

M. Keithley

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## Rhetorical Analysis of Anita Hill's Testimony

Long before the #MeToo movement, Anita F. Hill's testimony before the United States Senate laid the groundwork for a cultural shift. Hill's testimony sheds light on the importance of addressing sexual harassment while empowering individuals to speak out. This pivotal moment shaped the landscape for activism and advocacy, contributing to the momentum that would fuel the #MeToo movement. Her courageous testimony stands as an effective persuasive speech deserving of rhetorical analysis.

In 1991, President George H.W. Bush nominated Clarence Thomas to replace Justice Thurgood Marshall on the United States Supreme Court. During the Senate confirmation hearings, the Senate Judiciary Committee, led by then Delaware Senator Joe Biden, had been tasked with determining if Thomas was fit to serve in such a prestigious and powerful position on the United States Supreme Court. At the center of the hearings was the testimony of allegations of sexual harassment misconduct against Thomas brought forth by Hill. Hill's testimony made history because it was the first time anyone had discussed sexual allegations in a Supreme Court nominee on national television. Prior to Hill's testimony, sexual harassment was often a silent and overlooked issue. Hill's willingness to come forward and share her experiences broke the silence surrounding workplace sexual harassment, inspiring others to speak out.

At the time of the allegations, Hill was a law professor at the University of Oklahoma and a former assistant to Thomas; first at the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights and later at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) (Tikkanen). Prior to Hill's testimony, gender equality and workplace sexual harassment had slowly evolved since the women's liberation movement of the 1970's. At the time of the hearings, sexual harassment in the workplace had not been fully exposed; creating an opportunity for a successful and warranted appeal to Kairos (Cohen). In front of the entire nation, Hill effectively employs a range of rhetorical strategies of appeals to ethos, pathos, logos as well as utilizing Kairos to convey her message, connecting with her audience on multiple levels.

The initial intended audience was the Senate Judiciary Committee, consisting of 14 white males; however, it can't be ignored the actual audience was the entire country with the assistance of media sources. The sexual harassment allegation against Thomas had been dissected in the press for weeks prior to Hill's testimony that was broadcast live on national television. Hill made the decision to not speak to the media prior to her testimony, she originally did not wish to testify and had to be subpoenaed by the Senate Judiciary Committee, which helped to heighten interest and increase public curiosity providing a more engaged audience (Aliano). According to her testimony, she felt it was her "duty" to divulge the details of the sexual harassment by Thomas since he would hold a powerful position in our government that is based on ethics, his behavior could be viewed as contradicting the standards and conduct required of a Supreme Court Justice. In her speech Hill states, "I felt that I had to tell the truth. I could not keep silent" (Hill).

Hill's testimony recounts her allegations of sexual harassment by Thomas during her time working under him as his assistant. In her speech, she describes multiple instances when Thomas

made inappropriate sexual comments and advances towards her, creating an uncomfortable and awkward work environment. She states that she had concerns regarding her job security and did not come forward with her allegations out of fear of retaliation and job termination, “I was aware, however, that telling at any point in my career could adversely affect my future career. And I did not want early on to burn all the bridges to the EEOC” (Hill).

Hill begins her speech by establishing her ethos through a detailed discussion of her background, childhood, education, and professional career achievements. Hill discusses her family history and religious faith to suggest conservative modesty and virtue. She highlights her academic career and offers her resume to the Senate Judiciary Committee to offer as proof to support her credibility as a knowledgeable witness. At the time of the hearings, Hill’s academic and work record included a law degree from Yale University and teaching positions at both Oral Roberts University and University of Oklahoma (Tikkanen). Hill’s demeanor comes across as civil, calm, and professional. In her testimony she is well-spoken and refrains from crying or showing any unbalanced emotional behavior. By painting a comprehensive picture of her life, she provides the audience validation of her credibility. She refutes her reluctance to come forward at the time the harassment took place, focusing on her desire to acknowledge the truth without revenge for criticism of her work performance, “I began to be concerned that Clarence Thomas might take out his anger with me by degrading me or not giving me important assignments. I also thought that he might find an excuse for dismissing me” (Hill).

Hill accomplishes an appeal to pathos by emphasizing certain adjectives to describe situations with words such as “only”, “however”, “uncomfortable”, and “vividly” to help persuade the audience to understand how she felt at the time of the harassment. She also

perfectly executes uncomfortable pauses before and after with words like “pornography”, “sexualized language”, or “inappropriate behavior” to make the audience feel just as awkward as she did at the time of sexual advances by Thomas. This strategy allows for the audience to relate to Hill’s experience. To connect with the audience in an appeal to pathos; Hill provides details of her dating history and personal relationships, making her relatable to the audience. She shares with the committee how the stress of the experience has affected her life. By making the audience aware of her struggle, she elicits sympathy and empathy from the audience, “I was handicapped because I feared that, if he found out, he might make it difficult for me to find other employment and I might be dismissed from the job I had...In February 1983, I was hospitalized for five days on an emergency basis for an acute –for acute stomach pain, which I attributed to stress on the job” (Hill).

Hill also effectively appeals to logos by remaining composed, providing extrinsic proofs like dates of occurrences in an organized timeline, she also refutes possible audience objections throughout by explaining her thought process and reasons for not coming forward at the time(probabilities). She does a skilled job of letting the audience know she is not a disgruntled employee, unable to take criticism of her work by a superior. She remains calm despite the stress of having her speech nationally televised and delivering the details to a panel of all white males. Hill provides specific incidents and details of the harassment, such as Thomas's graphic discussions of sexual matters, “He spoke about acts that he had seen in pornographic films involving such matters as women having sex with animals and films showing group sex or rape scenes. He talked about pornographic materials depicting individuals with large penises or large breasts involved in various sex acts. On several occasions, Thomas told me graphically of his own sexual prowess” (Hill). She provides dates and locations to further corroborate her

testimony. This is an appeal to logos by presenting the evidence to support her claim of the inappropriate behavior.

After the hearing, gender equality issues received increased public awareness and support as women began to open conversations about their own harassment. Prior to Hill's testimony, workplace sexual harassment was not openly discussed, despite the awareness of its existence. Sexual harassment was simply not talked about in public, especially on national television. Hill's testimony encouraged more women to enter politics and share their own experiences which helped raise the public's perception of sexual harassment in the workplace. Many women were outraged about how she was treated by the Senate Judiciary Committee, motivating more women to run for political office, "A record 47 women were elected to the House of Representatives, 24 for the first time, in what became known as "The Year of the Woman" (Strauss). Anita Hill's testimony during the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings was not effective in persuading the Senate Judiciary Committee to block his nomination. However, it was an effective rhetorical situation in its time; long before the #MeToo movement, which helped to influence future legislation regarding gender equality and sexual harassment in the workplace.

According to Hill, she was doing her "duty" to be honest and divulge allegations of sexual harassment in the workplace. She stated she had no ill will towards Thomas, "I have no personal vendetta against Clarence Thomas. I seek only to provide the committee with information which it may regard as relevant" (Hill). I believe she wanted to bring awareness about sexual harassment in the workplace and be an advocate for all women who had also experienced this same situation. It is possible there was some part of her that knew Thomas would never be a Thurgood Marshall.

Despite the Senate Judiciary Committee's decision not to block Thomas's nomination, Hill's speech was a pivotal rhetorical situation. The historical event marked the first nationwide televised event of its kind. Hill's televised testimony was responsible for changing the nation's conversation on gender equality and workplace harassment, encouraging more women to enter politics and to speak out about their experiences.

The heightened awareness resulted in a record number of women being elected to the House of Representatives in what became known as "The Year of the Woman". Although Hill's testimony did not alter the confirmation outcome, it was effective in influencing future legislation on gender equality and sexual harassment in the workplace.

Hill's speech effectively used rhetorical appeals, contributing to a transformative moment in American discourse on gender equality and workplace sexual harassment.

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