

How Trauma Affects Memory: Scientists Weigh In On The Kavanaugh Hearing

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In Thursday's testimony at Judge Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation hearings, Christine Blasey Ford alleged Kavanaugh sexually assaulted her at a party in 1982, when she was 15 years old and he was 17.

Kavanaugh staunchly denied these allegations.

But memory is fallible. A question on many people's minds is, how well can anyone recall something that happened over 35 years ago?

Pretty well, say scientists, if the memory is of a traumatic event. That's because of the key role emotions play in making and storing memories.

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“The stress hormones, cortisol, norepinephrine, that are released during a terrifying trauma tend to render the experience vivid and memorable, especially the central aspect, the most meaningful aspects of the experience for the victim,” says [Richard McNally](#), a psychologist at Harvard University and the author of the book *Remembering Trauma*.