

'Indelible in the Hippocampus Is the Laughter.' The Science Behind Christine Blasey Ford's Testimony

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Christine Blasey Ford drew heavily on her psychology background while giving an [emotional testimony](#) about her [alleged sexual assault](#) by Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh, discussing everything from brain chemistry to risk factors for anxiety.

Experts say that during trauma, the brain does select for salient details. Research indeed shows that norepinephrine, a neurotransmitter released in response to stress or emotional arousal, allows the brain to zero in on certain things and tune out others, says Charan Ranganath, director of the Memory and Plasticity Program at the University of California at Davis. (Ranganath is not involved in the Kavanaugh confirmation process.) “People tend to think of memory as all-or-none — as if you either remember everything, or your entire memory is flawed,” Ranganath says. “Neuromodulators like norepinephrine can change what will and will not be prioritized, so it’s very possible that some aspects of an event can be retained and recalled fairly accurately for long periods of time, while other, less significant details may be lost.”