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Writing 105R

The Opening Remarks of Dr. Christine Blasey Ford

I remember reading in an article by Rebecca Solnit where she mentioned, “The story of Cassandra, the woman who told the truth but was not believed, is not nearly as embedded in our culture as that of the Boy Who Cried Wolf — that is, the boy who was believed the first few times he told the same lie.” This quote is very much relevant to how many survivors of sexual misconduct up until the mid-2010s were typically not believed. Hence, the perpetrators faced no consequences and likely continued their cycle of abuse undisturbed. Sexual assault is a close companion to unbalanced power dynamics. It is common acceptance that the sharpest gradient in power dynamics in the world are dictatorships. However, there are a whole lot of these unbalanced power dynamics within the United States of America. Most Americans and the world as a whole were dumbstruck upon witnessing Hollywood’s exposed underbelly during the #MeToo movement’s raising awareness. Harvey Weinstein, Bill Cosby, and about two hundred men in just a year elapsed since the #MeToo movement started facing the consequences for their history of sexual abuse. It was all because these women came out of the cyclic wheel of internalized shame to pave a more honest and accountable future for Hollywood. This movement does not just apply to the entertainment industry; it gained enough traction to hold men in political positions accountable.

Dr. Christine Blasey Ford was one of these specific survivors who impacted the political sphere. She took Brett Kavanaugh, the associate justice elect of the United States Supreme Court at the time, to court on December 27th, 2018. This essay will focus on the rhetorical situation and context of Ford’s opening remarks of her sexual misconduct allegation against Supreme

Court elect Brett Kavanaugh as it was the important foundational starting point that ignited one of the most significant modern controversies in American politics.

In her opening remarks, Ford explained that when she was in high school, Kavanaugh's group of friends and her friends intersected a lot, especially during parties. They were not very familiar with each other, but they did know of one another. She spent her summers at the Columbia Country Club in Chevy Chase, Maryland. She attended a gathering nearby one day, and while she was there, someone pushed Ford into a bedroom and locked the door. Mark Judge and Brett Kavanaugh were the two accused assailants, in which Kavanaugh pushed her onto the bed, groped her, attempted to remove her bathing suit, and muffled her screams for help.

Her diligence in reciting that norepinephrine and epinephrine coded in the hippocampus alters the memories of traumatic events reminded the people in the courtroom, and the world, of her Ph.D. in Psychology. Dr. Ford is a professor of clinical psychology at Palo Alto University and is a research psychologist at the Stanford University School of Medicine. Ford's experience in the psychology field as a woman in her 50s and her being a co-author for over 50 scientific publications is remarkable. Her expertise is abundantly clear in how she can compose her testimony so that factors in the trauma responses the brain experiences during those events. It caters to her credibility, her ethos, in her testimony. She starts by saying, "I am here not because I want to be. I am terrified. I am here because I believe it is my civic duty to tell you what happened to me while Brett Kavanaugh and I were in high school." Despite the dark topic, she was precise and explanatory of the events that happened 36 years or some previous. She affirmed her certainty of the perpetrator being Brett Kavanaugh. Her opening remarks were cushioned by the pathos-based sentiments of a current push to "believe all women," which helped bolster her case and perseverance to pursue such a case. This hearing's timing was perfect as it was the

#MeToo movement's zeitgeist, and the American people heavily responded to the opening remarks of Dr. Christine Blasey Ford, which was very kairotic in nature because of better public acceptance.

A person holding someone else accountable for sexual misconduct that happened decades ago in court, especially if the defendant is a person in power, would have been a nonviable case even 20 years in the past. It just wouldn't hold up. And technically, it still didn't. But the fact that Ford's case gained enough heat ever to have this hearing happen is a byproduct of the technological, equality striving age we are in today. She enunciated during her opening remarks, "My motivation in coming forward was to be helpful and to provide facts about how Mr. Kavanaugh's actions have damaged my life." Dr. Ford's claim for her taking Kavanaugh to court was out of civic duty to the people to inform the public about the Supreme Court nominee's past actions for the public to come to their own conclusions. This hearing is especially important for a role that will impact many American lives because a Supreme Court Justice has that job for life and will continue to affect significant rulings in the United States of America until their demise or resignation of their own volition.

Kavanaugh v. Ford isn't the first time a woman has taken a Supreme Court nominee to the court. Anita Hill accused Clarence Thomas of sexual harassment in 1991. In the past, Hill was seen unfavorably compared to the Supreme Court nominee during the early 90s era, expectedly, as a black American and a woman. However, this time around, the belief sided more heavily in favor of Dr. Ford, with even President Trump, a known Republican, and Republican Senator Chuck Grassley claiming the credibility of her witness account. She stated in her hearing, "I have been accused of acting out of partisan political motives. Those that say that do not know me. I am an independent person, and I am no one's pawn." She was the right person

coming out to hold Kavanaugh accountable at the right time, with compelling ethos, pathos, and logos. Anita Hill, a black woman in the '90s paved the way for Ford to make waves within the deeply rooted American political stasis and opinion toward women.

Many women showed outward support for Ford in the fact of starting up a new hashtag of #WhyIDidntReport. This specific subset of the survivor movement explicitly addresses why some people wait a long time before coming forward and how judges should not just write off their statements. To reach stasis, many victims of sexual assault end up suppressing the memory. This trauma response ends up impacting their psyche more the longer they suppress it. So this constant battle of trying to stay in a tolerable state of stasis, the psyche of a person not experiencing extreme emotion/unbalance, the victim would address it. This situation is the case with Ford. Ford went on to explain in her opening remarks, "Apart from the assault itself, these past couple weeks have been the hardest of my life. I had to relive this trauma in front of the world, and I have seen my life picked apart by people on television, on Twitter, other social media, other media, and in this body who have never met me or spoken with me." She appeals to people's empathy and compassion towards her situation, a common rhetorical technique of pathos, whether she did that knowingly or unknowingly. Dr. Ford staunchly acknowledges that this is something she knew would happen but needed to follow through with the hearing anyway. Between her public duty and subliminally reaching personal stasis, Ford decided to address the event of trauma to inform the people and have them come to their own conclusions while she exposed herself under the scrutiny of the public eye.

Violence under the influence, no matter the age or gender, can bite you in the butt in modern times. A common rebuttal sentiment against the survivor movement is not holding accountable something men did when they were immature boys. However, as Ford said, "It is not

my responsibility to determine whether Mr. Kavanaugh deserves to sit on the Supreme Court. My responsibility is to tell you the truth.” It is not the people’s responsibility either; it is a responsibility that relies on those on the President and the Senate. Women from both political sides show support for her, saying that the testimony was credible, followed by saying you should believe women. It is hard for others of the same gender not to recognize that they have heard thousands of stories like it. However, just four years previously, polls leaned 62% in favor of not considering sexual assault allegations a deal-breaker. The same applies to their sentiments that although many believed Ford’s testimony, it should not be considered a deal-breaker that should force Kavanaugh to withdraw. Although these Republican women wanted to see a conservative Justice in the Supreme Court office, they recognized that Kavanaugh claiming his innocence while simultaneously swerving away from a complete investigation is suspicious.

Although Kavanaugh still got elected, Ford’s testimony was ripe in powerful rhetoric, and the context for how this hearing even happened along with Ford being a singular woman that substantiated enough traction to hold a person accountable at such a high level while he was transitioning into more power, changed America. Ford would have never been able to take this situation to court if not for the suitable social environment the sexual assault survivor movement provided. It took 60 accusations for Bill Cosby to face his consequences, while Kavanaugh was taken to court by just Ford just a couple of years later. The world is finally starting to listen to women, despite the misogynistic dog whistles of the disbelievers and our current climate. This hearing was very kairotic in nature because of the timeliness of the more social acceptance of survivors. Cassandra was finally being listened to over the boy who cried wolf.

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