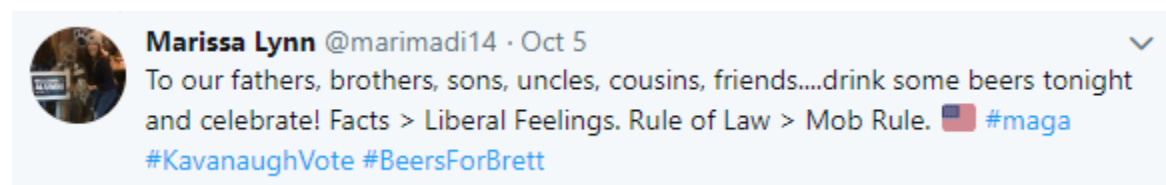Lauren Vosler

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#BeersforBrett and the Division of the Twitter Community

Political issues, while often fiercely debated on Twitter, are rarely resolved on this versatile social media platform, and #BeersforBrett seems to be no different. Twitter users reduce highly complicated political ideals to simple, mud-slinging arguments that focus more on the assumed values of the opposition than the actual issues presented. Twitter hashtags have simplified the sorting of these arguments. Hashtags have become tools to circulate specific, value-driven rhetoric that partitions the masses into, generally, two very distinct sides. In this example, the words "Beers for Brett" imply a celebration of not just Brett Kavanaugh's induction into the Supreme Court but also the freedom associated with the dismissal of his sexual assault charges. Supporters and opposers of this hashtag are both associated with a stereotypical social branding which divides Twitter into two groups who use rhetoric to defend their personal identity politics and simultaneously attack the other group's values. While #BeersforBrett started as a simple congratulatory effort for Justice Brett Kavanaugh, it has developed into a vicious social battle that, while not explicitly linked to a party-driven issue, draws its rhetorical power from embracing cultural assumptions about Republicans and Democrats.

The supporters of Brett Kavanaugh created #BeersforBrett after Kavanaugh's testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee where he stated several times that he enjoyed beer. The tweets from supporters seem to use rhetoric as a statement of 'victory' over liberals who, they say, have smeared the name of a 'good man.' This rhetoric is built off the traditional ideals of

masculinity, where strong men are conservative, evangelical, and patriotic (Ahler 11), and groupthink psychology which interconnects similarly-minded Twitter users to the concept of winning. In the minds of #BeerforBrett supporters, the 'contest' is strong, intelligent, conservative ideals in the form of Brett Kavanaugh versus lying, complaining, liberal women represented by Christine Blasey Ford. In response to Time Magazine, user Antee20x tweeted on October 6th, "Have a beer and relax. You tried to smear a good man but we saw through your deceit and didn't waiver. #Beers4Brett." This rhetoric of 'you,' the perceived liberal media, against 'us' bands supporters together to fight against deceit, a concept that is objectively bad. Since both sides acknowledge lying as morally wrong, this rhetoric only strengthens the 'warrior mindset' where supporters associate opposers with evil that must be destroyed. #BeersforBrett has morphed into a fight of good versus evil, and user Antee20x believes he is on the right side. Another user stated:

Marissa Lynn @marimadi14 · Oct 5

To our fathers, brothers, sons, uncles, cousins, friends....drink some beers tonight and celebrate! Facts > Liberal Feelings. Rule of Law > Mob Rule. 🇺🇸 #maga #KavanaughVote #BeersForBrett

This tweet congratulates Brett Kavanaugh, denies the validity of Ford's accusation, associated the 'winning side' with President Donald Trump, and attacks the assumed strength of the entirety of the Democratic Party. By associating those against the confirmation of Kavanaugh with liberals and associating liberals with 'mob rule,' Marissa Lynn has created a persona of power and success linked to President Trump that wins over the assumed hectic, weak, and unintelligent nature of liberals. This theme is personified in Vincent James' tweet which states, "Let's get #BeersForBrett trending while all of the vile left are screeching like pterodactyls in the distance." The most successful rhetorical strategies of #BeersforBrett supporters focus on pathos, which uses precise diction to attack the opposition, and logos, which emphasizes the fact of

Kavanaugh's confirmation. By stating that Kavanaugh opposers are 'screeching pterodactyls,' James implies that they are annoying, loud, disruptive, ancient, and even unearthly. Pterodactyls, an extinct animal, associates the opposers with corruption and alludes to their values being obsolete in the political realm. With corruption being a common stereotype for Democrats among Republicans, embracing this cultural assumption allies supporters together to defeat what they consider a foe. This type of associative rhetoric both attacks #BeersforBrett opposers and affiliates supporters with success, a united nation, and strong, Republican men represented by Kavanaugh.

Verified users are also more likely to support #BeersforBrett, as not a single opposed, public figure tweeted with this hashtag. Associative rhetoric is exponentially stronger when enforced by trusted public figures because, as Political Analyst Douglas Ahler states, "[both parties] see the other side as extraordinarily stereotypical and alien" (4). When the alienation of the other is supported by a trusted figure, it endorses the assumed values of the opposition. Verified users bennyjohnson, Rambobiggs, CarmineSabia, and even Senator John Cornyn have posted their support of this hashtag and, by extension, the confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh. Senator Cornyn's post seemed to get the most attention, even if it lacks the traditional associative rhetoric of most supporters. He posted:

This post includes no mention of traditional conservative values or attacks on the opposition, but it still received intense backlash. Verified user Alyssa Milano replied on October 6th to this post by saying, "Serve you constituents with dignity or get out." Even with a typo, her post raked up over two thousand likes, implying that two thousand people believe supporting #BeersforBrett is undignified. Senator Cornyn's post included nothing but two simple hashtags congratulating another recently-inducted member of the government, but after only two days, the opposition has affiliated the words 'beer' and 'Brett' with a depraved enemy. This enemy is, according to opposers, rapists and sexual abusers. Because Senator Cornyn mentioned this hashtag, he is automatically associated with these violent criminals in the minds of opposers, but as a public figure, his tweet appears a more severe statement. Political stereotypes are often overgeneralized and widely accepted among one party or the other, and when public figures endorse this stereotype, it only strengthens the associative qualities (Ahler 7). Kavanaugh supporters have joined forces under #BeersforBrett and their trusted public figures to attack the stereotypes of assumed liberals and celebrate a 'win,' but Kavanaugh opposers quickly fought back.

As #BeersforBrett carries two meanings, opposers took on an emotion-based rhetoric that focused less on the confirmation aspect of the hashtag and more on the alleged sexual assault element. Because #BeersforBrett only circulated after Kavanaugh's confirmation, the opposition of Kavanaugh himself would fail rhetorically and is primarily absent from opposers' tweets. Instead, opposers' associative rhetoric frames themselves as 'cultural winners' which they achieve by degrading supporters and embracing an assumed trend that conservatives are sexual abusers. User SarahEastcoast demonstrated this with her post:

This post completely ignores the celebration or protest Kavanaugh's confirmation, and only criticizes the appearance of those she believes are supporters. Based on the stereotype that conservatives are unintelligent or Southern, user SarahEastcoast shared her attack and gained 1.5 thousand likes, but it gains an additional rhetorical edge by including a picture. Chang Liu studied the rhetorical methods of popular Twitter users and discovered that "the pathos appeal of an image is an advantage of visual argumentation that may help to provide more comprehensive questions and consequences when considering and making choices" (Liu 12). Pictures provide a more accurate representation of the topic, and in this debate, it aids in the descriptive, impassioned ridicule of #BeersforBrett supporters. Mud-slinging rhetoric such as this convinces like-minded users that, even if they 'lost' this imaginary battle, they are still mentally superior to those who 'won.' Many opposers tweet only about the alleged sexual assault aspect of this

hashtag, their assumption being that Kavanaugh is guilty. User boosterpink tweeted, "I'm just going to assume that everyone posting #BeersforBrett is a rapist too tbh." This user did not accuse Kavanaugh supporters of 'raping women,' an action committed, but rather being 'a rapist,' a lifestyle. By accusing #BeersforBrett supporters and Kavanaugh of doing an impartially evil deed, boosterpink and the 269 people that liked this tweet join together under emotional rhetoric to attack the essence of assumed-conservative supporters. This tactic evokes strong feelings of hatred and disgust against these supporters, but, because it makes an obviously false definitive statement, it lacks rhetorical success. User SeanBradbery attempted this same tactic with his tweet, "#BeersforBrett because #SexualAssaultForBrett was too long?"; however, by not explicitly stating that supporters were rapists, his tweet seemed to be more successful with almost one thousand likes. With this debate so focused on pathos, the embracing of stereotypes seems to exclude logos; however, emotional rhetoric is only successful when it remains logical. When users like boosterpink tweet objectively false statements, the rhetorical triangle cannot support itself, and the tweet fails to thoroughly convince its audience.

Simply opposing Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation, aside from his alleged sexual assault or conservative stereotypes, is seemingly absent from opposers' tweets. The rhetorical focus for opposers is heavily centered on attacking the essence of supporters by pinning them with ugly characteristics; however, opposers seem to lack the attention of verified users. Perhaps, because opposers have 'lost' the battle of Kavanaugh confirmation, public figures are unwilling to get involved in the #BeersforBrett opposition and even more so because verified Twitter users are expected to post differently because they have the social significance of a blue check mark. This is common because "while the potential exists to engage in dialogue, debate, conversation, and community outreach, Twitter's verified usage reflects a different reality" (Kimmons et al. 108) in

which these 'high priority' individuals are expected to only broadcast positive highlights and unbiased information. While verified users often share their opinions on topics they can influence, because #BeersforBrett circulated after Kavanaugh's confirmation, they cultural weight of the check mark will not change reality, and so opposed, verified users did not tweet using this hashtag. For #BeersforBrett supporters, posting about this issue only emphasizes their association with the 'winning' culture, but because verified users have to maintain a certain appearance to their followers, it is significantly less common for opposers to subconsciously admit they are on the 'losing side' by tweeting about this issue. Since opposers are starting from this assumed disadvantage, their strongest rhetorical strategy has become defensive and emotionally rooted to disassociate themselves with the negative stereotype of Kavanaugh supporters. By emphasizing the assumed, morally-undesirable qualities of supporters, the rhetoric of opposers boosts the positive assumed-stereotypes of their own social construct and negates any concept of a 'losing' battle.

Twitter debaters often embrace stereotypes in order to either root themselves in a like-minded community or to publicly oppose a common foe, and this 'victory' rhetoric morphs a genuine debate into a battle for social media triumph. #BeersforBrett was not intended to be a battle, but 'warriors' on both sides have used rhetoric to morph a congratulatory effort into an aggressive banter of stereotypes that only loosely connects to a political party. Users fight so diligently against their opponents' assumed, negative characteristics that they lose focus on the issue being debated all for cultural glory and spoils. Twitter users are given subconscious social rewards when they see like-minded individuals fighting alongside of them, and, while there is no winner of #BeersforBrett, emotional rhetoric shifts terministic screen into one where victory is achievable. These social rewards can be supportive memes, encouraging comments, likes, or

retweets, but with a paucity of convincing logos, the rhetoric of each side has devolved into simple name calling. Twitter users bolster community and categorization by embracing stereotypes; however, the degrading of the opposition's humanity has morphed this platform into a brutal colosseum.

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