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Pregnant Pauses

Silence and Authority in the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas Hearings

Norma Mendoza-Denton

Cross-examination is an adversarial war of words, sequences, and ideas, a war in which the capability to finesse reality through talk represents the ultimate weapon of domination.

—Gregory Matoesian
Reproducing Rope

Few political events in this decade have captured the American public imagination as did the October 1991 confirmation hearings of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas. The hearings brought to the fore a complex of issues of race, gender, sexuality, and power that has profoundly affected the way in which political discourse is now conducted. Before and during the hearings, women voiced a multiplicity of opinions, from indignation to rage to the conviction that the senators "just didn't get it." After the hearings, public action was added to opinion, and in 1992 a record number of female representatives was elected to public office.

In her essay "No Peace in a Sisterly Space," Julianne Malveaux (1992:143) describes feeling "hypnotic rage . . . at the Senate Judiciary Committee's treatment of Anita Hill." What exactly did this treatment consist of? Was it made up solely of malicious insinuations and indignities, such as the extended discussion regarding Hill's "proclivities" or the committee's refusal to allow expert testimony on sexual harassment (Jordan 1992)? What was in the hearings that moved the coalition African American Women in Defense of

The Study

The senators who conducted the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas hearings displayed a variety of linguistic strategies that provided a framework within which the literal words of the hearings must be interpreted. Through their rapid-fire interrogation style reminiscent of cross-examination, the employment of questions embedded with unwarranted presuppositions, topic shifts, and the avoidance of verbal acknowledgment, the senators placed Hill in a discursive situation very different from that of Thomas. Thomas's discourse setting was characterized by numerous and lengthy expressions of support and sympathy from the senators, questions that were answerable with a simple "Yes, Senator" or "No, Senator," and weighty, respectful silences following his hyperbolic turns of phrase. The strategies were both conscious (as in rapid-fire interrogation and questions with embedded presuppositions) and below the level of consciousness (as in the differing length of silences given after Hill's versus Thomas's statements).³ I argue that it is not any one of these strategies alone that created a hostile environment for Hill but, instead, the aggregate, along with the sociopolitical context of the accusations, that served to undermine her testimony. The variables that I have chosen to analyze, and that are explained in greater detail below, are gap length, simple yes/no questions versus tag questions, concise answers, changes of topic, and acknowledgments.

Gap Length

Also known as *wait-time* in the legal literature, *gap length* is the natural complement to interruption. If interruption consists of measurable overlap in the speech of two speakers, and if the fact of interruption might say something, *ceteris paribus*, about the relationship of the speakers in question (regardless of how we choose to characterize this relationship), then gap length, or the measurable silence between the speech of two speakers, is equally worthy of study.

I propose that gap length may reflect important power dimensions within a discourse; it may be used in different ways to legitimize, acknowledge, support, or cast doubt on the statements of the previous speaker. A controlled study of gap length should expose otherwise unnoticed interlocutor attitudes toward different speakers, revealing a more subtle microlevel enactment of power relations. For the purposes of this study, I examined the gap instances that followed statements made by Hill or Thomas and preceded senatorial comments or questions, comparing the length of the silences occurring after Hill's statements with those occurring after Thomas's statements.

- (a) <Statement by Hill> <Gap> <Statement by senator>
 (b) <Statement by Thomas> <Gap> <Statement by senator>

Speech excerpts conforming to the patterns in (a) and (b), above, were chosen for analysis on the basis of their well-formedness within the legal discourse structure. Because this structure is rigid and has established turn-taking procedures, I did not consider gaps caused by confusion over documents or turn-taking, choosing only those gaps that followed one another within continuous streams of exchange. The total sample size was forty-nine gaps for Hill and forty-six gaps for Thomas. After the excerpts were recorded in computerized digital form, a phonetic analysis software package called Xwaves was used to measure the gap lengths given to each subject.

The results of the analysis revealed a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$ on a 1-tailed t-test) between the mean gap length following Hill's statements (1.046 seconds) and the mean gap length following Thomas's statements (1.386 seconds). This difference can be explained only with reference to the power dynamics that characterized the discourse. The senators employed a number of silencing strategies that served to validate Thomas's statements and weaken Hill's. Most notably, they employed longer gaps after many of Thomas's dramatic, indignant statements in order to underscore the import of his words and allow the weight of his responses to "sink in" with the audience, and they employed shorter gaps after many of Hill's statements so as to obscure her answers, firing rapid questions in succession and giving her little time to think. In addition, the senators frequently employed a short gap followed by a change of topic after answers that were problematic for their case, thereby shifting the focus of the discussion.

Simple Yes/No Questions versus Tag Questions

There are two types of yes/no questions in English: *simple yes/no questions* and *tag questions*. Simple yes/no questions, such as the question asked of Thomas in (c) below, generally carry vacuous presuppositions. Tag questions,⁴ in contrast, consist of a statement followed by a question, and as such, can be a powerful way of introducing assumptions. In the question asked of Hill in (d), for instance, the tag *did he?* carries a question force that serves to modify the assertoric force of the declarative clause.

- (c) Did you say these things to Professor Hill?
Presupposition: Either you did say these things to Professor Hill or you didn't.
- (d) In fact, he did not ask you to have sex with him, did he?
Presupposition: He did not ask you to have sex with him.

Ourselves (1992:291) to a public protest first published in the *New York Times* and later in newspapers across the United States: "As women of African descent ... [we] are particularly outraged by the racist and sexist treatment of Professor Anita Hill, an African American woman who was maligned and castigated for daring to speak publicly of her own experience of sexual abuse?" Why did so many women believe, upon watching the hearings, that Hill was being treated unfairly? Certainly, the hearings had a makeshift legal structure, a stopgap arrangement that provided time limits, testimony given and witnesses called on both sides, and preestablished turn-taking procedures. This is not to say that the hearings proceeded according to "the rules" (for there were no rules in the traditional legal sense)¹ but that even given the structure they took, and adding in the insinuation and the overt attempts to discredit testimony, still something more elusive contributed to our perception of the event and its outcome.

Part of the answer to these questions lies not only in *what* was said but in *how* it was said, in the pragmatic level beyond the semantics—a level found not in printed transcripts of the hearings but in the interactive unfolding of the television drama itself. In this chapter, I examine the hearings as a site for the reproduction of power relations, focusing on how microlevel linguistic features worked in subtle, almost hidden ways to construct a discourse that catapulted many of its listeners into a rage. I begin by orienting the discussion toward some of the premises in language and gender research, and proceed by analyzing the pragmatic features that characterize the Hill-Thomas hearings. I conclude by considering some of the consequences of such linguistic patterns, both for the hearings and for the field of language and gender studies.

Language and Gender: Beyond Essentialism

Twenty years ago Candace West and Donald Zimmerman (1975) began the study of what has proved to be an enduring puzzle. In their analysis of conversational interaction in same-sex and mixed-sex dyads, they found a gender difference in a particular linguistic domain: interruptions. After observing that the men in their study interrupted women much more often than they interrupted other men, and more often than women interrupted either women or men, West and Zimmerman attributed the gender imbalance to men's greater likelihood to exert dominance and power in conversations. In another equally influential study, Pamela Fishman (1978) tape-recorded the conversations of couples living together and found that topics of conversation introduced by men were successfully launched 96 percent of the time, and women's topics succeeded only 36 percent of the

time. These studies and others set the groundwork for theoretical discussions of conversational variables and strategies in terms of men's exerting dominance and control, and women's either doing the interactional housework,² as it were, or exercising resistance.

More recently, however, the easy unitary relationship between a linguistic form and its social meaning has been dismantled and questioned by researchers [Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992a, b; Gal, this volume]. Any single linguistic feature may carry different and contradictory social meanings across cultures and even within the same culture. Deborah Cameron (1992:55) stresses the importance of recognizing that many linguistic practices cannot be reduced to tautological statements of the following form: "If a woman does more or less of linguistic feature *x*, it must mean that [the feature] denotes powerlessness because women are powerless in the social discourse." Such an assertion, Cameron argues, is simply the *post-facto* interpretation of data based on what we know about power relationships between the sexes.

Deborah James and Sandra Clarke's (1993) comparison of various researchers' findings in the domain of interruptions reveals that only seldom are results consistent from one study to the next. One conversational analyst may find that men interrupt more than women, a second may find no gender difference, and a third may find that women interrupt more than men. This observation calls for two related responses, both of which are clearly articulated by Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet (this volume). The first is an invitation to look beyond the generalizations that large-scale abstractions such as "female" and "male" force upon us as researchers. If we essentialize all women into one category, we ignore the many axes (African American, Latina, European American, Californian, Jewish) along which particular women structure their identity. The diversity of influences affecting the dynamics of any single conversation necessarily sets up for failure any comparison of these different studies, particularly because each study works with subjects from different ethnic groups, age populations, and geographical backgrounds who have only their gender in common. Second, we should study language behavior within contextualized, situated settings, conducting microlevel analyses alongside large-scale statistical studies. By doing so, we will better understand the different functions and meanings of a particular interruption, as well as the ways in which that interruption might fit into the dynamics of a contextualized interaction. In this chapter I pursue both of these approaches, observing how the Hill-Thomas hearings were conducted in the intersection of language, gender, and African American issues.

In the first example the epistemological status of the claim is not predetermined; in the second, the presupposition introduced by the statement *he did not ask you to have sex with him* is salient. For the purposes of this study, I compared the number of simple yes/no questions and tag questions directed at Hill with the number of those directed at Thomas.

The analysis revealed that Thomas was asked significantly more simple yes/no questions than Hill (53 percent versus 37 percent of the total questions asked); in contrast, Hill encountered more tag questions than Thomas (27 percent versus 17 percent of the total questions asked). The discrepancy between the ways in which Thomas and Hill were asked questions may have ultimately given the impression that Hill struggled with her testimony and that Thomas performed with ease. The proliferation of simple yes/no questions in Thomas's session made for a relatively smooth testimony; the proliferation of tag questions in Hill's session often led to disappointed responses because many of them contained presuppositions with which she disagreed. Consider the following example, an exchange between Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) and Hill:

- Specter: Professor Hill, you testified that you drew an inference that Judge Thomas might want you to look at pornographic films, but you told the FBI specifically that he never asked you to watch the films, *is that correct?*
- Hill: He never said, "Let's go to my apartment and watch films or go to my house and watch films." He did say, "You ought to see this material."
- Specter: But when you testify that, as I wrote it down, "We ought to look at pornographic movies together," that was an expression of what was on your mind—
- Hill: That was the inference that I drew, yes, with his pressing me for social engagements, yes.
- Specter: That's something he might have wanted you to do but the fact is flady, he never asked you to look at pornographic movies with him.
- Hill: With him? No, he did not.

The example illustrates the import of a tag question and the presuppositions that it may introduce. In his first turn, Specter introduces the word *inference* to cast doubt on a statement made by Hill. An inference is by definition not a fact, and Specter's suggestion that Hill presents her evidence in such a manner plays into the already existing context of many senators and journalists asserting that Hill had "fantasies"—a term deliberately used by many of the Republican senators to invoke and leave unspoken the possibility that

Hill's accusations were mere sexual fantasies. In the next turn, Hill attempts to rectify her position, clearly stating what Thomas did say and what he did not say, but Specter returns to his previous argument that Hill's inference was a product of her imagination: *But when you testify that, as I wrote it down, "We ought to look at pornographic movies together," that was an expression of what was on your mind—* Especially noticeable is the way in which Hill tries to rectify Specter's assumptions by challenging them or providing further explanation, a phenomenon I discuss below.

Concise Answers

The third variable in my study, related to the second, is whether Hill or Thomas provided concise answers to the two types of yes/no questions. In a classic trial textbook, Thomas Mauet (1988:220) points out that cross-examination is "the art of slowly making mountains out of molehills. Don't make your big points in one question. Lead up to each point with a series of short, precise questions." Gregory Matoesian (1993:172), in his analysis of rape trials, asserts that these short questions are "designed not so much for securing information but for building a series of progressive 'facts,' eliciting the defendant's agreement to those 'facts,' and assembling her answers to formulate ... [an argument]. The cumulative and progressive establishment of these facts operates as a pre-sequence: as a preliminary to some forthcoming or projected action." The following exchange between Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) and Clarence Thomas nicely exemplifies Matoesian's understanding of a "pre-sequence":

- Hatch: Did you ever say to her in words or substance something like: "There is a pubic hair in my coke"?
- Thomas: No, Senator.
- Hatch: Did you ever refer to your private parts in conversation with Professor Hill?
- Thomas: Absolutely not, Senator.
- Hatch: Did you ever brag to Professor Hill about your sexual prowess?
- Thomas: No, Senator.
- Hatch: Did you ever use the term "Long Dong Silver" in conversations with Professor Hill?
- Thomas: No, Senator.
- Hatch: Did you ever have [a] lunch with Professor Hill in which you talked about sex?
- Thomas: Absolutely not.

senators. It is in cases like this that we can forge an interpretation of otherwise puzzling differences in gap length, only by contextualizing a silence can we come closer to an understanding of its meaning. Consider the following example, in which Senator Howell Heflin (D-Ala.) is questioning Thomas. Senator Hatch goes so far as to interrupt out of turn in order to provide additional acknowledgment of Thomas's statement:

Thomas: Senator, there is a big difference between approaching a case subjectively and watching yourself being lynched. There is no comparison whatsoever.

[gap: 2.36 seconds]

Heflin: Ah yes [sighs].

[gap: 1.12 seconds]

Hatch: I may add that he has personal knowledge of this as well, and personal justification ... for anger.

In this excerpt, the acknowledgment that the senators provided, combined with two very long silences, gave Thomas's well-crafted phrase added weight. In that 2.36-second span the camera had time to zoom out, give a wide-angle view of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and focus back on Heflin who was nodding gravely. Hatch's overt support of Thomas is characteristic of the positive feedback that Thomas received throughout the hearings from senators of both parties—a reception that Hill rarely experienced.

Implications

The interaction of several factors in the formation of each silent gap makes it difficult to determine the exact cause of statistically significant correlations in the data. Depending on context, silence can be seen as powerful (Bauman 1983) or disempowering (Lakoff, this volume). Western Apaches, for example, use silence to confuse European American outsiders (Basso 1979), and European American men may exert dominance in household situations through nonresponse (Fishman 1978). Susan Gal (this volume) makes the observation that in settings of institutional inequity, when one party must self-expose before another (such as in psychotherapeutic contexts), the silent observer holds all the cards.

With regard to deciphering the complexity of the silences in the Thomas confirmation hearings, there are some relevant observations to be made. Generally speaking, speech is always coconstructed so that the silences are not "owned" by any single person. It may well be that Thomas, speaking at a slower overall rate and constructing responses with long internal pauses, contributed to long gaps to some degree. This is not to say, however, that

when combined with all the other linguistic characteristics of the hearings, the silences did not contribute to a public perception of Thomas as getting more television airtime and a more sympathetic ear from the senators. Thomas's statements were followed by pregnant pauses and poignant silences so often that the television cameras had time to wander around the room and focus on his wife, Virginia Thomas, nodding thoughtfully, as well as on some senators' furrowed brows and sympathetic expressions. Thomas's experience (and Hill's lack of experience) as a judge may have contributed to the relative ponderousness of his speech style, which might appropriately be referred to as *judge style* in its slow tempo, frequent rhetorical questioning, and repetition of arguments. By adopting features of a speech style perceived to be powerful, Thomas was able to subvert the position in which he was placed.

Yet this explanation alone is too simple for, as Geneva Smitherman (1995) argues, Thomas also adopted elements from the positively valued African American speech styles of *testifyin*, *sermonizin*, and *signifyin*. Smitherman locates Thomas's rhetorical posture squarely within the African American tradition, offering the following exchange between Thomas and Senator Heflin as an instance of *signifyin*.

Heflin: We're trying to get to the bottom of this, and if she is lying, then I think you can help us prove that she was lying.

Thomas: Senator, I am incapable of proving the negative. It did not occur.

Heflin: Well, if it did not occur, I think you are in a position, certainly, your ability to testify to in effect to try to eliminate it from people's minds.

Thomas: Senator, I didn't create it in people's minds. (230)

Smitherman defines *signifyin* as "the verbal art of ceremonial combativeness in which one person puts down, talks about, 'signifies on' someone or on something someone has said, ... a rhetorical modality ... characterized by indirect, humor, exploitation of the unexpected, and quick verbal repartee" (228). In the above excerpt, Thomas employs such repartee to shift the terms of the debate, exploiting unexpected implications (e.g., *I didn't create it in people's minds*) and taking the upper hand by refusing to acknowledge the very premises of Heflin's questions (*Senator, I am incapable of proving the negative. It did not occur*). By employing discourse patterns associated with both African American style and judge style, Thomas was able to appeal to the majority of popular African American opinion; at the same time he was able to retain some elements of a European American style throughout the

By concise answer, I mean simple confirmation or denial as with Thomas's responses above—answers that lawyers can build on and that may establish a presequence as described by Matoesian. Any answer that involved a rebuttal of the premises of the question was considered *noncon- cise*. The results of the analysis revealed that Hill gave fewer concise answers than Thomas ($p < 0.05$, chi-square = 3.882). (See Table 2.1.)

Table 2.1. Types of Answers in Response to Yes/No Questions

Responses	Hill	Thomas
Yes/no, concise	4	13
Yes/no, nonconcise	14	12

Only 16 percent of the questions directed toward Hill elicited a short answer; 30 percent of Thomas's questions prompted some kind of simple affirmation or denial. This result can be explained if we consider that the questions directed at Thomas were formulated by the senators (most of whom are lawyers by training) in a radically different way than the questions directed at Hill. Thomas faced an environment favoring an effortless explanation (realized in the data as a concise answer) much more often than Hill did. The questions directed at Hill contained in many cases false presuppositions and incorrect factual assumptions, and this caused her to elaborate on her answers to a further extent than Thomas did. Additionally, because Hill was the person bringing forth the charges, she needed to provide much more detailed explanation in her answers so as to make her position clear, particularly on the first day of the hearings. Thomas, on the other hand, as the accused party, needed to offer nothing but denial. By asking questions of the form *did you or did you not do x*, the senators facilitated this denial; their questions did not function as information questions but rather as leading questions that had an obvious "correct" answer. Thomas needed merely to answer concisely.

Change of Topic

This variable refers to the changes of topic initiated by the senators after the conclusion of a statement made by Hill or Thomas. A careful record of topic changes can help determine who controls the structure and nature of the information in the discourse setting. Matoesian refers to topic control as "the second face of power—setting the agenda"; he highlights the asymmetrical distribution of resources to organize topics, frame testimony, and present evidence, all of which are primarily in the hands of the prosecutor, or in this case, the senators. Senators were expected to take turns at questioning Hill

and Thomas after their prepared statements were presented. They were free to guide the discussion, introduce topics, and present evidence, all of which were performed with great ceremony and with the stated purpose of "getting to the bottom of this," as summarized by Senator Helfin.

In a discourse setting where one of the overt aims is to find out as much as possible about an incident, one would expect to find a continuity of topic such that participants engage the same topic for several clauses. That is to say, interlocutors will choose something to talk about and continue to talk about it until they are satisfied that it has been covered in depth. Most results in the data confirm the prevalence of topic continuity, save for one: when Hill provided brief answers to yes/no questions, the topic was *always* changed ($p < 0.01$, chi-square = 9.992). (See Table 2.2.)

Table 2.2. Topic Changes in Response to Hill's Short Answers

Responses	Change of Topic	No Change of Topic
Yes/no, concise, Hill	4	0
All others combined	24	67

The senators' tendency to change the topic directly after a question that Hill answered with ease may be analyzed as a discursive strategy: the senators would topic-switch whenever it became clear that there was no further avenue for contradictions or apparent struggle in Hill's testimony. These shifts of topic may have served to discount Hill's testimony in the eyes of the public, particularly because the senators also refused to acknowledge Hill's assertions, as discussed in the following section.

Acknowledgments

I counted as an acknowledgment any response from the senators that legitimated or supported the statements made or positions taken by Hill or Thomas. Thomas's nonconcise answers were followed by an overt acknowledgment of his position 50 percent of the time. Hill, on the other hand, received no acknowledgments but, rather, a change of topic in 46 percent of the follow-up queries by senators.

This was one of the more blatantly biased aspects of the hearing. When combined with greater gap length, the overt acknowledgments and expressions of sympathy for Thomas after his nonconcise statements served to legitimate his claim. Thomas's slow pace and dramatic delivery succeeded in silencing the entire room, and the content of his arguments, replete with racial and sexual accusations toward the senators and the media, often elicited prolonged apologies and expressions of solidarity from many

hearings, such as grammar and pronunciation, and make his speech acceptable to the larger audience.

In a similar way, Hill's linguistic options were influenced and constrained by many factors, but these constraints did not work to her advantage. African American women clearly have access to the discourse styles outlined above, as Michèle Foster (this volume) illustrates in her study of an African American instructor who expresses solidarity by manipulating grammatical structures and employing figurative language, symbolism, and gestures. Hill, however, was unable to employ these discourse styles. Why? Because to mainstream American norms, this style is identified primarily as male and only secondarily, if at all, as African American. Gloria Hull (1992:96-97), for instance, characterizes Thomas's performance as "an aggressive offensive ... high male dudgeon at its best," and apologetically wishes "that Hill had acted less 'feminine' when confronted with the affidavit." But if acting like a Black woman and capitalizing on Black speech styles is seen as masculine and verbally (and implicitly sexually) aggressive, then the only recourse is to speak like a white woman. Witness the following remark that appeared in *Newsweek*:

Charming in speech and manner, backed by parents of incontestable respectability, Miss Hill was the very image of maidenly modesty. Yet the forthrightness with which she repeated to the Committee and to an audience of untold millions of television listeners Judge Thomas's dirty jokes in all their tasteless detail would have done credit to a truck driver. (Trilling 1994:12)

In front of European American lawmakers and national television, it was paramount that Hill not appear to fulfill the cultural stereotype of the Black woman as verbally and sexually aggressive. Equally important was that she not fulfill wider female stereotypes of emotionality and hysteria. Because half the hearings were spent on the subject of her personal credibility (read purity), Hill was left with no choice but to adopt a dispassionate and clinical speech style. To have testified any less dispassionately, any less clinically, would have invoked the very stereotypes she was trying to avoid.

You can't win for losing. The dispassionate speech style that Hill adopted was deemed highly suspicious by the African American community (Jordan 1992; Malveaux 1992; Smitherman 1995) and made her appear, in the eyes of many Americans, insincere. Hull (1992:288) observes that "having to talk like a woman—and a black woman—about gross sexual matters ... forced Anita Hill into an almost 'prim and proper' self-presentation. Even more importantly, it compelled her to subdue her emotions and behavior and

deaden her affect. Unfortunately, deadening her affect also helped kill her power." Both Hill and Thomas had to frame their arguments in ways that addressed the dominant society's most damaging mirror-image stereotypes of African American sexuality: Jezebel (the sexually promiscuous Black woman) and the Black rapist (the dangerous, oversexualized Black man). These stereotypes are the legacy of slavery, of the control that whites had over Black bodies, depending on them literally to reproduce their capital. Thomas confronted these stereotypes and uttered their name on national television, his famous "high-tech lynching" speech is a direct allusion to wrongful accusations of Black men as sexually dangerous, and in this context is meant as a symbol for racism in general. Hill chose to deflect the Jezebel stereotype that was continually insinuated (especially in the Doggett episode, in which a coworker claimed that Hill had continually sought to go out with him, thereby implying that she was sexually available if not promiscuous) by acting with remarkable seriousness. Both of these strategies are in principle valid ways of dealing with racist preconceptions. But because of the social context in which they were embedded, it was precisely the employment of these strategies that reinforced public notions of Hill as cold and calculating, and Thomas as standing up to fight the oppression of Black people. In one of the most ironic turns of argument, Thomas was able to insinuate that Hill was "a woman scorned" by implying that she was jealous of his preference for women of "lighter complexion."

The reception of Hill's testimony and the questions centering on her credibility have strong implications. The Senate's dogged refusal to legitimate her claims has paradoxically both undermined women's (and especially African American women's) claims to public discourse, and at the same time encouraged many women to come forward with their own allegations. Kimberlé Krenshaw (1992) argues that Hill's status as an African American woman played a central role in both her representation and her reception. Her multiple marginality in the white/feminist and male/antiracist circles that appropriated her story meant that she could not tell her own story because she was continually interpreted in the frameworks, metaphors, and paradigms of the forces around her. One of those metaphors is rape, another is lynching, and during the hearings they were often invoked side by side. Krenshaw eloquently argues that when Hill came forward with her allegation, each side fit her story to its own metaphor: feminism, that of a raped white woman; antiracism, that of a lynched Black man. Marginal in both metaphors, Hill stood by as her story was taken away and she herself was de-ethnicized by white women and desexualized by Black antiracists.

The tendency of the feminist movement to universalize women's

experience, Krenshaw argues, was a powerful disservice to Hill, because the rape metaphor at once took on a life of its own and could continue only as long as it was fed, with Hill cast as a suitable victim. For the casting to be successful, she had to be processed through a quasi-rape trial that attempted to determine her purity as measured by her sexual behavior, as well as whether or not she had consented. Until as late as 1978, consent could not be proved in a court of law unless the victim exercised "utmost resistance"—a behavior that still seems to be a standard requirement of the person in the street. But what is utmost resistance? Certainly, failing to report such a hideous crime for so many years is not utmost resistance, or so the senators and much of the public thought. Meanwhile, European American feminists tried to excuse Hill's silence by invoking her career but failed to take into account the historical exploitation of Black women's bodies and the specific reasons that a Black woman might remain silent in the face of harassment. Indeed, Krenshaw (1992:415) argues that "many Black women have been reluctant to reveal experiences of sexual abuse [because] they fear that their stories might be used to reinforce stereotypes of Black men as sexually threatening." To conclude her argument, Krenshaw chronicles the way in which the lynch metaphor rallied the African American community around Thomas. But there is no equivalent metaphor that tells the tale of Black women's sexual abuse. By speaking directly to the Black experience in speech style as well as content, Thomas won the support of many African Americans. This sort of strategy was utterly unavailable to Hill, who was eventually to align with European American feminists, her most vocal and consistent supporters.

Conclusion

Robin Lakoff (this volume), in her discussion of the literal and metaphorical silencing of women, notes that silence has multiple meanings. Likewise, in analyzing the discourse of the Hill-Thomas hearings, I have come to believe that the silences in this discourse are many, complex, and connected. There is the silence of the people who were not allowed to appear or were intimidated from doing so (other women who were allegedly harassed, as well as expert witnesses on harassment); the silences that appeared throughout the hearings as tacit confirmations of the validity of Thomas's assertions; the silence of senators who would not acknowledge Hill's position during the hearings; the silencing of Hill's story by the cacophony of voices seeking to appropriate her; the silencing of Black women's experiences within the larger feminist enterprise; and finally the silence of Hill, whose narrative was constrained by sociopolitical forces that had already decided how she must speak.

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Notes

1. Improvised rules made by powerful people legitimated the proceedings despite internal contradictions, giving the impression that there was a precedent for a public forum of that sort, though in reality there were no legal equivalents. Committee members, because they were senators and not judges (and thus their job is to make policy and not to judge people), and in order to discount rules of legal evidence, voiced the mantra "This is not a trial." Ironically, just as in a court of law, Thomas was repeatedly told, "The presumption [of innocence] is with you" (Biden, D-Del.), although this was in direct contradiction to the policy drawn up at, of all places, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which "allowed for the charging party to prevail in cases that lacked third-party evidence" (Ross 1992:52-53).
2. This interactional behavior is also known in language and gender studies as *maintenance work*, a term originally coined by Fishman (1978).
3. By *below the level of consciousness* I refer to a process that is relatively automatic and unmonitored. A shorter pause on average after Hill's statements is surely not something the senators consciously set out to accomplish.
4. My analysis of tag questions here differs from that presented in previous language and gender literature, which frequently links the production of tag questions with powerless (i.e., female) speakers. For a critique of the literature and an insightful discussion of the polysenantic nature of tag questions and other linguistic phenomena, see Cameron (1992).

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