

## OPINION

# Kavanaugh vs. Ford: A battle we can help our kids avoid

T'Shana McClain and Noël Busch-Armendariz, Texas Perspectives Published 4:21 p.m. CT Oct. 1, 2018



(Photo: Pool photo by Saul Loeb)

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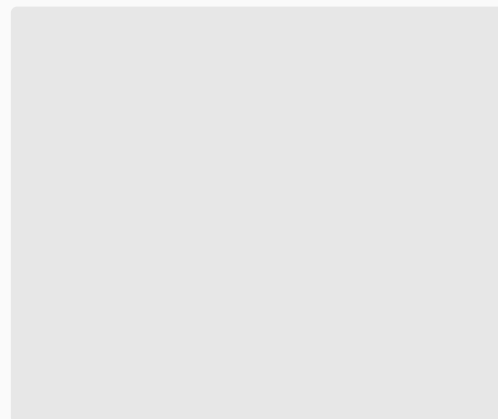
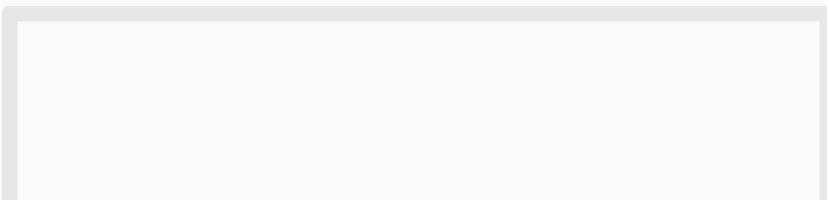
What's the score between Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh vs. Professor Christine Blasey Ford? After the congressional hearing, who is in the lead? Who has more points today? Did Kavanaugh score because he was interviewed on Fox in prime time with his wife, or did Ford score points because many female sexual assault survivors have reported similar experiences?

America is in the middle of an acrimonious "game," and it's time to change the rules. Bottom line: This is about people's lives. It's not a game.

There is no point of keeping score when it's certain to be a lose-lose. About the same numbers of people who believed either Ford or Kavanaugh on Day One are going to believe them when this is all over. Nothing will have changed. The only way to win is to change the game.

That means pivoting from polarizing debate to a meaningful conversation, especially with our kids. It means leaving hyperbole behind and operating in reality and fact-based information.

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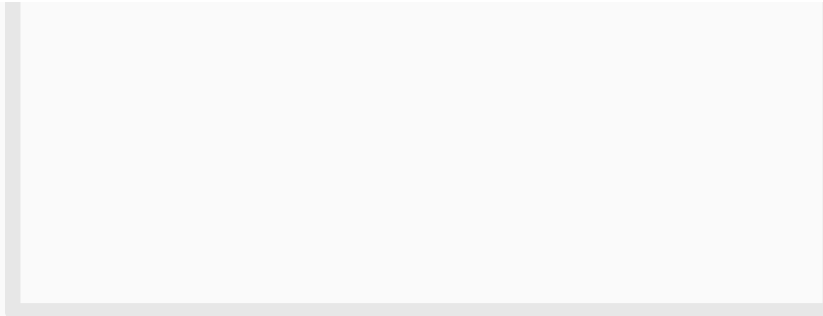


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There is a scientific connection between sexual assault and alcohol consumption, particularly with our young people, and Kavanaugh vs. Ford highlights that point.

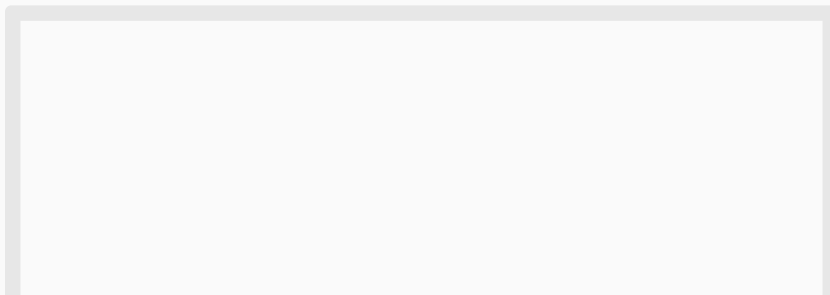
Studies estimate that between [50](#) and [77 percent](#) of sexual assaults involve alcohol consumption by either the victim or offender and many times by both. Sexual assault is one of the [most underreported violent crimes](#). [Ninety percent of sexual assault victims in college](#) do not report their assault. If victims do decide to disclose, they often do so to a close friend or roommate. Formal disclosures to law enforcement are rare, especially when alcohol is involved.



Judge Brett Kavanaugh (Photo: Pool photo by Melina Mara)

Research indicates that sexual assault victims do not disclose because they think they are more likely to be blamed if they were drinking before the assault; they feel shame, guilt or embarrassment; or they fear they will not be believed. They doubt themselves and quiet the voice inside that knows something happened. Sexual assault victims rationalize and blame themselves, believing they are somehow responsible because they were drinking. But, they know. They recognize that somehow they aren't able to focus as much as they were before. Their grades slip. They are withdrawn and moody. And, they don't feel as if they can tell anyone because they worry that others will doubt the veracity of their account of what happened.

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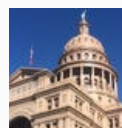
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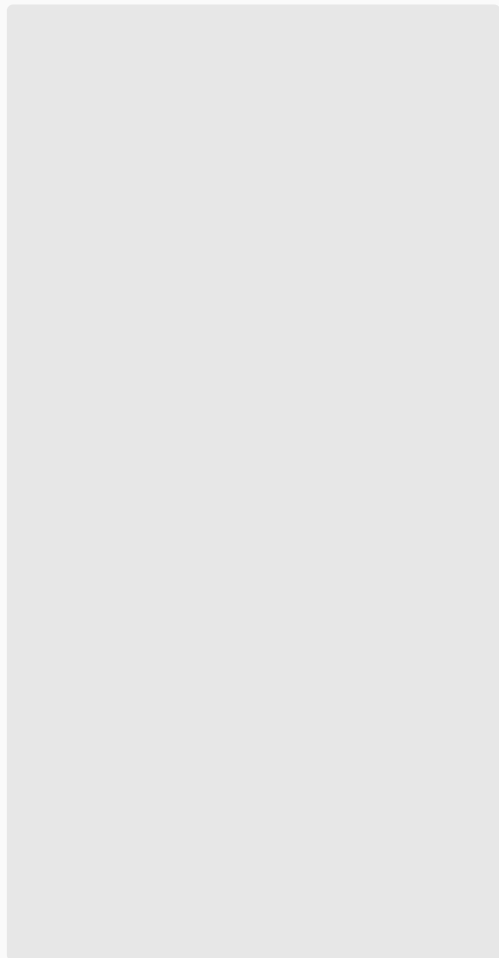
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Science is helping to change this and to validate what victims have known all along. We now know that trauma creates gaps in memory because of the flood of hormones that are activated in the brain when someone is being traumatized. This makes it difficult for victims to recall specific details and a full time line. Those who do come forward and share their story have usually received support and worked to realize that the sexual assault is a part of them but does not define them. And, those who tell their story publicly are compelled to do so for a variety of reasons. Some are worried that their offender will hurt other people, and some are motivated because to them, not speaking up can result in an untenable situation.

This is an opportunity to start a conversation with our children, and not just our daughters, about the connection between underage drinking and sexual assault. More of us need to talk to our children about drinking responsibly well before they are 21. We know underage drinking happens, and that will continue to be the case. Therefore, we have to work with them instead of against them.

Parents and teachers can educate teens on risk reduction behaviors and increase awareness about the high rates of alcohol-involved sexual assault. Institutions should commit to creating a safe space for underage victims or witnesses to come forward without fear of being punished for being under the influence. College administrators and faculty members need to advocate for "Good Samaritan" policies that encourage reporting by providing amnesty for underage drinking and drug overdoses.

We might not have influence on the Senate Judiciary Committee, but we do have influence on our students in the classroom; in our churches, mosques and synagogues; and most definitely in our homes.

*T'Shana McClain is a research project manager at the Institute on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault in the Steve Hicks School of Social Work at The University of Texas at Austin. Noël Busch-Armendariz is a University Presidential Professor and the director of the Institute on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault in the Steve Hicks School of Social Work at The University of Texas at Austin.*

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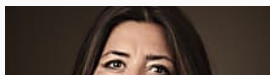
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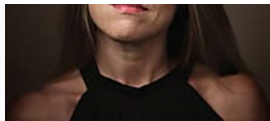


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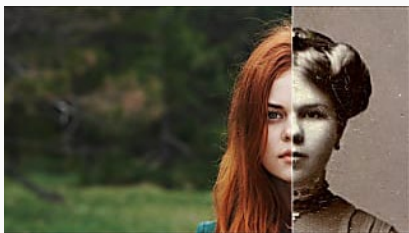
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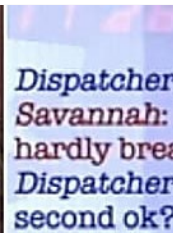
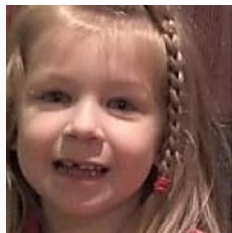
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