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D E M O C R A T I C C O M M U N I Q U É

# **"MeToo Might Have Begun in 1991": An Analysis of the U.S. Media Coverage of the Cases of Dylan Farrow and Anita Hill That Unmask the Inequalities of how Sexual Violence Survivors are Represented in Media**

Mikayla Pevac

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*The MeToo movement has changed the public consciousness surrounding the topic of sexual violence. Throughout history, survivors of sexual violence have publicly disclosed their experiences in the hope that others would be spared similar fates. This paper looks at two such cases where survivors publicly accused prominent men in society of sexual violence and how news commentary preceding and following the MeToo hashtag have shifted. Case number one focuses on Dylan Farrow: the adopted daughter of filmmaker Woody Allen who accused him of sexually abusing her as a child in August 1992. Case number two is Anita Hill: the lawyer and academic who accused Supreme Court Justice nominee Clarence Thomas of sexual harassment in October 1991. While both Farrow and Hill's stories have found new awareness post-MeToo, the two cases diverge in the media framing of their allegations due to the racist bias of mainstream media. This paper argues that Farrow's whiteness, and the whiteness of other prominent players within MeToo, have emboldened her claims in ways that Black or Brown survivors would not similarly experience—thus continuing the trend of prioritizing whiteness in the U.S. feminist tradition. By thematically comparing the public statements of Farrow and Hill and the resulting news commentaries, this paper will use intersectionality theory to analyze how MeToo has influenced the way that the news media frames discussions around the experiences of sexual violence survivors for survivors of different ethnic backgrounds.*

**Keywords:** Feminism, Sexual Violence, Sexual Assault, Intersectionality, MeToo, Dylan Farrow, Anita Hill

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The MeToo social movement brought awareness to the pervasiveness of sexual violence in the everyday lives of women on a scale never seen before. Used over 19 million times in the year following the Harvey Weinstein sexual abuse allegations, MeToo represents a pivotal moment in which the feminist ideals of gender equality (or more specifically the right to not be accosted because of identifying as a woman) have been thrust into the global spotlight (Anderson & Toor, 2018). However, MeToo did not occur in a vacuum. The hashtag movement is laden with the limitations of what is known as White Feminism, a form of feminism that typically prioritizes the experiences of white women over those of marginalized or less privileged women (Moon & Holling, 2020). To explore how BIPOC women were represented differently in the MeToo movement as opposed to white women, this paper uses intersectionality theory to explore two prominent cases, Dylan Farrow and Anita Hill, of sexual violence survivors who have publicly discussed their traumatic experiences both before and after the popularity of the MeToo movement began in 2017. Farrow and Hill serve as examples of how the mainstream U.S. media's treatment of sexual violence survivors can differ based on the social positionality of the survivor. By analyzing how ways that Dylan Farrow, a white woman with celebrity parents, and Anita Hill, a Black academic, have been represented in the media before and after MeToo the aim is to critique the perception that MeToo is equitable for all survivors. While this study is not generalizable to all the survivors who participated in MeToo, it does establish examples of how the U.S. media contributes to survivors being treated differently based on their identity. Both cases are over thirty years old at the point of this paper's construction, so together, they highlight the changes, continuities, and ambivalences around how survivors of sexual violence are treated by the mainstream, popular media in the U.S. both before and after #MeToo began trending on Twitter on October 15, 2017.

### **How MeToo Fits into the U.S. Feminist Tradition**

To understand the MeToo movement's place in the lineage of U.S. feminism, three areas of literature will be discussed: (1) the critiques of Black feminist theorists of whitewashed feminism, (2) how the MeToo movement is dominated by white survivors despite Black sexual violence rates, and (3) the role of the media in representing survivors with different identities.

### **Whitewashed Feminism and the Rise of Intersectionality Theory**

The legacy of erasing Black women's experiences in the U.S. harkens back to the time of slavery (the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries). As Saidiya Hartman (2008) contextualizes in her work *Venus in Two Acts*, the voices of Black girls and women slaves are almost non-existent in the archive: "no one remembered her name or recorded the things she said or observed that she refused to say anything at all...It would be centuries before she would be allowed to 'try her tongue', because they were not given the opportunities to write down and preserve their experiences for prosperity (p. 25). This tendency of ignoring Black women's experiences continued into the late 19<sup>th</sup> century with the Seneca Falls Convention (July, 1848) focusing on gaining the vote for white women—no Black women attended the convention nor were any invited (Brown, 2018). Despite the voices of Black women activists Mary Church Terrell, Sojourner Truth, Anna Cooper, Amanda Berry Smith

(among others) calling for equal representation of women of color in the women's suffrage movement, the lived oppression of Black women was often framed in opposition to the white woman's experience rather than as yet another example of patriarchal control.

Ironically, while the recent women's movement called attention to the fact that black women were dually victimized by racist and sexist oppression, white feminists tended to romanticize the black female experience rather than discuss the negative impact of that oppression. When feminists acknowledge in one breath that black women are victimized and in the same breath emphasize their strength, they imply that though black women are oppressed they manage to circumvent the damaging impact of oppression by being strong—and that is simply not the case. (hooks, 1981, p. 6)

When the white figureheads of the mainstream feminist movement failed to adequately include feminists of color in the movement, Black feminists branched off and formed activist groups of their own, including the establishment of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) in 1896 (Roth, 2004).

During the 1960s and 1970s (a time commonly labeled as the "second wave"), both Black and white feminist groups were bringing awareness to how the U.S.' patriarchal society was facilitating discrimination against women, including the perpetuation of sexual violence (Martinez, 2011). As Roth (2004) explains, both white women and feminists of color were organizing and challenging the status quo at this time, but "feminists of color [argue] that their activism was written out of the histories of second-wave feminist protest", leading to the whitewashed version of history that prioritizes the white privileged experience over the activism being done by marginalized groups (p. 3). The stratification of feminism into *feminisms* (i.e., white feminism, Black feminism, etc.) was due in large part to the theorizing about how different societal structures can oppress or influence a woman's life. The white, middle-class women that dominated the feminist movement in the second wave (i.e., Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem) tended to want to group all women together to fight for gender equality; however, as Frances Beal's (1969) piece *Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female* (2008) explains, women of color experience not only face gender-based oppression, but also racial prejudice (Roth, 2004). The statement by the Combahee River Collective (originally published in 1979) explains how oftentimes women are confronted with multiple axes of mistreatment: "We are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking" (2019, p. 28). Intersectionality theory, therefore, aims to account for these differences in lived experiences by highlighting how the multiple identities of an individual can affect the ways that they are treated within a society (Crenshaw, 1991). One such issue where women of varying identities can experience life differently is sexual violence—for the purposes of this study, the history of Black women and sexual violence has been solely focused upon.

Through the work of Black feminist theorists, the history of sexual violence against Black women has been used to better understand why Black women today are at higher risk of being sexually assaulted than white women (Planty, Langton, Krebs, Berzofsky & Smiley-McDonald, 2013). In *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Black Feminism* (1981) bell hooks writes about the historical tradition of the systematic sexual assault and abuse of Black female slaves by their white masters

as a tool of oppression. hooks explains how the high levels of sexual violence were used to break the wills of the female slaves as a way to ensure that they teach their children, the next generation of slaves, that resistance was futile (p. 18-19). Sexual trauma has continued to disproportionately affect women of color into the twenty-first century.

In adulthood, approximately 1 in 5 African American women reported that they had been raped at some point in their lifetime. More specifically, 18.8% of Black women in the National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS) and 22% of the Black women in the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) reported a lifetime rape. (West & Johnson, 2013, p. 3)

This disparity carries over to the rates of reporting: it is estimated that for every Black survivor there are at least 15 other women who did not disclose their sexual assault to the police (Hart & Rennison, 2003, p. 5). These statistics are important for pointing out that not only are Black women more at risk for being sexually assaulted, but also tend to not report their traumas—a trend that can arguably be traced back to the history of trauma, racism, and oppression that Black women have endured since the time of slavery in the American colonies.

### **MeToo's Moment**

The MeToo movement began not with a white actress' tweet, but with a Black activist's work with fellow sexual violence survivors. Sexual assault activist Tarana Burke officially began the "Me Too" campaign in the 1990s when she found herself speechless during a conversation with a survivor: "I didn't have a response or a way to help her in that moment, and I couldn't even say 'me too'" (Garcia, 2017, para. 2). To never feel helpless in the face of a survivor's disclosure again, Burke committed herself to creating an organization, Just Be Inc, that would provide resources for other survivors and allies to help survivors process their trauma. Her nonprofit organization used the slogan "me too" to embody her movement that aimed to bring awareness to the silent epidemic of sexual violence in American society—this was in 2006, about 10 years before the hashtag version of the MeToo movement began (#MeToo). On October 15, 2017, actor and activist Alyssa Milano responded to the allegations of widespread sexual violence levied against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein. Within the tweet, Milano asks other survivors of sexual harassment or assault to reply to her tweet with the words "me too" to "give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem"—now, does this verbiage sound familiar? Supposedly without knowing it, Milano was co-opting the work of Burke, a Black woman. This claiming of Black feminist thought by white women has a long history in the American Feminist movement, as established in the previous sections. In an interview with *The New York Times*, Burke explains how when she saw Milano's tweet getting such traction on Twitter, she feared her life's work might be in danger of being overtaken: "Initially I panicked. I felt a sense of dread, because something that was part of my life's work was going to be co-opted and taken from me and used for a purpose that I hadn't originally intended" (Garcia, 2017, para. 19). It is reported that Milano became aware of Burke's work soon after her tweet and reached out for a collaboration. The issue remains though that the MeToo movement's origin will be widely associated with Milano and Hollywood sexual harassment, rather than with Burke and her work with Black women and girls. On the metoomvmt.org website that features the work of Burke's organization, it is pointedly stated that "Tarana has a commitment and vision that is bigger than any hashtag or viral movement", therefore

highlighting how Burke is wanting to make sure her work lives beyond the longevity of the trending hashtag (*Get to know us*, 2021, para. 1).

Despite being lauded as changing the way that U.S. society will view and handle sexual violence forever (North, 2019), the hashtag campaign MeToo has been criticized for being beneficial for only the white individuals who participated (Johnson & Renderos, 2020). Gill and Orgad (2018) believe that while MeToo did achieve a digital reach unlike any other feminist campaign in history, they do note that "the global movement privileges career women with 'respectable' [identities] while marginalizing many others" (Starkey, Koerber, Sternadori, & Pitchford, 2019, p. 440). Mueller et al (2021) found that even though women of color experience sexual violence at a higher rate than white women, women of color participated less in MeToo. According to an analysis of 660,237 tweets that included the MeToo hashtag, 31.48% of the tweets were posted by white identifying women, with descending participation by Black women (13.41%), Asian women (5.12%), and Hispanic women (3.03%) (Mueller et al, 2021). While we cannot know the personal motivations of the Twitter users, it can be deduced that white survivors felt more comfortable using social media to share their experiences than women of color. This unequal promise of MeToo has led to Johnson & Renderos (2020) pointedly asking: "what happens when the wrong people—that is, people of color, the working-class women, and transgender people—speak out on the same issue (sexual assault or abuse)?" (p. 1123). Described as "excluded populations", the survivors that choose to speak out but do not fit the mold of white, middle-class woman are often "discredited, marginalized, or silenced by being ignored" (Johnson & Renderos, 2020, p. 1123). Black women often fall into this category because of the historical lineage of harmful rhetoric that has carried over since the times of slavery that dehumanized Black women and justified discrimination—the modern iterations of Black stereotypes, notably the sexual siren (also known as jezebel), mammy, matriarch, and welfare mother/queen caricatures are still being used in modern media (hooks, 1981). A study by Starkey et al (2019) analyzed news coverage in four different national contexts and deduced that there are four common media frames of MeToo participants: "brave silence breaker, stoic victim of an unjust system, recovered or reluctant hero, and hysterical slut" (p. 438). White survivors often fall into the more favorable frames of "brave" or "stoic", while survivors of color are more on the "hysterical" end of the spectrum. These frames are often used by the mainstream media in such a way as to victim blame and (intentionally or not) erode the credibility of the woman speaking up. Overall, differing news coverage of sexual violence survivors can be traced back to the perception of the credibility and culpability of the survivor.

### Media Treatment of Survivors

Media treatment of marginalized groups, specifically Black individuals, also has its roots in the racist and sexist ideologies developed during the time of slavery. As hooks (1992) writes in *Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance* (1992), modern mass media culture has "commodified the Other" turning "ethnicity [into] spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture" (p. 366). Arguing that the modern hyper-sexualization of Black girls and women is a form of "imperialist nostalgia" that encourages white men to "consume" Black women through pleasure, similar to how the white slave owners sexually dominated Black female slaves, hooks highlights how not much has changed in the way that American society treats, views, and represents Black women (p. 369). For example, in Sofia Noble's *Algorithms of Oppression: How search engines reinforce racism* (2018) text, she exposes how Google's algorithms reinforce the jezebel fantasy

by offering pornographically explicit sites as the first results under a search for “black girls”. With the continuation of the cultural appropriation of Black culture, the bodies of Black women are often commodified as symbols of Otherness that are consumed in the name of exoticism (hooks, 1992, p. 372). This hyper-sexualization bleeds over into the way that survivors are treated by the media. In her book *Virgin or Vamps: How the Press Covers Sex Crimes* (1992), Helen Benedict reviews how the media relies upon common rape myths to determine if a survivor is a “virgin” who was attacked by antisocial “monsters” or a “vamp” who was “asking for it” with her sexuality in some way (p. 18). The “virgin-whore dichotomy” focuses on the survivor’s sexuality and as previously mentioned, the sexuality of Black women can often be based upon the historical stereotype of the hypersexualized siren or jezebel.

Media representation matters. Social norms theory “maintains that our behavior is strongly influenced by our perceptions of the attitudes and behaviors of our peers” (Pribble, 2006, p. 740); therefore, if the media a society consumes reiterates sexist and racist ideology, then it is not likely that past colonial atrocities or current racial power structures will ever be problematized in the public consciousness. Media coverage of sexual violence works the same way: victim-blaming rhetoric and rape myths are repeated by the media, so distrust of survivors is high—even higher if the survivor does not fit the “ideal victim” mold (Taylor, 2020; Gill & Orgad, 2018; Starkey, Koerber, Sternadori, & Pitchford, 2019; Johnson & Renderos, 2020; Fung & Scheufele, 2014; Benedict, 1992). As defined by Jessica Taylor (2020), the “ideal victim” fits the stereotypical image of innocence and purity that is typically associated with whiteness. If a survivor diverts from this image in any way (think intersectional identities), then the societally learned behaviors of victim-blaming attitudes and belief in rape myths will result in the blaming of survivors for their trauma. For example, as Black author Luvvie Ajayi Jones (2018) stated on her blog, she thinks that the social stereotypes of white women inherently associate them with femininity and ideal womanhood, thus positioning white survivors as better “victims” and therefore better positioned to tap into social pity (para. 3). This unequal treatment can also be seen within the media framing of the survivor stories shared during the MeToo movement.

Using two prolific sexual violence case studies that received large and sustained amounts of news coverage before and after the hashtag MeToo movement occurred, this study compares some of the journalistic media commentary written about a white survivor (Dylan Farrow) versus a Black survivor (Anita Hill) to begin to expand on how MeToo media coverage does not treat all survivors equitably. The research questions that this analysis aims to answer are:

**R1:** How does the media commentary of Dylan Farrow’s sexual abuse allegations against Woody Allen change after MeToo?

**R2:** How does the media commentary of Anita Hill’s sexual harassment allegations against Clarence Thomas change after MeToo?

**R3:** How does the media represent Dylan Farrow and Anita Hill in ways that reinforce and challenge the social norms of sexism and racism that tend to celebrate white women’s experiences over Black women survivors of sexual violence? And how does this change after MeToo?

## Methodology

This comparison between survivors is significant because sexual assault survivors are treated differently by the media based on a variety of factors, including most notably for this work racial identity. So, why were Dylan Farrow and Anita Hill chosen to be the case examples over other survivors? With the recent release of the HBO documentary *Allen v. Farrow* (2021), interest in Farrow's case has found new life in the public awareness. Within the fourth and final episode, Farrow was asked: "Why now?" (Dick & Ziering, 2021). Why did she choose February and March of 2021 to bring back up the allegations against her adopted father that she made over three decades ago? She answered that it was because of MeToo's promise of justice. Farrow, like all the other survivors who came forward during the MeToo movement, hoped that the social climate had changed significantly enough to where perpetrators of sexual violence might be held more accountable for their actions. Farrow is a unique case, however; she has the backing of celebrity family members and access to resources (like the opinion section of the *New York Times*) that most survivors do not. Therefore, the case of Anita Hill was chosen as a foil to Farrow. As the thematic analysis of news commentary soon showed, Farrow and Hill did experience different levels of support from the media. So, this analysis shifted from a comparative analysis to a social commentary on how survivors of different identities were being treated differently by journalists. Both Farrow and Hill's accusations have been under national scrutiny for over 30 years at the point of this paper's writing and both cases have since re-entered public awareness due to current developments in MeToo. These two high-profile case studies both feature women who have: (1) experienced sexual violence of some form, (2) been outspoken about the need for societal change, and (3) continued to remain in the public eye. The purpose of this project is not to make a generalization about all survivors, but to make the argument that Farrow was treated differently by the mainstream media both before and after MeToo due to her social positioning in contrast with how Hill was and has been treated by the same media sources.

The following is an analysis of purposively selected media commentary pieces that discuss the public statements made by Farrow and Hill that were released both before and after the MeToo movement began. The researcher analyzed commentaries from the top U.S. news sources (n=50), drawing specifically from sources that either attacked or supported the survivor in a significant way. Using purposive sampling, four commentary pieces were chosen for each survivor, two for each public statement before and after MeToo (n=8), to qualitatively focus upon the specific sources in an in-depth manner (Yin, 2010). The personal statements of each survivor were also thematically analyzed for relevant passages that position each woman within the social debate on sexual violence. Finally, the argument is made that the media is more delicate when it comes to framing Farrow and more brutal when it comes to discussing Hill, thus providing evidence for the claim that the mainstream U.S. media treats white survivors differently than survivors of color.

It must be noted that the author of this article does not identify as a woman of color and so acknowledges that there are gaps in her knowledge of what it means to live as a Black woman in American society. The author also does not consider herself a survivor of sexual violence. Despite these limitations, I hope that this research will add to the knowledge production of how the media portrays, represents, and treats survivors of sexual violence in differing ways as an extension of the societal power structures that uplift whiteness and discriminate against women of color.



## Narrative Discussion of the Relationship Between the Media, Dylan Farrow, and Anita Hill

When analyzing the case studies of Farrow and Hill, the news media reinforces and challenges racism and sexism through credibility attacks and the attribution (or lack thereof) of agency and voice.

### Dylan Farrow: The Case

Dylan Farrow's age at the time of her alleged abuse has constantly been a barrier to her legal case. When the sexual abuse allegations against Woody Allen were filed with the police, Dylan Farrow was only seven years old in 1992. Her mother, Mia Farrow, was accused of implanting the experiences of abuse in Dylan's head by Allen to discredit both Mia and Dylan in the public arena. The False Memory Syndrome Foundation is partly to blame for this rhetoric. In 1992, the foundation popularized the term "false memory" that "became one of the most effective tools to instill doubt not only about allegations of child sex abuse but in all forms of sexual violence", including by Allen and his Public Relations team (Heaney, 2021, para. 12). The resulting media storm was constantly attacking Mia for turning Farrow against her father, so after the police chose to not move forward in the indictment of Allen, Mia chose to remove herself and her children from the spotlight to regain some sense of normalcy. Filmmaker Amy Ziering, one of the directors of HBO's documentary *Allen v. Farrow* (2021) claimed that getting Mia to participate in the exposé was difficult due to the past harassment by the media.

She (Mia) knows that the more public things become, the more destructive it is for the family and her children. And that was the trade-off, I think, she made. It was better to protect her children than to try to get her point of view into the public. (Strause & Siegel, 2021, para. 12)

It was not until February 1, 2014, when Dylan was 32 years old, did she formally speak out again against Allen in an opinion piece published in the *New York Times* after Allen received the lifetime achievement award at the 71st Golden Globe Awards.

### Dylan Farrow: Before MeToo

Within the opinion piece, *An open letter from Dylan Farrow* (2014), the first public statement ever released by Farrow, she backs up her younger self. Farrow reiterates the abuse allegations that she made over two decades ago by restating the claims that: (1) Allen paid abnormal attention to her in comparison to Mia's other children, (2) he would isolate her and force her to participate in inappropriate actions (like sucking his thumb) and (3) he sexually assaulted her in the attic space of her mother's Connecticut home—in an effort to explain that she still stands by her allegations as an adult (Farrow, 2014). Dylan goes on to explain how the ramifications of the abuse she experienced as a child had manifested into an eating disorder and cutting tendencies in her teenage years because of the "guilt that [she] had allowed him to be near other little girls" since she was deemed unfit to testify against Allen in 1992 (para. 4). Now in her adulthood, Dylan elucidates how she has moved beyond guilt and is ready to break her silence.

For so long, Woody Allen's acceptance silenced me. It felt like a personal rebuke, like the awards and accolades were a way to tell me to shut up and go away. But the survivors of sexual abuse who have reached out to me—to support me and to share their fears of coming forward, of being called a liar, of being told their memories aren't their memories—have given me a reason to not be silent, if only so others know that they don't have to be silent either. (para. 5)

Arguably, this statement embodies the fundamental aspects of MeToo: the vulnerable exposure of the intimate details of personal trauma in an act of solidarity with other survivors. Dylan ends her piece with the pronouncement: "Woody Allen is a living testament to the way our society fails the survivors of sexual assault and abuse" (para. 9); therefore, firmly aligning Allen within the structural patriarchal systems of society that perpetuate violence against women and protect the men who commit sex-based crimes.

Farrow's first official statement to the world as an adult almost did not even happen. Originally submitted as a stand-alone opinion piece, *The New York Times* editorial department decided to not publish Farrow's "open statement". This is when family friend Nicholas Kristof offered his own *New York Times*-affiliated blog as a platform for the statement. Media reactions to Farrow's opinion piece were mixed but can be separated into two categories: those that focus on Farrow's voice and those that prioritize Allen's reaction. The headlines of two separate articles by *Vanity Fair* frame the allegations as a "he said/she said" debate: "Dylan Farrow Describes Woody Allen's Alleged Sexual Abuse in Open Letter" (Miller, 2014a) and "Woody Allen Responds to Dylan Farrow's Open Letter" (Miller, 2014b). In the first, the allegations are positioned as sexual in nature, while in the second the contents of the letter are scrubbed away. An opinion piece by Sasha Weiss (2014) published in *The New Yorker* implores the audience to "listen" to Farrow and highlights how the case is indicative of a greater societal issue: "the still-hidden subject of rape within families and how frequently it takes place" (para. 7). Weiss sets aside the complexity of the Farrow versus Allen discussion and instead chooses to use the moment to point out how these seemingly isolated cases are indicative of how the legal system fails the children abused by members of their own family. On the other hand, there are the news commentaries that question Farrow's motives. Writing in *The Guardian*, Michael Wolff (2014) frames Farrow's statement as a media grab.

Indeed, the larger context for this rehashed scandal is not a pattern of abuse or the ongoing dysfunctions of a celebrated family but rather the demands of a publicity rollout. Twenty-one years after the event—all parties long quiet—a story is revived. It is an old scandal for a new generation.

Labeling Farrow a "convincing" victim, Wolff turns his attention to the common scapegoat for the media's discrediting efforts: Farrow's mother. He frames Mia as a washed-up actress looking for a way back into public awareness who orchestrated "interlocking media deals" and enlisted "cultivated media cronies" (like Kristof) to do her bidding (para. 22). Interestingly, on Feb. 10, 2018, *The Guardian* released an amendment stating that Wolff's statements were not based on fact, just a "cynical presumption"—however, I wonder how many readers saw this correction before they allowed Wolff's negative rhetoric to frame their views of Farrow and Mia (para. 24)?

## Dylan Farrow: Post MeToo

Approximately two months after the beginning of MeToo in October 2017, Dylan wrote another opinion piece, this time published in the *Los Angeles Times*, that asked the question: “Why has the #MeToo revolution spared Woody Allen?” (Farrow, 2017). Within this statement, Dylan highlights the actors, specifically women, who support the efforts of taking Harvey Weinstein down, yet still work with and support Allen because the circumstances around Dylan’s allegations are currently unsubstantiated by criminal charges. Most significantly Dylan gives a glimpse into the media harassment she, Mia, and the rest of her family have had to endure, including how *The Hollywood Reporter* was retaliated against by Allen’s P.R. team for running a piece written by Dylan’s brother Ronan Farrow that publicly denounced Allen and the continued attacks on Mia: “Allen’s savvy affiliates know that it’s unseemly to direct attacks at me, an alleged victim, and so the invective is directed at my mother again and again. It’s awful and enraging” (Farrow, 2017, para. 11). Ultimately, Dylan is highlighting how MeToo, at least at that point, had failed to include Allen in the reckoning, she claims that despite the widespread usage of MeToo, “The revolution has been selective” in who has been held accountable (para. 1). Since this second opinion piece was published, there has been progress. More actors have come forward either apologizing for working with Allen or vowing to never work with him again—some stars like Timothée Chalamet and Selena Gomez have even donated the pay they earned from their projects with Allen to charity. More significantly, the U.S. release date of Allen’s most recent movie, *A Rainy Day in New York* (2020), was delayed when Amazon Studios backed out of the release deal with Allen after Farrow’s allegations were reignited (the film has since been released via MPI Media Group and Signature Entertainment) (Olsen, 2020). Finally, the release of the HBO documentary *Allen v. Farrow* (2021) which solely features Dylan and Mia’s side of the story, had the largest debut for an HBO documentary series since 2019 with 1 million total viewers. Overall, since MeToo and Dylan’s 2017 statement, Allen has felt the ramifications of the modern feminist movement.

Farrow’s second public statement came at a time when support for survivors disclosing their traumatic experiences was at an all-time high (Anderson & Toor, 2018). While most news sources repeated Farrow’s question asking why Allen was being spared attention during MeToo, there was one significant dissenter: Bret Stephens, opinion columnist for *The New York Times*. Titling his piece “Smearing Woody Allen” (2018), Stephens makes it clear whose “side” he is on by beginning with an anecdote about the gang rape at a University of Virginia fraternity that turned out to be fabricated by a news-hungry reporter. Already having equated Farrow’s allegations with one of the few false reports of a sexual crime (the prevalence of false reporting of sexual crimes lies somewhere between 2% and 10% of cases), Stephens is subtly situating Farrow in the company of liars (National Sexual Violence Research Center, 2012). Like Wolff, Stephens does not directly attack Farrow, but convolutedly argues that “If Allen is in fact a pedophile, he appears to have acted on his evil fantasies exactly once” (para. 13). Also, he frames Farrow’s actions as going against the American values of law and order by continuing to attack Allen even after he has been “cleared” of wrongdoing: “Smear the accused, smudge the line, and the truth will never out” (para. 15). Stephens is relying on old evidence to discredit Farrow’s allegations to retain the media’s pattern of dancing around attacking Farrow directly. However, in a tweeted rebuttal to Stephens’ article, Farrow highlights the embedded victim-blaming situated within Stephens’ call for Allen’s innocence to be respected.

If I (Dylan Farrow) invented this story & convinced myself of it is no less insulting than calling me a liar. I've consistently stated the truth for 25 years, I won't stop now. It's Stephens' right to doubt me if he so chooses but his incredulity doesn't change what happened that day. (2018, Feb. 10: 8:39 AM)

What it does do is make it harder for the next victim to come forward. (8:40 AM)

The main hindrance to Farrow's claims being believed "has been...disentabl[ing] her claims from the vicious break-up that raged between Woody Allen and her adoptive mother Mia Farrow" (Leonard, 2018, para. 12). However, both times that Farrow spoke out her statements were featured in popular national publications and received major national attention. Will the national dialogue surrounding Hill, a Black woman, give her a voice and avoid direct credibility attacks?

### **Anita Hill: The Case**

In 1991, lawyer and academic Anita Hill accused then U.S. Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas of sexual harassment that had previously occurred when he was her supervisor at the U.S. Department of Education and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. On October 11, 1991, Hill was called to publicly testify at Clarence's Senate hearings—an event now known as the Hill-Thomas Hearing. Hill's allegations ranged from continued romantic requests as well as continued inappropriate discussions of topics that were sexual: "He spoke about...such matters as women having sex with animals and films showing group sex or rape scenes...On several occasions, Thomas told me graphically of his own sexual prowess" (Hill, 1991, p. 3). Over 8 pages, Hill describes her working relationship with Thomas, ending with an explanation of why she chose to come forward and testify over 10 years after she stopped working for Thomas:

It is only after a great deal of agonizing consideration that I am able to talk of these unpleasant matters to anyone but my closest friends. Telling the world is the most difficult experience of my life...I declined any comment to newspapers, but later, when Senate staff asked me about these matters, I felt I had a duty to report...It would have been more comfortable to remain silent...But when I was asked by a representative of this committee to report my experience, I felt that I had no other choice but to tell the truth. (p. 8)

In her debut memoir, *Speaking Truth to Power* (1997) Hill speaks of the attacks by the Republican-led Senate on her credibility, positioning her as "the defendant"—an individual who is on trial (p. 2). So, Hill not only had to present evidence against Thomas, but she also had to fight off victim-blaming attitudes to prove that her "character was such [she] was not guilty of inventing" the past discretions (p. 2). During and after the hearing, Hill was bombarded by the media asking for interviews, pestering those around her for the "inside scoop", and creating news stories that may or may not have had any factual basis: "The continued media interest, like the initial intrusion of the press on my privacy, was unanticipated and uninvited on my part. To them the event was a news story. To me it was my life" (p. 3). Unfortunately, as Hill notes, the press was not interested in discussing the widespread prevalence of sexual harassment, and if they did speak on the topic they lacked "insight" and "sensitivity" (3). However, after the trial when Hill returned to her desk job as a professor at the University of Oklahoma, she began to sift through the letters she was receiving in response to the hearing. While some letters were negative, Hill describes the most significant correspondences being from other survivors and that "each letter in its own way

established a link between the writer and [herself]. Each had a common experience so potent as to create a bond between total strangers. ‘I feel like I know you,’ many wrote” (5). Therefore, it became clear for Hill that her fight against sexual violence should no longer just be contained to her personal experiences but should be expanded into a larger movement “about finding *our* voices and breaking the silence forever” (7, emphasis added by author).

### **Anita Hill: Before MeToo**

The news commentary surrounding the Hill-Thomas Hearing is vast and varied. Jill Smolowe, a reporter for *TIME*, labeled it a simple “he said, she said” where “it would come down to...the specificity of Hill's charges against the intensity of Thomas’ denials” (para. 4). Theis rhetoric of “we will never really know” is repeated in multiple news stories (Garment, 1992), and effectively privileges Thomas because the burden of evidence is placed on Hill, not himself. The lineages of Hill and Thomas are often compared: both are Black, both come from rural poor backgrounds, and both graduated from Yale Law School (talk about academic privilege/class privilege). However, by repeating these facts, they are still hyper-analyzing Hill’s positionality for reasons not to believe her. As Garment (1992) points out, discussion during and after the 1991 hearing soon divulged into a gender versus race debate.

They claim (opponents to Thomas) that the Senate by its treatment of Hill had already demonstrated men's outrageous indifference to the welfare of women and the fundamental incapacity of male elected officials to give proper political representation to their female constituents. (28)

And from my standpoint, as a black American, as far as I'm concerned it is a high-tech lynching for uppity blacks who in any way deign to think for themselves, to do for themselves, to have different ideas, and it is a message that unless you kowtow to an old order, this is what will happen to you. (Thomas, 1991, para. 8)

Therefore, erasing Hill’s intersectional identity as both Black and a woman. In 1993, political consultant and commentator, David Brock wrote an “exposé” about Hill’s “true” motivations for testifying against Thomas. A bestseller, *The Real Anita Hill*, reinforced the claims that Hill had ulterior motives, leading to news commentaries like the one written by Terry Eastland (1993) that used Brock’s rhetoric to label the Hill-Thomas Hearing as a “deplorable sequence of events” that put “morality” on trial (para. 59). While it later came out that Brock had written the book to protect Thomas and discredit Hill, the rhetoric positioning Hill as a pawn in the liberal agenda would continue to follow her into the future media dialogue.

### **Anita Hill: Post MeToo**

While Hill has spoken out over the years through many different interviews, the media and public interest in Hill waned after Thomas was affirmed to the Supreme Court. That is until (1) MeToo happened and (2) the senator who oversaw the Senate Judiciary Committee for Thomas back in 1991, Joe Biden, chose to run for president in the 2020 election. In an interview with *The New York Times* in May 2019, Hill describes her reaction to a phone call from Biden apologizing for the mistreatment of Hill during the hearing two decades before. Hill asserts her belief that if the

Senate Judiciary Committee and Biden had been more open to the discussion of the trauma of sexual violence, then “the cultural shift we saw in 2017 after #MeToo might have begun in 1991—with the support of the government” (Hill, 2019, para. 4). Asserting that there could have been a “ripple effect” if the government had made strides to be more sensitive to survivors (para. 5), then other sectors of American society could have begun fighting against the perpetuation of victim-blaming and rape myths and more survivors would come forward with their stories sooner than 2017. Hill highlights how MeToo did expose how prevalent sexual violence was, but she also noted that not all survivors are on the same footing due to their respective social positionalities and intersectionality.

The #MeToo movement taught us that it happens to people of all ages, races, and ethnicities, whether poor, middle class or wealthy. While no group is immune, some groups like women of color, sexual minorities and people with disabilities are more susceptible than others. (para. 7)

After expressing her frustration with the outcome of the Brett Kavanaugh hearing (Kavanaugh was accused of sexual assault by former classmate Christine Blasey-Ford; therefore, undergoing a similar public hearing where he was questioned by the Senate Judiciary Committee on September 4-7, 2018), Hill ends the interview by renewing her challenge to American society to listen and believe survivors. She also pointedly disregards the media discussion around whether she will “forgive” Biden for his past failures and instead implores for future progress (para. 23).

The title of Liza Mundy’s commentary piece for *Politico* says it all: *I Rewatched Anita Hill’s Testimony. So Much Has Changed. So Much Has Not* (2018). While the era of MeToo increased public awareness of sexual violence exponentially, the movement was not enough to keep another sexual perpetrator from being appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court. By comparing the Hill-Thomas Hearing to the Ford-Kavanaugh Hearing of 2018, Mundy explains how the trial is exposing “in real time how women can be intimidated by everything from the attacks they face to the constrictions placed on how they can tell their stories” (para. 4); therefore, acknowledging that the trial is effectively reinforcing the social and political threats that women face when they disclose their traumas. Crowder (2018) does point out that before Hill’s accusations, not many Americans even knew what “sexual harassment” was and that the news media had reported on other women’s accusations of Kavanaugh whereas Hill was the sole testimony against Thomas (para. 12). While it is important to note the similarities between the experiences of Hill and Christine Blasey-Ford at the hands of a Senate Judiciary Committee, the media focus has shifted away from discussing Hill’s experiences. Most articles were written about Hill after MeToo use her story as a foil by which to analyze powerful men like Kavanaugh or Biden. By using Hill’s experiences to analyze “What Joe Biden Hasn’t Owned Up To...” (Mayer, 2019), the news media is shifting the conversation away from any kind of justice for past wrongs but instead co-opting Hill to discredit powerful men. The media is taking away Hill’s autonomy now, similarly to how Brock and other news representatives did it back in 1991. There have been no “Justice for Anita” campaigns, there are just questions of how far America has come as a society since 1991.

## Discussion

Overall, the case studies of Dylan Farrow and Anita Hill have interesting parallels: both cases began in the 1990's and both have reemerged today in the public discussion of topics of sexual violence due in part to the popularity of MeToo. Also, both Farrow and Hill seek to use their traumatic experiences as a platform through which they can fight for real change in the way that sexual violence is framed in American society. However, the media commentary surrounding the cases is starkly different in two main ways, the way that the media presents the survivor's credibility and the way that the survivor is afforded agency and/or voice they give to the survivor.

## Credibility

One differentiating factor that contributed greatly to the type of credibility attack directed at each survivor was the age of the individual when the sexual violence occurred. Since Farrow was a child at the time of her alleged abuse, the Allen P.R. campaign has routinely decided to target her mother Mia instead, and the media seemed to follow suit (Farrow, 2017). Even when Farrow published her two opinion pieces as an adult, the commentary pieces never went after some of Farrow's past behavioral problems, like drug use or self-harm, as ways of discrediting her remembrances of Allen. Any negative attacks of Farrow are positioned under the guise of accusing Mia of manipulating Farrow as a child (Stephens, 2018). In contrast, Hill was 35 when she testified against Thomas, so there were no such qualms about attacking her credibility: see the entirety of Brock's *The Real Anita Hill*. In her book *Speaking Truth to Power*, Hill describes the lengths that the media went to dig up dirt on her like calling lesbian bars in the town in which she lived to ask if she frequented their establishments (Hill, 1997). I argue that Farrow was and is protected by her status as a child of a Hollywood icon from the wrath of the media, a position Hill certainly did not possess. Looking beyond the simple fact that Farrow is white and Hill is Black, it is important to explore the power structures accessible to each of the survivors. Farrow is the daughter of two wealthy actors and was raised amongst the Hollywood elite. She knows the people who work with Allen personally (like Diane Keaton who Farrow mentioned having met as a child on her father's movie set), therefore she can call them out and they are more likely to listen (Farrow, 2014). Hill did not have these types of resources, however. She is a Black woman from Oklahoma who never even had the full support from the African American community behind her: even after her testimony, a poll published in the *Chicago Tribune* estimated that Thomas was supported by 70% of Black Americans (Curry, 1991, Oct. 15). This clashing of identities can be traced back to the days of suffrage. As hooks (1981) affirms, Black women's intersectional identities as both women and Black can cause more opportunities for oppression.

Black women were placed in a double bind; to support women's suffrage would imply that they were allying themselves with white women activists who had publicly revealed their racism, but to support only black male suffrage was to endorse a patriarchal social order that would grant them no political voice. (hooks, 1981, p. 3)

Unfortunately for Hill, she did not have the social resources (like a family friend at *The New York Times*) that Farrow did to get America to listen to her. Instead, she had only herself to rely on when testifying against one of the most powerful men in Washington.

## Agency and Voice

With powerful headlines like "The #MeToo Movement Changed Everything" (Bellafante, 2018) and "MeToo Has Changed Our Culture Now Its Changing Our Laws" (Beitsch, 2018), MeToo is often framed as an achievement unlike any other in history in the way that it shifted public perception of issues of sexual violence. Most articles on MeToo begin with a celebration of the high levels of female empowerment that resulted because of the movement.

In the face of flagrant chauvinism, women's voices are rising defiantly to challenge a status quo that, until now, was accepted. Every day, more women step forward to share their stories of humiliation, harassment, and assault at the hands of powerful men. (Weitz, 2017, para. 1)

So, just as participation in MeToo favored whiteness, the media representation of survivors also discriminates against survivors of color. The cases of Farrow and Hill are two specific examples of how a survivor's identity can influence how they are represented by the mainstream media due to engrained biases of who an "ideal" survivor should be. This project explores how Farrow and Hill's decades-old cases have been given new life in the age of MeToo, therefore reinvigorating their past claims of sexual violence. However, Farrow's voice was given significantly more agency than Hill's. Farrow's statements were published in *The New York Times* calling for vindication against Allen. While Hill was interviewed by *The New York Times* to discuss whether she "forgives" Joe Biden for his role in the 1991 hearing. Hill was never allowed the chance to call for personal justice but was only afforded media interest because of her relation to Kavanaugh and Biden. Farrow has been able to enact justice after MeToo. Hill has not been given the same chance to hold Thomas accountable. By pointing out this discrepancy, it situates Farrow and Hill in the legacy of inequities within the feminist movement (hooks, 1981; Crenshaw, 1991). MeToo was framed by the media as a global campaign (Gill & Orgad, 2018) that made it possible for any survivor to stand in solidarity with one another against the widespread issues of sexual violence. But, as the case of Hill explicates, if the survivor is not "ideal", then the public discourse set by the media is apt to let them down. Ultimately, the Farrow and Hill case studies show that there has been progress in the ways that the media handle discussions of sexual violence, but the shift has been unequal for survivors of color.

## Conclusion

While Woody Allen and Clarence Thomas are just two modern examples of perpetrators within the historical legacy of sexual violence against women, they have certainly been molded by the societal structures that protect powerful men and silence oppressed women. Farrow and Hill both tried to fight back against these societal challenges to break the cycle of victim-blaming, and they both continue to do so now thirty years later. These case studies are especially unique in their celebrity: not many sexual violence cases are as widely publicized as Farrow versus Allen and Hill versus Thomas; therefore, they cannot be generalized to the experiences of all survivors. There is a lot that can be learned from comparing how Farrow and Hill have re-emerged in the public awareness, however. Most significantly how societal power structures of the patriarchy, neoliberalism, and white supremacy sustain sexual violence through the perpetuation of social



norms in the media. For MeToo and the feminist movement to become equitable to all women, then these power structures will need to be permanently unmasked, disrupted, and dismantled.

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