A Rhetorical Analysis of a Gymnastics Physician Sentenced to 40-175 Years in Prison

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In this paper, I will be analyzing the artifact, *Larry Nassar, former USA Gymnastics Doctor, Sentenced to 40-175 Years for Sex Crimes by* Will Hobson. Hobson discusses a court case that took place in Lasing, Michigan in January of 2018 against Larry Nassar, a USA Gymnastics and Michigan State University doctor who was found guilty of sexual abuse towards young Olympic Gymnasts that he treated in his office. Nassar would sexually abuse these young women during their visits knowing that they wouldn’t know any better and he would get away with it, at least for the time being. During his treatment with these gymnasts, he would inappropriately touch them and abuse them sexually for the benefit of his pleasure which went on for years until these gymnasts finally were old enough to know that what he was doing was wrong. Many gymnasts, as well as parents, were put on the stand to talk about their experience with Larry Nassar’s abuse and how it has affected them or their child emotionally, physically, and mentally even into adulthood. Larry Nassar’s judge, Rosemarie Aquilina, showed no mercy when giving him his sentencing. Until 2016, many complaints against Nassar went ignored even though his sexual abuse had been going on for many years before that. Nassar’s case went nationwide quickly, getting the attention of many gymnasts, coaches, USA Gymnastics judges, and doctors.

Larry Nassar abused many Olympic Gymnasts during his time as a gymnastics doctor, such as Simone Biles, McKayla Maroney, Gabby Douglas, Aly Raisman, Jordan Wieber, and Jamie Dantzscher. This case involved Larry Nassar, USA Gymnastics, and Michigan State University. Hobson intended to inform people about the abuse going on from a doctor that people thought they could trust. Nassars abuse had been ignored or looked over when someone spoke up.

In this essay, I will analyze ethos, pathos, and logos from an Aristotelian Appeal perspective and reasoning through logical fallacies used throughout Hobsons’ artifact. Emotions and statistics play the biggest role as they are the most successful in getting the audience’s attention.

**Methods**

Throughout the artifact, *Larry Nassar, Former USA Gymnastics Doctor, Sentenced to 40-175 Years for Sex Crimes,* Aristotelian Appeals were present, also known as ethos, logos, and pathos. Ethos appeals to one’s credibility or authority. It states how someone has the authority and knowledge to discuss what they are writing about. It analyzes what makes them a credible source, such as their education, experience, research, and degree. Logos appeal to logic. These are the statistics, facts, common sense, and theories used. Pathos appeal to emotion. Pathos is used to persuade an audience to believe a stand by getting them to sympathize and feel the same emotions as the author such as anger, frustration, sadness, happiness, disgust, and surprise.

There is also the use of logical fallacies throughout the artifact. Logical fallacies are techniques the author uses to persuade the reader to take their side of the argument but are done through improper reasoning. Logical fallacies can be misleading or wrong due to not being supported by enough evidence or reasoning. They weaken their stand in the argument.

Aristotelian Appeals and logical fallacies are beneficial to the readers because it helps to guide them in the right direction for what is reliable information from what is not reliable information. They help readers to be able to analyze texts by picking out facts that can be proven from opinions that may not be true or logical. They also help readers to analyze whether the author’s reasoning used is reliable or if it is misleading just to make their argument stronger.

**Using Journalist and Popular Newspaper Companies to Create Ethos**

Ethos helps people to understand one’s credibility and what makes them a reliable source. In Hobsons’ artifact, *Larry Nassar, Former USA Gymnastics Doctor, Sentenced to 40-175 Years for Sex Crimes,* there were two sources, The Washington Post and Will Hobson. The Washington Post is a widely known publishing company that publishes many articles from journalists. The Washington Post is one of the leading daily newspapers in the U.S and ranks in the top five news brands in the U.S. 56% of respondents in 2019 said that the newspaper was very or somewhat credible (Statistica). The Washington Post is ranked very high in news brands due to their long experience publishing articles over the years and because they don’t let everyone’s article get published through their newspaper. They have a process that people must go through before their articles can be published in their newspaper.

The writer, Will Hobson, has a lot of experience as a journalist and reporter as well as an educational background. Will Hobson has experience as a writer and reporter for many big writing companies, such as The Washington Post, Tampa Bay Times, Daytona Beach News, and Panama City News since 2006. He has a Bachelor of Arts in English from Boston College (Hobson, linkedin). Hobson spent a lot of time in school learning about his career and received a four-year degree. He knows what he is doing within his career and on top of that he has years of experience in journalism and reporting; he has 13 years of experience. Readers are more likely to trust someone who has a degree as well as experience.

Although The Washington Post and Hobson has great reviews and experience, they aren’t the most reliable sources possible. The Washington Post is one of the top newspaper companies, but it can also be known for being bias because it is written by journalists and reporters. Being a journalist or reporter can weaken their ethos because not everything that journalists and reporters write about is 100% accurate. They go off of what other people say and then write an article on it. People don’t always tell the truth and what they say also isn’t always supported by facts. Hobson doesn’t have any knowledge of the court system or laws. He was just sitting in on Nassars’ case taking notes and getting as much detail as he could. It’s not clear whether he included everything; he could have left things out to favor the side of Nassar’s victims. People are more likely to trust someone’s credibility when that person has background knowledge in what they are writing about, such as the legal and court systems in this case. A lawyer or someone with a criminal justice background would be a more reliable source. Hobson only has a degree in English.

**Using Logos to Help Take a Stand**

Logos support the writer the most by giving evidence and providing logical reasoning. There was use of logos throughout Hobsons’ artifact to provide evidence for Nassars crimes. For example, Victims have said they complained about Nassar’s conduct to Michigan State athletics officials as far back as 1997, and in 2014, an investigation by the school’s Title IX office cleared Nassar after a woman alleged, he assaulted her (Hobson, “Larry Nassar”, para. 16). Here, Hobson provided facts to support his argument. He is stating what has been found and how people tried to stop Nassar’s crimes by speaking up, but they weren’t taken seriously. He states the year it was first brought up to when the school finally started to take action. Rachael Denhollander, the Louisville woman whose decision in 2016 to file a police report and contact the Indianapolis Star ultimately brought about Nassar’s prosecution (Hobson, “Larry Nassar”, para. 10). Hobson talks about how Denhollander was the one to start Nassar’s case. He states the year she came forward about Nassar’s crimes and how she got this case into action. There were more than 150 girls and women abused by Nassar and 140 women and girls are suing Michigan State University and USA Gymnastics (Hobson, “Larry Nassar”). Here, Hobson pulls facts from his case on the extent to how many people he has affected and how they are taking action against him to stop his abuse. They are going to the law for help. Larry Nassar was sentenced to 40-175 years in Michigan State Prison for Federal Child Pornography crimes (The Washington Post, WP Company- national). Hobson uses this as evidence that what Nassar did was serious and the judge was trying to make a point to people that this kind of behavior will not be tolerated and will be treated with the worst punishment possible.

Overall, Hobson did a good job using logos to make his argument stronger. He wanted people to be against Nassar. His facts and statistics were relevant as they discussed how there has been attempts to put this case in action, but they failed. Now, those attempts are getting the results they’ve been waiting for and all they can do now is to keep providing facts and statistics that his victims have accumulated over the years.

**Using Pathos to Make People Feel the Same Emotions as Nassars Victims Felt**

Throughout the artifact, the audience was influenced to feel the same way that Nassar’s victims did. One way that Hobson appealed to his audience’s emotions was by making them feel like they can’t trust Nassar. Judge Aquilina said she wouldn’t even send her dogs to him. Victims were treated with skepticism and as liars until they could prove themselves. Victims said they thought they could trust adults (The Washington Post, WP Company-sports). Even the judge didn’t have trust in Nassar. Based on his treatment towards his patients, she wouldn’t feel comfortable for him to treat her dog even though he’s a doctor and should be fully capable of doing so. Nassar gained his victim’s trust by going through medical school and getting a degree in treating people with injuries and illnesses which is all his victims wanted, so they went to him. However, Nassar betrayed them by knowing exactly what he was evilly doing to them. He treated them to his benefit, rather than their benefit which was what they were there for. Hobson also used sympathy by making the audience feel bad for the victims that Nassar abused. Figure 1 demonstrates a screenshot from a video within Hobsons artifact to show the victims speech where they were crying, shaking, and talking with disgust towards Nassar because of how much Nassar had traumatized his victims by his “treatments”. The victims talked about their experience with Nassar and made it clear to Nassar that he would not get away with his abuse. Hobson’s audience felt sorry and wanted the worst to come for Nassar.

Figure 1: Aly Raison during her speech for all of Nassar’s sex crimes

Hobson also used bravery and happiness to appeal to his audience’s emotions. Judge Aquilina told Denhollander that she was the bravest person to ever step in her courtroom for initially coming forward and getting this case started. All because of Denhollander, Nassar was convicted and put in prison, resulting in the victims celebrating by coming together in a line in the middle of the courtroom saying thank you for finally getting their victory over Nassar (Hobson, “Larry Nassar”, para. 27-29). Hobson showed how much bravery it took for these women to come forward. They were scared to and felt like they had to just deal with their problems silently. The judge commended them for coming forward and the celebration in the courtroom showed the happiness of the victims who had been sitting in this courtroom waiting for this day to come true.

**Using Logical Fallacies to improperly reason to Gain Support Against Nassar**

A couple of logical fallacies were demonstrated to make the case against Nassar stronger. The first logical fallacy I observed was *Appeal to Pity.* The victims’ emotions were used to cause the audience to feel disgusted or hateful towards Nassar. Not only did Hobson express how Nassars victims felt through the use of words, but he also included visuals. His visuals were videos of the victims being on stand where the cracking of their voice could be heard as they were talking about Nassars abuse, their faces bright red from how angry Nassar made them, and the tears running down their face from the traumatizing effects that Nassar left on them. The Appeal to Pity a was very strong logical fallacies as it allowed the readers to visualize what was going on in the courtroom and feel the emotions of his victims without any evidence that all that they said happened did happen.

The second logical fallacy I witnessed was *Contradictory Premises,* which Larry Nassar unintentionally did to himself. Here, Larry Nasar spoke out in court and contradicted himself from a previous letter that he wrote about the case. Larry Nassar began to apologize right before the judge gave him his sentencing just after he wrote a letter complaining about the length of his sentencing and how victims were only coming forward because the media was influencing him to do so (The Washington Post, WP company- national). Nassar contradicted himself in his case when trying to persuade the judge not to give the worst punishment, however, it did not work because it contradicted what he had said in a letter earlier on which made his stand even weaker.

**Conclusion and Discussion**

In conclusion, Aristotelian Appeals were used throughout the artifact, *Larry Nassar, Former USA Gymnastics Doctor, Sentenced to 40-175 Years for Sex Crimes,* with pathos being the strongest because of all the victims who spoke on their experience with Nassar and how it has traumatized them to this day. The victims and parents spoke out against Nassar, they told him how much they hated him and were disgusted by him, they shed tears and even spoke anger with no mercy. Some people have committed suicide or harmed themselves to get out of the situation they felt they were stuck in. People felt the emotions that Nassar’s victims felt and they wanted Nassar in jail. Hobson makes the audience aware of what has happened and catches the audience’s attention. It has a lasting effect on society because the audience knows his crimes are wrong and unacceptable within society. Crimes like what Nassar did has no tolerance and if someone were to do what Nassar did, they would not get away with it no matter what the situation was or who they were.

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