

STATEMENT FROM IFPE
REGARDING IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF
TRAUMATIC MEMORIES OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

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The International Forum for Psychoanalytic Education (IFPE) held its annual conference on the theme of Unsilencing in Seattle, Washington, October, 2018, having witnessed a national unsilencing in the US during the Senate confirmation hearings of Judge Brett Kavanaugh, the nominee to the U.S. Supreme Court. In moving testimony, Dr. Christine Blasey Ford, accused Judge Kavanaugh of a sexual assault 30 years ago. Dr. Blasey Ford anticipated in her Senate testimony that she would not be believed. In fact, she has been disbelieved, mocked, stalked, harassed, and pilloried by some. But importantly, she has also received an outpouring of support. And according to the New York Times, there has been a sharp increase in the number of reports of assaults since her testimony.

Time may have passed since the initial event, but its chilling effect persists. IFPE reaffirms its support and admiration of Dr. Blasey Ford, who clearly had nothing to gain from coming forward. As Kamala Harris wrote about Dr. Blasey Ford, who was nominated as Time Magazine's 100 Most Influential People of 2019, "She had a good life and a successful career - and risked everything to send a warning in a moment of grave consequence." IFPE recognizes that the emotional consequences of sexual assault remain over one's entire lifetime, and we consider her testimony as nothing short of heroic. IFPE also extends its support and admiration for all victim-survivors who have suffered in silence, and who are now "unsilenced", and coming forward to speak their truth.

The American Psychological Association (APA) released a statement on September 24, 2018 in which the President, Dr. Jessica Henderson Daniel, Ph.D. outlined several research findings on sexual assault allegations, namely, research on the characteristics of memory following trauma, and the reasons for a person delaying a report by many years, or not reporting an assault at all, in the hope of increasing awareness and understanding in the general public of the extraordinary complexity of emotional suffering of the survivors of sexual assault. In addition, Dr. Daniel described the characteristics of memories of traumatic events, which are stored differently in the brain compared to non-traumatic events. Dr. Daniel concluded that a delay in reporting an assault of this kind in no way undermines the credibility of the victim's claim. IFPE continues to support unqualifiedly Dr. Daniel's statement, and would like to elaborate on the nature and manifestation of traumatic memories. Such memories can return to the trauma survivor decades after the traumatic event in the form of flashbacks, intense emotion such as despair and panic, and/or physical symptoms of pain and chronic fatigue; a memory may also appear as a fragment, involving a person or place.

Finally, we note that those who sexually assault others may also have difficulty recalling those incidents in which they are the perpetrator. Additionally, sexual assault perpetrators may have their own personal histories as victims of sexual assault. Safe spaces of healing are necessary to truly disrupt the often unconscious repetitive cycle noted throughout history within families and communities.

These experiences of assault need to be taken seriously by the trauma survivor, the perpetrator, their loved ones, the psychotherapeutic community, and as the recent events exposed - by our larger community of fellow citizens and governing officials. It is both a community and individual endeavor, and we are all in this together.