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THE POWER OF WORDS: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF EMILY DOE'S COURT STATEMENT

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the rhetorical strategies in Emily Doe's victim impact statement following her sexual assault by Brock Turner. The analysis is conducted within the discourse analysis theoretical framework to explore how Doe employs specific rhetorical devices such as pronouns, metaphors, antithesis, parallelism, and triplets to construct her narrative and convey her message. The findings show that Doe's effective strategic use of these rhetorical devices emphasizes her pain, resilience, and quest for justice, helping her reclaim her voice and identity. The research contributes to a deeper understanding of the rhetorical power in victims' narratives.

Keywords: rhetorical devices, victim impact statement, identity, Emily Doe, Stanford Rape Case

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SỨC MẠNH CỦA NGÔN TỪ: PHÂN TÍCH TU TỪ BẢN KÊ KHAI TẠI TÒA ÁN CỦA EMILY DOE

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Tóm tắt: Trong những năm gần đây, diễn ngôn công cộng đã thu hút sự chú ý đáng kể, tạo điều kiện cho những tiếng nói yếu ớt được lắng nghe. Một trong những diễn ngôn quan trọng nhất là bản kê khai ảnh hưởng của nạn nhân (VIS), giúp nạn nhân chia sẻ hậu quả về thể chất, tâm lý và kinh tế của mình, đồng thời cung cấp thêm thông tin quan trọng cho quan tòa trước khi kết án. Bài viết này tập trung vào các chiến lược tu từ trong bản kê khai của Emily Doe sau vụ cưỡng hiếp do Brock Turner gây ra. Sử dụng phương pháp phân tích diễn ngôn, tác giả khám phá cách Doe sử dụng các phương tiện tu từ như: đại từ nhân xưng, ẩn dụ, đối lập, song hành và nhóm ba đơn vị (triplets) để xây dựng câu chuyện và truyền đạt thông điệp một cách hiệu quả. Kết quả cho thấy việc sử dụng chiến lược các phương tiện tu từ này giúp Doe khắc họa nỗi đau, sự kiên cường và hành trình tìm kiếm công lý, đồng thời giúp cô lấy lại tiếng nói và danh tính của mình. Nghiên cứu cũng làm nổi bật tầm quan trọng của VIS trong quá trình xét xử và tác động của nó lên diễn ngôn công cộng về bạo lực tình dục, đóng góp vào việc hiểu rõ sức mạnh tu từ trong câu chuyện của nạn nhân.

Từ khóa: phương tiện tu từ, bản kê khai ảnh hưởng của nạn nhân, danh tính, Emily Doe, vụ cưỡng hiếp tại Stanford

1. Introduction

In recent years, public discourse on various social issues has received much-needed interest, hence, becoming more impactful, thanks to involvement of various social groups. Individuals are given more chances to share their stories and perspectives, strengthening voices which were previously overlooked (Benford & Snow, 2000). This shift can be observed clearly in the discourse on sexual violence, i.e., media coverage and journalism, or public testimonies and hearings.

A crucial element of the public testimonies is the victim impact statement (VIS) where survivors have room to articulate their trauma and resilience. Through these statements, survivors do not only inform the court and the public about the personal profound effects of the assaults on their lives; they also have a powerful tool for reclaiming self-identity and playing an active role in the judicial proceedings (Roberts & Erez, 2004; Lens et al., 2013).

One of the most impactful VIS that resonated deeply with audiences and spurred the legislation action is the powerful and moving court statement delivered by Emily Doe after her assault by Brock Turner in 2015. On January 18, 2015, Emily Doe, pseudonym of Chanel Miller, was sexually assaulted by Brock Turner, a Stanford University student. The assault occurred behind a dumpster on the Stanford campus, and Turner was caught red-handed by two passersby. Turner was found guilty on three counts and should have faced up to 14 years in a state prison; however, he was sentenced to six months in county jail and probation. In reality, he only served three in jail. The particularly lenient sentence, considered as 'a gentle slap on

the wrist' (Salter, 2018), together with Emily Doe's statement, provoked a public outrage about the legal system's treatment of sexual assault survivors and the impact of privilege and bias in judicial outcomes. Later that year California imposed mandatory minimum sentences for sexual assault crimes and in 2018, Judge Persky, who made a wildly condemned decision in Turner's case, was ousted by voters.

There is a substantial body of research on VIS, discussing their roles and impacts within the criminal justice system as well as analyzing the content of survivor statements to understand their emotional and therapeutic value (Erez, 1999; Booth & Weisman, 2009). However, few have focused on the specific detailed functions of the rhetorical devices in these statements. This study aims to examine the use of rhetorical devices in Emily Doe's court statement, examining how she employs these devices to construct her narrative, engage her audience, and convey her message.

The primary research question guiding this study is: *How does Emily Doe's use of rhetorical devices contribute to the persuasiveness of her court statement?*

2. Literature Review

2.1. Persuasion and Rhetoric

As a vital human communication skill, persuasion has evolved significantly throughout history. It shapes opinions and behaviors in every aspect of life. Persuasion has been extensively studied in various disciplines, and defined differently (Aristotle, 2004; Andersen, 1971; O'keefe, 2016). However, based on the main components of these definitions, persuasion can be best described as 'a symbolic process in which communicators try to convince other people to change their attitudes or behaviors regarding an issue through the transmission of a message in an atmosphere of free choice' (Perloff, 2017, p. 22). This definition emphasizes the importance of voluntary reception and response to persuasive messages within the relevant context.

However, it is not always the accuracy or truthfulness of the message that makes the audience more receptive; it is usually the validity of the presented arguments that persuades the audience (Beard, 2000). It is the employment of rhetoric or 'the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents' (Burke, 1969, p. 42) that *moves* people. This points to a close relationship between persuasion and rhetoric. Rhetoric as the foundation for persuasion, through well-crafted arguments and engaging language, allows speakers to influence their audience's beliefs and actions, which leads to successful persuasion.

To get a better understanding of how rhetoric can function as a tool to manipulate the audience, a discussion of an array of rhetoric devices is to follow. The landscape of the study elements is quite broad (Mulholand, 1994; Corbett, 1999; Jones & Wareing, 1999); however, within the scope of this study, only a number of different kinds of rhetoric devices prominent in the data are reviewed.

2.2. Pronouns

According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), *personal pronouns*, together with other types of personal reference, create a link between different parts of the text. They are to maintain the continuity and coherence of the text by locating who or what is being referred to. Personal pronouns are quite context – sensitive as the meaning and referent of a personal pronoun can only be determined by considering the immediate text and the prior discourse. There are two kinds of personal pronouns. Subjective personal pronouns refer to a subject complement or

subject of a clause; they include *I, we, you, he, she, it and they*. Objective personal pronouns refer to the same people or things as the equivalent subject pronouns. The objective personal pronouns include *me, us, you, him, her, it and them* (Collins, 1990, p. 29).

2.3. Metaphors

Metaphors, as Mulholand (1994) elaborates, ‘act to present one thing, X, called the ‘tenor’ in terms of another thing, Y, called the ‘vehicle’, and in so doing can direct a reader’s perception of X by aligning its meaning with that of Y’ (p. 181). By using a metaphor, speakers may influence how the audience understands X by associating it with the attributes or qualities of Y. Although the comparison made by a metaphor can be quite straightforward and accurate, sometimes metaphors may distort the reality to serve the speaker’s purpose, overlooking some aspects and emphasizing others (Mulholand, 1994). Take “*The world is a stage.*” as an illustration. The comparison made here is between the world (X) and the stage (Y). The implication of the metaphor is that life is like a play, and every one of us in this world is all actors with our specific roles to play.

2.4. Antithesis

Contrast defined by Mann and Thompson (1988) is a rhetorical relation that emphasizes differences between two pieces of information, highlighting their distinct characteristics or opposing qualities. In order to make sense of a text i.e. understanding the coherence, readers usually look for connections between different parts of the text. One way to create coherence is through the use of contrast which would allow readers’ better understanding of the relationship between the items being compared (Mann & Thompson, 1988). A key concept related to contrast is **antithesis**. According to Mulholand (1994), antithesis is also a rhetorical device similar to contrast, and one characteristic to antithesis is “juxtaposition in antithesis involves the parallel grammatical structures of the two compared ideas” (p. 37).

2.5. Parallelism and Triplets

Parallelism is defined differently by different scholars from different approaches (Richards & Schmidt, 2000; Foley, 2013); however, a general definition of the concept can be drawn upon the agreed elements of the previous definitions. Parallelism is the recurring patterns with the same grammatical functions, which can be words, phrases, clauses or sentences, in neighboring structures/ clauses. It creates symmetry in the sentence structure, resulting in more balance and rhythm in the structure.

At first glance, repetition and parallelism may look quite similar; yet, they tend to focus on different aspects. While repetition focuses on the recurrence of the same words, or phrases, parallelism focuses on similar grammatical structures. In this quote by Winston Churchill, “*we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills,*” the **repetition** of “*we shall fight*” emphasizes determination, while the **parallel** structure of the different locations creates a balanced and rhythmic effect.

A **triplet** is a rhetorical device where three parallel elements (words, phrases, or clauses) are used in a sequence to create a powerful effect. Mulholand (1994) underscores the persuasive value brought about by a triplet as repetition and recognizable pattern based on cognitive principles that a pattern of three is the ideal complex whole, not too few, not too many.

A triplet specifically involves three parallel elements, making it a form of parallelism, but parallelism can involve any number of repeated structures. Compare these two sentences:

a. Our plans, our schemes, our future viability, depend on this

b. Our plans, our schemes, our goals, and our future viability depend on this.

While sentence a uses a triplet to group three related ideas, the second sentence extends this structure by adding a fourth element, maintaining parallelism throughout.

2.6. Relevant Studies to Emily Doe's Statement to Court

There is a substantial body of research on VIS by sexual assault victims, discussing their roles and impacts within the criminal justice system. Stenberg (2022) analyses a collection of VIS in the Nassar case. He arrives at the finding that collective VIS use emotional and rhetorical statements in expressing the victim's trauma and in demanding accountability from those who enabled Nassar's abuse, which can effectively highlight systemic failure in protecting the female athletes from sexual assault. Balfour et al. (2017) insist that the discourse of ongoing trauma and struggle, constructed in their understudy rape narratives, would challenge societal perceptions of victims and highlight the pervasive impact of sexual violence. It can be concluded that both studies emphasize the transformative potential of VIS in making victims' voice heard in the legal system, and at the same time challenge societal misconceptions about sexual violence, victimhood, and the criminal justice system.

On a different course, other studies with different approaches, focus particularly on the Stanford rape case including the ones by Potter (2017), Larson (2018), Jerca (2019). Potter (2017) employs critical discourse analysis to see how power dynamics and accountability interact; she finds the media's portrayal often minimizes the penetrator's accountability while ignoring the victim's agency by focusing on factors such as the penetrator's potential sports success and the victim's allegedly alcoholic behavior. Larson (2018) focuses on visceral counterpublicity in refining rape narratives. The study highlights how Doe's use of bodily language to describe her trauma of sexual assault has affectively silenced the social norms that often dismiss the severity of sexual violence. Taking a different focus, Jerca (2019) does a critical discourse analysis of both Doe's statement and Judge Persky's sentencing decision to explore how lenient sentence of Turner reflects the systemic barriers and institutional failures in dealing with sexual violence, and how language can reflect a reluctance to hold perpetrators fully accountable, especially in cases where privileged defendants are involved.

While the previous studies on Emily Doe's case each examine different aspect of the case – media portrayal, bodily language, and judicial discourse, this study particularly focuses on the variety and richness of language used by Doe to reclaim her identity and challenge the social norms. By studying the rhetorical power of language, this paper adds a new perspective to understanding how victims of sexual violence employ language to assert their agency and influence public and legal perceptions.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative and quantitative research design.

Discourse Analysis (DA) approach was adopted here as the overarching theoretical framework as it enabled an in-depth exploration of how Emily Doe's language engages with societal discourses on sexual violence and victimhood. DA not only helps explore what is said, but also how it is said, thus the approach could uncover how language reflects and challenges the power relations between the victim and the perpetrator in the legal context. Meanwhile, the

two methods, thematic analysis and rhetorical analysis, help break down the discourse into manageable components for deeper analysis. While thematic analysis pinpoints the repeated themes in Emily Doe's VIS, and organizes the central messages in her narrative such as trauma, violation, or empowerment, rhetorical analysis studies the specific linguistic strategies Emily Doe uses, accompanied with the themes identified through thematic analysis, to persuade and impact her audience.

3.2. Data Description

The primary data source for this study is the complete text of Emily Doe's victim impact statement, which was officially released on BuzzFeed.com on June 3, 2016 and widely disseminated through various media channels and online platforms. Her VIS, apart from being an account of the events of the assault as well as the emotional and physical aftermath she underwent (Baker, 2016), is a means of connecting with the public audience, addressing the issue of injustice in the court system regarding violence against women. Following the #MeToo movement, Emily Doe's testimony has become a powerful symbol in the fight against pervasive sexual violence (Miller, 2019) as well as for reclaiming survivors' voices in the pursuit of justice. The testimony is 7199 words long, spreading over 74 paragraphs of various lengths.

3.3. Data Analysis

The data analysis followed several steps.

Thematic analysis was carried out through four steps.

Step 1. Familiarization

The author read the statement over and over to familiarize herself with its tone, language, and emotion. Then she noted the initial impressions associated with recurring significant phrases and ideas, e.g. ***intense feelings of pain and frustration, powerful imaginary description, strong sense of injustice and self-identity assertion.***

Step 2. Code generation

The author broke down the VIS into smaller segments, and assigned labels or codes for each meaningful segment. The most prominent codes include ***violation of autonomy, dehumanization, resilience and survival, betrayal, solidarity, emotional impact, and moral and ethical appeals.***

Step 3. Theme identification

Once the data was coded, the labels or codes were organized into potential themes such as ***violation, dehumanization, and empowerment.*** The author then roughly looked at how the linguistic choices helped intensify these themes.

Step 4. Final theme defining

Each theme was clearly defined and examined how it contributed to the rhetorical analysis and the overall narrative of the VIS.

The rhetorical analysis underwent three steps.

Step 1. Identification

Rhetorical devices were identified as metaphors, antithesis, parallelism, and triplets. The high frequency of first and second personal pronouns was recorded.

Step 2. Analysis

The author analyzed the frequency and function of the rhetorical devices as well as the

prominent pronouns, and decided how their use affects the tone and perspective of the statement.

Step 3. Evaluation

The author reflected on how these elements contribute to the effectiveness of her messages.

Quantitative data, like personal pronoun frequencies, was analyzed with the help of web-based text analysis *Voyant Tools*, while the frequency of other rhetorical devices was conducted manually. Qualitative insights were derived from both thematic analysis and rhetorical analysis.

4. Findings and Discussion

Emily Doe's VIS is organized into four meaning segments with each serving a different purpose. The first segment, spanning over the first 28 paragraphs, details the events of the night Doe was assaulted, beginning with "*On January 17th, 2015, it was a quiet Saturday night at home*". The second segment, paragraphs 29 - 62, shifts towards a direct confrontation with Brock Turner, where Doe addresses him personally, challenging his narratives and his attempts to minimize the severity of his actions. With "*Figure out how to take responsibility for your own conduct*," she refuses to let Turner's justifications define her experience. The third segment, paragraphs 63 - 72, focuses on the leniency of Turner's sentence and her intense disappointment with the legal process. She writes "*When I read the probation officer's report, I was in disbelief, consumed by anger which eventually quieted down to a profound sadness*". Finally, paragraphs 73 and 74 express closure and a call to action.

Following the organization of Doe's VIS, the findings and discussion of prominent themes as well as the rhetorical devices will be interwoven throughout the following section, ensuring a cohesive analysis that mirrors the structure and emotional progression of her statement.

4.1. Pronouns 'I, You, He'

Though other personal pronouns are used in the statement, their occurrences are quite low. Only four personal pronouns *I*, *me*, *he*, and *you* are discussed here for they contribute to the personal and immediate narrative in Emily Doe's statement.

Table 1

Frequency of Pronouns

Pronouns	Times of occurrence
I	292
me	123
you (total)	184
you (referred to Turner)	122
You (referred to audience and judge)	22
You (referred to Doe)	40
he (referred to Turner)	73

One of the most noticeable features of pronoun usage in this text is the prolific use of the first personal pronouns *I* and *me* with 292 times for *I* and 123 times for *me*, referring to Emily Doe. Taken into consideration of the context, a VIS is a description of the emotional, physical and financial impacts that victims have suffered as the result of the crime (U.S.

Department of Justice, n.d.); hence, the victim should be placed at the center of the narrative. The frequent use of first personal pronoun ‘I’ indicates a self-focus thought process, not avoiding the memory of the traumatic experience, placing the self at the center of attention, better facilitating the cohesion of the narrative (Dunnack & Park, 2009). In this VIS, *I* and *me* have helped Emily Doe to share her personal story truthfully. To begin with, Emily Doe describes a seemingly ordinary evening at home with her dad and sister, which would later lead to the assault. Out of the first nine sentences, *I* is placed at the beginning of almost all clauses, drawing the audience into her personal experience, highlighting her individual perspectives. This direct address seems to evoke empathy and connection, as the audience can see the events unfold through her lenses. “*I planned to stay at home by myself, ... Then, I decided it was my only night with her [Emily Doe’s sister] ... I would go... I called myself ‘big mama’ ... I made my silly faces, let my guard down ...*” The first personal pronoun, together with detailed accounts of her evening, helps Emily Doe create a smooth transition into the traumatic events. Within the first 28 paragraphs, Emily Doe draws more attention to her personal suffering and experiences. She recounts how her life was put on hold after the assault, and how disoriented she felt. “*I may have been raped behind a dumpster but I don’t know by who or when or how.*” Or “*I didn’t talk, I didn’t eat, I didn’t sleep.*” Or “*When I read about me like this, I said, this can’t be me, this can’t be me. I could not digest or accept any of this information. I could not imagine my family having to read about this online. ... I read that according to him, I liked it. I liked it. Again, I do not have words for these feelings.*” Or “*And then it came time for him to testify and I learned what it meant to be revictimized.*” The repetitive use of *I* helps illustrate Doe’s vulnerability and highlight her experience of withdrawal from her social environment. Throughout the paragraphs, Doe’s use of *I* and *me* serves as a powerful rhetorical device that places the audience in her shows, that draw the audience into her emotional journey.

Although Emily Doe goes back and forth between her own experience and the penetrator’s actions, she seems to assign paragraphs 29 – 62 solely to the direct confrontation with Brock Turner, strategically using personal pronouns ‘you’ to hold him accountable and force him to face with the consequences of his behavior. Both *you* and *he* have been referred to Brock Turner. “*You don’t know me but you’ve been inside me and that’s why we’re here today.*” “*...two Swedes on bicycles approached you, and you ran... You didn’t even stop when I was unconscious anyway! ... I am asking you; Would you have pulled my underwear back on over my boots?... Would you then go find a friend and say, Will you help me get her somewhere warm and soft? ... That’s what you’ll never have a good answer for, that’s what you can’t explain even after a year. You are guilty... Assault is not an accident. Somehow, you still don’t get it... you still sound confused... You cannot give me back the life I had before that night either... You should never have done this to me. Secondly, you should have never made me fight so long to tell you, you should have never done this to me.*” Or “*He has done irreversible damage to me and my family during the trial and we have sat silently, listening to him shape the evening. But in the end, his unsupported statements and his attorney’s twisted logic fooled no one. The truth won, the truth spoke for itself.*” By alternating use of *you* (122 times) and *he* (73 times), Doe creates a tension in her narrative. While *you* makes the statement more personal, impactful and confrontational, *he* creates a more emotional distance. Her choice of depersonalization has shifted the focus to his actions and their consequences, rather than his identity, making her account related to the ongoing legal process. The VIS is not only a platform for the victim and the defendant to have a dialogue; it is also a tool to assist the judge to decide on the sentence. Switching to *he* enables Emily to detail how severe and both intentional Brock Turner’s actions were, showing the third party i.e. the judge and the audience the deliberate

nature of his actions and setting the broader context for his behavior. “**He** admitted to kissing other girls at that party, one of whom was my own sister who pushed him away. **He** admitted to wanting to hook up with someone”.

Emily Doe’s strategic use of personal pronouns serves to create a powerful narrative that helps her to confront her assailant and legal system. The pronoun *you* directed at Brock Turner emphasizes her rejections of his attempts to minimize his assaulting actions. She is confronting him as a victim confronting her assailant about the **violation** he made. This has put Turner in the spotlight, a specific individual responsible for her trauma. Conversely, the use of *he* directed to Turner highlights the **dehumanization** in the legal proceedings. Doe illustrates how the system has tried to detach the perpetrator from the weight of his crime by framing Turner’s actions in the third person. At the same time, the progression of personal pronouns reflects Doe’s journey from **victimization** to **empowerment**. Phrases that include *I* and *me* mark her reclamation of identity, acknowledging her agency which seems to be dismissed in the whole legal process. She affirms her humanity and resilience through the statements about her feelings and the aftermath of the assault.

4.2. Metaphors

It is not an exaggeration to say that metaphors play a significant role in the success of Emily Doe's statement with 35 metaphors. As one moves from the beginning till the end of the statement, one would feel the emotional rollercoaster Doe experiences before and after the assault through the employment of vivid metaphors. Some metaphors were labeled under different codes such as violation of autonomy and emotional impact.

Table 2

Frequency of Metaphors

Codes	Number of occurrences	Examples
Violation of autonomy	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I tried to push it out of my mind, but it was so heavy. (paragraph 12)</i> • <i>You are the cause, I am the effect (paragraph 52)</i>
Dehumanization	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>where a car was hit, and found dented, in a ditch. But maybe the car enjoyed being hit. Maybe the other car didn't mean to hit it, just bump it up a little bit. (paragraph 15)</i> • <i>Throw in my mile time if that's what we're doing (paragraph 16)</i>
Resilience and survival	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The world is huge, it is so much bigger than Palo alto and Stanford... (paragraph 61)</i> • <i>Lighthouses don't go running all over an island looking for boats to save; they just stand there shining. (paragraph 73)</i>
Betrayal	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Your attorney is not your scapegoat. (paragraph 47)</i> • <i>Rewrite your story. (paragraph 61)</i>
Solidarity	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“I sleep with two bicycles that I drew taped above my bed to remind myself there are heroes in this story, (paragraph 73)</i> • <i>To girls everywhere, I am with you. (paragraph 74)</i>

Emotional impact	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>a blanket wrapped around me, pine needles trailing behind me (paragraph 6)</i> • <i>I would see the fear on their faces, and mine would multiply by tenfold. (paragraph 11)</i> • <i>Become a little barnacle (paragraph 57)</i>
Moral and ethical appeals	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Two evil Swedes (paragraph 32)</i> • <i>You do not get to pretend there were no red flags. (paragraph 61)</i> • <i>What he did to me doesn't expire. (paragraph 71)</i>

The metaphors were then grouped into three overarching themes, i.e. violation, dehumanization, and empowerment, based on their relevance to the victim’s emotional and psychological state, the interactions with the perpetrator and the legal system, and the process of healing and solidarity among survivors, as follows.

4.2.1. Violation

Emily Doe’s selection of metaphors in the beginning of the VIS seems to focus on the theme of violation. She begins by stating that her statement directly speaks to the defendant. With the very second sentence, she sets an intense tone for the whole narrative. *"You don't know me but you've been inside me and that's why we're here today."* The metaphor juxtaposes two opposing realities that are not supposed to go together. The first clause ‘You don’t know me’ denoting the lack of personal connection is contrasted with the physical invasive act of raping in the second clause ‘you’ve been inside me’. The metaphor reveals a violation of autonomy; the perpetrator intruded the victim’s most private body part without consent, and without even knowing or caring for the victim’s identity. Though no emotive lexical is used, the metaphor evokes strong emotions such as anger, and bitterness. The bluntness in wordchoice has made the metaphor powerful enough to direct the audience to confront the brutality of the assault. When she describes the impact of her sharing experience with family, she has successfully summarizes her overwhelming nature of fear and anxiety by *"If I told them, I would see the fear on their faces, and mine would multiply by tenfold."* The fear is too large; it can manifest physically on her family’s faces, and intensifies exponentially her distress. In another metaphor, *"I tried to push it out of my mind, but it was so heavy"*, Emily Doe shows the audience how she has been suppressing the traumatic memory of the assault. To push reminds one of removing something physically heavy out of a confined space. ‘Push it out’ indicates a desperate ongoing struggle to get rid of the unwanted intrusive memory, but the memory persists as it is ‘too heavy.’ The emotional and psychological impact of violation is also demonstrated in the metaphor ‘I became isolated from the ones I loved most.’ The metaphor shows a sense of unwillingly being cut off from those who used to be sources of support and comfort. What’s more, powerlessness due to violation is conveyed with the image of *'my life was put on hold'*. The assault has turned her life into inactivity, even normalcy was suspended. Everything, progress, plans, even self-worth, has been disrupted due to the legal and emotional aftermath of the assault. Since the sentence hearing was organized a year after the assault, the long wait for justice left her questioning her own value and identity.

4.2.2. Dehumanization

The second theme emerging from the statement is dehumanization. The loss of what has been hers, what has been defined as human’s properties has been acknowledged. *"You took*

away my worth, my privacy, my energy, my time, my safety, my intimacy, my confidence, my own voice, until today.” Each item listed here represents an important aspect of a fully realized human being. They are all the core to a sense of boundaries, resources, security, and self-assurance. The fact of a victim being stripped off these human qualities emphasizes the severity of the assault. Other metaphors aligning with this theme include “*My independence, natural joy, gentleness, and steady lifestyle I had been enjoying became distorted beyond recognition,*” “*I was the wounded antelope of the herd I, completely alone and vulnerable, physically unable to fend for myself, and he chose me.*” In “*You dragged me through this hell with you, dipped me back into that night again and again,*” ‘hell’ refers to the place of extreme torment and sufferings; “dragged” and “dipped” imply being physically attacked against one’s will, to relive the traumatic event, to highlight the ongoing nature of the trauma “again and again.” All have furthered emphasizing the victim’s powerlessness and demumanization as healing is not accepted. The sharp contrast between the “hell” and what is considered everyday’s normal experiences has exacerbated the intense emotional impact and her struggle to reclaim her humanity.

4.2.3. Empowerment

Empowerment can be viewed as the most important theme manifested through the metaphors in Emily Doe’s statement. Starting with how unexpectedly the assault occurred i.e. violation, with the use of metaphors, Emily Doe shows the audience the profound impact of trauma i.e. dehumanisation, and gradually describing her healing process, her strength and resilience, and her journey toward reclaiming identity. In the metaphor, “*I am no stranger to suffering. You made me a victim. In newspapers my name was “unconscious intoxicated woman”, ten syllables, and nothing more than that. For a while, I believed that that was all I was. I had to force myself to relearn my real name, my identity. To relearn that this is not all that I am,*” Emily Doe identifies herself as ‘unconscious intoxicated woman’ as reported in the news media as an act of dehumanization reducing her to a mere label. The label is then reduced to ‘ten syllables, and nothing more than that’ leaving a sense of hopelessness and surrender. However, she has forced herself to overlook this reductionist view and focused on the process of ‘relearning my real name, my identity’. This process of reclaiming her identity is how she has empowered herself. She does not mention it with one metaphor. “*I have to relearn that I am not fragile, I am capable, I am wholesome, not just livid and weak.*” The process of relearning her identity is powerful in itself; she is actively internalizing her strengths, asserting her multifaceted nature, and declaring her resilience. She rejects what other people label her; instead, she affirms her humanity and individuality.

Besides reclaiming her identity, Emily Doe in a way has adopted a new mission, being an agent of change. In her case, two cyclists intervened and stopped the assault; they ensured that the perpetrator was caught and brought to the police. She reads “*I sleep with two bicycles that I drew taped above my bed to remind myself there are heroes in this story.*” The image with *two bicycles* here serves as a metaphor for the constant presence and influence of the two kind-hearted and courageous cyclists. She decides to surround herself with a symbol of protection and heroism. Besides, the metaphor seems to serve as a reminder that empowerment would not be achieved were it not for the intervention of those who are willing to protect the vulnerable. Emily Doe communicates a powerful message of collective strength in “*Although I can’t save every boat, I hope that by speaking today, you absorbed a small amount of light, a small knowing that you can’t be silenced.*” “Boats” symbolizes the individuals who have suffered from the aftermath of trauma, who may feel isolated and adrift navigating through their

own emotional challenges. On the one hand, Emily Doe accepts her limited power in helping other people “*I can’t save every boat.*” On the other hand, she is trying to provide them with hope and strength referred to as ‘light.’ No matter how little the light is, Emily Doe projects the empowerment through the continuity that each act of speaking out is believed to contribute to the larger movement. Small acts of courage together would make a big difference.

The use of metaphors in Emily Doe’s VIS has woven together her experience of violation and dehumanization with her journey toward agency and empowerment. Through the powerful imaginary language, Doe has expressed the profound impacts of her trauma, as well as the resilience and solidarity among survivors, reinforcing her message of reclaiming identity in the face of adversity.

4.3. Antithesis

Similar to the findings of metaphors, data on contrast antithesis of Emily Doe’s court statement reveals her journey from victimhood to empowerment. Besides antithesis showing resilience amidst adversity, or moral failure of the assailant, a salient theme emerged is justice vs. injustice in the legal context. There are 33 antitheses identified in this VIS.

Table 3

Frequency of Antithesis

Codes	Number of occurrences	Examples
Violation of autonomy	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>My hand touching my skin and grabbing nothing (paragraph 4)</i> • <i>The thin piece of fabric ... was missing and everything inside me was silenced (paragraph 4)</i>
Dehumanization	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Dancing is a cute term; was it snapping fingers and twirling dancing, or just bodies grinding up against each other in a crowded room? I wonder if kissing was just faces sloppily pressed up against each other? (paragraph 16)</i> • <i>The probation officer’s recommendation of a year or less in county jail is a soft time-out, a mockery of the seriousness of his assaults, an insult to me and all women. (paragraph 64)</i>
Resilience and survival	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>It is enough to be suffering. (paragraph 34)</i>
Betrayal	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>And then, at the bottom of the article, after I learned about the graphic details of my own sexual assault, the article listed his swimming times. (paragraph 16)</i>
Solidarity	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sometimes I think, if I hadn’t gone, then this never would’ve happened. But then I realized, it would have happened, just to somebody else.</i>
Emotional impact	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>They gave me huge hugs, and I walked out of the hospital into the parking lot wearing the new sweatshirt and sweatpants they provided me. (paragraph 7)</i> • <i>It is enough to be suffering. It is another thing to have someone ruthlessly working to diminish the gravity of validity of this suffering. (paragraph 34)</i>
Moral and ethical appeals	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I think the end is where you list your extracurriculars to cancel out all the sickening things that’ve happened. (paragraph 16)</i>

In this line *‘Instead of taking time to heal, I was taking time to recall the night in*

excruciating detail, Emily simply puts the two opposite states within a sentence, to contrast the normal process of healing with the painful act of recalling details of the traumatic event. “Healing” is often associated with recovery, and moving forward, while recalling trauma deals with the distress, and getting stuck in the past. In a longer piece of text, retelling what she has gone through, “*After a physical assault, I was assaulted with questions designed to attack me, to say see, her facts don’t line up, she’s out of her mind, she’s practically an alcoholic, she probably wanted to hook up, he’s like an athlete right, they were both drunk, whatever, the hospital stuff she remembers is after the fact, why take it into account, Brock has a lot at stake so he’s having a really hard time right now*”, Emily underscores the nature of her suffering, not simply only from the assault itself, but also from the subsequent psychological torment she encountered during the trial. As a victim, she should have been given the adequate of support; she was then under attack because of her characters e.g. *out of her mind, an alcoholic, wanted to hook up* for the athlete perpetrator’s reputation to be protected. Her traumatic memories were dismissed while empathy for the assailant was encouraged “*he’s having a really hard time right now*”. In the sentence, “*He has done irreversible damage to me and my family during the trial and we have sat silently, listening to him shape the evening*”, several elements of antithesis are found. The contrast between active shaping and passive reception all point to the fact that the assailant and his defence were actively manipulating the narrative of the event in the trial. These few examples of antithesis have highlighted the injustice that Emily Doe and her family have endured, and drawn attention to the tendency of the justice system as well as the general society that often mitigate the actions of privileged individuals, particularly white males. In this case, significant emphasis has been put on Turner’s swimming career and academic standing, downplaying the victim’s healing and equality “*And then, at the bottom of the article, after I learned about the graphic details of my own sexual assault, the article listed his swimming times*”.

The use of antithesis in this VIS has illustrated the conflicting emotions and experiences surrounding Emily Doe’s trauma. The sharp juxtaposition of contrasting ideas to create sustained tension (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.) helps to highlight the overarching themes of violation, dehumanization and empowerment. By contrasting her diminished agency with the desire for justice and accountability, Doe has emphasized the injustices that survivors have to face, and advocated for a collective acknowledgment of their sufferings. She also calls for change within the legal system which has tilted too much towards the privileged like Brock Turners.

4.4. Parallelism & Triplets

Data on parallelism and triplets are ample in the text. Parallelism occurs 123 times. E.g. “I do not want Brock to rot away in prison. I did not say he does not deserve to be behind bars”. Or “the consequences of sexual assault needs to be **severe enough** that people feel enough fear to exercise good judgment even if they are drunk, **severe enough** to be preventative”. while triplets occurs around 42 times, e.g. “a soft time-out, a mockery of the seriousness of his assaults, an insult to me and all women” or “I had to force myself to relearn my real name, my identity. To relearn that this is not all that I am”.

To set the tone for the narrative, Emily uses a series of parallelism at the beginning of the statement. “I had multiple swabs inserted into my vagina and anus, needles for shots, pills, had a Nikon pointed right into my spread legs. I had long, pointed beaks inside me and had my vagina smeared with cold, blue paint to check for abrasions”. The repetition of ‘I had’ followed by a list of invasive procedures of the medical examination, highlights Emily’s emotional

detachment as well as the dehumanizing experience and the trauma caused to her. By “that I was also afraid, that I was also devastated”, Emily uses a parallel structure to draw attention to both emotions fear and devastation equally, declaring they are both central to her experience, at the same time indicating an overwhelming chaos of her emotional state. Similarly, in the sentence “I could not digest or accept any of this information, I could not imagine my family having to read about this online”, the repetition of ‘I could not’ helps emphasize her sense of incapability to process or accept what has happened. This parallelism also draws attention to her worry for her family to be affected by the exposure of the assault information, reinforcing the dual burdens she carries. The same pattern can be noted in this passage “When I see my younger sister hurting, when she is unable to keep up in school, when she is deprived of joy, when she is not sleeping, when she is crying so hard on the phone she is barely breathing...”

Triplets are a special case of parallelism; it calls for particularly three elements such as “That distorted me, damaged me, almost broke me,” “I had no power, I had no voice, I was defenseless”. In these two examples, the repetition of ‘that, I had’ creates the rhythmic pattern that reinforces the severity of her trauma as well as the victim’s vulnerability. With “It stays with me, it’s part of my identity, it has forever changed the way I carry myself, the way I live the rest of my life”, the rhyme has created the lasting effects of the assault on Doe’s life, creating an emotional weight of her message.

The use of parallelism and triplets in Emily Doe’s VIS has brought about the emotional intensity and clarity of her message. Employing these rhetorical devices, employing the recurring patterns, the rhythmic flow, Doe has deeply engaged the audio. The stylistic choice has painted a vivid picture of her trauma and resilience. The structured repetition in these rhetorical devices has instilled a sense of urgency and gravity in acknowledging the collective struggle for justice and healing among survivors.

5. Conclusion

Emily Doe's victim impact statement can be viewed as an exemplary statement that has become a powerful tool for social change. This paper investigates how Emily Doe’s strategic use of rhetorical devices has conveyed her trauma, reclaimed her identity, and amplified her voice. Main findings of the use of pronouns, metaphors, antithesis, parallelism, and triplets are as follows.

The frequent use of pronoun "I" and the direct address to Brock Turner with "you" and "he" centralizes Emily Doe's narrative, and at the same time holds Turner accountable while emphasizing his actions over his identity fostering empathy and understanding. With the use of vivid metaphors, violation, dehumanization, and empowerment are depicted, making Emily Doe’s trauma more relatable and her healing more impactful. Besides, concurrent themes have emerged thanks to the employment of antithesis. It highlights the contrasts between healing and trauma, manipulation and suffering, justice and injustice, underscoring systemic failures. Lastly, parallelism and triplets add rhythm and persuasive power to the story, reinforcing her trauma's severity and emotional resonance.

These findings are believed to contribute greatly to the existing literature on Victim impact statement, particularly in the case of Emily Doe’s VIS by expanding the understanding of rhetorical strategies used. Potter (2017) focuses mainly on power dynamics and accountability within the social structure through CDA; she looks at the distinct different perspectives of the victim and the perpetrator on the same event, and highlights the fact that new discursive practices entails the unequal social relations. Larson (2018) employs the visceral

counterpublicity as a frame to work on Emily Doe's bodily language to raise social awareness. Jerca (2019) mainly deals with how Judge Persky's lenient decision reflects a legal system failure and how language can reflect a bias towards a certain group of people. This current study, using the same set of data in the same setting i.e. Emily Doe's VIS, however, takes a completely different approach. By focusing on rhetorical devices like antithesis, parallelism, and the use of pronouns, the study has depicted the complete active transformation of Emily Doe from victimhood to empowerment. Doe's linguistic choice through the use of rhetorical devices provides insights into how the underrepresented can seize the opportunity from adversity to amplify their voices and reshape public discourse.

In conclusion, Emily Doe's statement demonstrates the transformative power of victim impact statements. Emily Doe's rhetorical skill contributes to her success in communicating her suffering, challenging societal misconceptions, and inspiring changes. Despite the fact that the study may not fully present the diversity of rhetorical devices used in this statement, it does highlight the importance of rhetoric in shaping public discourse and advancing social justice. Further study could explore a more specific type of rhetorical devices in this VIS, or use a comparative analysis of several VIS from different cases to identify the common rhetorical patterns and their effectiveness.

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