



Greetings!

Like many of you, I have been following the Supreme Court confirmation process. Throughout this process and particularly while watching the hearing where Dr. Ford and Judge Kavanaugh testified, I have thought of our own work and the impact on our students. Though I am not making any judgement as to what actually happened while they were in high school, I am struck and disturbed by the messaging that has and continues to occur.

Both parties were lauded for their resumes and experiences, yet I am troubled by the messages that a woman needs to be well-educated with a “respectable” job to even possibly be considered a victim and that if you have a good job and are nice to some women you can’t possibly have sexually assaulted someone. How often do we work with students who are afraid to come forward because the accused is a person of privilege, power, and/or status or that someone is an excellent student, active in community service, or holds a prominent position or role at the university? We hear that the complainant doesn’t want to “ruin” the accused’s life even though their life will be forever altered. Time and again, we see privilege as a free pass to behave however one wants.

When Dr. Ford admitted at the beginning of her statement that she was terrified, she spoke for millions who have felt that same terror of having to recount the incident. As a society, we talk as casually about people needing to report sexual violence as we would about someone reporting a stolen car. If it was only that easy and now it will be harder.

We expect students, regardless of their role as the complainant or respondent, to be their most vulnerable with us and we need to respect and honor that vulnerability. They meet with us to share the intimate details of the most traumatic event of their lives. When they leave our offices, they continue on with the motions of life while we investigate. The strength needed to participate in the process, continue as a student, and then wait for a decision is profound. We all know that, despite our best attempts, our decisions are never satisfactory to both parties and the trauma of the incident lives on forever.

We are left with the reality that until we as a society truly face and combat the issues of power, privilege, and equity, we will have to address the power and privilege that brings about sexual violence in an effort to end sexual violence. In the meantime, we need to have effective processes to investigate and address the behaviors. Most importantly, we need to have strong, ethical, and kind people who work with those processes because it is about the people involved. Our students need to know we

care about them. They need to know they are not a “to do” item and that we respect and acknowledge the vulnerability and courage needed to participate in our processes. This holds true, albeit at varying degrees, for anyone who is a participant in the process.

Over the years, we have struggled to tell “our story” regarding managing sexual violence cases on campus. I think that is because the process and procedures aren’t the real story. It is the work with the students and that is deeply private and it is not actually our story. We don’t get to tell someone else’s story. We must continue to be open about our processes and we must address issues of sexual violence. I encourage all of us to be more vulnerable and discuss how our work impacts us and what we are striving to accomplish within our communities.

On behalf of ASCA, thank you for your work and for caring. The work is hard, complicated, and deeply impactful, on our students, their support networks, and on us. We take on so much of our students’ stories, trauma, and grief – it is bound to impact us personally and professionally. The work you do matters, and now more than ever, we need you to keep doing it. Please take care of yourself as you also take care of your students. You’re the beacon of humanity that we desperately need right now.

Sincerely,



Cathy Cocks
ASCA President

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