Contrary Convictions: Race and Subjectivity in Public Opinion on the O.J. Simpson Criminal Trial[1]

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ABSTRACT: In the pair of studies reported here, we probe the operant subjectivity at play in public opinion on the Simpson saga—in the process amplifying our understanding of the role of race, among other things, in the diversified accounts taking shape on the spectacle as a whole. Results reveal a three-fold set of meanings for the case at both pre-trial and post-verdict points in time. These contrasting constructions of the same set of events are examined in light of their defining themes and their affinities to the racial identities of their proponents. A concluding discussion takes stock of the simultaneously complementary and incommensurate relationship of these results to findings from scores of surveys seeking to gauge public opinion on the case.

It's a tabloidy, guilty pleasure but it's also an important

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[1]Prepared for presentation at the annual meeting of the International Society for the Scientific Study of Subjectivity, Stephenson Research Center, School of Journalism, unviersity of Missouri—Columbia, October 3-5, 1996. The authors acknowledge, with appreciation, the assistance of Pat Hennes int he development of Q sample for the second study reported here, and of Lee Sigelman for bibliographic advice. Omitted here for reasons of space, the complete inventory of all statements comprising the two Q samples, cell-design identifications for each statement, rotated factor matrices, and the final array fo factor scores for each statement in each study—all are available on request from the first author at Social Sciences Department, Wartburg College, Waverly, IA 60677 (E-mail: Thomas@ns. wartburg.edu).

> historical event at this point. Put another way, this case has everything that obsesses the American people. It has sex, violence, race, Hollywood, sports. And the only eyewitness is a dog.
>
> — Jeffrey Toobin (1996)

> Intellectuals are people, too. We need excitement like everyone else. We need good stories to hook our interest and tie our tables to.
>
> — Bruce Lewenstein (1996)

The Simpson Case as a Human Interest Spectacle

Looking back over the course of events—both alleged and acknowledged—which constitute the raw ingredients of the Simpson case, it scarcely comes as any surprise that public fascination with the affair would assume the obsessive dimensions it did. At issue, after all, was a *human interest spectacle* of immense proportions. This species of spectacle, according to Edelman (1988) "...is public in the sense that it deals with the private life of a celebrity or with a kind of pathetic, heroic, or scandalous action that carries instant and wide appeal regardless who does it" (p. 99). Edelman, it bears noting, is fundamentally concerned with the *political* spectacle; hence his interest in the way in which such phenomena "help to politicize the public and so keep it both apprehensive and hopeful." Human interest variants of this type, Professor Edelman says further, "...evoke a dramatic setting that impinges upon private lives; a scene comprised of effective and ineffective leaders managing the effort to cope with distressing problems ...." (p. 120). Whether or not the Simpson case warrants consideration solely as a human interest species of the *political spectacle* genus need not concern us at this point. As the comments excerpted at the outset reveal, perhaps there is too much energy expended on the part of observers, scholars included, defending and rationalizing their deep fascination with this case. For our part, let it suffice to say that we, too, find this a compelling story and so do millions of others. That being the case, there is much to be learned, no doubt, by pursuing the Simpson case as a human interest spectacle quite apart from any lessons it might contain about the condition of our politics.

While the Simpson story was dominating national news, the major survey organizations sought to monitor the public pulse on the events, undertaking scores of polls aimed at calibrating, among other things, the effects of race on opinions regarding Simpson's guilt or innocence and a series of collateral issues elevated by the crime (e.g., the role of race and racism in police conduct and the criminal justice system more generally, the conduct and stature of defense attorneys, domestic abuse, etc.). Despite some variation over time and slight differences attributable to question wording, the polls were producing a fairly stable portrait of public sentiment with respect to at least one facet of the spectacle: when addressing Simpson's guilt or innocence, as well as the plausibility of a genuinely fair trial before a jury of his peers, black and white Americans were reaching decidedly different verdicts. In survey after survey, solid majorities of white respondents were inclined to regard Simpson as guilty, whereas even larger majorities of black citizens were convinced that the defendant was unjustly accused (Moore & Saad, 1995).

Data from Gallup polls reveal a remarkably stable and racially divided distribution of responses toward the question of whether allegations that Simpson was guilty were "definitely or probably true." In July, 1994, one month after the murders, 63% of whites concurred; in October, 1995, before the jury reached its verdict in the case, this figure climbed to 73%. Conversely, the percentage of white Americans considering such claims as probably or definitely untrue ranged from 15% early on to only 20% as the case went to the jury. For black respondents, these percentages are almost precisely the opposite. A month following the murders, 24% of African Americans agreed that Simpson was probably or definitely guilty, a figure that swells only slightly to 27% as the trial wound down. Early on, 60% of blacks deemed allegations of Simpson's guilt *untrue*; and this majority remained virtually unchanged (62%) as the defense rested its case (Newport, 1996). With no reason to doubt the accuracy of these findings, we cannot be entirely certain what they might signify in a wider or deeper sense. Presumably, such racial cleavages in response to bottom-line questions of Simpson's guilt are symptomatic of more deep-seated differences in the way the events of the spectacle were being understood or defined in the first place by white and black Americans. Our initial aim in this research, then, is to probe beneath the surface of such topographical differences in opinion to determine the larger Simpson story was being *constructed* by onlookers of different races. Unlike surveys on the Simpson affair, we seek to

probe the full range of public meanings ascribed the hearings—an aspiration which stems from the elemental nature of a human interest spectacle as inherently void of meaning. As Edelman (1988) puts it, the public spectacle "carries no meaning in itself. It is always a gloss on the phenomenal worlds of individuals and groups" (p. 93).

Constructing and Deconstructing the Human Interest Spectacle: From Discrete Opinions to Operant Factors on the Simpson Case

To address such issues we employ Q technique and its methodology (Stephenson, 1953; Brown, 1989; McKeown & Thomas, 1988) in a manner similar to the strategy followed by Thomas, McCoy and McBride (1993) in their study of audience constructions of the Clarence Thomas vs. Anita Hill spectacle which unfolded before a massive television audience in October 1991. Among other things, the latter research was able to demonstrate how public constructions of the Thomas-Hill hearings were affected in powerful ways by the race and gender of the viewers of the events. Given the power of race and gender in audience constructions of the Hill-Thomas spectacle, our emulation of that approach in the present research also affords an opportunity to compare our findings. This comparison—bearing on the relative effects of race and gender in two human interest spectacles featuring both factors—illuminates an additional set of issues that the present study should position us to address.

In the research at hand we undertake *two* explorations of public opinion, each at different points in the chronological course of the Simpson story: The first study was undertaken in September 1994, following the conclusion of the pretrial hearing in the Simpson case and prior to the onset of the criminal trial itself. The second study was conducted in the two-week interim following Simpson's acquittal. While the respondent pools in the two studies are comprised of different individuals, their racial composition is comparable (roughly equal numbers of black and white respondents in each instance). The two studies, then, enable us to address questions pertaining to the effects of time and the trial itself on the substance and structure of audience opinion toward the Simpson case.

Study 1: Pre-Trial Schemata on the Simpson Case

From the moment that news reports of the grisly double-homicide of

Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman first aired on June 14, 1994, to the questioning and arrest of O.J. Simpson as a prime suspect, to the so-called "suicide note" penned by Simpson prior to his flight from authorities when he was supposed to be surrendering to police, to the infamous "slow-speed chase" through southern California freeways—the most widely-viewed event in television history—to the pre-trial hearing, the trial itself and, finally, the verdict of "not guilty" a year and one-half later, the Simpson saga became a national obsession. For the remainder of the summer of 1994, the murders and the question of Mr. Simpson's guilt or innocence dominated news coverage and no doubt countless conversations as well.

Concourse and Q Sample

In the parlance of Q technique, the volume of communication spawned by the Simpson case constitutes a *concourse* of communication (Stephenson, 1978) of enormous proportions. Everyone, it seemed, had something to say about what the whole affair signified quite apart from the central question of Simpson's role in the murders. To many, the events were coalescing into a series of parables serving as a huge mirror to society and, in the process, affording an occasion for earnest soul-searching vis-a-vis a litany of unsavory features of the American cultural landscape: the status and temptations of celebrity; the ever-receding line between tabloid and serious journalism; the possible effects of sports violence in spawning domestic abuse; race and racism in their own right as well as in connection with police conduct, the criminal justice system, interracial marriage; and so forth and so on seemingly without end. From our inspection of the massive emerging concourse on the Simpson case, we selected nine such *frames* as receiving prominent treatment in the summer months of 1994.[1] Statements representing each of these thematic frames were further divided into one of three categories pertaining to the *valence of the sentiment* conveyed in the expression: (1) positive/affirming, (2) neutral or null, and (3) negative/skeptical. Each of the 27 cells in the resulting 9 X 3 factorial design was fitted with at least two (in some cases three) statements of that type for a total Q sample of 60 statments.

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[1]Topical frames dealt respectively with: (1) Race; (2) Simpson as a Fallen Hero; (3) Media Coverage; (4) the Defense's Strategy; (5) the Prosecution's Case; (6) the Victims/Domestic Violence; (7) Impact on Audience Members; (8) the Spectacle as Mirror to Society; and (9) Fact vs. Fiction in Evidence.

Participants

Students from two universities (one located in the Midwest, the other in the South) and one college (in Iowa) served as respondents. Altogether, 96 usable Q sorts were performed by a P-set that included 54 whites (29 men, 25 women) and 41 blacks (16 male, 25 females). (One person refused to provide any identifying information as to race or gender.) With two exceptions, all black respondents were enrolled in the Southern university (an all-black school) making regional and racial differences among our respondents virtually impossible to separate. Despite its nonrandom—and hence nonrepresentative—character, the sample is more than adequate for present purposes. Moreover, its resemblance to the P-set from the Thomas et al. (1993) study bolsters confidence in our ability to draw comparisons between popular constructions of the Simpson case with those forged from events and issues in the Thomas-Hill hearings.

Findings: Pre-Trial Schemata on the Simpson Case

Q sorts were intercorrelated and the 96 X 96 correlation matrix factor analyzed via the centroid method. Three meaningful factors were extracted and rotated using both judgmental and varimax criteria to a solution approximating simple structure. Due to its slightly greater clarity, the varimax rotation was selected over the judgmental alternative and forms the basis for the final rotated factor matrix for Study 1. (Omitted here for reasons of space, this matrix is available upon request from the authors.) It bears mention that of the 96 participants, only 7 produced Q sorts which failed to reach significance (loadings of $\pm$ .36, $p < .01$) on at least one of the factors. Eleven sorts were saturated significantly on two of the three factors. Of the 89 defining variates, 32 are located on Factor A, 36 are on Factor B, and the remaining 10 are associated with Factor C.

Factor A: Casting the Aspersions of Conscience—The Dominant White Construction

Factor A is defined by a preponderance of white respondents; there are, in fact, no Q sorts by African Americans among the defining variates for the first factor. Given our interest not only in taking into account the effects of race but also of gender, loadings on each of the factors were treated as dependent measures in a series of 2 X 2 (RACE

BY SEX) ANOVAs. For Factor A, race emerges as a significant effect ($\underline{F}(1,91) = 27.865$, $p < .001$), owing to the high loadings, on average, of both white males ($\underline{M} = .37$) and females ($\underline{M} = .35$). Neither the SEX effect nor the SEX BY RACE interaction reached significance for Factor A.

What, then, is the story told by Factor A as it seeks to make sense of the events surrounding the tragedy? By and large Factor A finds little of value in the entire episode. Its leitmotif is one of generalized anger and lament at the amount and the kind of attention devoted to the developing case against Simpson. To the extent that Factor A espouses a defining narrative for the events it is one borne of a belief that news coverage and public attention were focusing too much on the accused murderer and too little on the victims, particularly Nicole Brown Simpson, whose history of abuse at the hands of her former husband was a matter of public record. To Factor A, far too much had been made of the tragic tale of Simpson's stature as a fallen hero.

A	B	C	
+5	+2	-4	(48) I'm disgusted at the media coverage of Simpson. There are events elsewhere in the country and the world that are every bit as epic, but hardly anyone knows about them because the media have decided people prefer sleaze and sensationalism to hard news.
+4	-4	+1	(6) This is not the story of a fallen idol. This is the story of a woman who was brutally murdered while her children were just on the other side of the door. Remember Nicole Brown Simpson. This is her story. Remember what she said to police when they arrived at her house: "He's going to kill me."

Factor A includes among the ranks of its defining variates persons convinced of Simpson's guilt at this point as well as others insisting that he be regarded as innocent until proven guilty. Even so, adherents of Factor A can muster little sympathy for Simpson as a human being, let alone as a tragic figure by virtue of his fall from grace. To Factor A, neither Simpson's celebrity nor his wide circle of friends willing to serve as character witnesses can suffice to dampen doubts about his innocence and the possibility that he may, in fact, have brutally murdered his ex-wife and her friend.

-4	+2	-1	(1) It's hard to imagine the same O.J. Simpson whose exploits on the football field embodied skill, deter-

mination and courage in the 1970's having a darker private side prone to violence. I feel a deep sadness for the loss of the well-respected "public" O.J.

-5 2 -1 (20) One usually has a gut feeling about such situations, but I do not feel that O.J. Simpson committed these murders. He just does not look or act like he is guilty to me.

-5 +1 -2 (60) So many of O.J.'s friends and acquaintances have come forward to share their knowledge of O.J. as a kind and decent human being who never gave even the slightest indication he was capable of murder. It doesn't seem possible that a man could so completely deceive so many friends for so long. No one can be that big of a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde!

For Factor A, then, the Simpson saga is, by September 1994, already a rather sad chapter in contemporary American experience. If emblematic in deeper ways for the millions of observers whose fascination with the case seemed inexhaustible, the moral to the story was not a happy one. Indeed what the Simpson case was telling us about ourselves and our life together was tantamount to a harsh and extensive indictment of several facets of American society. Television coverage—for example, of the famous slow-speed chase—was driven not by the news value of the information but by ratings alone. And the millions who were fast on their way to becoming "O.J. Junkies" ought to be ashamed of themselves for there was nothing, from the vantage point of Factor A, that was edifying or enlightening to be derived from such an investment of time and energy. The heavy hand of *conscience* thus permeates Factor A's denial that anything of value or social good—even the prospect of an enlarged common, playful conversational common ground—might grow out of the case and public preoccupation with it.

+4 +2 -2 (28) Televising the entire pursuit of O.J. was purely sensational and exploitative. It shows what's wrong with the media: It was covered not because it was important, but because network execs feared that viewers would switch channels.

-4 -1 +3 (44) In a sad-sick way, O.J. Simpson's demise has brought America together—by giving us a "shared experience." It's not a happy story, but it has given us

something to talk about with many people we don't have much to talk about with.

Factor B: American Justice on Trial—The Dominant Black Construction

Thirty-six respondents produced Q sorts which are purely loaded on Factor B. Of these, all but four are from African American respondents. Given the magnitude of mean loadings for black men (.56) and women (.43)—as compared with means of .09 and .14 for white men and women—it should occasion no surprise that RACE emerges as a powerful effect in accounting for loadings on Factor B ($F(1,91) = 45.593$, $p < .001$). The differences in scores attributable to gender, either in isolation or in tandem with race, fail to approach significance. Factor B, therefore, is for blacks what Factor A was for whites: the dominant African American construction of the Simpson spectacle as of September, 1994.

Turning to the factor scores to probe the substance of that construction, we are impressed immediately by the decisive importance attributed to race and to racism in this version of events. Whereas Factor A feels that race issues had been overplayed in media reports, Factor B is adamant that the centrality of race and the pervasive influence of racism define the very core of the entire case. Rather than peripheral issues introduced as smokescreen by those interested in exonerating Simpson, race questions permeate all aspects of the affair, from media portrayals to private conversations.

A	B	C	
-3	+4	-4	(2) Race is definitely an issue. Simpson has been made to appear a violent animal, a savage, which is the stereotypical perception people have of black men. Unfortunately in America, race has a great influence over how one is treated.
-2	+4	-5	(30) How can race not be a factor in this? When you have a person who was trusted by America suddenly being called an animal, it affects how people view African Americans. And the portrayals of Simpson as a wife-beater and jealous stalker have reinforced stereotypes of black men as unpredictably violent.

Factor A, it will be recalled, insisted that this was "not the story of

a fallen idol," but rather the "story of a woman who was brutally murdered while her children were just on the other side of the door," (statement 6, cited above, given a +4) This claim is soundly rejected by Factor B (which gives the same item a -4). Indeed, Factor B goes further in insinuating that Nicole not automatically be accorded the status of an innocent victim while Simpson is denigrated as a cruel, sick murderer.

-2	+4	+2	(38) Granted, O.J. Simpson's marriage to Nicole was not perfect. But we shouldn't assume that their problems were all his fault. Nicole, no doubt, was no saint either.
-1	-5	-3	(7) O.J. Simpson is obviously a sick man. He has diminished our lives by magnifying his violence. A conviction will restore our faith that a tortured and murdered woman did not die in vain.

Factor B finds Simpson a more sympathetic character than does A, and its identification with the accused is revealed as well in the strong resentment with which it reacts to the suggestion that Simpson's story is emblematic of evil influence of celebrity status on those who society places on such high pedestals that they lose their moral bearings:

0	-4	+2	(19) O.J. Simpson's story is not the story of a black man overcoming all odds and making it big in a white man's world. This is the story about how pampered individuals lose their moral bearing because they have always played by different rules than the rest of us.

Despite their vast differences, Factors A and B are alike in one respect: both have a jaundiced view of media. But there are differences in the precise source of their animosity. Factor A, as noted, was disgusted with the tabloid-sleaze cast of the O.J. coverage; in its view, true news value took a backseat to sheer market value and Nielson ratings, leading print but especially broadcast journalism to a "lowest common denominator" criterion of newsworthiness. Factor B's condemnations are animated less by concerns that market-share calculations *per se* were driving news reporting than by media machinations of an even more sinister nature. (Recall, as well, the first two statements cited for Factor B above, nos. 2 and 30, each of which links race to media portrayals of Simpson that fueled and were fueled by ill-disguised racial stereotypes).

+3 +5 +1 (21) The conduct of the media has been shameful in this case. For several days it was universally reported that police had found a "bloody ski mask" at the murder scene when, in fact, no such mask ever existed.

+1 +3 -5 (11) *Time* magazine tricked up its photo of O.J. making him look darker, more sinister and menacing. If a picture is worth a thousand words, then that one says a lot about the interest of the media in reporting the truth and sticking to the facts.

Finally, criminal-justice considerations weigh heavily Factor B's framing of the Simpson story. The authorities generally, but particularly the police, are felt by Factor B to be prejudiced, incompetent, or both. And if Simpson's lawyers were already plotting to play the race card, by organizing a defense around the dubious credibility of an allegedly racist cop, there was certainly no reason to raise ethical qualms about the possible social-racial costs of pursuing such a strategy. Accompanying such sentiments, interestingly, is a denial that the quality of Simpson's defense says more about his ability to afford the most expensive lawyers than it does about the merits of his case.

0 +5 +4 (55) The police seem to have assumed that O.J. was the sole killer and then acted on that assumption without investigating other possibilities or suspects. There's no excuse for not getting a search warrant before entering Simpson's estate, and there's no excuse for rushing to judgment without tracking down leads from other suspects.

0 -3 +1 (22) I worry that the defense is test marketing the idea that O.J. was framed by a racist cop. This strategy is a dangerous and unethical gambit by O.J.'s defense lawyers and it runs the risk of inciting minorities and risking civil unrest if he's found guilty.

-1 +4 -3 (23) I can't believe the incredible incompetence of the authorities in this case. From the L.A. police to the Coroners' Office to the Office of the District Attorney, the entire investigation seems to have been botched.

+1 -3 0 (40) The only education the public is getting on our criminal justice system is how the system works for someone who can afford to pay thousands per day in

legal fees.

Factor C: On the Bright Side of O.J.

Factor C is defined by ten purely-loaded Q sorts, eight of which are from white respondents (5 males, 3 females) and two of which are from black females. The mean loading for whites, both males and females, was .19 on Factor C; for black females it was .15, and for black males it was .03. Again RACE emerges as a significant effect in the 2 X 2 ANOVAs ($F(1,88) = 6.916, p < .01$), with the SEX and RACE BY SEX effects falling shy of significance ($p = .094$ and .107, respectively), most likely because of the relatively small number of black males ($n = 15$) relative to the other three subgroups in the sample. Factor C is thus an orientation shared primarily by whites, but also by a small number of black women as well. Included among these individuals are roughly equal numbers of people convinced that Simpson was guilty as opposed to being undecided about his guilt or innocence.

The story from the standpoint of Factor C is rather different in tone and substance from both of the foregoing accounts. While Factor C expresses disappointment that Simpson may, in fact, have committed the murders, it nonetheless cites several positive lessons that might be drawn from the whole experience, revealing in the process its rather upbeat, playful orientation toward the events that are viewed with such negativity and anger by Factors A and B. To begin with, C objects to claims that would relegate the entire affair to the excesses of tabloid journalism.

A	B	C	
+1	0	+3	(10) This case is not all about tabloid sleaze. It is also an instructive lesson in a variety of subjects: how the court system works (or doesn't), how pervasive a problem domestic abuse really is, how wealth and fame can't buy you happiness, and so on. These are not trivial issues.
-3	+1	+5	(29) Say it ain't so O.J.! We've had enough fallen heroes: Baseball's Pete Rose, Boxing's Mike Tyson, soul music's James Brown. We don't want to add O.J. Simpson's name to the Hall of Fallen Heroes. We liked it better in Football's Hall of Fame.

Cited above are statements indentifying Factors A and B as cynical and angry, particularly in their views toward media and the police authorities. Statement 11, for instance, referred to the controversial *Time* cover story and photo of O.J., which became an inflammatory emblem of media race-baiting from the standpoint of Factor B, who gave the item a +3 ranking; for Factor C, the score is -5. Likewise, Factor B alone of the three accounts gives statement 48 ("I'm disgusted with media coverage . . . ," cited above) a negative score (-4) revealing again its doubts that media conduct with respect to the Simpson saga was as reprehensible as Factors A and B would have us believe. And even more strongly than Factor A, C takes issue with the suggestion in statement 23 that media "portrayals of Simpson . . . have reinforced stereotypes of black men as unpredictably violent," giving that item a -5. In a similar vein, Factor C—even while conceding that the police may have prematurely singled out Simpson as the sole perpretrator of Nicole Simpson's and Ronald Goldman's murders—comes to the defense of the authorities generally, including the Los Angeles Coroner, in sharp contrast to the generalized anti-authority strain of Factor B.

More positively, Factor C construes the Simpson case as chalk-full of opportunities for valuable learning. It therefore warns against the tendency to moralize about the depths of our common depravity for displaying interest in the case. Instead, we should acknowledge the wide range of genuinely significant human issues raised by the matter. Not least among these are two issues of transcendent, moral importance—one a warning about prejudging others, the other a precaution about knowing and acknowledging our (various) selves—that might well qualify as wisdom in a thorough accounting of what is engaged in humans as they ponder the case at hand.

+2	+1	+5	(45) One thing that all this shows is that we have to be careful before we rush to judgments about people. We need to suspend judgment on O.J.'s guilt or innocence until all the facts are in. And quite a lot of us should not have treated O.J. as a role model without really knowing much about him.
-3	0	+3	(58) Let's not go through another one of those "how terrible we are as a country" routines because of our fascination with this case. The interest is natural and nothing to feel guilty about. Where else can you have so many dramatic elements—sex, fame, wealth, terrible family secrets, and betrayal—all wrapped up in a real-

life whodunit mystery?

-1 +1 +4 (4) Everyone has two or more selves. We can't kid ourselves that the only man in America to have a congenial, charming public self along with an abusive, tormenting private self is O.J. Simpson. We all have our darker sides, and we all have our snapping points.

Study 2: Post-Verdict Schemata

As is well known, O.J. Simpson was acquitted of the murders of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman when, on 3 October, 1995, the jury announced its verdict in the murder trial after deliberating for less than four hours. Public reaction was immediate and intense; apparently it was also sharply polarized along racial lines. Front pages of newspapers and television news broadcasts accented this aspect of the reactions by featuring pictures of black on-lookers to the verdict celebrating with enthusiasm while white observers appeared stunned as if in disbelief. The pictures were matched, very quickly, with an avalanche of words: communications media over the next several weeks were inundated with all manner of opinions on the trial—the justice or injustice of the verdict, the possible range of motivations affecting jurors, what the whole thing signified for society and the future of racial relations in the United States.

Concourse and Q Sample

From the same kinds of sources consulted in the first study, we amassed several hundred statements from this burgeoning concourse. To facilitate the selection of items reasonably representative of the themes and issues in the concourse, we again employed a factorial design consisting of two main effects (*Topical Frame* and *Valence*), this time each with three levels. Statements were thus categorized initially by their dominant topical focus (i.e., frame) based on whether they featured comments about (a) race, (b) the criminal justice system and/or the trial as a legal proceeding, and (c) speculation regarding the larger portents of the case for American society as a whole. The valence subcategories reflect distinctions based on whether the commentaries in question (d) take a definite affirming stand on the question at hand, (e) express a detached or neutral view on the subject, or (f) challenge or criticize claims registered most clearly in the case of the *ad*, *bd*, and *cd* combinations. Each of the nine cells in the

design was fitted with five statements representing each type for a final post-verdict Q sample of N = 45 items.

Participants

As in the pre-trial study, our interest in the opinion effects of race (and, to a lesser degree, gender) was critical in the composition of the P-set. A total of 54 respondents, including 30 black and 21 white respondents (three identified themselves as of "other"), comprised the subject sample. Only one-third of these participants are men (9 black, 9 white); included among the female respondents are 21 blacks and 12 whites. As with the initial P-set, there is a pronounced regional difference between black and white segments of the respondent pool. All but two of the African Americans reside in the South, in Louisiana particularly, whereas the whites are from Midwestern states in the North. These drawbacks notwithstanding, our P-set is certainly adequate for the purposes at hand. Though comprised of different individuals than those participating in the initial study, the respondent pool is similar enough in its composition—by race, sex, region, and age, among other variables—to that from the first study to warrant comparisons between the two sets of findings.

Post-Verdict Findings: The Factors and Their Interpretation

The 54 Q sorts were correlated and factored (centroid method) and then rotated via varimax criteria as well as manually to produce three-factor solutions that were virtually indistinguishable from one another. The manually-rotated matrix was selected over the varimax version due to its marginal advantages in clarity, and this too is available upon request.

Factor X: An Indignant Vindication—The Dominant Black Reaction

The first factor, Factor X, is defined by the purely loaded Q sorts of 22 respondents, three of whom are white with the vast majority being African American. Following the same variance-analysis strategy employed in the first study, we discovered for Factor X a strong RACE effect ($\underline{F}(1,47) = 24.451$, $p < .001$) owing to the high loadings, on average, for the Q sorts of black respondents relative to whites. As before, GENDER does not materialize either as an independent effect

or in interaction with RACE. However, it is worth noting that the mean loading for African American women on Factor X is .50 while it is only .27 for black men. (Tantalyzing though such differences may be, it is important to bear in mind that our entire P-set contains only nine black males and, of these, six were in fact defining variates on Factor X.)

First and foremost, Factor X agrees with the verdict of the jury in the Simpson trial. The Prosecution simply failed to prove Simpson's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. On that score alone, partisans of Factor Y, who are as noted below, clearly unhappy with the verdict, actually agree with Factor X. The two viewpoints would *appear* to agree in one other vital respect as well, at least if we view the identical +5 rankings given to item 1, shown below, in isolation from the larger context of each factor's feeling-state. As will become clear, however, the "agreement" here is entirely illusory and gives dramatic illustration to how identical scores can be given to the same statement when, in fact, the item is understood to mean something entirely different by proponents of the two viewpoints. One need not look too far into the factor array for Factor X to appreciate the dramatically different construction it is giving to statement 1 in contrast to Factor Y. Factor X is reading the item as a literal statement, where the quoted material—intended, it would seem, to convey an ironic tone—is understood as if it were not in quotes. In a sense, this difference metaphorically captures the larger contrast in understanding represented by Factors X and Y.

Fashioning its own spin on the outcome, Factor X denies that Simpson's acquittal is but one more reminder that a rich man's justice, regardless of race, is apt to be different than that for defendants of less lavish means. Indeed, Factor X goes further than simple denial of the contrary on this score: As is shown by the placement of statement 40, Simpson is seen as emblematic of a whole class of people who have been persecuted and prosecuted by the system.

X	Y	Z	
-5	-5	-1	(1) Whites acquitting whites is "justice," blacks acquitting blacks is "emotional/stupid/racist." Whites acquitting whites are "impartial." Blacks acquitting blacks are "biased."
-5	-2	-3	(33) The acquittal of O.J. Simpson for the murder of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman ranks as one of the biggest travesties in the history of jurispru-

dence. Money does buy justice, no matter what one's race or ethnicity.

+5 +4 +1 (31) I am not surprised that O.J. Simpson was found not guilty. Putting aside the racial issue that everyone seems to be so interested in, the prosecution could not prove the case beyond a REASONABLE DOUBT.

+3 -4 -5 (40) I think that Simpson represents a whole class of people who have been persecuted and prosecuted by the system. To see him get off simply means there is some hope.

The spirit of vindication felt by Factor X extends well beyond the person of Simpson himself. Indeed, to persons on this factor Simpson was not the sole individual on trial in this case. The real "defendant," in the eyes of Factor X was the American system of justice as it relates to race. The Simpson case did not manufacture "the race card," as it were, out of thin air. Race was there from the beginning, predating even public disclosures of Mark Furhman's racist record of years prior. For Factor X racism is an undeniable, incontrovertible fact that has delegitimated the criminal justice system in the lived experience of the African American community for decades if not centuries. Accordingly, it should occasion no surprise to find that one of the most disturbing facets of the fallout of the verdict was the perception that blacks were drawn to Simpson on mindlessly racial grounds, celebrating his acquittal without regard to the merits of the evidence or the case against him, but simply because of his race. To Factor X, anyone so inclined, quite simply "just doesn't get it."

-5 0 -2 (3) What I am angry and disturbed about is the almost uniform cheering of O.J.'s acquittal in the black community. I cannot believe that these blacks who were cheering O.J. did not know that he was at least probably guilty, and to cheer this man like they did was unexcusable.

-4 +1 -3 (30) There is no real racial issue in this case, only a manufactured one. The fact that a racial issue can be produced out of pure moonshine only confirms the malleability of the American people.

+3 -3 +5 (29) Blacks and whites have different views and experiences with justice which are not the same and never

have been.

+4 -2 -2 (28) I was not surprised that many African-Americans believed that O.J. could be innocent or that evidence against him could have been planted. The highly disproportionate arrest rate of blacks to whites only goes to show that the police are out to get blacks, especially young black men.

Consistent with the belief that race was an integral issue from the outset, Factor X is quick to exonerate the Simpson defense team, particularly Johnnie Cochran, of any blame for exploiting race as a contrived issue to get black members of the jury to "nullify" a verdict that would otherwise have been been reached. By the same token, members of the jury themselves are defended for having reached their verdict so quickly when their charge was to weigh evidence presented in painstaking detail over a several-month duration.

+4 +2 +2 (21) Cochran played more than the race card. He played the whole deck. He did not invent it. Politicians, discriminatory employers, and racist cops have played it for years. I wonder how long it will take for Americans to remove the deck from the table.

+4 +2 +1 (22) I know Cochran's racial tirade has upset a lot of people. But you have to ask yourself. . . "If I were on trial for a double murder, would I want my attorney to play all his cards, or just use half the deck?" Cochran and the defense team did what they had to do, and they did it better than the prosecution.

-4 -2 -1 (15) Had we heard that the jury had spent any substantial amount of time deliberating, we would have respected this verdict. If they had come to "reasonable doubt" after doing that, we could have accepted that this jury had acted in good faith.

Finally, the sense of vindication animating Factor X does not lead its proponents to a more charitable estimate of those who were charged with the investigation and prosecution of the case. Statement 41 appeared verbatim in both phases of our research. Factor X gives it the same +5 score it was accorded by the analogous Factor B in Study 1.

+5	+2	-2	(41) I can't believe the incredible incompetence of the authorities in this case. From the L.A. police to the Coroner's Office to the Office of the District Attorney, the entire investigation was botched from beginning to end.

Factor Y: Enough Already about Race!—The Dominant White Reaction

Factor Y is comprised of the purely loaded Q sorts of 13 respondents, all but one of whom are white. It, too, shows a powerful RACE effect in the ANOVA findings ($F(1,47) = 50.670$, $p < .001$), owing to higher loadings on average by white participants (M for white males = .36; for white females = .44 as compared to scores of -.09 and .08 for black men and women, respectively. It is noteworthy that SEX materializes as a significant effect with respect to the Factor Y loadings, the first and only instance in which gender differences of this magnitude are observed in either study. This stems from the fact that average female loading on Y, irrespective of race, was .21 while male loadings averaged .14. Despite the fact that black male loadings are particularly low (M = -.08), the RACE BY SEX interaction is substantially shy of significant (p = .376). In demographic terms, then, Factor Y is disproportionately white and female.

We have noted already that Factor Y is willing to concede at least the plausibility that the legal threshold of "reasonable doubt" was never truly surmounted in the Prosecution's case against Simpson (see no. 31 above). Thus, even though the majority of Factor Y's proponents were inclined to believe that Simpson was guilty, the opposite conclusion is not treated as tantamount to idiocy. The more pressing issues for persons associated with Factor Y have less to do with the actual verdict itself than with their understanding of how the Simpson story —from the murders to the arrest to the trial and verdict—was being portrayed and understood by the majority of onlookers. That understanding, in their view, was incomplete and innacurate—and harmfully so on both counts. In the first place, despite reports that placed the defendant at the center of the entire story, Factor Y believed this was truly "Nicole's story" and that this fact had basically been eclipsed by less-deserving, peripheral elements of the drama. One such consideration was race. In no less than half a dozen statements, listed below, one finds sharp indication of the strong belief by Factor Y that race was blown completely out of proportion in the Simpson affair coupled with

repeated denials that the criminal justice system is itself racially biased.

X	Y	Z	
-1	+5	0	(17) This is not the story of a fallen idol. This is the story of a woman who was brutally murdered while her children were just on the other side of the door. Remember Nicole Brown Simpson. This is her story. Remember what she said to police when they arrived at her house: "He's going to kill me."
0	+3	+1	(2) "Color is just an expression of cellular pigments." -Jonas Salk
+1	-4	+3	(19) We have two Americas that are dramatically different. One is black and one is white—separate and not equal.
+3	-3	+5	(29) Blacks and whites have different views and experiences with justice which are not the same and never have been.
+5	-4	+5	(38) Putting aside the guilt or innocence of Simpson, the message of this whole affair is that black and white people saw it through different sets of eyes.
+2	-5	-5	(39) The only reason that white people are upset that O.J. got off is because he's a black man. They don't care if he was guilty or not.

Bothered by the prominence ascribed race generally—not simply in the case at hand, but in the discussions of issues collateral to the Simpson matter—Factor B would prefer to think only in terms of the Salk quote, namely that "color is just an expression of cellular pigments" (item no. 2 above). Otherwise there are few hints of generalized cynicism in Factor Y's outlook. While not overjoyed by the verdict and certainly not happy with the undue attention paid to race throughout the trial, Factor X attempts to plant the seeds of a hopeful, optimistic spin on the outcome in imagining that conscience will surely exact a price from Mr. Simpson even if he was found, unjustly, not guilty:

+1	+3	-2	(7) Due to this trial, O.J. was confronted with the murders for more than a year and had a lot of time to think about it. The majority still thinks that O.J. is

guilty, so he will have to spend the rest of his life being "good" and trying to change their mind.

Factor Z: A Matter of Class, not Race

Seven Q sorts serve as defining variates for Factor Z, the final factor from the second study. Two come from white respondents, and five are from blacks. While the loadings of blacks, on average, are higher than those for whites (M for black males = .29; black females = .20; white males = .19; white females = .08), none of the effects in the RACE BY SEX ANOVAs on Factor Z meet conventional thresholds of significance. The effect for RACE, however, reaches a significance level of .051, suggesting that Factor C is more congenial to blacks, especially black men, than to the other subgroups in the P-set.

The story from the standpoint of Factor Z is one which acknowledges the reality of race in American society. As such, it agrees with Factor B from the first study and Factor X from the second study that blacks and whites have good reason to see things differently, particularly when the objects in question are connected to criminal justice considerations and the practicality of the ideal of racial equality under the law. As shown above (in scores for statements 19, 29 and 38, in particular), Factor Z in general sees good reason to doubt that this ideal approximated in actual practice to the degree it that it should in America. Having said that, however, Factor Z is quick to add that its own verdict on the Simpson case is that it was actually less a story about race than about class, specifically the wealth of O.J. Simpson and the lavish legal defense that such wealth could bring to bear on his behalf.

-2	+2	+4	(24) Once again, this trial reminded us the uncomfortably close relationship between justice and money. If Simpson was middle class or even merely rich, he would not have gotten off. He bought the best defense he could and got what he paid for.
-2	-2	+3	(34) O.J. just happened to be a wealthy black man who could afford the best lawyers. It had nothing to do with being a victory for blacks. It is a victory for affluent Americans.
+1	+3	+5	(35) This wasn't really a matter of race. It was a

matter of money and fame. If O.J. were a poor black man, or even a poor white man, he wouldn't have had such a strong defense team, nor would he have been acquitted in all likelihood.

Unlike Factor Y, Z does not deny that race is fundamental. All other things being equal, race is indeed of paramount importance. In *this particular case*, however, all other things are not equal; hence when race is weighed against the influence of class considerations, the latter clearly prevail from the standpoint of Factor Z. Black men like Simpson, who happened to be wealthy, thus have nothing to fear from a system of justice that falls far short of being color-blind (see above, statements 28 and 40) for in the experience of Factor Z there is ample reason to doubt that the system is indifferent to the color of money. And yet Factor Z is not so caught up in the corrosive effects of wealth that hints of hope are entirely eclipsed by cynicism. Reminiscent of Rodney King's oft-quoted exhortation, "Can we all get along here?," Factor Z is alone in distilling one simple yet hopeful moral maxim from the case for posterity:

0	-2	+4	(43) We're all different. However, since we all live in the same place, we're going to have to learn to be different together. Or life is going to be one long O.J. Simpson trial.

Discussion: Race and Subjectivity in the Simpson Spectacle

As the foregoing attests, the Simpson case defies efforts to discover the "truth"—not only about the defendant's true guilt or innocence, but about a host of other issues as well. Quite clearly, race is of paramount importance in the construction of—and the cleavages between—the rival accounts of the Simpson case. For most blacks in our samples (Factor B in Study 1, and Factor X in Study 2), the criterial facts in the case against Simpson were all-too-familiar. And they had less to do with blood samples and DNA evidence than with tell-tale signs of racial prejudice—implicating individual cops (Furhman), the criminal justice system more generally, and even media coverage of the crimes and Simpson's possible involvement—from the beginning. Among our African American respondents, race was from the outset the central, organizing principle—and galvanizing theme—in the case against O.J. Simpson. As such, Simpson himself became cast in this

drama as emblematic neither of wealth nor celebrity but as an exemplar of the disproportionate numbers of black men convicted and sentenced by a racially biased criminal justice system. In the predominantly black Factors B and X, therefore, we see evidence of a *generalizing* tendency in the accounts fashioned out of the details and circumstances of the specific case (Sigelman et al., 1996). Proponents of these viewpoints, in other words, show a predilection for interpreting the "facts of the case" in light of broader, yet from their vantage point, equally relevant contextual criteria.

For their part, white respondents are, in the main, perturbed by this. From the perspectives of Factor A and Y, the most disquieting feature of the Simpson story, dramatically at odds with their own understanding, is the role and importance of race--whether inadvertantly or intentionally as a function of the Simpson defense strategy. In a sense, then, white opinion can be said to display a *morselizing* tendency in its desire to see more focussed concentration on what for it were the more compelling and relevant facts and evidence in the case. In this respect, public reaction to the Simpson case echoes the same racially-mediated cognitive patterns observed from studies of opinion on the Rodney King beating and the death at the hands of Detroit police of Malice Green in November, 1992 (Sigelman et al., 1996).

An especially large element in the Simpson story (and public opinion toward it) is therefore *public opinion itself* on the matter—particularly as regards the role of race and the racial divide among opinion holders. Factors A and B in the pre-trial study and X and Y in the post-verdict research emerge as dynamically tied to one another: B's beliefs, in large part, are a function of its understanding of A, and vice versa; likewise, Y represents a viewpoint that in large measure is drawn around its perception of what X is thinking (and vice versa). There is thus a self-reinforcing dynamic in the prevailing views of whites and blacks toward the Simpson case; each, in its own way, "feeds off" what it sees as the wrong-headed and fundamentally prejudiced views of the other. A preponderance of whites are angry—not just at blacks, or defense attorneys, or jurors, but at media as well—for "not getting it" about the true gist of the Simpson case: the fact that two innocent people were brutally murdered, one of them a long-suffering victim of spousal abuse at the hands of the accused murderer. But the majority of blacks are at least equally disturbed that whites "just don't get it" in duly appreciating the realities of racism in American society, particularly when a black man is charged with a heinous crime, when all evidence is circumstantial, and when a key member of the police unit

implicating the accused is a reputed racist.

The most dramatic effects in the Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill spectacle were demonstrated by the differences between black and white women as they viewed the events in question: black women defined the factor in that study which gave the most sympathetic account of Clarence Thomas discovered in that research; white women defined the most ardently pro-Hill/anti-Thomas construction (Thomas et al., 1993). In the Simpson case, the prismatic effect of gender is muted substantially: in none of the factors from the pre-trial study does it emerge as significant, although it does do so with respect to Factor Y in the second study. That Factor, it will be recalled, was deeply disturbed by the prominence ascribed race at the expense of the victims, especially Nicole, in prevailing accounts of the case. In the Thomas-Hill case, to be sure, the circumstances were such that black women may have felt compelled to rush to the defense of Thomas based on beliefs that he was under attack, and unjustly so, by a woman of his own race. In the Simpson case, of course, the situation is dramatically different as the black male was on trial for having murdered a white woman; and the latter, quite obviously, was in no position to mount a public attack on the person accused of her murder.

Examining the subtle ways in which the broader narratives of the racially divided first pair of factors undergo modification from Study 1 to Study 2, we begin to appreciate what our operant factors can tell us that survey data cannot about the range of meanings attending the Simpson case and the role of race in their elaboration[3]. Consider first the similarities and differences between white-dominated Factors A and Y. The racial complexion of their subscribers is identical, and subjective discomfort with the prominent role played by race all along is a constant in the distinguishing statements and the factor scores. But there are elements to the story that race alone fails to capture, and there are subtle differences in subjectivity over time that surveys alone are not well-suited to detect. Granted, at the trial's conclusion, Factor Y is no less irritated by what it takes as undue weight accorded to race than was Factor A some sixteen months earlier. But that aside, Y has no trouble countenancing Simpson's acquittal on grounds of reasonable

[3]Survey findings related to racial differences differ dramatically from our own in structural respects as well. Examining aggregate differences between races in the response to individual survey items leads one to conclude that opinions *overall* are polarized—in the sense of representing bipolar ends of a single continuum—whereas the starkly orthogonal structure of our factors shows this to be illusory.

doubt; nor is it so consumed by outrage at the verdict that it is incapable of imagining a fairly hellish "life after" for O.J. Simpson. These are important modifications in a viewpoint that, a year earlier, was laced with indignation and generalized anger over the whole affair.

The subjective transformation from A to Y is also accompanied by a shift in the aggregate sexual composition of the two factors. Whereas white men and women are equally prominent on A, the leading edge of Factor Y is defined by white women. Nowhere identified in the numerous polls on the Simpson case, we are of course obliged to treat the generality of this difference with caution. But it is important to note that the "feminization" of Factor Y is something quite different than what can be captured from surveys where gender categories are examined for their effects on a select set of discrete opinions that are purged of their interactive properties. On discrete opinions having to do with bottom-line considerations such as Simpson's guilt, white women may indeed be indistinguishable in their responses from white men. But when allowed to "tell their own story" with an interactive sampling of the larger Simpson concourse, the stronger appeal of a given story to one set of onlookers, in this case white women, is allowed to display itself. This gender shift, we might further infer, is implicated in the "kinder and gentler" subjectivity revealed by Factor Y (vs. A) in its ability to decipher at least a semblance of a silver lining in the case, a possibility nowhere to be found in the generalized resentments of Factor A.

The correspondence between Factors B and X would appear to be more exact, but even here there are signs of relaxation in certain regards, particularly with regard to the barrage of aspersions cast by Factor B on all media as inherently racist. But the measure of vengeance that remains alongside the sense of vindication otherwise felt by Factor X might well be understood as a legacy of its lived experience with a system of justice that is hardly neutral with respect to race (Welch, Combs, Sigelman & Bledsoe, 1996) and to its fixation with those whose opinions are represented by Factor Y. Again, these dynamics—and the understandings of the Simpson case they foster—are not the stuff of which opinion polls and surveys are made. Brought to light by our factors and fortified by post-sorting interviews with key informants on these factors, such dynamics call attention, at one and the same time, to the complementary *and* incommensurate relationship between Q technique and large-sample survey studies of public opinion.

Finally, we rest our case on the merits of Q methodology in the case at hand by calling attention to the unanticipated (and unpredictable)

perspective represented by Factors C and Z in our research. The discovery of these perspectives, can be taken as instructive on methodological and normative, no less than substantive, grounds. Neither of these understandings, it seems fair to say, could possibly have emerged from the veritable mountains of survey data accumulated on the trial. Opinion surveys, as we have acknowledged, were quite adept at calibrating the pivotal role of race on discrete opinions toward select issues and events in the case. And the power of race in shaping discrete opinions—not only toward the Simpson case but more generally toward crime and justice issues more generally—has been extensively documented in several major surveys of late (see Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Hochschild, 1996; Welch et al., 1996). Blacks and whites do indeed view questions of justice and criminal-justice institutions in dramatically different ways; that much seems beyond dispute. There is a major difference, however, between an ability to quantify with some precision *what percentage* of blacks relative to whites regard Simpson's acquittal as just, on the one hand, and the capacity to decipher what those responses might *mean*, on the other. Surveys, of course, seek to "sanitize" the meaning of the questions they employ, stripping them of surplus meaning so as to strengthen confidence that identical responses do in fact signify identical understandings. The approach taken here proceeds from very different premises and, if anything, denies both the desirability and the feasibility of purging surplus meaning from self-referent statements of opinion. Indeed, it is axiomatic in Q studies that meaningful statements of opinion are, at their very core, self-referential. Factors C and Z bear eloquent testimony to the difference this makes: first with respect to operant subjectivity; and second with regard to the logic of discovery.

Factor C's hopeful, optimistic construction of the emerging spectacle stands in sharp contrast to the harder-edged, "polarized" accounts contained in Factors A and B. Lighter and more playful in its approach, C eschews "heavier" themes dominating the alternative accounts and instead sees the spectacle as a parable with diverse morals and lessons worth contemplating, e.g., in jumping to conclusions about others not well known to us, and in remembering that we, too, might all be like O.J. in our possession of darker selves. Factor Z, likewise, takes a more detached view of the verdict than either X or Y, acknowledging race as a peristent problem but seeing beyond it with respect to the Simpson case—first, to the effect of class in Simpson's ostentatious defense and, second, to the task of surviving as a multicultural society the vagaries of mistrust between blacks and whites aggravated by

episodes such as the Simpson saga. In these factors we see models of a subjectivity less constrained by the prism of race, less fraught by its fears of those aligned with the alternative accounts. Open and unthreatened by the challenge of diversity, these are viewpoints worth exploring for the possibilities they recommend in transcending without denying race as a fulcrum of social experience. As such, the subjectivity at issue holds normative as well as scientific interest. However, representing "third ways" of seeing in a context of a bifocal, racially divided social order, viewpoints like C and Z often remain invisible and inaudible due to the intemperate, mutually reinforcing animosities of the principal protagonists locked in dispute. In a full reckoning, therefore, finding—and learning from—subjectivity of this order might well betoken a humane hope as much as a scientific advance.

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