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Residential &
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2 Cleaning Areas or more
\$30.00 each Area
Pre-Spray Traffic Areas
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Includes Pre-Spray Traffic Area
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Chair or Recliner:
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OPINION



Why Women Don't Report Sexual Assault

Delays should
not discredit
accusers

BY JILL
RICHARDSON

When Christine Blasey Ford came forward to report that President Trump's Supreme Court nominee, Brett Kavanaugh, sexually assaulted her in 1982, you could cue the response: Why didn't she speak out then? Why didn't she go to the police?

There's a long, long list of reasons why a woman wouldn't speak out even now, and no doubt it was even more difficult in the pre-Anita Hill world of 1982.

I can't speak for everyone who has faced sexual assault, but I can speak for myself.

1. **At first, I didn't know that what happened to me was a crime.** My first assault occurred in college, 18 years ago. He lived in my dorm. I knew what rape was and didn't think I'd experienced that. But I didn't know that sexual violations without consent that aren't sexual intercourse are also a crime.

2. **I couldn't talk about it.**

Even now, I can't describe what happened to my therapist in any detail. What happened involved body parts that are too private to discuss with those closest to me — let alone the police, a judge, or a newspaper. Talking about a past trauma can be re-traumatizing. Some of us cope by staying silent.

3. **I blamed myself.** I physical-

ful. It's a perverse response, but it's apparently not uncommon.

5. **I know someone who reported a rape** to the police and had a traumatic experience of testifying in court and getting cross-examined by her rapist's lawyer in front of her rapist. And then the rapist was found innocent. I don't want that to happen to me.

I'll tell you this: Like Christine Blasey Ford, if the man who assaulted me was nominated for the U.S. Supreme Court, I'd speak up.

ly resisted for a while and then I froze and it happened. At the time, I told myself that if I really didn't want it, I would've kept fighting. I didn't know that freezing is a normal human response in a traumatic situation.

4. **Afterward, I wanted him to be my boyfriend.** My therapist said this was my way of trying to improve the situation. If he was my boyfriend, then what happened could be reinterpreted as meaning-

ful. It's a perverse response, but it's apparently not uncommon.

The answer to that is: I don't know. If I thought he was still assaulting women and my speaking out would contribute to making him stop, I would in a heartbeat.

What he did to me 18 years ago

still hurts so much that I would only revisit that assault and expose him publicly if there was a very clear purpose to doing so.

I expect if I did attempt to expose him, I'd be attacked. People would say that it wasn't an assault because I wanted him to be my boyfriend afterward. They would say I wanted it because I froze and stopped fighting. There are good odds I wouldn't be believed.

I'll tell you this: Like Christine Blasey Ford, if the man who assaulted me was nominated for the U.S. Supreme Court, I'd speak up. I don't think a man who violates a woman that way is qualified to rule on cases of violence against women, or any other aspect of their well-being. I don't think he could be impartial.

When a victim of sexual crimes comes forward, even if it's decades after the crime took place, we shouldn't use her past silence against her as "evidence" to discredit her. That urge to discredit is exactly why it takes so long for some to come forward in the first place.

OtherWords columnist Jill Richardson is pursuing a PhD in sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She lives in San Diego.