthropological theory.

Honor Pledge

On my honor, I have neither given, nor received, any unauthorized aid on this project. Honor Code Upheld.

—Sophia Fern Pray

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“If woman had no existence save in the fiction written by men, one would imagine her a person...very various; heroic and mean; splendid and sordid; infinitely beautiful and hideous in the extreme.”
—Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

Introduction

Women have consistently and constantly been characterized by men throughout history as caricatures of their desires, fears, and frustrations. In embracing a feminism that complicates women's characters in narratives, and makes them more nuanced, however, we simultaneously must take another glance at how men, especially highly powerful and public-facing men, are characterized. This senior thesis research paper includes theoretical and historical perspectives as well as an in-depth linguistic analysis of such characterizations of high-profile men. I begin by providing an anthropological and personalized framework for the project, then discuss my methodology before presenting and analyzing my data, and finally ending with possible implications of discovered insights.

In early September of 2018 four-day long congressional hearings were scheduled for President Donald Trump's new nominee: Judge Brett Kavanaugh. A well-respected and prominent judge, he was to be evaluated by both the Senate and House of Representatives to determine whether he would be fit to serve in the highest court of the nation. Due to leaked allegations of attempted sexual assault from a woman named Christine Blasey Ford, who originally intended her statements to be private, the hearing committee postponed a vote and another day of hearings was scheduled. On September 27th, both Judge Kavanaugh and Dr. Ford testified. Their comments and statements were broadcasted worldwide, with live streams running on major sites including YouTube and Facebook as well as on television. Anthony Zurcher, a reporter for BBC, wrote that “Donald Trump's court pick generated a controversy that captured the nation's attention in a way that few political issues do,” with other news outlets characterizing the day of 9-hour long proceedings as being “historic” and “emotionally charged” (Guardian 2018, Variety 2018, NPR 2018). Protests broke out in Washington D.C. on the day of the hearings, and social media sites in particular spiked with heated political discussion. The country was not only watching but participating in the controversial hearings — and as an undergraduate anthropology student, young woman, and survivor of sexual assault, my attention was captivated.

While I will go into a more in-depth historical overview of the events leading up to the Kavanaugh hearings on page 5, I want to note the importance of this moment in history through a brief personal reflection. My generation of young women have been entering our most formative years amidst a chaotic and violent emergence of discussion around Gender-Based Violence (GBV). The beginning of my college experience in 2016 was marked by the severely lenient conviction of Brock Turner, the Stanford University athlete who got off with only 6-months of jail time as a result of his witnessed raping of an unconscious woman. It was also marked by the election of Donald Trump and his infamous Tweets and video clips that promoted the normalization and promotion of the objectification and violation of women. My friends and I spent days upon days in tears, disillusionment and anger. Then, in 2017, we saw the emerging scandal of Harvey Weinstein's widespread harassment in the entertainment industry, and the #MeToo online resistance movement—followed by the emergence of another scandal on our

own campus related to the former college president William F. Slocum who groped and harassed hundreds of former students and employees. My friends and I, along with countless others, have been witnessing an inescapable confrontation of the widespread, deeply rooted yet often infrequently accounted for presence of GBV in the U.S. These events have fueled political discussion, and promoted critical inquiry, and yet it is important to note the personal effects of witnessing—we have been attempting to create our own identities and discover our own power in spite, or in defiance to, the utter violence we have seen and perhaps experienced. We need to be recognized in GBV discourse.

Through the lens of the now-notorious Kavanaugh hearing, I hope to shed more light on the question of how current conversations around sexual assault and harassment have become so polarized and focused on the matter of who is right or wrong. I believe these aspects of the current discourse around GBV are exactly what prevent any real, lasting, self-confrontational change in a Western, U.S. setting, and hope to advocate for a new form of cultural awareness. Mark Moberg, an ethnographer, writes: “to interpret a culture requires that we examine an event in terms of particular actors’ motives, intentions, values, and the particular meanings that they attribute to the associate action, speech, and gestures” (2013: 283). For my own research and analysis purposes, I will be focusing my study of the cultural through the realm of speech, specifically as it is represented through the realm of media.

I am following anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes’ version of a “good enough” ethnography and primarily interpreting her notion that ethnography is both an “act of solidarity” and the “*work of recognition*” with my attempt at a linguistic-centered account of the current culture around topics of sexual harassment and assault (Scheper-Hughes 1995:417-418 in Moberg 2013:327, my emphasis added). While discussion surrounding the current aspects of the GBV discourse will center around the Kavanaugh hearing, I will also be focusing on two other historic cases that involve high-profile, public-facing political men and sexual harassment/violence allegations: the William F. Slocum controversy on the Colorado College campus in 1917, and the Thomas Clarence congressional hearing involving Anita Hill in 1991. These three cases, spanning over a century of U.S. history, will provide a more contextualized framework for understanding the major changes and shifts in the GBV discourse, as well as for understanding any similarities that emerge through analysis. Specifically, I wonder how the emergence of new media (the television, internet, and social media) has altered the GBV discourse in regard to patriarchal and political power. How are themes of belief and characterization of powerful men accused of sexual harassment/assault interwoven into this increasingly public discourse? By exploring both public officials’ and the general public’s reactions to these three heavily controversial events, I want to illuminate some of the consistent themes of the GBV discourse, while discussing specific challenges and changes these new platforms for discourse present.

Considerations for this project have included choosing media sources for all three events, including a social media platform for online data collection, filtering searches for relevant archived newspapers, magazines, and tweets, and engaging in close textual analysis with selected media sources and commentary. A more detailed description of the modes of data collection and analysis are presented on page 6. Themes from the GBV discourse that are explored in this paper include: identity construction, claims to truth, normalization, patriarchal power over speech, and linguistic silences in the discourse. Due to the unique interdisciplinary nature of this project, involving media studies and anthropological/linguistic methodology, feminist frameworks, and even experimental psychological theory, as well as the unique demands the analysis of online

script requires, I have found the need to establish a new theory that I call *defensive othering*. Essentially, this created theory posits that subconscious fear leads people to feel either a literal or ideological identity threat when hearing about cases, movements, or events like the Kavanaugh hearing, which then translates into their focus on that specific case and an introduction of a binary between actors within that case as right or wrong. Through this process, individuals are able to distance themselves from the broader implications of an issue that transcends just that case. Inspired by postmodern thinking, I hope to move beyond assumptions and political polarization that impede a woman's right to be heard when speaking out against GBV.

Defining the Gender-Based Violence Discourse

In understanding the impacts of socially constructed knowledge, as it is circulated and established through various media platforms, Michel Foucault's theorizing on discourse becomes crucial to my research. Moberg summarizes much of Foucault's own scholarly work on power, discourse, and knowledge by saying that "claims to knowledge and the truth are the means by which institutions, bureaucracies, and even individuals dominate others" (2013:317). Within this framework, responses to all three of these historically significant cases — whether they come from established newspapers, television screens, or social media sites — are representative of existing, or created, power structures. The impact of these responses, however, is inherently limited when they are positioned within the current political realm that upholds patriarchal standards of knowledge (Hlavka 2014). Such limitations are notable especially in context of the GBV discourse, through exclusionary binaries created between a victim and a perpetrator, and between true and false accusations, both of which will be discussed later on in this paper. The United Nations, in a 1993 declaration, described GBV as being: "any form of violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life" (U.N. 1993). For the purposes of this paper, I will be using the term Gender-Based Violence specifically in regard to sexual harassment and assault of women in the context of the United States. I attempt to incorporate intersectional theory and analysis relating to different racial identities, though I have chosen to not directly focus on queer or international identities — this does not mean that femme-identifying individuals that lie outside of the gendered binary are not affected by these same issues, but rather are left out solely for limiting the scope of this project. Throughout my research, the phrase "GBV discourse" therefore refers to public conversation around issues related to sexual harassment and assault of women in the United States.

Foucault further writes that there are "many silences" that are an "integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses" (Foucault 1990: 27), which in this context, I recognize as the lack of confrontation of patriarchal power. Gendered and inherently sexist ways of thinking are ingrained in the written, spoken, and online dialogue around GBV, yet they often remain operational at only a subconscious level. This cycle perpetuates a normalization of violence, which, with the power of the internet and online media, becomes easily reproduced and enhanced. Essentially, even recent public outcries against instances of GBV, like the ones emerging from the Kavanaugh hearing, are lost under a hardly recognized patriarchal suppression of speech.

These phenomena can also be explored through the highly referenced French theorist and sociologist/anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualization of "misrecognition." When power achieves a legitimacy, Bourdieu analyst Zander Navarro describes, it becomes separated from

material interests and therefore goes “unrecognised by other social groups” (2006:19). Essentially, a legitimized power is a power that has transcended the daily consciousness of the public; in this framework, I would consider patriarchal power to be a legitimized power that is only more recently becoming recognized in all of its forms. At this moment of legitimization, Navarro writes that “the origins of social inequalities become part of a *mystifying discourse*” (Navarro 2006:19, my own emphasis added). For my own theorizing on the discourse of GBV, I find that the lack of recognition of these social inequalities, such as the lack of accountability for public-facing male perpetrators and the lack of recognition of women’s autonomy, becomes the primary roadblock to any lasting change. Without acknowledging and departing from overtly patriarchal systems of speech and dialogue, GBV becomes normalized through heavily circulated, seemingly harmless responses. Navarro writes about the optimistic possibilities of such analysis through the words of one of Bourdieu’s students: “[This theory] allows critical thought about society ‘to perpetually question the obviousness and the very frames of civic debate so as to give ourselves a chance to think the world, rather than being thought by it, to take apart and understand its mechanisms, and thus to reappropriate it intellectually and materially’” (Wacquant 2004 in Navarro 2006:20). A thinking of the world, and more specifically a *rethinking* of the media realities related to the discourse around GBV, constitutes my primary mission for this thesis project.

Anthropological writings concerning GBV in the U.S. and globally also provide a foundation for understanding this discourse, though most are focused on the physical implications and responses to such violence. *Sanctions and Sanctuary* (1992) by Dorothy Counts, Judith Brown, and Jacquelyn Campbell was one of the first anthropological books to discuss instances of GBV, in this case instances of domestic abuse. *Violence in the City of Women* (2007) written by my academic advisor Sarah Hautzinger also serves as one of the first full-length ethnographies concerning GBV and provides an empathetic yet critical representation of the domestic abuse and consequent women-led interventions in households in Bahia, Brazil. Sally Engle Merry’s *Human Rights & Gender Violence: Translating International Law into Local Justice* (2006), Mindie Lazarus-Black’s *Everyday Harm: Domestic Violence, Court Rites, and Cultures of Reconciliation* (2007), and Jennifer Wies and Hillary Haldane’s *Anthropology at the Front Lines of Gender-Based Violence* (2011) are also seminal works in the field of anthropology related to GBV. Merry’s work in particular, as it relates to the creation of social change and human rights-related justice, informs the optimistic stance I adopt near the end of this paper. She writes about the concept of venacularization as one of “translating human rights,” in which victims of rights violations are able to redefine their experiences according to legal structures and terms created by human rights activists and officials (2006: 219). In this way, new language emerging in the GBV discourse, as used and spread across different media sources, can be viewed as an empowering mode of social justice.

Emergence of New Media

The element of the internet, and online media, must also be addressed as a crucial aspect of my research project since it is my sole ethnographic, as opposed to historic, site. Moberg writes that “the world takes on a kind of intense unreality” with the fact of online news and instant reporting, and that “...an increasing penetration of our daily lives by electronic media [has] altered both our desires and perception of the world” (2013:312). The role of the internet in shaping an individual’s mindset, value system, and consequent construction of knowledge must be acknowledged as a separate influencing entity, rather than a neutral aspect of the current

discourse. The internet is widely cited as a virtual reality that imprints heavily on our own mindsets and daily existence (Harvey 1989, Hine 2000, Ginsburg et. al. 2002, Couldry 2004, Moberg 2013). David Harvey, a professor and analyst of anthropology and geography, writes that this phenomenon creates a “diversification of values within a fragmenting society” and a “sensory overload, in which the present changes so quickly that the individual ceases to be able to understand it clearly” (Harvey 1989:286 in Moberg 2013:312). Moberg references Harvey when he writes that “this is precisely the kind of environment of uncertainty and flux in which postmodern epistemologies can flourish” (2013:312). Postmodern thought, as it relates to discourse theory and virtual reality constituting an “environment of uncertainty” that Moberg writes about, greatly informs my research project.

Bourdieu also provides an interesting take on the role of media in creating a new reality which influences my theory and theorizing of the GBV discourse. In his article “On Television and Journalism,” he writes: “One thing leads to another, and, ultimately television, which claims to record reality, creates it instead. We are getting closer and closer to the point where the social world is primarily described — and in a sense prescribed — by television” (Bourdieu 1998). While my study focuses more intensively on social media and interactive cyberspace than television, the message of a created reality still rings true. Social media acts particularly like an echo chamber, in which actors express their identities, and then have them reinforced by the platforms they engage with (Vickery and Everbach 2018).

A Brief History of GBV-Related Movements and Events

While this research project is by no means a comprehensive historical linguistic analysis of the discourse around GBV, it does seek to illuminate certain trends regarding the discourse through the close analysis of responses to the three aforementioned cases in 1917, 1991, and 2018. I have compiled a list of seemingly significant other events related to GBV regulation and discussion in the U.S. that I hope will provide a more nuanced context for the data presentation and analysis that follows regarding the three cases.

To begin, it is important to note that the United States’ history of slavery heavily influences the GBV discourse, even today, for conversation around violence against women in this country has historically focused around white women (DuMonthier, Childers, and Milli 2017:150). Violent sexual acts committed against black women during the era of slavery were virtually ignored by the justice systems in place, for they were run by the same demographic that typically committed those acts in the first place: powerful, wealthy, white men. Today, acts of sexual violence are still influenced by racial identity, with black women experiencing intimate partner violence at higher rates and black women who are survivors of domestic violence experiencing drastically greater risks regarding criminalization in the U.S. compared to all other women (DuMonthier, Childers, and Milli 2017:152). Intersectional consideration, in which GBV-issues are studied in relation to race, are necessary in understanding historical differences in responses to public GBV cases and movements (Crenshaw 2005).

In **1892**, the famous African-American feminist and journalist Ida B. Wells wrote about the lynching of men, primarily black men, for accusations of rape against white women. In an editorial entitled “The Malicious and Untruthful White Press,” she said: “The South has claimed that they only lynched coloured men for committing rape upon the white women of that section. But unfortunately, the record is against them... Another thing is very clearly shown and that is only about one-fifth of the number lynched in the South were charged with the crime of rape. Probably 190 of the number murdered by mobs in the South were entirely innocent of any crime.

Mobs are not organised to find out whether a man or woman is guilty or innocent, but they are organised for the sole purpose to condemn and kill” (1892). Wells’ commentary and critical analysis of the lynchings in America during her time make clear the strategy that white men utilized in targeting black men: accusations of rape, which often times were not founded.

Jump forward 29 years, to **1917**, and we get to the time of the Slocum controversy on Colorado College’s campus, where the college president, Dr. Slocum, faced mounting pressure from faculty members and reluctant trustee members to resign due to hundreds of affidavits from women who accused him of sexual harassment and assault. Jump forward another 62 years, to **1979**, and rape of a spouse is finally outlawed in the U.S. court system for the first time. A little less than a decade later, in **1986**, the Supreme Court officially recognized sexual harassment as a violation of federal employment law. Just five years after that, in **1991**, the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings occur, where a brave young woman named Anita Hill came forward with allegations of sexual harassment during her time working under the prominent judge.

In **2006**, the term #MeToo is first introduced, marking the beginnings of a new social movement relating to sharing personal accounts of sexual assault and harassment. Six years after that, in **2012**, the FBI finally updated its definition of rape from “the carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will” to any type of penetration “without the consent of the victim.” In **2016**, the country witnessed the rise of a notorious sexual harasser and reality-television star into the political scene, with the election of Donald Trump and his now notorious line of “grab her by the pussy.” One year later, in **2017**, famous Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein is outed by the industry for rape and sexual harassment, causing the rise of the “Weinstein effect” where other high-profile individuals across all industries began facing public accusations and trials for their misconduct relating to GBV issues. In **2017** we also see the rise of #MeToo as an official movement online. In **2018**, we arrive at the final case for this thesis project: the Brett Kavanaugh confirmation hearings.

Methodology

With such a broad thematic research question relating to the changes in the discourse around GBV in the United States, my first step towards narrowing down this thesis project involved selecting historical events to compare. The Kavanaugh confirmation hearings were chosen due to their recent nature and widespread public responses; the Thomas confirmation hearings were chosen due to their relevance to the Kavanaugh hearing, and their historical status in regards to their public broadcasting; the Slocum controversy was chosen due to its older time frame and the unique access I have to the event’s archives through Colorado College’s Special Collections Department. Within all three of these cases, I decided to focus on the characterization of the men themselves because it provides some common ground that can be further explored in analysis: all three were publicly well-known, supported, and well-established at the time of the allegations or reports made against them for sexual harassment or assault.

In terms of choosing the media used to represent responses to these unique cases, the selectivity increased with the recency of the events. For the Slocum controversy, there was hardly any media to filter through, so the responses presented below are representative of almost the entirety of archived responses that I could find. The Thomas hearing was televised, but I chose to focus on newspaper and magazine articles, transcribed opening statements, and polling data because they are easier for textual analysis. The Kavanaugh hearing presented the most available media content for possible analysis, however I chose to focus primarily on Tweets because Twitter represents the realm of public social media sites well and provides an easy platform for “historic” searches. Weller et. al. writes that Twitter represents “a new kind of

publicness” where information is “selected and presented according to personal relevance [and] shared with an (intended) audience of articulated social ties in a conversational mode” (2014: 11). In gathering social media data from Twitter, I decided to organize it around five central themes that I discovered as I read through mass amounts of responses. I conducted searches according to terms that matched those five themes and included data in this paper that matched all thematic and linguistic considerations for this project. More information about the methodology of Twitter data collection, in particular, is available on page 26.

I adapt a close-reading strategy, of both the selected Tweets and all other media sources in this paper, as put forth by Weller et. al., where there is a focus on individual words, syntax, and diction. I also expand my study to include what Weller et. al. calls “critical discourse analysis,” where I focus on “power relationships and links between texts and ideology” which “relies on thick description” (2014: 118). I utilize italics throughout my entire data presentation to denote my emphasis on certain elements I see in the data itself, paired with in-depth surface analysis, and larger perspective content analysis in my data analysis section.

I will use Weller et. al.’s description of qualitative research to further emphasize my data analysis framework: “qualitative research seeks to understand meaning-making, placing technology use into specific social contexts, places, and times” (120). This approach directly informs my research question regarding the changing nature of media in regard to the GBV discourse in the U.S. Lastly, in the data analysis section I will be focusing on narrative linguistic analysis, that involves a close-reading of all responses. Linguistic theory regarding narratives, and narrative analysis, will be primarily utilized in the data analysis section of this paper.

Initial Data Presentation: Public Officials’ Reactions

Comparing these three historically significant cases concerning sexual harassment or assault allegations requires an initial look at characterization of the men from the viewpoint of public officials, and then the general public. The characterization of all three of these high-profile men by public figures, including faculty members and trustees of the college in the Slocum case and congress members in both the Thomas and Kavanaugh hearings, reveals an unchanging character trope. *The trope that transcends historical boundaries, in this case, is that of a dedicated, hard-working, and innocent man, faced with unfortunate allegations or charges.* The nuances in the descriptions of these men, however, when taken into context of the speaker or writer, provide a deeper meaning for the perpetuation of this trope. Some of these variations, as seen below, are attributable to the different types of media that either prevented information from spreading or created new public pressures and a larger, national audience. General cultural shifts regarding the GBV discourse are also notable through the varied nature of characterization of these men.

As mentioned on page 6, I use italics throughout this data presentation to denote particular areas of linguistic interest — they are my emphasis only, and not included in the original data source.

College Faculty and Trustee Responses to President William F. Slocum

To examine public officials' responses to Slocum, during the time of the controversy in 1917, I rely primarily on what is referred to as the "James Hutchison Kerr Papers" in the Colorado College Special Collections Department. Kerr remained at Colorado College from 1876 until 1880 as a professor of Geology, Chemistry, and Metallurgy, and maintained a far-reaching and thorough collection of accounts relating to the college, including transcriptions of women's affidavits against the former president Slocum, and copies of letters to and from other faculty members and college trustees. I also rely on the "Guy Harry Albright Papers" which include a series of letters from different faculty members around the time of the Slocum controversy.



Figure 1. James Hutchison Kerr Papers, Ms 0081.7, Colorado College Special Collections.

First, I will examine a letter from the faculty member Guy Albright himself. Albright wrote his first impression of former president Slocum:

"At this time came William F. Slocum, fresh from a Congregational pastorate in Philadelphia, I believe, thirty-seven, *strong, ambitious, backed by rich friends in the East, dominating, indomitable, aggressive, persuasive, eloquent, impressive in appearance and address*" (Albright Papers).

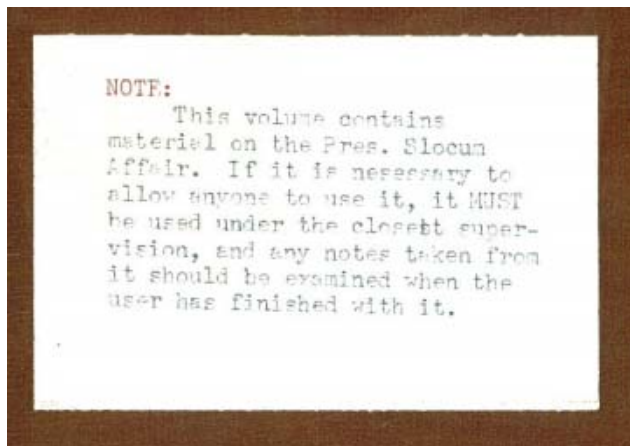


Figure 2. Front cover label of the Kerr papers warning readers of sensitive content related to the Slocum case.

Albright's choice of adjectives set up the president as a powerful opponent with words that have a simultaneously negative and positive connotation, like strong, dominating, indomitable, and aggressive. The juxtaposition with more positively characterizable terms like eloquent and impressive also set up Slocum as a powerful figure. It is interesting to note that Albright included a religious association as well. All together, these many adjectives create a context of tension around Slocum that foreshadows his later commentary: Slocum is powerful, and hard to defeat. Albright writes:

"Someway, while rumors had been abroad for many years, nobody dared expose the *old libertine*. His position and his power as well as *a woman's modesty* protected him through twenty-seven years in Colorado Springs. He was hated.... But until these young women were *goaded to speak, no one had the courage to attack him*" (Albright Papers).

Albright now characterizes Slocum as an "old libertine," showing both a passing of time since he first arrived at the school and also emphasizing his sexually immoral behavior. By

separating Slocum's position from his power, Albright references back to his original list of characterizations that list Slocum as a powerful man in a powerful position. "A woman's modesty," as Albright writes, essentially describes a time period in which women were scrutinized for sexual behaviors, even if they were acts of harassment or violence. This phrase in particular is worth noting as time-period specific. Albright also writes that the women did not come forward freely, but rather were "goaded to speak" — this shows a reluctance to come forward and speak out against a powerful male figure.

It is relevant to mention here that of the "hundreds of women" who spoke of harassment incidents from Slocum, only 22 actually allowed their statements to be written down, and of those, only nine allowed their statements to be written down by Kerr, and only four of those allowed their statements to be attached to their names (Kerr Papers). Albright describes these women as varied, saying: "college girls, women secretaries, wives of professors, married women in town, pretty or homely, old or young, all were liable to shocking caresses and suggestive language from Slocum." The lack of courage is what Albright ascribes to this phenomenon of not reporting, seeing as how Slocum was able to stay in his position for 27 years without any power lapses, though it is well understood after hearing his characterizations of Slocum's power and public status. The language Albright uses regarding the actual incidents stands out as well, as he uses the terms "shocking caresses" and "suggestive language." Caresses, in a modern-day analysis, are positive gestures usually delegated amongst loved ones, and "suggestive language" remains a broad statement. This is the only mention of the actual incidents in his letter, aside from the following: "I long to get away to a place where I can teach without being constantly stirred by rumors and acts which should be quite strange to education." In this sentence, Albright refers to the incidents as mere "acts," that are not necessarily opposed, but "strange" to the realm of education. Clearly, Albright is not as concerned with the actual incidents as he is with Slocum himself.

In summary, Albright speaks as a member of the faculty in saying "...we are standing out for academic freedom against autocratic government." Here are Albright's objectives, and revealed positionality. It is academic freedom (i.e. Albright and the faculty) versus autocratic government (i.e. Slocum and the trustees); there is no mention of ending harassment directly, nor any mention of making women feel more comfortable in the academic setting. In fact, Albright brings in the earlier tension set by his characterizing of Slocum as an opponent, an enemy, with this sentence. To reinforce his pressing concern over the politics of the institution, as opposed to the harassment occurring, he finishes with the following: "the war has affected institutions very unexpectedly and not all in like manner." Albright's commentary in this letter is very much aligned to his positionality as a faculty member wanting to have more evenly distributed power in the authoritative positions of the college, which might explain the very obvious lack of commentary on the incidents and the women themselves. Albright was eventually let go from the college for his apparent disloyalty to the college in challenging Slocum — this firing did make it into the local papers¹.

A different public official's perspective, that of trustee Dean Edward S. Parsons from a joint meeting of the Trustees and Faculty, shows a similar disregard for the incidents and women involved with the Slocum fallout. He said: "The first time the rumors began to come to me about

¹ Albright's dismissal, along with one other faculty member, was described as being caused by "acts of disloyalty to the college, and to former President Slocum" (Alamosa Courier, Volume XXIX, Number 28, July 14, 1917 as accessed through NewsBank in 2019). See page 19 for more information.

Mr. Slocum was about ten years ago” (Kerr Papers). The mention of rumors then translates into “more definite things concerning the relations of Mr. Slocum to women members of the faculty, secretaries, and students,” though the phrase “definite things” does little to describe the actual harmful incidents themselves. A professor with medical training later commented that “the dangers [of Slocum’s relations] were very great and could not be overlooked” and that Slocum had “a pathological condition” (Kerr Papers) — this is the first public official to recognize the actual violence (i.e. danger) of Slocum’s actions, and suggest that it is a mental condition as opposed to a normal occurrence.

On the other hand, one trustee commented: “Many men do the things which Mr. Slocum had done and are not caught, but Mr. Slocum had been caught, and he simply could not be retained in his present position” (Kerr Papers). For this trustee, the problem was a matter of public attention and backlash, not the actual incidents, for the reference to “many men” seems to normalize Slocum’s persistent and widespread harassment as a male trait. The phrase “he simply could not be retained” also demonstrates that the trustees were in favor of trying to retain him in the first place, though ultimately unsuccessful because of the overwhelming accounts against him.

In a letter to a faculty member of the college (the one who recorded all of the proceedings as used as data entries above), lawyer Charles W. Haines wrote the following:

“Our *‘esteemed contemporary’* is suffering from acute Erotomania. Medical men, one at least, here recognize it. How far 'tis a *misfortune* (weakness, physical) and how far *“sin,”* I cannot be called upon to decide, but I am clear in my mind that 'tis *venial compared with chronic lying, hypocrisy, and hideous selfishness — itself conceit*” (Kerr Papers).

Haines’ quotations around “esteemed contemporary” shows his disdain for the public recognition of Slocum, and his use of the term “Erotomania” also refers to Slocum’s highly egoistic personhood as it relates to women’s affection (or lack thereof, though that was unrecognized by Slocum). Haines’ question of whether Slocum’s actions were a physical happening, a “misfortune,” or a more intentional “sin,” show a more sympathetic approach to the powerful man — he, after all, is not one to judge. The politics of the college come up in the later section of that sentence, however, as he makes the ultimate decision that his actions against the women were less derisive than lying, hypocrisy, and selfishness; I believe this comparison was representing all of Slocum’s character flaws. It is telling of the time that the sexual harassment actions would be considered a lighter, and separate, offense than selfishness and lying.

Senator’s Opening Statements at Clarence Thomas Congressional Hearing

Congressman Joe Biden opened the final hearing of the Clarence Thomas confirmation with an opening statement that addressed thematic effects of the allegations against the judge as well as the purpose of the hearing. Biden said:

“Sexual harassment is *a serious matter* and, in my view, any person guilty of this offense is unsuited to serve, not only the Nation’s highest court, but any position of responsibility, of high responsibility in or out of government. Sexual harassment of working women is *an issue of national concern*” (Thomas Hearing Transcript, Library of Congress).

Biden takes the opportunity during this statement to point out the national cultural relevance of sexual harassment as a topic, specifying that the issue of concern during the time was related to

working women; in other words, gender-based harassment in the workplace. He also makes it clear the distinction that any guilty person would be immediately disqualified from positions of responsibility, setting up his later statement concerning the purpose of the hearing. He says:

“...let me make clear that this is not, I emphasize, this is not a hearing about the extent and nature of sexual harassment in America... This is a hearing convened for a specific purpose, to air specific allegations against one specific individual, allegations which may be true or may not be true” (Library of Congress).

Biden narrows down the scope of the focus of the hearing in these sentences to make clear that this hearing is not representative of an answer to a much larger national concern. The congressman also introduces the idea of truth as something that must be uncovered regarding the allegations. This element of judgement inherent in his analysis of the situation proves more complicated and nuanced as he writes about the role of fairness in the proceedings to come.

“In closing, I want to reiterate my view that the primary responsibility of this committee is *fairness*... And without making any judgement about the specific witnesses we will hear from today, *fairness means understanding what a victim of sexual harassment goes through*, why victims often do not report such crimes, why they often believe that they should not or cannot leave their jobs” (Library of Congress).

Biden puts together ideas of the national concern over sexual harassment in the workplace by hinting at the barriers of power and psychological distress that prevent victims from publicly announcing their experiences. Through this statement, he is already advocating for the contextualization of these allegations in the era’s emerging framework for GBV. The pressure of a national audience, and maintaining face underneath the pressure, might explain the reasoning behind his statements. He says in closing:

“Perhaps 14 men sitting here today cannot understand these things fully. I know there are many people watching today who suspect we never will understand, but *fairness means doing our best to understand, no matter what we do or do not believe about the specific charges*. We are going to listen as closely as we can at these hearings... In the end, this hearing may resolve much or it may resolve little, but there are two things that cannot remain in doubt after this hearing is over: First, that the members of this committee are fair and have been fair to all witnesses; and, second, that we take sexual harassment as *a very serious concern* in this hearing and overall” (Library of Congress).

Biden’s statements are honest and self-aware: he addresses his audience (the national public concerned with how sexual harassment is being represented, talked about, and accepted or barred); the positionality and identities of his fellow congressmen (which to some may have seemed unfair for a situation in which empathy and understanding would be required); and finally, the ultimate uncertainty over what this hearing would lead to in terms of Thomas’ confirmation and/or the progression of a national discussion around GBV. His separation of the roles of understanding and belief seems to address an inherent tension in these hearings about the significance of government officials actually respecting a victim of sexual harassment even if that victim is accusing a well-respected judge who might align more closely with the political beliefs and identities of the men than her. An important note is the repetition of his characterizing of sexual harassment as a “very serious concern,” which he did initially in the statement, calling it “a serious matter.”

The following opening statement from Strom Thurmond shows a much different approach to introducing this day of the hearings, possibly due to both congressmen's differing political standpoints. From the beginning, Thurmond brings in the role of truth, and introduces a characterization of Thomas. He says:

“We are here this morning to attempt to *discern the truth* in some rather *extraordinary allegations* made against this nominee, and because Judge Thomas has requested an opportunity to refute these allegations and *restore his good name*” (Library of Congress).

Thurmond sets up the role of congress in these hearings as a discerner of truth and uses the term “extraordinary” to insert his belief that Anita Hill's statements were hardly believable. The congressman also mentions Thomas' “good name,” and focuses the content of this statement on the judge's reactions to this situation as a way of introducing him as the main character for which the audience should feel sympathy. This is a unique characteristic of Thurmond's opening statement, that marks a clear distinction from Biden's statement. Later on, he brings up Thomas' character again, saying that a governmental committee's previous investigation “showed him to be an individual of great character and accomplishment,” and that “witness after witness spoke of the impeccable character, abiding honesty and consummate professionalism which Judge Thomas has shown throughout his career.” These comments obviously lend themselves to a positive viewing and characterizing of the judge, but there also forms an interesting parallel between the characterization of the judge and congressman Thurmond and his fellow members, which I will touch on after analyzing more of his statement. For now, it is important to point out the use of the phrase “abiding honesty” as it describes Thomas, since it connects to the larger theme of finding/discerning truth that Thurmond set up as the purpose of this hearing.

Similarly to Biden, Thurmond mentions the “seriousness” of the topic of sexual harassment by saying: “Mr. Chairman, before we begin, I want to emphasize that the charge of sexual harassment is a grave one and one that each Senator on this committee takes with the utmost *seriousness*.” Here, Thurmond is characterizing all of his fellow congressmen as being fair, and understanding, of the context that Biden had set up prior to his speaking. Interestingly, however, Thurmond goes far to equalize the experiences of all members of the hearing:

“This will be an exceedingly *uncomfortable process for us all*, but a great deal hangs in the balance and our duty is clear, *we must find the truth*” (Library of Congress).

This sentence reads and sounds like an ask for sympathy for all congressmen and witnesses, which seems odd considering that there is nowhere near as much at risk for congressmen as there is for either witness. Again, though, Thurmond brings up the theme of truth as the ultimate goal, which brings us back to the initial set-up of a parallel between his characterization of Congress and Judge Thomas. One of his last comments is as follows:

“While I fully intend to maintain an open mind during today's testimony, I must say that the timing of these statements raises a tremendous number of questions which must be dealt with, and I can assure all the witnesses that we shall be unstinting in our efforts to ascertain the truth” (Library of Congress).

Thurmond describes himself as being open-minded, but also inquisitive as it relates to having many questions about the statements. He presents himself as accountable to the witnesses, and

most importantly for this analysis, as a truth-seeker. This is the third thematic mention of truth in his statement, a significant revelation for his ultimate intentions. The primary task of a judge is to remain impartial and find the truth of all proceedings in order to achieve justice — the primary task of Congress, as set up by Thurmond, is to remain impartial and find the truth behind these allegations. Where Congress' role in these hearings is that of a judge, Thomas himself is a judge; where Congress' mission is to uncover the truth, Thomas is described as having “abiding honesty”; where Congress is supposed to remain impartial and responsible to the public, Thomas is described as having “impeccable character” and “consummate professionalism.” In flattering Thomas with a positive characterization throughout his statement, Thurmond also flatters himself and Congress by developing a simultaneous parallel framework. This flattery could serve multiple purposes — namely, to humanize Thomas and congressmen so as to avoid harsh criticism from the public or to advance the likelihood of Thomas' confirmation by developing a credibility.

Both Biden and Thurmond's opening statements serve the purpose of setting up the issue of sexual harassment as a “serious” issue, worthy of concern and careful consideration, however their approaches at characterization (or lack thereof in Biden's statement) show more nuanced positionalities and goals.

Senator's Opening Statements at Brett Kavanaugh Congressional Hearing

Senator Chuck Grassley delivered the opening statement for the most notorious day of the Kavanaugh hearings in 2018, the day in which both Kavanaugh and Dr. Ford were to provide statements surrounding the allegations of an assault during their high school years. Grassley starts by framing both Dr. Ford and Judge Kavanaugh as victims of this situation, saying: “both Dr. Ford and Judge Kavanaugh have been through a terrible couple weeks.” He continues by saying:

“What *they have endured* ought to be considered by *all of us* as unacceptable and a poor reflection on the state of civility in our democracy... So I want to apologize *to you both* for the way you've been treated. And I intend, hopefully, for today's hearing to be safe, comfortable and dignified for *both of our witnesses*. I hope my colleagues will join me in this effort of a show of civility” (Kavanaugh Hearing Transcript, Washington Post Website).

Grassley's use of the terms “all of us” and “our democracy” aligns him, and the Congress, with the larger audience of a national public. The focus on how both witnesses have been treated is a reference to the public media frenzy surrounding the allegations, though it is of importance to note that Grassley does not make any reference to the matter of assault. Later on, in reference to the widespread media reactions and reporting, Grassley says: “This is a shameful way to treat our witness, who insisted on confidentiality, and — and, of course, Judge Kavanaugh, who has had to address these allegations in the midst of a media circus.” Again, Grassley is emphasizing the mistreatment of both Dr. Ford and Kavanaugh, trying to create sympathy for both individuals. His use of the phrase “a show of civility” in the initial quote, however, serves to describe the hearing as an example of how sensitive and notably partisan matters be handled in a respectful manner. In regard to the matter of partisan matters, however, Grassley decides to play up the party tensions through constant references to how and when these allegations came about in his statement. Following these constant, yet less relevant, references to faulty party actions, Grassley continues to frame his statement around what in his mind is the actual problem at hand: the media's response to these allegations. He says:

“Dr. Ford first raised her allegations in a *secret letter* to the ranking member nearly two months ago in July... Then, only at an 11th hour, on the eve of Judge Kavanaugh’s confirmation vote, did the ranking member refer the allegations to the FBI. And then, sadly, the allegations were leaked to the press. *And that’s where Dr. Ford was mistreated*” (Washington Post).

In Grassley’s mind, the involvement of the press in this issue is more problematic for Dr. Ford than the actual allegations of the assault itself. This framework distracts from the actual issue of the assault allegations at hand and serves to criticize external factors rather than focus on the reasons for the hearing. That being said, he does use the same tone as Biden and Thurmond did in the Thomas hearing by mentioning the “seriousness” of the allegations. He uses this term two times:

“When I received Dr. Ford’s letter on September the 13th, my staff and I recognized the *seriousness* of these allegations and immediately began our committee’s investigation, consistent with the way the committee has handled such allegations in the past” (Washington Post).

“The testimony we will hear today concerns allegations of sexual assault; *very serious allegations*. This is an incredibly complex and sensitive subject to discuss. It is not an easy one to discuss” (Washington Post).

Both of these statements touch on the severity of the issue of sexual assault in a public way, yet Grassley then moves on to disprove the allegations themselves. He initially quotes from Joe Biden from the Thomas hearing to show that the role of the Congress in this matter is to discern the truth of the allegations themselves. He says: “The FBI provided us with the allegations. Now it’s up to the Senate to assess their credibility. Which brings us to this very time.” In assessing the credibility, however, Grassley had already planted some seeds of distrust. He mentioned:

“Nowhere in any of these six FBI reports, which committee investigators have reviewed on a bipartisan basis, was there a *whiff of any issue* — *any issue at all* related in any way to *inappropriate sexual behavior*” (Washington Post).

Not only the reference to a bipartisan review, but also the use of words like “whiff” and the repetition of “any issue” followed by “any way” sets up a direct threat to the credibility of the allegations. Grassley also uses the phrase “inappropriate sexual behavior” to denote the content of the allegations, instead of the perhaps more dramatic or negatively characterized word “assault.” Finally, further support against the credibility of the allegations themselves come in the form of a positive characterizing of Kavanaugh as a highly successful, long-time judge. Grassley says:

“Judge Kavanaugh has served on *the most important* federal appellate court for *12 years*. Before that, he held *some of the most sensitive positions* in the federal government. The president added Judge Kavanaugh to his short list of Supreme Court more than *nine* months ago, in November 2017” (Washington Post).

Grassley’s use of specific numbers for time-frames, concurrent with his statement above where he uses a concrete number to describe the FBI reports, sets up a contrast with the more recent emergence of the allegations. His characterization of Kavanaugh also emphasizes the judge’s

long-standing positive reputation in the court system, and also established credibility and influence.

In contrast to Grassley's evasive and more political responses, senator Dianne Feinstein takes on the issue of sexual assault more head-on. One of her earliest comments in her opening statement is as follows: "...how women are treated in the United States, with this kind of concern, is really wanting a lot of reform." Feinstein also continues with the following statements regarding sexual assault in the U.S.:

"Sexual violence is *a serious problem* and one that largely goes unseen..."

"When survivors do report their assaults, it's often years later due to the trauma they suffered and fearing their stories will not be believed" (Washington Post).

These statements of Feinstein's are reminiscent of Biden's overarching commentary on the nature of sexual harassment in the workforce 27 years ago. Clearly, the significance of barriers to reporting like power dynamics and psychological effects are still relevant to the discourse of GBV in the U.S., though a new emergence is that of visibility. Feinstein uses the term "serious" as a theme in a fashion similar to both Biden and Thurmond in the Thomas hearings. Feinstein actually references back to the Thomas hearings twice in her opening statement, though in very different ways:

"*There's been a great deal of public discussion about the #MeToo movement today versus the Year of the Woman almost 27 years ago. But while young women are standing up and saying "No more," our institutions have not progressed in how they treat women who come forward. Too often, women's memories and credibility come under assault. In essence, they are put on trial and forced to defend themselves, and often revictimized in the process*" (Washington Post).

"Twenty-seven years ago, I was walking through an airport when I saw a large group of people gathered around a TV to listen to Anita Hill tell her story. What I saw was an attractive woman in a blue suit before an all-male Judiciary Committee, speaking of her experience of sexual harassment. She was treated badly, accused of lying, attacked, *and her credibility put to the test throughout the process*" (Washington Post).

The first of these comments from Feinstein seek to address the lack of reform that she had mentioned earlier on in her statement, along with commentary on the false illusion of progress in the discourse around GBV with more and more women speaking out. Her choice of the word "assault" in this context is particularly haunting, with allusions to a multi-layered system of violence for victimized women. The second of her comments that refer back to the older hearing are specifically centered on Anita Hill, the witness who had allegations of harassment from Thomas. The adjectives she uses to describe Hill's experience presenting a statement characterize an incredibly harmful process. In using negative imagery to define the Thomas hearing, Feinstein signals a warning that these hearings are both public, and incredibly important in terms of setting a new precedent for victims coming forward. In fact, her statement below reflects this exact sentiment:

"*The entire country is watching* how we handle these allegations. I hope the majority changes their tactics, opens their mind and *seriously reflects* on why we are here. We are here for one reason: to determine whether Judge Kavanaugh should be elevated to one of the *most powerful positions in our country*" (Washington Post).

The personification of the “entire country watching” serves to dramatize the sentiment in her warning description above and illuminate the role of the public eye. The reference to open-mindedness emulates Biden’s opening statement as well, as well as the thematic reference again to “seriousness.” The call and response of “why we are here” and “we are here for one reason” also adds to the dramatic nature of this comment, and calls attention to the content: the significance of the decision Congress is making. Feinstein’s description of the Supreme Court justice position alludes to power on a national scale — again bringing up the theme of a national conversation and nationwide pressure as well as the more obvious role of power.

Importantly, Feinstein also uses her opening statement to characterize Dr. Ford and Kavanaugh, though doing so in very different ways than Grassley, seeing as how he only spoke of Kavanaugh in positive terms and also neglected to characterize Dr. Ford as anything other than a mistreated witness. The congresswoman uses the following phrases to address Dr. Ford:

“Thank you for coming forward and being willing to share your story with us. I know this wasn’t easy for you” (Washington Post).

“... I am very grateful to you for your strength and your bravery in coming forward. I know it’s hard” (Washington Post).

In both of these statements, Feinstein uses the phrases “thank you” and “I am grateful” to acknowledge the active role Dr. Ford has had to play in these hearings, especially against her original wishes. She also uses the phrase “I know” in both comments, as a sentiment of solidarity and empathy in alignment with Dr. Ford. Lastly, the terms “strength” and “bravery” in the latter comment really cement the positive characterizing of Dr. Ford, especially in contrast to how she characterizes Kavanaugh:

“... more and more people have come forward challenging [Kavanaugh’s] characterization of events and behaviors” (Washington Post).

“This is not a trial of Dr. Ford, it’s a job interview for Judge Kavanaugh. Is Brett Kavanaugh who we want on the most prestigious court in our country? Is he the best we can do?” (Washington Post).

The building opposition to Kavanaugh’s credibility that Feinstein presents in the first comment, as well as the series of questions in the second comment, together create an incredibly negative view of Kavanaugh. Feinstein uses the words “prestigious” and “best” as adjectives that seek to contrast with her view of Kavanaugh — a contrary statement to what Senator Grassley says when talking about his long-standing commitment to the courts.

Initial Data Presentation: General Public Reactions

The public reactions to these three individual cases, specifically regarding the characterization of the three high-profile men, all look very different due to the varying availability of media sources that were used to report and discuss them. In 1917, when the Slocum controversy happened on the Colorado College campus, the only source of media were newspapers. In 1991, when the Thomas congressional hearings were occurring, there were newspapers, magazines, and most importantly, televisions that were able to broadcast the once private happenings of the Supreme Court confirmation process. In 2018, the Kavanaugh hearings were not only broadcast on television, but also all over the internet on various media platforms, bringing in the largest public reception of all three cases — there were also many written and online newspaper, magazine, and podcast segments created in response to the recent hearings. To

find a comparison of the kinds of newspaper coverage that emerged following both the Thomas and Kavanaugh hearings, I searched NewsBank, an online archival database that houses a majority of print publications from U.S. history. I found 8,559 responses from 1991 to the search of the names Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill using NewsBank, and 34,942 to the names Brett Kavanaugh and Christine Ford in 2018.

For the purposes of this paper, I have cultivated a selection of public responses that include characterization of all three men, using available media and other archival sources. For the Slocum controversy, I look at newspaper segments, letters, and written and recorded primary accounts; for the Thomas hearing, I look at newspaper segments, magazine articles, and polling data; for the Kavanaugh hearing, I look at newspaper segments both in print and online, polling data, and social media responses from Twitter.

Student and Local Responses to William F. Slocum

Julia Hassell Lipsey, a graduate of Colorado College in 1917 — the same year former President William Slocum officially submitted his resignation letter — agreed to be interviewed as part of the Colorado College Oral History Collection in 1977. Her reflections as a senior during the time of the Slocum controversy are telling of the early twentieth-century era discourse (or lack thereof) around GBV. In reference to the “improper advances towards the secretaries and college girls” that Slocum was making, she said:

“...that was news to me! I had never heard such an idea in my life! *Things were not talked about in my day.*”

In this quote, Lipsey’s voice is high-pitched, excited, and dramatic — she expresses in her vocal expression the same feelings of shock when she had originally found out what was happening with the former president. Her reference to “things” in the last line stands as an example of the absence of language to describe the harassment incidents themselves during that era as well. She continues:

“*I was completely [shocked], I [realized] my total ignorance of such matters, and between that and my mother’s general Puritanical talk, I simply didn’t talk about it. I thought most of the college didn’t so they would gossip gossip gossip and be horrified, whatever their nature was...*”

Lipsey describes the revelatory moment in this statement about how uninformed she was as a young college student about “such matters,” or in today’s language, the instances of inappropriate sexual behavior against other female students and staff members. She also connects her emotionally shocked state of mind with her “mother’s Puritanical talk,” which denotes a strict religious script concerning such “matters,” or in that case, anything even remotely related to the sexual being. Her last comment also references to the idea that no one was talking about the actual harassment incidents at the college, except through gossip which generally passes through friends or acquaintances by word of mouth. Lipsey repeats the term “gossip” in quick succession, demonstrating the flurry of confusion that emerged following the faculty and trustee actions regarding Slocum’s resignation. Exactly how this information emerged is unclear, however according to Lipsey, there was a more official student response as well. Lipsey mentions that the student body had a meeting:

“It only *broke* graduation week it seemed to me...and we were to go to that meeting and express our opinions that [Slocum] should not be kept as the president or something of that notion... *[the] general consensus was that the students should join the faculty.*”

Lipsey does not extrapolate how exactly the news of the Slocum controversy emerged to the student body, but her use of the term “broke” implies that it was a fast dissemination of information that spread quickly. Similar to professor Albright’s letter describing the two sides of the controversy with the faculty and trustees, Lipsey mentions that the students were to “join the faculty,” or in other words, support the power opposition to the trustees and Slocum. Lipsey’s statements do not mention anything about broader reactions from the city or state to these college affairs, though Albright suggests in his letter that:

“Articles in the local papers stated that the faculty was preparing a report upon college administration and that the trustees were investigating the same matter.”

In my research process, there were no accessible archival newspapers that discussed the report preparation, however there were published reports of the aftermath of the controversy. A Fort Collins, Colorado, based paper, the *Weekly Courier*, addressed the controversy in their July 13, 1917 issue (see Figure 3).

**“FIXTURES” REMOVED
FROM COLO. COLLEGE**

Not a little interest is being taken here in the removal of some of the “fixtures” of Colorado College.

Dean Edward S. Parson and Prof. G. H. Albright, head of the department of mathematics, have been “canned.” Both men have been with the institution for many years. One of them has been there a quarter of a century.

The college board decided that the two were trouble makers and that it was their work which resulted in the retirement of President W. S. Slocum. The board says the men are fired and will stay fired.

In a statement issued, it was declared that for six years Parsons has been trying to gather affidavits of women to cast a cloud on the reputation of Dr. Slocum, but that this effort has not altered the high opinion the board holds for the former president.

The two discharged men say they will appeal to the National Association of College Professors to obtain reinstatement, but the board declares this will avail them nothing.

Figure 3. Newspaper article from the *Weekly Courier*. July 17, 1917.

Under the headline “‘Fixtures’ Removed from Colo. College,” this paper segment reads as follows:

“*Not a little interest* is being taken here in the removal of some of the “fixtures” of Colorado College. Dean Edward S. Parson and Prof. G. H. Albright, head of the department of mathematics, have been ‘canned.’ Both men have been with the institution for many years. One of them has been there a quarter of a century. The college board decided that the two were *trouble makers and that it was their work which resulted in the retirement of President W. S. Slocum.* The board says the men are fired and will stay fired. In a statement issued, it was declared that for six years Parsons has been trying to gather affidavits of *women to cast a cloud on the reputation of Dr. Slocum, but that this effort has not altered the high opinion the board holds for the former president.* The two discharged men say they will appeal to the National Association of College Professors to obtain reinstatement, but the board declares this will avail them nothing.”

From the start, though subtle in effect, this newspaper segment sets up the controversial aspects of Slocum’s resignation by using the phrase “not a little interest” and by using quotes from other sources not mentioned with terms like “fixtures” and “canned.” The paper’s description of these two men, Albright and Parson who are mentioned earlier in this paper, emphasizes their long-standing commitment to the college, and highlights the dissonance between the trustee’s decision by immediately following those two sentences with the accusation that the two were trouble makers. Their

intentions were described in a metaphor (“cast a cloud on the reputation of Dr. Slocum”) but the actual descriptions of what these affidavits were remains at-large, and apparently insignificant, since the proposed “effort” went unacknowledged by the board. Nowhere in this statement is Slocum himself characterized separately by the paper, except through use of his title as “President” and “Dr.” Another Colorado-based newspaper, the Montrose Daily Press, discussed this same controversy on their front page on an issue from September 5th, 1916, though they took a much different approach (see Figure 4). The earlier time frame, and the actual focus on Slocum’s resignation as opposed to the firing of the two faculty members, might explain the reasoning behind some of the noticeable differences in approach.

Figure 4. Newspaper segment from the Motrose Daily Press. September 5th, 1916.

Under the headline “Pres. Slocum, of Colorado College, Resigns After 28 Years of Actual Work” the United Press of Colorado Springs wrote:

“William Frederick Slocum, for 28 years president of Colorado College has tendered his resignation, which has been accepted by the board of trustees. Dr. Slocum will, however retain his position until his successor is chosen, probably about Oct. 1 when he will leave for the east in an effort to *complete the half-million endowment fund* on which he has been working for the last year or more. The fund now totals \$353,000, and Dr. Slocum expects to raise the remainder before Christmas. Dr. Slocum will then be elected president emeritus of the college and he and his wife will continue to make their residence in Colorado Springs.”

This report constructs Slocum’s resignation as an active choice, leaving out the actual controversial nature of his leaving and failing to report on the many reports of sexual harassment against him. In fact, this segment characterizes Slocum as a philanthropist who wants to focus on raising more money for the college he has spent so long working at and for; this approach differs immensely to the first newspaper article examined, which leaves out any general characterization of Slocum. The headline itself also works to build on his long-term service for the college, by making a numerical reference (“28 years”) to his tenure as president. The active verbiage in this passage, like “will retain,” “will leave,” “will then,” and “will continue” all contribute to the idea that this resignation was fully his idea, and just one step in his thought-out plan of raising the endowment.

Apart from these two newspaper segments, the only other information regarding the resignation of Slocum and the firing of the two professors were small, one to two sentence snippets as follows from various papers found in the Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection:

Two Dismissed at Colorado College

“At a meeting of the board of trustees of Colorado College, Dean Edward S. Parsons and Prof. Guy Albright, head of the mathematics department, were notified that their services had been dispensed with. The reasons given by the board in both cases were *nets of disloyalty to the college and to former President W. V. Slocum.*” — From the United Press, as published in *Montezuma Journal*, July 19, 1917, *Mancos Times - Tribune*, July 20, 1917, and *Haswell Herald*, July 19, 1917.

Interesting Pick-Ups

“Albright, an instructor in Colorado College, has been discharged *"because of acts of disloyalty to the college, and to former President Slocum."* — *Alamosa Courier*, July 14, 1917.

“Word has been received here from Colorado Springs that Dr. Clyde Augustus Dunway, formerly president of the University of Wyoming been elected president of Colorado College, following the resignation several months ago of Dr. Wm. Slocum. Dr. Dunway will assume his duties late In August.” — *Montrose Daily Press*, Volume X, Number 5, July 11, 1917.

All of these statements read as purely informational, and purposefully or incidentally vague. Phrases like “disloyalty to the college” offer little to no explanation for the excusal of the two professors, and the phrase “following the resignation” suggests nothing more than a standard resignation of a former college president. Understanding how much information was available to these papers, and the press in general, would be helpful for further analysis, though following the trace of this case beyond the published and spoken record is near impossible.

National Responses to Clarence Thomas

As mentioned earlier, there were 8,559 newspaper article headlines and articles that came up when Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill’s names were searched together on News Bank, an archival newspaper site. While there are so many more responses than those found during the Slocum controversy, public responses to the hearing will be explained through close-readings of two articles of the time and poll reactions. I reviewed sample headlines pulled from an archival search that included both witnesses’ names from October 4th-7th, in 1991. Though they were just a selection of the thousands of reports that emerged in early October of that year, in response to the allegations and the scheduling of the hearings, there are some definite themes that emerged. The terms sex harassment and sexual harassment are used throughout almost all of the news articles I read, and in the place of sexual harassment, terms such as “report,” “claims,” and “charges” are used. The prolific nature of the allegations and hearings are notable, however, through the sheer number of archived news articles relating to the topic. There are varying positionalities within these articles as well, evidenced solely through their titles, based on who is named, who is described, and how the event is being said.

Two articles in particular stand out as worthy of close-reading, for the authors published sensational and fiercely inquisitive editorials in two prominent newspapers. The first was written by John Hanchette for USA Today, titled *“Thomas-Hill Hearings Will Redefine ‘Fairness’ in U.S.”* His perspective, that the hearings were important for the defining of country-specific fairness, or in other words, national morality, rings eerily into the future. He writes:

“The venerable topic of *‘fairness’* mushroomed from Friday's Clarence Thomas hearings *like a rare and fluffy cloud...* We will be arguing about it for years. *The fairness question's context will expand from the Clarence Thomas-Anita Hill sexual harassment wrangle to saturate several layers of American life.*”

Hanchette's vivid use of figurative language makes clear the significance of these hearings as morally confused and controversial. In mentioning "several layers of American life" that will be affected, Hanchette also makes clear that the entire country is involved, whether they know it or not. The author quotes a political research expert at Stanford, John Bunzel, who also went through a confirmation process upon entering the Civil Rights Commission:

"Can men sit in judgment on issues being discussed by women? Is it not time for women themselves to be treated in a wholly different fashion? What is permissible behavior? What is impermissible? *All these questions need redefinition. Up to now, fairness has usually been defined cynically by men...* In terms of genuine sensitivity, we will recognize what a man thinks fair by his rules may turn out to be unfair to a woman if she is a victim. *This will redefine how we think about fairness in this country.*"

No matter the year, these statements — as quoted from Bunzel by Hanchette — are unforgivingly feminist, questioning, and revolutionary. The calling of a "redefinition" of these questions concerning women's equal acceptance in society fits well into the realm of multi-cultural and feminist studies, with the very notion of who defines morality coming into play. Scholar Sonia Sikka writes about the need for separating ideology from morality so those in power are not able to define morality on their own terms (2012); Thomas Csordas' "Morality as a Cultural System?" also draws on anthropological theory to promote an idea of multiple moralities instead of one universal morality as an all-encompassing noun (2013).

In "*Hill v. Thomas*," another article from the fall of 1991 that was published in the magazine *America*, focused primarily on the element of media in these hearings as it relates to civics and politics. Author Thomas H. Stahel—then executive editor of *America* — wrote primarily about the live broadcast of the Thomas Clarence hearing that reached millions of people. He wrote:

"We still do not understand how television is affecting our nation's history... *The instrument by which we now observe political events also changes them.*"

Stahel was concerned about the role of television in the realm of politics, especially as the pressures of the media form itself changed, in his opinion, the way political figures spoke and made crucial decisions. Stahel's latter comment reflects his crucial sentiment: the act of observing inherently changes events being observed. Stahel reflects on the lack of care Congress took when dealing with these hearings and allegations, especially concerning their lack of efforts to ensure privacy. He wrote:

"*Before they knew it, the hearings had migrated, predictably but uncontrollably, into the nation's living rooms, where the outcome, and political fortunes therefore, were unexpectedly at risk.* The charges were uglier than anyone knew, and, under television's bright lights. Senatorial reactions were neither acute nor dignified. A politician's nightmare—which gives hope the scenario will not be soon repeated."

Stahel recreates the dramatic impacts of having a new public media that allowed a rapid dissemination of highly sensitive information, particularly from the point of view of the Senate. Stahel argues that public officials involved in these hearings were in a position where there would be no favorable outcome, despite their best attempts at trying to save face, due to the nature of the sexual harassment charges themselves. To this point, Stahel wrote:

“More importantly, lurid light was cast on a new continent: the whole world of sexual harassment, not terra incognita exactly (women know all about it), but still unexplored by men. Senator Barbara Mikulski (D., Md.) said on David Brinkley’s ABC talk show that the hearings were a national ‘teach-in on sexual harassment.’ ... That is true. But the nation received an even more fundamental schooling in civics, and more particularly, the kind that could be called “television” civics.

Here, Stahel writes of the televised hearings as a major milestone in terms of public attention being turned to GBV issues, in particular, sexual harassment. His separation of women’s knowledge around this topic and men’s ignorance is particularly telling of the era, as it denotes sexual harassment as a gendered issue. Stahel’s introduction of the term “television civics” is also heavily tied to the late 20th century, for with the emerging new media, public official’s behavior was able to be scrutinized more than ever before. This new public attention forced new patterns of self-awareness and sensitivity to a larger audience. While this might be seen as a beneficial growth, the author also critiques this shift:

“In this case, we were served up instant televised hearings, followed by instant nationwide polls, followed by instant reports of the polls, which in the event predicted the outcome of the Senate vote. Is the winner of such a process bound to be, not the more thoughtful contestant, but the one with the more artful poses and soundbites?”

Stahel talks about the order of events following the hearings, suggesting a correlation between national response and congressional votes in favor of Clarence Thomas. He asks a biting question at the end about whether honesty or public presentation becomes more important when matters such as these are publicized so heavily, but also introduces a concept of “the winner,” which denotes a competitive context that might emerge simultaneously with public broadcasting. Stahel later in his article critiques the superficiality of such public actors; for example, he suggests that congress members calling both Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas credible witnesses is a logical fallacy, and one that is only mentioned for the appearance of fairness. Diving into his commentary on the predictive nature of polls, however, it is relevant to discuss the poll reactions to the hearings from 1991.

The American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research provides an in-depth overview on the polling that happened in the fall of 1991 related to the hearings and nomination of Thomas. The following data is taken from their website:

- Initial reactions to Thomas were generally positive. *In Gallup’s first question in July, 52 percent urged a vote in favor and 17 percent a vote against. Three in ten had no opinion.*
- *After Hill’s charges, the public became more interested in the hearings.* In an ABC News question asked soon after her testimony, 62 percent said they had no opinion about whether her charges were true or not. People were divided in a CBS News/New York Times poll whether the charges should be taken seriously because Hill did not make them when the incidents happened. *The balance of opinion on the questions about truth telling was on Thomas’s side in almost all polls throughout the hearings.*
- *All of the 29 polls from major pollsters that asked about confirmation between July 1 and October 14 showed plurality or majority support for Thomas’s confirmation. In many of these polls, there were sizable “don’t know” responses. Opposition bounced around in a narrow range from the low twenties to low thirties.*

- *Many observers predicted that the hearings would change the opinions of two important subgroups, blacks and women. This didn't happen.* At every point in the final polls, a plurality or majority of black Americans supported the nomination. In the final Gallup/CNN poll conducted on October 14, 69 percent said they would like to see the Senate vote in favor of confirming him. Differences by gender were modest throughout on the confirmation vote. In the final CNN/Gallup poll, 57 percent of women said the Senate should vote in favor, 31 percent said it should not, and 12 percent were unsure (AEI 2018).

From the polling data, there are three important trends that emerge: support of Thomas remained consistent, even after Hill's allegations went public; many people were either detached or confused about the allegations and confirmation; and gender and racial identities were less impactful than originally assumed. Ultimately, Stahel was correct that the polls were predictive of the outcome — Thomas won the confirmation by only a few congressional votes. The consistent polling support shown to Thomas as a nominee throughout these hearings might have contributed to the favorable leaning of the congress, however the impact of these polls is hard to tangibly assess. The major confusion or detachment that showed up in polls in terms of whether Hill's allegations were true or not and whether Thomas should be nominated seems indicative of a changing time, one in which the public was not used to participating in such political yet highly personal matters. There is a major contrast between these polling results and the results from the Kavanaugh hearings (see page 24) which might prove a changing role of public opinion. The lack of polling differences despite gender, and the constant support of Thomas accounting for racial identity, also seems surprising, though the intersections of blackness and gender might explain the results. Within the past half century more and more scholars are approaching the concept of intersectionality, understanding and proving the unique inequality that persists for women of color in the U.S. context (Almquist 1975, Crenshaw 1989, Guy-Sheftall 1992). A black woman, in other words, has less power and perceived credibility in a patriarchal, racist society than a black man who has already established himself in positions of power and affluence.

National Responses to Brett Kavanaugh

Using Google Trends, we can see the popular searches of 2018 relating to the Brett Kavanaugh confirmation hearings. In Figure 5, we can see that "Brett Kavanaugh" as a search term spiked in the summer of 2018, then drastically increased during September, the month of the hearings. "Christine Ford" as a search term spiked alongside Brett Kavanaugh in the month of September, as her allegations and statement became widely publicized. These two-name searches are placed alongside the terms "rape" and "sexual assault." The term rape remained a continuously used search term in the year of 2018, though there was a major surge in the month of September, following Dr. Ford's public statement and allegations of attempted rape against Kavanaugh. The term "sexual assault," while less used than "rape," also spiked at this time.

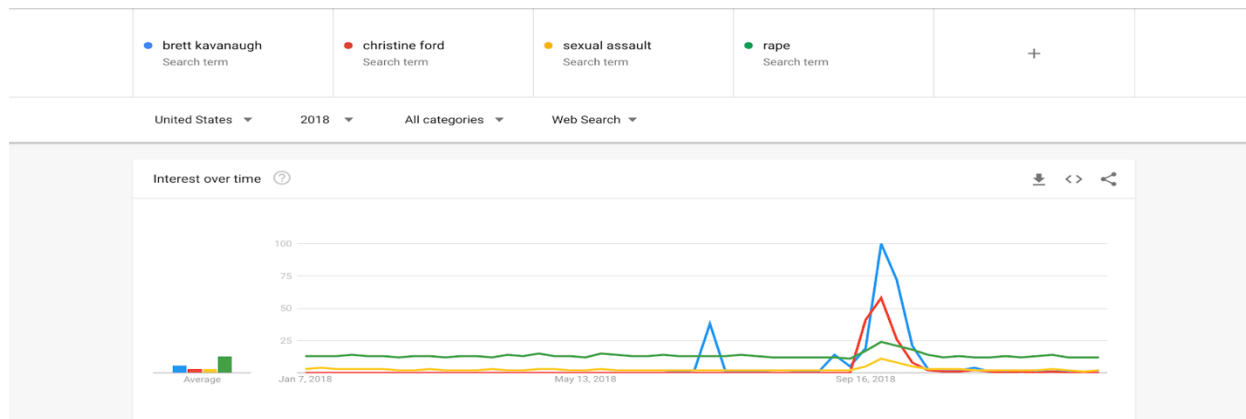


Figure 5. United States. 2018. Web Search.

In Figure 6, we see the same comparison of search popularity for “Brett Kavanaugh” and “Christine Ford,” yet this time alongside the terms “Clarence Thomas” and “Anita Hill.” Both of the former names from the hearings of 1991 were not searched significantly until the month of September, again, when Dr. Ford’s allegations became publicized.

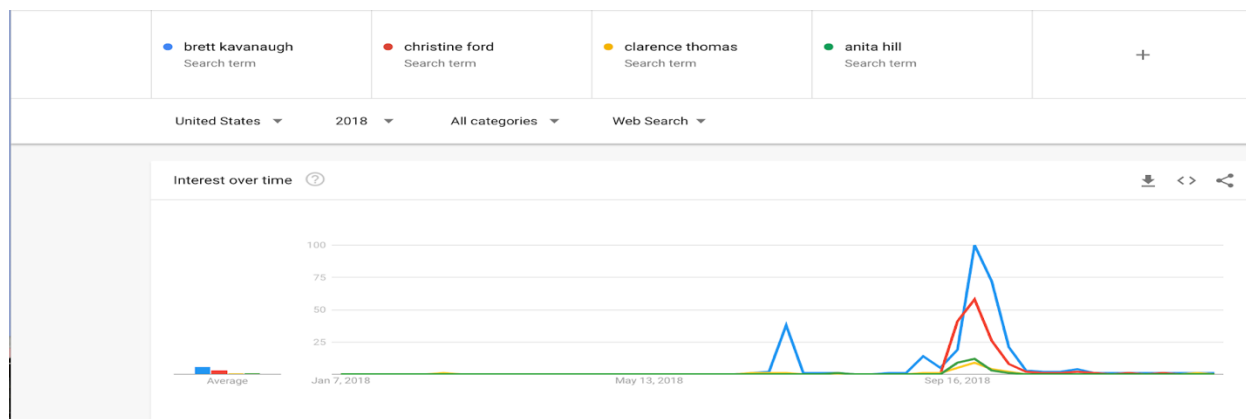


Figure 6. United States. 2018. Web Search.

These searches help contextualize the role of the internet in helping the public acquire information regarding the confirmation hearings of Kavanaugh and provide perhaps a more nuanced understanding of public reactions and media responses to this event below.

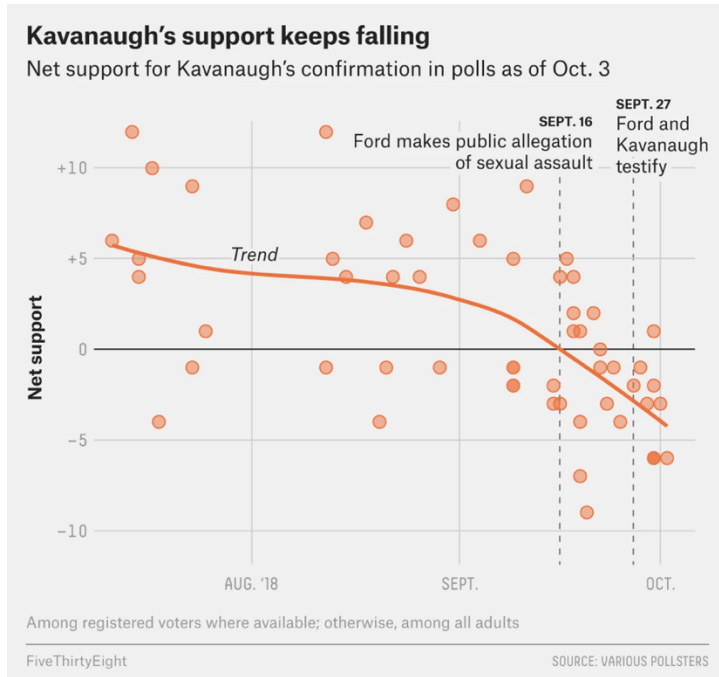


Figure 7. AEI 2018.

According to FiveThirtyEight, an online news publication, polling data showed three major trends throughout the confirmation process: Kavanaugh's support dramatically fell after Ford's allegation went public; from the beginning a majority more men than women supported Kavanaugh as a nominee, and while both men and women's support for Kavanaugh declined after the allegations were released, more women than men were affected in polling results; lastly, the partisan divide of support for Kavanaugh increased, showing a rise in Republican support for the Republican nominee, and a decrease in Democratic and Independent party support (2018). See Figures 7, 8, and 9 for more detailed depictions of this polling data.

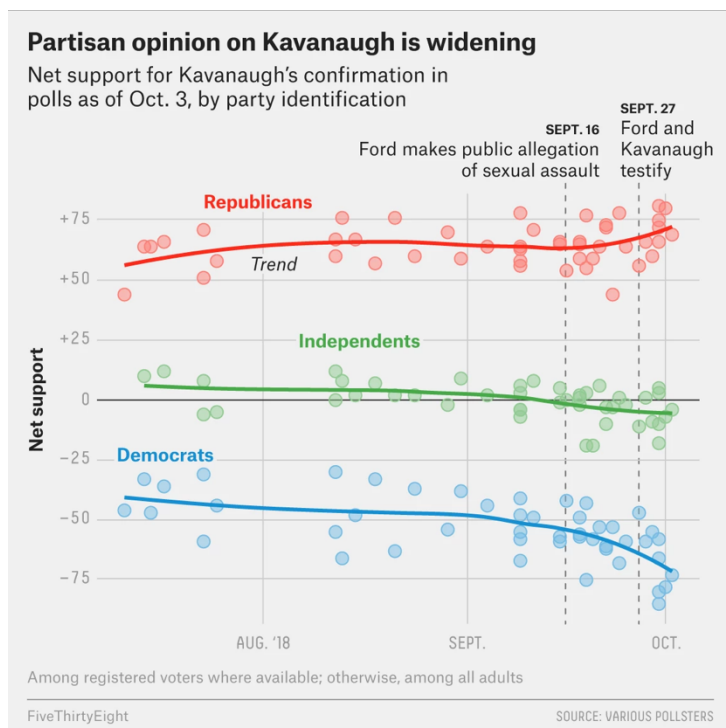


Figure 8. AEI 2018.

committed, problem-oriented, textually based study, CDA cannot shy away from substantially engaging with the new media communications as emerging sites of discursive struggles” (KhosraviNik 2014 cited in Kelsey and Bennet: 2014). Social media platforms such as Twitter offer large amounts of textual data regarding public engagement with such social issues and are therefore important in understanding contemporary GBV discourse.

Using Twitter’s streaming API service, I was able to filter tweets by specific dates and refine them using key search terms. Due to the widespread and prolific nature of responses that came up with just a search about Kavanaugh on the day of the hearing in which Dr. Ford and Kavanaugh gave statements—hundreds of thousands of tweets—I chose to refine my search even more by pairing together key terms thematically. I created a list of four different themes that I was interested in exploring within these Twitter reactions to the hearings, including

Along with polls and a plethora of print and online newspaper and magazine articles related to the Kavanaugh hearings, the social media responses to the live streams of the hearings, available on Facebook, YouTube, and other major platforms, are reflective of public reactions. One platform in particular, Twitter, hosted a wide variety of users responding in real-time to the live broadcasted hearings. In order to understand current trends of the discourse around GBV, as it relates to high-profile men being accused by less high-profile women, focusing primarily on social media responses to the Kavanaugh hearing becomes crucial. As Kelsey and Bennet argue: “The theoretical underpinnings of critical discourse studies are not only relevant to digital media research, ‘but as a socially

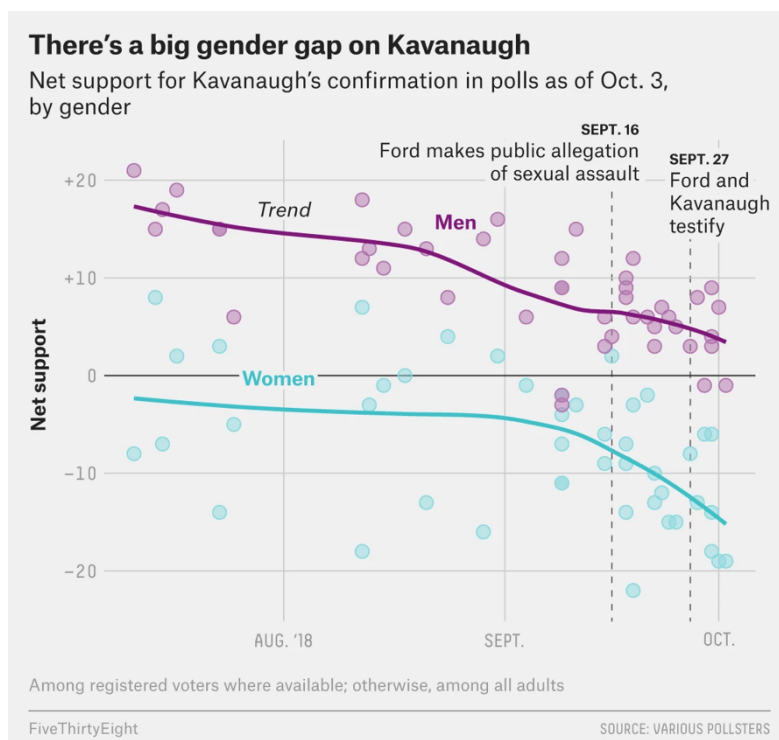


Figure 9. AEI 2018.

the roles of truth and credibility, moral or religious right, survivor narratives, and characterization. I combed through thousands of tweets, Facebook posts, YouTube comments, and news article online comments before narrowing down my themes to the four I listed, after qualifying them as the four most common themes behind every substantial comment.

In order to refine these responses even further, I made sure to have one overarching set of hashtags that was used alongside every thematic word search, these terms include: #Kavanaughhearings; #kavanaugh; #SCOTUS; #SupremeCourt; #hearings; and #DrFord. Responses that included at least one of these hashtags and contained at least one of the words in the thematic categories, are included in my initial data collection. See Table 1 for a more detailed description of these terms, and the results they yielded.

		Search Results
Search Dates	9/26/2018 through 9/28/2018	
Overarching Terms	#Kavanaughhearings; #kavanaugh; #SCOTUS; #SupremeCourt; #hearings; and #DrFord	
Thematic Category #1: Truth	Credible; evidence; belief/believe; truth; legal	410 responses
Thematic Category #2: Moral/Religious Right	God; pray; bible; or moral	129 responses
Thematic Category #3: Survivor Narratives	Survivor; sexual; assault; rape; victim	407 responses
Thematic Category #4: Personal Characterization	Powerful; honest; brave; courageous; respect; believable; angry; distraught; slut; credible; dumb; blonde; alcoholic; intelligent	324 responses
Total Responses Collected		1,270 responses

Table 1. Twitter search terms and hashtags used to collect social media responses as data points for analysis.

After refining my search for social media responses to corresponding, thematic Tweets, I coded all 1,270 responses using NVivo for certain content, related to the overarching themes. All of the coding terms I used can be seen below in Figure 10, the flow chart.

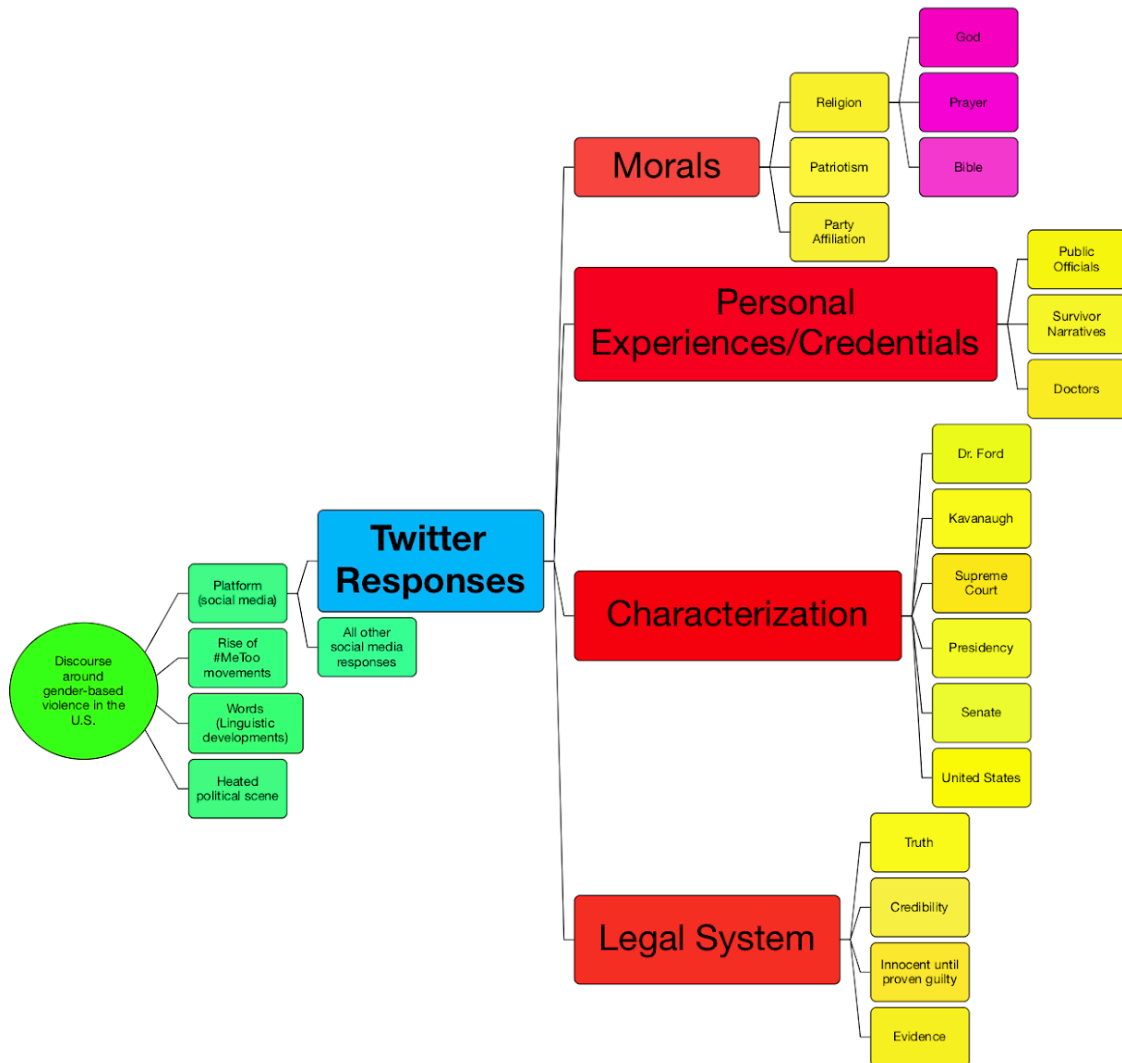


Figure 10. Flow map of the coding process of collected Tweets as it relates to the broader research topic.

Characterization became the focus of my coding as I read through the responses, since a large number of them were actively characterizing subjects involved with the hearings including Dr. Ford, Kavanaugh, the President, the Senate, the Supreme Court, and the U.S. as a whole. The most prominent overlaps in characterization coding can be seen in Table 2 below, with cross-references to various content themes.

	Dr. Ford	Kavanaugh	Credibility	Evidence	Party Affiliation	Truth
Dr. Ford	██████	78	90	17	41	22
Kavanaugh	78	██████	121	37	88	41
President	6	27	14	5	14	3
Senate	41	77	79	21	74	29
Supreme Court	6	14	4	0	4	0
United States	4	10	6	2	5	4

Table 2. Coded subjects of Tweets compared to coded topics of Tweets showing the most popular areas of overlap.

From the table, we can see that not surprisingly there is a much higher cross-coding of political components with Kavanaugh than Dr. Ford; namely, references to the President, Senate, and Supreme Court with Kavanaugh are all almost more than double the references to those and Dr. Ford. In terms of Party Affiliation, the subjects of Kavanaugh and Senate also brought the most responses, with Dr. Ford at nearly half of both of them with only 41 cross-references. Kavanaugh's name is also mentioned more often when in reference to the U.S., compared to Dr. Ford. Credibility was the most popular coding sub-category, below the four major thematic categories, with 90 responses cross-referenced to Dr. Ford and 121 to Kavanaugh. Interestingly, there were also 79 cross-references to the Senate as well. Truth as a category brought in the most responses in regard to Kavanaugh and the Senate with 41 and 29 respectively, though Dr. Ford also had 22 responses related to truth.

After seeing major crossovers between the themes of credibility, evidence, party affiliation, truth, and characterization of the major actors in these hearings, it is important to see a representation of some of those tweets. Using the coding cross-references, I have pulled 17 tweets centered around themes of characterization of Kavanaugh. Characterizations of Dr. Ford are also included, though merely as counter-points.

Negative Kavanaugh Characterization / Credibility

#	Tweet	Analysis
1	<p>“What a surprise: Dr. Ford, a highly-educated, helpful, calm and composed woman who bravely recounted her trauma — is more credible than — A volatile, combative, evasive, and perjury-prone Brett Kavanaugh who filibustered when he couldn’t straight up lie. #KavanaughHearings”</p>	<p>The contrast between the adjectives used to characterize Dr. Ford and Kavanaugh in this tweet is dramatic. The tone is accusatory towards Kavanaugh, and the ultimate comparison the author makes is about credibility. The introductory phrase of “what a surprise” shows irony, showing a sense of frustration from the author’s point of view towards the hearings. The main theme of Kavanaugh’s characterization in this tweet is focused around violent and dishonest tendencies.</p>
2	<p>“Angry white men screaming about women’s sexual assault accusations is beyond tone deaf. #KavanaughHearings”</p>	<p>The usage of the terms “angry,” “white,” and “men” here are presumably in reference to Kavanaugh and Congress members that fit the given description. The specificity of race and gender in this statement is purposeful and help set up elements of privilege related to identity. The tone of this tweet is angry, and meant to add a broader, critical perspective to the hearings. The main theme of Kavanaugh’s characterization in this tweet is focused around racial and gendered privilege and anger.</p>
3	<p>“Judge #Kavanaugh has never known anything but privilege. He makes over 200K a year. He paid 91K to join a country club. His family has never & will never want for anything. And I’m supposed to weep for him because this credible allegation is ‘ruining his life.’ Fucking spare me.”</p>	<p>This tweet includes specific references to large sums of money relating to Kavanaugh’s income and memberships, which emphasize his high socioeconomic status. These references, in combination with the sentiment that him and his family will always have everything they want in life, serve as a contrast to what the author sees as a ridiculous statement made during the hearings that the allegations are harming all of their lives. Considering the use of a swear word in the last statement, as well, this tweet is easily read as angry, and frustrated. The main theme of Kavanaugh’s characterization in this tweet is focused around economic privilege.</p>
4	<p>“Media are gushing over Brett Kavanaugh's angry rambling opening</p>	<p>The author uses irony in this tweet to show their negative judgement towards the seemingly</p>

	<p>statement. Apparently, if you are a man accused of sexual assault by a woman, facts don't matter so long as you yell loudly and claim having to respond makes you the victim. #KavanaughHearings”</p>	<p>positive media representations of Kavanaugh’s opening statement — as evident by the word “gushing” compared to the author’s description of his statement as “angry” and “rambling.” The gender distinction in this tweet (“man” vs. “woman”) is also emphasized in this tweet, showing the author’s belief that the media is biased. The main theme of Kavanaugh’s characterization in this tweet is focused around gendered privilege and anger.</p>
5	<p>“He was just a 17-year-old boy who on occasion had too many beers. If only that ‘he was just a kid’ lens applied to #TrayvonMartin to #JordanDavis to #TamirRice and on and on... None of whom, btw, were ever accused of sexual assault. Only of living. #KavanaughHearings #Privileged”</p>	<p>This tweet is an example of powerful commentary relating to race-based privilege. The author sets up the justifications and excuses for Kavanaugh’s received allegations of attempted rape of Dr. Ford in high school next to the names of young black kids who were shot and killed only because of racial profiling and racist police brutality. The use of the hashtag “#Privileged” also demonstrates the author’s intentions. The main theme of Kavanaugh’s characterization in this tweet is focused around racial privilege.</p>
6	<p>“I’m a #Kavanaugh supporter. I believe him. But he needs to man up now and stop the crying and sniffing. It’s making him look too weak.”</p>	<p>The author aligns themselves on the side of Kavanaugh, yet then demands that he “man up,” which involves suppressing his public emotional response. The tweet is primarily concerned with Kavanaugh’s public appearance, especially concerning his male identity. The main theme of Kavanaugh’s characterization in this tweet is focused around emotion and gender.</p>
7	<p>“I’ve seen dramatic over-acting before, but it’s usually in porn films. Any moment now, Brett Kavanaugh going to break out the Bible and quote sweet baby Jesus. Kavanaugh appears not only to be an inveterate liar — but just a really f*cking creepy dude. #KavanaughHearings”</p>	<p>The author of this tweet compares Kavanaugh’s presence during the hearings to acting in porn, a major critique of his credibility and honesty. The author then mentions the Bible and Jesus as a theme of Kavanaugh’s acting, or lying, in a mocking tone through the use of the verb “break out” and phrase “sweet baby Jesus.” Then, the author directly criticizes Kavanaugh as a liar and a creepy man. The main theme of Kavanaugh’s characterization in this tweet is focused around religious affiliation and dishonesty.</p>

Positive Kavanaugh Characterization / Credibility

#	Tweet	Analysis
8	<p>“Judge Kavanaugh was credible, forceful in his denial, and heartfelt. He should be confirmed immediately! #KavanaughHearings”</p>	<p>The pairing of the adjectives “forceful” and “heartfelt” in this tweet sets up an apparent tension, but also works to justify his position in the Supreme Court. The main theme of Kavanaugh’s characterization in this tweet is focused around credibility and personal qualifications.</p>
9	<p>“This is why Christine Ford shamelessly attempted to defy centuries of basic jurisprudence by demanding she give her statement AFTER Kavanaugh. He’s believable. She’s Lifetime TV for Women. #KavanaughHearings”</p>	<p>The author of this tweet critiques Dr. Ford’s delivery of her statement as well as her choice to go after Kavanaugh. The active construction of that choice, through verbs like “attempted” and “demanding,” adjectives like “shamelessly,” and the phrase “defy centuries of basic jurisprudence” negatively characterizes Dr. Ford as an evil figure. The author then says only two words relating to Kavanaugh that indirectly show he is no-fuss, and obviously believable. The last statement further constructs Dr. Ford as a hysterical woman, for Lifetime TV is oftentimes related to soap operas and dramatic movies. The reference to gender, through both the repetition of “he’s...” and “she’s...” statements one after the other and the use of “Women” in that last line, further creates a line of contrast between the two figures. The main theme of Kavanaugh’s characterization in this tweet is focused around believability.</p>
10	<p>“We are witnessing a man defend his name, family, & honor. I believe Judge Brett Kavanaugh. #KavanaughHearings”</p>	<p>The use of a “we” in this statement sets up the rest of the tweet’s analysis of the hearings as being a universal experience, in which Kavanaugh “successfully” protected the elements of his life that are most central to his identity as a “man”: “his name, family, & honor.” The switch back to “I” in the second sentence confers a supportive and confident claim of the author. The main theme of Kavanaugh’s characterization in this tweet is focused around gender identity and believability.</p>

11	<p>“If you think #Kavanaugh is lying then he deserves an Emmy, and an Oscar for best performance. His emotion for those who stood up for him is palpable. Name the actor that could deliver this if it weren’t true. No one but the best actors could pull this off. He is telling the truth.”</p>	<p>The phrase “if you think…” conveys an angry and accusatory tone towards those who thought Kavanaugh was lying in his statement, for the author then uses commonly accepted American acting awards like the “Emmy” and “Oscar” to show how implausible it would be for Kavanaugh to be lying. The description of his emotion as “palpable,” and the further accusatory call and response (“name the actor” then saying “no one…”) also serve this purpose. The matter-of-fact statement in the end provides a resolution to the series of accusatory questions and statements. The main theme of Kavanaugh’s characterization in this tweet is focused around believability and honesty.</p>
12	<p>“WE ARE WITH YOU JUDGE KAVANAUGH we believe you our hearts break with you #ConfirmKavanaughNow #KavanaughHearings #MAGA”</p>	<p>The use of all-caps in this tweet seeks to emphasize the support of Kavanaugh and the statement of solidarity following. The three uses of “we” in these three distinct yet joint statements also acts to emphasize a universal kind of support for him. The metaphoric phrase “our hearts break with you” adds more drama and emotional intensity to this sentiment as well. The use of the hashtag #MAGA is in reference to “Make America Great Again,” the slogan of President Trump who nominated Kavanaugh. There are no adjectives to characterize Kavanaugh, but rather direct statements of support. The main theme of Kavanaugh’s characterization in this tweet is focused around believability.</p>
13	<p>“I watched the whole thing, I’m exhausted God Bless Judge #Kavanaugh, he is an honorable & humble man. And Thank You Senator @LindseyGrahamSC ***Christine Blasey Ford is a Psychologist, who has not one, but two Therapists.. That says it all… #KavanaughHearings”</p>	<p>The introduction to this tweet creates a certain level of credibility for the author, though the phrase “exhausted” suggests that watching the hearings was an emotional investment for them. The use of the phrase “God Bless,” denotes a very high level of support for Kavanaugh, and the adjectives “honorable” and “humble” fit in with the popularly named characteristics of a Christian man. The thank-you to Lindsey Graham, a figure that sided heavily in favor with Kavanaugh during the hearings, also adds another level of credibility and support for their point. The aside, in reference to Dr. Ford’s</p>

		<p>occupation and personal counselors, seems to serve a point that the author feels does not need any further explanation. The mockery is supposedly towards her inability to maintain her mental health all on her own, though that is not a medically (nor morally) sound critique or assumption. The main theme of Kavanaugh’s characterization in this tweet is focused around his religious identity.</p>
14	<p>“The #KavanaughHearings are a very important moment in American history. Can a crying woman with no evidence of any kind ruin the career of a innocent man. Let’s see what happens. God help us if we choose wrongly.”</p>	<p>The first statement in this tweet sets up the importance of the commentary to follow, and brings in an element of patriotism. The author then describes the hearings in a very pointed fashion, characterizing Dr. Ford as a “crying woman” and Kavanaugh as an “innocent man.” If the contrast in adjectives were not enough, the author also focuses on how Dr. Ford’s allegations would be ruining a career, based on the assumption the allegations are false, which completely disregards the possibility that her allegations are true, in which case it was indeed her life that had been ruined to a degree. The use of “let’s” and “us” in the following two sentences again align the author with a larger audience, perhaps the country as noted earlier. The final phrase incorporates God, and sets up the notion of false consequences if the outcome turns against the author’s wishes. The main theme of Kavanaugh’s characterization in this tweet is focused around credibility and innocence.</p>
15	<p>“I believe the victim. The victim is Kavanaugh and his family. Heart breaking to watch Kavanaugh & his wife behind him so affected by vicious hit job from the left. #KavanaughHearings”</p>	<p>The author of this tweet sets up their opinions firmly from the very beginning, while utilizing a flip of the common narrative surrounding the hearings, and sexual harassment/assault cases in general, that Dr. Ford was the victim. It is a powerful linguistic element, that when followed by adjectives like “heart breaking,” “so affected,” and “vicious,” creates a dramatic analysis of the hearings themselves. The mention of “hit job from the left” also introduces a theme of party affiliation, and negatively characterizes the allegations as a cruelly-intentioned political move. Dr. Ford is not mentioned at all in this</p>

		tweet. The main theme of Kavanaugh’s characterization in this tweet is focused around victimhood.
16	“I am horrified that Judge Kavanaugh & his family had to endure such a crucifixion by 95% of the media. I absolutely believe #Kavanaugh will be seated on our Supreme Court, because he went on the offense today & showed America he is a man of character”	The author clearly states their negative reaction (“horrified”) to the media representations of Kavanaugh. They draw a possible religious parallel through the use of the term “crucifixion,” and the reference to “family” which alludes to the morally upright symbolic presence of a unified Christian family. Then the author uses the phrase “went on the offense,” making a reference to a game or sport, a seemingly odd contrast to the earlier reference. Later on, the author then mentions America, creating a larger audience and making the assumption that the entire country was able to see that he was “a man of character.” The main theme of Kavanaugh’s characterization in this tweet is focused around credibility.
17	“This is the greatest thing I’ve ever seen. An INCREDIBLE Man. God bless this #Kavanaugh family. In his remarks, he talked of his daughter who told him “we should pray for the woman” ... that did it. Raw emotion took hold, for him, and for us. #KavanaughHearings”	The first three statements in this tweet are all dramatic, using different linguistic elements to show the author’s opinion of Kavanaugh. Words like “greatest” and “incredible,” usage of all-caps for the latter word, and the phrase “God bless” all extend great praise to Kavanaugh. The author also directly references a quote from his daughter, which acts as an example of Kavanaugh and his family’s character. The final statement refers to “raw emotion,” and says it “told hold, for him, and for us” — this positioning puts a broad audience (an unknown “us”) in line with Kavanaugh, a linguistic act of solidarity. The main theme of Kavanaugh’s characterization in this tweet is focused around credibility and religious affiliation.

The negative characterizations of Kavanaugh are centered around perceptions of his violent and dishonest tendencies, emotions such as anger, religious affiliation, and racial, economic, and gendered privilege. The positive characterizations of Kavanaugh are centered around perceptions of general credibility, personal qualifications, believability, gender identity, honesty, religious identity, innocence, and victimhood. There are significant crossovers between the positive and negative characteristics in the themes of religious affiliation and gender identity, however there are also significant conflicts between the two, namely in terms of perceptions of honesty and credibility. Tweets related to characterization regarding Dr. Ford were also plentiful,

however they will not be focused on in this presentation of data since I am focusing on the media reactions to accused high profile men throughout history.

Along with all of these tweets relating to characterization, which was one of the largest themes I discovered in my research, I also found many tweets that related to personal experiences of the Twitter users themselves. Stories about personal experiences included sexual assault narratives, professional credentials, and statements relating to gender identity. The significance of the presence of tweets relating to Dr. Ford, and personal experiences, is important to discuss within the context of changing media and a changing GBV discourse in the U.S.

Data Analysis

The previous sections of this paper detail selections of responses from both public officials and the general public in regard to the Slocum controversy and the congressional hearings of Thomas and Kavanaugh. While surface-level analysis was presented throughout, this section in particular will focus on broad-scale analysis that seeks to answer the research question of how changing media has affected the characterization of high-profile men accused of sexual harassment and assault. Using narrative, linguistic and new media theory, I hope to illuminate the significance of shifts regarding characterization of public-facing and powerful perpetrators in the larger discourse around GBV.

To begin where we are now, in the age of the Internet and social media, I refer to an anthropological and media studies book titled *Virtual Ethnography*, by Christine Hine. She writes that the Internet is “a text that is both read and written by its users” — in this case, internet users are tasked not only with consuming the mass amounts of information available online relating to any given subject, but also with forming an opinion, or stance, and constructing their own voice within the abyss of information (2000: 147). In referencing back to Moberg and Harvey from page 4, this participation involves immersion into an “environment of uncertainty” (2013:312). Hine also writes that the internet is “shaped by social context,” where “perceptions of what a medium is for and what it symbolizes can be influential in determining when it is used” (Trevino et al 1987 in Hine 2000: 3). *Users are actively contributing to online discourse, and the internet and social media platforms themselves are actively involved in the process of culture creation.*

Within the framework of the former statement, the role of social media could be seen as allowing a freedom of expression unknown to the general public before the internet — this definition then explains the popularity of Twitter responses to the Kavanaugh hearing, since internet users felt the need to respond and express their own viewpoints. This also ties into performance theory, and the notion that the “Internet (and the offline world) are simultaneously performative spaces and performed spaces” where people “try to behave appropriately within them” (Hine 116). While there are no set rules for participating in a social media context, except the moderation rules provided by the platform itself (Twitter 2019), there are cultural rules that are being followed through performance on social media that correlate to each user’s own cultural background and identity, as well as cultural norms and societal implications at-large, such as dominant patriarchal systems of thought. That is not to say that this online performance is not personal or relevant, however: linguist Catherine Riessman writes that “[performed] identities are not inauthentic, rather they are situated and accomplished with an audience in mind” (2007:106). To explore the ways in which these identities are performed, and explored, on social media, I refer to Hine one last time in her mention of narrative: “virtual community is just one of the many different kinds of narrative,” and narrative can be used as an “alternate framework for understanding online social phenomena” (Hine 2000: 20). I focus on the

narratives that are portrayed through Tweets relating to the Kavanaugh hearings, as well as the narratives that are portrayed in newspapers and interviews from my other two historical cases, in this paper. Riessman writes that “narratives don’t speak for themselves,” for they are positioned in a much broader context (2007: 3). In this case, the narratives I focus on are centered within the discourse around GBV in the U.S.

In searching through many online comments on social media platforms and news sites, the four main themes I found were references to the legal system, the moral right, personal experiences or credentials, and characterization. For this project, I chose to focus on Tweets relating to the characterization of Kavanaugh because I saw each response as a direct form of identity construction, where the Twitter users either aligned or opposed themselves with him. Riessman shows that there are many functions of a narrative, namely, to remember/make sense of the past, argue with stories, persuade a possibly skeptical audience, engage an audience, entertain, mislead audiences, and mobilize others towards action (2007), and while it is unclear exactly what the intentions of each narrative in these Tweets are, I find them to align mostly with making sense of the world and protecting a personal identity. For example, the negative characterizations of Kavanaugh were centered around perceptions of his violent and dishonest tendencies, emotional states such as anger, religious affiliation, and racial, economic, and gendered privilege — for purposes of analysis, I argue that each user found a different aspect of his character that felt like a threat to their own identities, and focused their narrative of the hearings around that threat. Perhaps they felt his religious affiliation and references throughout the hearing were harmful to their own lack of religious affiliation, or contrary to their own religious beliefs. It is telling that Kavanaugh’s religious affiliation was also mentioned frequently as a positive form of characterization in some of the Tweets. These attribute crossovers, where Kavanaugh’s multiple identities are used both for and against him in characterization, signify the active construction of his character by the Twitter users, for their own justification purposes. Another complication comes from the fact that many Twitter users commented on his history of dishonesty, while other users commented on his history of upholding the law and remaining truthful — *how can these conflicting ideas both exist in the realm of characterization commentary?* The answer, I suggest, emerges with ideas of self-interest as presented by the previously cited French philosopher Bourdieu.

Bourdieu developed an entire structure for analyzing human behavior through concepts such as habitus, capital, and misrecognition. Bourdieu writes about habitus as an inherently human condition in which individual’s behaviors are influenced by both the individual themselves and the social realm, a departure from a totalizing functionalist view but also a distancing from a complete notion of free will (Moberg 2013). The idea of habitus therefore reflects my commentary that social media operates like an echo-chamber, though I want to stress the agency of actors within the online social realm. *Without agency, there might be no way of moving beyond the current discourse and viewing it from a postmodern framework.* Bourdieu’s ultimate, and perhaps more relevant, argument seems to be that “while self-interest is the driving force of human behavior, the final result is that social struggles are the main facet of social arrangements in any specific field, because individuals try to maximize their gains and accumulate resources under different forms of capital (economic, social, cultural, symbolic)” (Navarro 2006:14). The ambition for capital, which is defined and provided by the social realm, in turn motivates individual’s behaviors, causing major clashes between groups vying for the same capital. Whether or not the ambition, and motivation, is clearly understood or recognized by these individual actors is contestable, though I view it as dependent on one’s own identity.

Within the context of the GBV discourse, I see polarization as a noticeable effect of individuals trying to establish their own capital in the field of public discourse, an effect that inherently distracts from a broader concern with these issues.

A final theory that I want to focus on for analyzing these Twitter responses is that of binary oppositions, which was most notably written about by Claude Levi-Strauss in his adapted, quasi-linguistic cultural studies (Moberg 268: 2013). Levi-Strauss wrote that binary oppositions compose the underlying principal quality of the human mind, including such distinctions like nature/culture, boy/girl, and good/evil, however Moberg stresses that this viewpoint universalizes a perhaps more distinctive, culturally-specific set of binaries, that may or may not be consciously recognized (2013: 269). In the Western U.S. discourse around GBV, there does seem to be a highly recognized prevalence of this binary-based way of thinking and responding (Ronai et al. 1997, Hlavka 2014), yet there are unique strains of it. For example, in the selected Tweets there were specific distinctions that emerged between victim/perpetrator, right/wrong, and trust/distrust. The notion that binary oppositions are culturally-specific, nuanced, and not always recognized informs my own revelations about this discourse. *Importantly, I want to frame binary oppositions as an act, rather than a given, that allows individuals more agency when entering this discourse.*

Referencing back to Tweet #15, on page 33, the author utilizes the existing binary of victim/perpetrator to emphasize their own positionality: “I believe the victim. The victim is Kavanaugh and his family. Heart breaking to watch Kavanaugh & his wife behind him so affected by the vicious hit job from the left #KavanaughHearings.” The author is consciously flipping the script, to force a new perspective on the hearings in which the accused then becomes the victim, and the accuser (and associated party) then becomes the perpetrator. Responses such as this one clearly demonstrate the powerful impacts of binary oppositions, however oftentimes they might be relied on rather than consciously used to further a point. The author’s intentions are nearly impossible to assume just through the Tweet, however linguistically, the narrative is set up to support Kavanaugh and his family. I argue that the author’s own identities — whether they be centered around strong family ties, party affiliation, or past experiences of accusations — are what motivated this response and characterization. Ochs and Capps, two prominent narrative linguist researchers, write that “uncertainty and doubt fuel narratives that seeks to establish a true self” (1997). The “environment of uncertainty” that Moberg writes about in reference to the internet can be directly interwoven into this notion, where *internet users utilize social media platforms to construct narratives that establish their own identities.*

This process, what I call *defensive othering*, becomes intensified within the GBV discourse due to the “serious” nature of such matters. I believe that an individual, subconscious fear leads people to feel either a literal or ideological identity threat when hearing about cases, movements, or events like the Kavanaugh hearing, which then translates into their focus on that specific case and a focus on positioning actors within that case as right or wrong. This focus then introduces a certain binary and allows individuals to distance themselves from the broader implications of an issue that transcends just that case. Returning to Navarro’s commentary of Bourdieu’s concept of “misrecognition,” the notion that “the origins of social inequalities” are “part of a *mystifying discourse*” characterizes my very reasons for creating a theory in the first place. The discourse around GBV, as I see it right now, remains clouded by its divisive, highly affectional, and personal nature. *De-mystifying the discourse means stripping these responses down to the very core of their narratives, which I believe are centered around individual identities and fear.* By posting online, and consequently establishing one’s own identity and

one's own claim to knowledge/truth, individuals become powerful actors in the larger scheme of the discourse around GBV.

Looking back at the Google Trends data from 2018, on page 23, we can see that searches for the terms “rape” and “sexual assault” spiked around the time of the hearings, showing a public interest in GBV-related issues as they were emerging on a more public platform. People were engaged with understanding what was happening with these hearings — and they wanted to participate in the national conversation through social media responses, as just one example central to this project. To me, this signifies that *the presence of the internet and social media again creates not only a freedom, but a need, for individual participation and expression within this public discourse*. Terms like “tone deaf,” as used in Tweet #2 on page 29, signifies an increasing linguistic vocabulary for encouraging this participation in the discourse as well: “Angry white men screaming about women’s sexual assault accusations is beyond tone deaf #KavanaughHearings.” “Tone deaf” is a phrase that has only emerged recently in the U.S. as a metaphorical signifier of someone who does not have the ability to critically reflect or comprehend the full scope of an event, or identity-related privilege. This expansion of vocabulary related to reflection in critical discourses, like the one around GBV, reflects a form of “vernacularization” that anthropologist Sally Merry talks about in her anthropological work (see page 4), and shows a culture shift around the role of public participation in political occurrences. Movements such as #MeToo also demonstrate this cultural shift and should be acknowledged as being equally important for understanding changes in the GBV discourse.

The increased public involvement in this discourse, as it relates to personal identity, can be seen in the polling results from the Kavanaugh hearing as well: Kavanaugh’s support from both women and men dramatically fell after Ford’s allegation went public, but more women than men were affected in polling results; also, the partisan divide of support for Kavanaugh increased, showing a rise in Republican support for the Republican nominee, and a decrease in Democratic and Independent party support (*AEI* 2018). Gender identity and party affiliation directly correlated to the support or lack thereof for Kavanaugh, a unique contrast to the polling results from the Thomas hearings. In the polling data from the Thomas hearings, we see that support of Thomas remained consistent, even after Hill’s allegations went public; many people were either detached or confused about the allegations and confirmation; and gender and racial identities were less impactful than originally assumed, though as mentioned earlier on page 23 the intersections of blackness and gender might explain the results. *The major confusion or detachment that showed up in polls in terms of whether Hill’s allegations were true or not and whether Thomas should be nominated seems indicative of a different era in which public discussion about GBV was not yet common*.

The lack of gendered differences in polling for the Thomas hearing, compared to the Kavanaugh hearing, is also intriguing due to the assumption of the era that sexual harassment and sexual assault were purely gendered issues. I refer back to Stahel’s article on page 22 where he separates women’s knowledge of the topic and men’s ignorance of the topic. Perhaps the general confusion stems from the fact that the Thomas hearing was the first event of its kind, in which GBV issues were broadcasted all over the country. Stahel himself wrote of the televised hearings as a major milestone in terms of public attention being turned to GBV issues, with “television civics” entering the scene for the first time (1991). The effects of “television civics” on the congress members involved in the Thomas hearing speak for themselves through the opening statements that were delivered. Both Biden and Thurmond’s opening statements characterized sexual harassment as a “serious” issue, worthy of concern and careful

consideration, however they addressed the main actors (Thomas and Hill) in very different ways that revealed their positionality. Namely, Biden left out mentions of Thomas and Hill, whereas Thurmond positioned himself and Congress as being in line with Thomas, and against Hill. Thurmond's characterization (where Congress' role in these hearings is that of a judge, Thomas himself is a judge; where Congress' mission is to uncover the truth, Thomas is described as having "abiding honesty"; where Congress is supposed to remain impartial and responsible to the public, Thomas is described as having "impeccable character" and "consummate professionalism," on page 12) utilizes the same binary oppositions mentioned earlier with Levi-Strauss and the Tweet responses to Kavanaugh. Thurmond may or may not have been operating out of fear with his statements, but he certainly acknowledges an identity threat through his opening statement addressing Hill's allegations.

Both Biden and Thurmond's opening statements also find close parallels with Grassley and Feinstein's statements during the Kavanaugh hearings. All four congress members mentioned the immense pressures of a national audience that is judging how they handle these matters, notably due to the live broadcasting of the hearings through television and online streaming platforms, as well as a historical element, where the Thomas hearings were making a historical precedent and the Kavanaugh hearings were revisiting that same precedent set years before. *All of the responses from these public officials also reference to the "seriousness" of GBV issues like harassment and sexual assault, though this might be explained by the pressures of a national audience.* Riessman writes: "People preserve 'face,' [in which they] act out a specific self that they want to be identified as" (2007:108). All of the congress members also set up their own personal concerns with larger national implications, however — for example, both Biden and Grassley acknowledge that sexual harassment was a pressing and widespread concern at the time, while Grassley focused on the national media frenzy, and Feinstein focused on the #MeToo movement and the statistics regarding GBV issues. Both Feinstein and Grassley had more mentions of party affiliation than Biden and Thurmond, though Feinstein and Biden (both Democrats) had way less instances of characterization of Kavanaugh and Thomas, respectively. Grassley and Thurmond (both Republicans) openly supported the judges who were elected by the respective Republican presidents at the time through characterization responses that focused on long-term service, honesty, and credibility.

Notably, Feinstein was the only public official in these opening statements to actually address and characterize the accuser, in this case, Dr. Ford, beyond the theme of a mistreated witness (pages 15-16). The congresswoman used phrases like "thank you" and "I am grateful" to acknowledge the active role Dr. Ford played in the hearings— this is a hugely significant shift in the discourse, for at last, this shows an increased public defense of women in the GBV discourse beyond just victimhood. Feinstein's positionality as a woman herself most likely explains her defense of Dr. Ford's credibility, an important component in this discussion. *With the increase of women in public official roles, the discourse around GBV inherently changes.* A look at the Slocum responses from public officials and the general public proves this point even more fervently.

As seen on page 9, public officials involved in the Slocum controversy, like faculty members and trustees, focused almost entirely on the political side of the events. Slocum was characterized either as a powerful fundraiser for the school or an autocratic leader — rarely was he acknowledged as a predator. In fact, the motivating reason for Albright in collecting the affidavits from women was for the purpose of getting Slocum to resign as the head of the school — it was less about the women's actual experiences being harassed and assaulted. *The victimized*

women, in letters and newspaper articles, were rarely ever given agency, or even recognition; there was simply an acknowledgment that this was a common phenomenon of that time. Lipsey, in her interview about her time as a student during the controversy, confirms this sentiment. She emphasized that GBV issues were rarely talked about, leading to a massive lack of information regarding the controversy, a plethora of formalities, and a discourse mostly relegated to word of mouth making it hard to track down even in the current day. When comparing all three cases, it becomes clear that women's involvement in the Slocum controversy was minimal at best, they were invisibilized by those in power; in the Thomas hearing, there was a greater recognition on behalf of the public and public officials regarding the accuser, Hill, though they were more focused on the allegations themselves; with the Kavanaugh hearing, the outpour of Tweets characterizing Dr. Ford as virtuous and heroic, and Feinstein's opening statement that characterizes her as an autonomous being show that *women are now official participants in the discourse around GBV in the U.S.*

Limitations

The limitations for this paper mostly center around the scope of the project, the research questions, and the time involved. Understanding all of the nuances around how a discourse has changed over time requires a massively in-depth analysis beyond the realm of my undergraduate studies and single-person research team — hence the focus on characterization of major actors involved in three specific historical cases. There are also significant limitations with the collection of media surrounding the Slocum controversy, due to the archival nature of media from 1917 and the lack of tools and time to uncover more than the few newspaper selections I found. In the collection of all media sources for this project, in fact, I had to use my own discretion in deciding what to include for presentation and analysis. Inherently, I operated out of bias in determining what I personally thought was crucial to examine for the academic nature of this project. There is also a significant limitation in the presentation of social media data, since I only focused on one source, Twitter, and of that only a small sub-section of responses. Weller et. al mentions other constraints inherent with using Twitter as a platform for social science research as well: because Twitter is "a large, public site," it is "difficult to bound, or even determine, exactly who or what one is studying" (2014: 116). I do not even attempt to understand who the users that produced the Tweets for my data collection are, simply because there are too many layers of identity that might be important to focus on but are not possible to find online. The issue of privacy for those users also would have become an issue had I revealed their usernames. In terms of users, Weller et. al also mentions that more vocal users will post frequently on Twitter, but the majority of Twitter users will just read the Tweets, and therefore be left out of the conversation entirely (2014: 64). Only users who felt like they had to share online, and created Tweets that matched my inquiries, are included in this paper — that self-selecting group of users does influence the results of my research, especially as it relates to identity construction and online behavior.

Conclusion

I have focused my primary efforts in this paper on a form of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which constructs language as a primary form of social practice in which societal power relations are established and reinforced (Ott 2016). After an extensive data presentation and analysis, I now want to focus on the implications of these insights in the GBV discourse from a feminist perspective. Prominent author and feminist thinker Jean Elshtain wrote that "boundary shifts in our understanding of 'the political' and hence of what is public and what is private have

taken place throughout the history of Western life and thought” (1981: 201). In the discourse around GBV, this redefining of what is public and private has significantly shifted American culture. Elshtain further writes that if “reclassifications stick over time, the meaning of politics — indeed of human life itself — may be transformed” (1981: 201). The characterization of high-profile, public-facing men accused of sexual harassment or assault in these three unique historical cases has not changed significantly. The men’s credibility, status, and public identity all came to the forefront of responses concerning them, however, *the increasing question of women’s credibility in these matters has changed drastically*. If the discourse around GBV in the U.S. continues to focus on women’s autonomy, and identity, and further complicates the narratives around well-known male perpetrators, I do believe that the realm of the political and personal will no longer look the same as it does now. Elshtain speaks directly to this point. She writes:

“Feminist analysts... share at least one overriding imperative: they would *redefine the boundaries of the public and the private, the personal and the political*, in a manner that opens up certain questions for inquiry. They would ‘*break the silence*’ of traditional political thought on questions of the historic oppression of women and the absence of women from the realm of public speech” (1981: 202).

Online contributions and official statements from public figures, such as Feinstein, that acknowledge Dr. Ford’s role in the Kavanaugh hearings, and contributions to the #MeToo movement, are helping to “break the silence” she mentions. A whole new realm of questioning regarding issues related to GBV is opened up when we consider the women’s perspectives as equally important, if not more so, than the man’s, even if, or especially if, the man is a highly accepted public figure himself. These new perspectives are more possible than ever with the increased accessibility of online media, which is an important shift in regard to public participation within the discourse. Continuing on, Elshtain writes:

“None of us lives in what I shall here call the ‘ethical polity.’ But we can conceive of that possibility... Rather than an ideal of citizenship and civic virtue that features a citizenry grimly going about their collective duty, or an elite band of citizens in their ‘public space’ cut off from a world that includes most of the rest of us, *within the ethical polity the active citizen would be one who had affirmed as part of what it meant to be fully human a devotion to public, moral responsibilities and ends*” (1981: 351).

Elshtain believes that a truly ethical political scene would involve the participation of a highly active, caring citizenry. I believe that the emergence of new media allows for this kind of participation in a way unbeknownst to the world before. The huge amount of definitive responses to the Kavanaugh hearings, in comparison to the Slocum controversy, or even the Thomas hearings in which there was mass confusion, signifies a more actively involved and aware general public. While some might argue that these definitive responses are a sign of polarization in the political realm, especially in the GBV discourse, I believe that these are an optimistic sign that we are moving in the right direction towards a new acceptance and valuing of the public opinion. One of the first large-scale studies to actually introduce empirical insights into social media discourse around GBV, an article titled “#NotOkay: Understanding Gender-Based Violence in Social Media,” reinforces this idea. The authors write:

“Our results show that *social media is a key enabler for people to discuss GBV issues* – this is apparent by the large number of self-reported stories and the sharing of news domains that host GBV-related stories.

We also find, on average, *higher engagement associated with GBV posts in comparison with generic tweets...* Finally, we show that *GBV hashtags inspire self-expression and communal coping through sharing and support*" (ElSherief, Belding, and Nguyen 2017: 60).

Specifically, the role of digital storytelling and digital activism contributes a great deal to this new public participation in shifting the discourse around GBV. Christina Cauterucci, writing for *Slate Magazine*, says that digital storytelling can "help women place isolated incidents in the context of systemic power imbalances and forestall complacency by keeping emotions fresh." And while these narratives might not change people's thinking related to GBV issues, it still contributes a great deal to the discourse. She writes:

"Where women once got an Anita Hill-grade moment of galvanizing anger once a decade, they now get one every few months... *the chronic agony of sexual-violence hashtags may provide the fuel female activists need to keep up the fight.* We don't have to tell each other to stay woke when the periodic invitation to revisit our trauma makes it impossible to get any rest at all" (2018).

While somewhat dismal, this reality that Cauterucci writes about definitely informs the GBV discourse in terms of creating a tangible public motivation to keep talking about these issues so they don't get disregarded, stacked away, and only excavated a century later like the Slocum controversy. From a personal perspective, this also reinforces my initial reflection that my generation of young women have been shaping our identities and learning our own power through a direct confrontation with this forced and constant recognition of GBV. That being said, there are still many nuances to this new wave of participation in conversation around GBV. Irin Carmon from the Washington Post writes:

"Such a necessary reframing lends the speaker some of the power long denied to victims, but it also opens new horizons with unclear boundaries for men and women... *beyond yes and no, power dynamics are harder to parse.* Abuses of power range across all kinds of conduct, with all kinds of frequency. Yet there are definite risks, even for victims, in conflating all abuses of power with the most egregious ones... For one thing, men of color are still likelier to be perceived as predatory (one study of exonerations found that black men are 3 1 / 2 times more likely to be wrongly incarcerated for sexual assault than white men). For another, as we become attuned to the subtler gradients of violation, *how do we respect people's accounts of harm while figuring out how to prioritize the most harmful?*" (2017).

I have no answer for this question, nor further probes into the current direction the discourse around GBV is heading; however, both of these aspects are important to address along with the optimistic attitude I have developed regarding the role of new media in this discourse. New narratives associated with the GBV discourse are certainly emerging, alongside the consistent master narratives regarding victims and perpetrators. However, I hope I have stripped some of these narratives down to their core elements to reveal a de-mystified version of the discourse around GBV. *The shifts that have been discussed in this paper concerning the GBV discourse are importantly representative of a newfound agency for women, and not just an abstract notion of progress.* Perhaps most importantly, I hope I have also captured an important moment of history from one perspective amongst a whole generation of young women that must not be overlooked.

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