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Dr. Christine Blasey Ford's Life and Impact

for

Gender Inequity in the Entertainment Industry

Sonja Mowery

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Abstract

This essay focuses on the life, challenges, and impact of psychology professor Dr. Christine Blasey Ford. Dr. Ford's name first appeared in the media after a leak that exposed the presence of a letter sent to Senator Feinstein informing her that Judge Brett Kavanaugh had sexually assaulted her in the summer of 1982. Dr. Ford was motivated to send this letter when she learned that Kavanaugh's name was listed on the president's shortlist for the Supreme Court Judge to fill Justice Anthony Kennedy's seat after his retirement in July of 2018. When Dr. Ford finally decided to tell her story to the public, her whole world changed. She testified in front of the Senate Judiciary Committee on September 27th in 2018, hoping that the allegation would allow for those considering Judge Kavanaugh for the seat in SCOTUS to reevaluate him as a person and a judge, especially during the emergence of the Me Too Movement. Kavanaugh aggressively denied the allegations, stating that he has never done such a thing to Dr. Ford or anyone. Dr. Ford's bravery would eventually open the door for other's who had similar experiences with Kavanaugh to come forward, as well as women around the world who had been withholding their own experiences of sexual assault and abuse. Although Judge Kavanaugh was confirmed to the Supreme Court on October 6th, Dr. Christine Blasey Ford's courage and honesty will be remembered for years to come.

Dr. Christine Blasey Ford's Life and Impact

Christine Blasey was born in November of 1966 to parents Ralph Jr. and Paula Blasey; she grew up in Washington D.C. with her two brothers, Tom and Ralph III. Blasey went to high school at the private, all-girls school, Holton-Arms, located in Bethesda, Maryland (Contrera, Brown, Shapira, & Hendrix, 2018). She attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, earning her degree in Experimental Psychology in 1988. Blasey obtained her Master's degree in Clinical Psychology in 1991 from Pepperdine University, and then her Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from the University of Southern California in 1996. Her thesis, written in 1995, was titled *Measuring Young Children's Coping Responses to Interpersonal Conflict* (Blasey, 1996). Additionally, Blasey received a Master's degree in Epidemiology, focusing on biostatistics, in 2009 from the Stanford University School of Medicine. Blasey married Russell Ford in 2002, with whom she has since had two children (NPR, 2018).

Dr. Ford teaches as a psychology professor in the Stanford-Pacific Graduate School of Psychology Consortium for Clinical Psychology, which includes both Stanford University and Palo Alto University. Dr. Ford has served as such since 2011, where she teaches various subjects to doctoral students, such as psychometrics, clinical trials, and statistics. Additionally, she has served on many dissertation committees for graduate students in the program. As a biostatistician, Dr. Ford has performed consultations for many pharmaceutical companies, such as Corcept Therapeutics. She is highly published and well-respected in the biostatistics field (McBride, Veklerov, & Allday, 2018). Some of Dr. Ford's most significant accomplishments have come from her work in academics. During her career thus far, Dr. Ford has authored and co-authored many journal articles on psychological topics. In 2015, Dr. Ford co-authored the

book, *How Many Subjects?: The Statistical Power in Research*, with Helena Chmura Kraemer, a Stanford professor emeritus in biostatistics (D'Angelo, 2018).

On September 27th, 2018, Dr. Blasey Ford went in front of the Senate Judiciary Committee to inform them that the judicial-nominee, Judge Brett Kavanaugh, had sexually assaulted her in high school. In her opening statement during the Senate hearing, Dr. Ford explained that after Kavanaugh was named on President Trump's shortlist for Supreme Court Judge nominees, she felt a sense of urgency to inform a representative of the attack. Dr. Ford spoke with Congresswoman Anna Eshoo and her staff to inform them of the assault and the truth about Kavanaugh's past. Representative Eshoo then urged Dr. Ford to send a letter to the ranking member, Senator Dianne Feinstein, hoping that the letter would inform the Senate of the nominee's past, which she wanted to do anonymously in order to protect her and her family. However, the press somehow got wind of the letter, which caused swarms of reporters to begin intruding on Dr. Ford's home and work life. She then went to the Washington Post to publicly share her story with her name attached before anyone else got the chance to do so; it was published in an article on September 16th. After the article's publication, Dr. Ford received an outpouring of support nationwide, but many of Kavanaugh's supporters berated her with intimidating messages and even death threats. Although she feared for her safety, Dr. Ford persevered and agreed to go in front of the Senate (NPR, 2018).

Dr. Ford explained that she was driven by her motivation "to provide the facts about how Mr. Kavanaugh's actions have damaged my life so that you can take that into serious consideration as you make your decision about how to proceed" (NPR, 2018). Dr. Ford disclosed that the assault had affected her greatly since its occurrence in the summer of 1982, mainly

because she rarely discussed it with anyone. Gilmore (2019) summarizes Dr. Ford's recollection of the assault as such:

Blasey Ford alleged that Kavanaugh and his friend Mark Judge forced her into an upstairs bedroom at a house party, locked the door, and turned up the music to cover her screams, as Kavanaugh pinned her to the bed and sexually assaulted her. She believed he intended to rape her, and she feared that he might accidentally kill her when he covered her mouth with his hand to silence her (p. 611).

In her testimony, Dr. Ford explained that she initially did not feel the need to tell her parents about it because she did not want them to know that they were drinking underage at a house with no adults present. She had also convinced herself that "because Brett did not rape me, I should be able to move on and just pretend that it had never happened" (NPR, 2018).

During the testimony-turned-trial, Brett Kavanaugh was able to respond to the allegations against him. Kavanaugh proceeded to insist that the allegation was false and political motives drove the allegation to surface in order for the Democratic party to hinder a Trump nomination to the Supreme Court. In her testimony, Dr. Ford explained why this was nowhere close to the truth; she initially shared this information with representatives after seeing Kavanaugh's name on the President's shortlist, not after being chosen as the nominee. Additionally, Kavanaugh's temperament was rather aggressive throughout his questioning, a behavior that had not been previously noted and could cause problems for him. For example, he could not control his emotions when questioned by the senators, continually raising his voice, interrupting them, and avoiding listening to and answering their questions.

Throughout her testimony, Dr. Ford worked hard to remain polite and respectful. She likely believed that her credibility depended on her likeability, for society has often reinforced

the theory that anger does not mean the same for men and women. A man's anger often works to their advantage, which is truthful in the Kavanaugh hearings because his outrage and arrogance garnered odd respect from the committee, especially the Republican Senators (Goodman, 2020, p. 183).

At one point, while being asked if he had ever drunk to the point of losing consciousness of a night, he refused to answer and turned the questions back onto Senator Klobuchar, immaturely asking her if she had ever "blacked out" from drinking. Throughout the questioning, when asked about his alcohol consumption, he often answered, "I liked beer... I still like beer," as well as mentioning that fact in his opening statement, following it up with "but I did not drink beer to the point of blacking out" (Hallemann, 2018). Some of his closest friends contended this statement off the record, and they said that Kavanaugh was known to be "a heavy drinker during the time period in question," which resulted in a point of contention for Kavanaugh's credibility if he was purposefully lying about that fact (MSNBC, 2018).

As reported by MSNBC, although Kavanaugh claimed that the allegation was false, it is unclear why Republicans, the White House, and even Kavanaugh all refused to ask the FBI to reopen the nominee's background investigation to gather evidence and witness statements about the allegation (2018). However, a Senate vote allowed for an FBI investigation into the allegations, and the investigative report returned on October 4th seemed to be insufficient. They had not interviewed Kavanaugh, Ford, or any additional people who had tried to contact the FBI to discredit Kavanaugh's claims about his drinking habits, and those who could support Ford's claims. The FBI did interview three of Kavanaugh's high school friends, two of Ford's, and another woman, Deborah Ramirez, who had an additional allegation against Kavanaugh (BBC News, 2018).

Many law professionals believe that the Senate Judiciary Committee severely mishandled the hearing; Dr. Ford and Judge Kavanaugh were testifying to the court and were not on trial. Gilmore (2019) points out that Dr. Ford's testimony was practically on trial, especially because of the interrogation and attorneys and a sex crimes prosecutor's presence. However, she was not allowed to bring any witnesses to the stand, a right that is allowed in proper legal proceedings (pp. 614-615). Beery (2019) recommends that in the future, if indecent allegations surface about the judicial-nominee, an additional investigation must be undergone to determine the credibility of the accuser and to gather further evidence for or against the claim (p. 236). Many people agree that the Senate must reevaluate their process to handle such information, especially since Dr. Ford's agonizing testimony is likely not the last of its kind.

Following the hearings, the Senate voted on the confirmation of Judge Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court. On October 6th, 2018, the voting took place and concluded 50-48 for Kavanaugh to take the seat (Senate Democratic Leadership, 2018). As much as Kavanaugh claimed that the allegations would "destroy [his] good name," he was still named a Supreme Court Judge (Hallemann, 2018). He will sit on the bench for the rest of his working life.

Dr. Ford's life changed drastically after her report of the allegations surfaced, which is precisely why she originally wanted to maintain her anonymity. As mentioned previously, after Dr. Ford's name was leaked to the press, swarms of reporters came to her work and home, and people on the internet threw terrifying threats at Ford and her family. As of September 16th, they moved out of their home and relocated between several safe houses, protected by guards (NPR, 2018). Additionally, she could not return to her job at Palo Alto University for at least two months following the relocation (Metro, 2018).

In many people's eyes, Dr. Ford was more credible than Kavanaugh, especially because of his rampant outbursts and failure to cooperate while being questioned. According to a poll conducted by NPR/PBS NewsHour/Marist, when asked who they believed was telling the truth, 45% of respondents answered Dr. Ford, 33% answered Kavanaugh, and 22% were unsure (Montanaro, 2018; Edwards 2018). However, there were still those who doubted her testimony and believed that she had other malicious intentions to come forward so late in the confirmation process. Gilmore (2019) explains that Kavanaugh was more likely to be believed because it is the way that, for so many years, these types of situations have concluded:

He said/she said as the default cultural narrative of women's unreliability is a form of testimonial injustice, repeated in the confirmation hearings, because it introduces a false equivalence between her accusation and his denial. [...] Women are doubted; they are also threatened when they come forward. Men are believed, and when they are not, they are still protected, or forgiven (p. 620).

Even in the age of the MeToo Movement, things have not changed on Capitol Hill. Nor have the minds of those who actively ignore the powerful men that often use their power to manipulate women and get away with it.

As far as the positive impacts resulting from Dr. Blasey Ford's testimony, many people around the world praised her for her bravery. She inspired many people to open up about their own experiences of sexual assault. After the testimony aired on national television, "[w]omen began calling into C-SPAN to tell their own, decades-old stories of harassment and rape[, and] #WhyIDidntReport exploded on social media, a rallying cry for those who had never gone public about their own sexual assault until then" (Edwards, 2018).

In 2018, the year of the Kavanaugh ‘trial,’ Dr. Ford was one of the nominees for *Time* magazine’s Person of the Year award. However, *Time* 100 included Dr. Ford as one of the most influential people of 2019 after being nominated by Senator Kamala Harris. Additionally, Dr. Ford was nominated for the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Alumna Award for going public with the allegation; she was nominated by UNC professor Dr. Jennifer Ho who praised her for “speaking truth to power” (Kelly, 2018).

As for Dr. Ford’s story’s relation to Gender Inequity, many people continue to theorize that her gender, unfamiliar name, political views, and anything else that today’s society may distrust led to the distrust of her credibility. All in all, we, as a society, need to agree to do better, right this wrong, and every wrong suffered at the hands of powerful men. Women have been silenced and dismissed for far too long. Dr. Christine Blasey Ford deserved better. Whether or not people believe that Brett Kavanaugh deserved a seat on the Supreme Court, we should all be able to agree that the Senate Judiciary Committee mishandled these hearings.

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