



AMA Journal of Ethics®

November 2020, Volume 22, Number 11: E979-980

VIEWPOINT

Caring to Vote

Audiey C. Kao, MD, PhD

Respect, compassion, and empathy are vital in any caring relationship.

Upholding the dignity of every individual is respect personified. Yet too much of this country's history has been marred by denying this basic human dignity. Racist, sexist, and other hateful ideologies that regard one group of people as superior to another have displaced, enslaved, and **disenfranchised** too many of us.^{1,2} Such ideologies expressed in personal actions and public policies continue to prevent everyone from realizing their full potential. For that, our country suffers mightily.

Concern for the suffering and distress of others is compassion personified. All of us are struggling to deal with the physical suffering and economic distress that have been wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic. This struggle is made that much more difficult when basic facts and critical evidence about the pandemic are discounted and disbelieved.^{3,4} If our country had tackled this public health threat as the emergency it was, more people would likely be alive today. It didn't have to be this way.

Placing oneself in another person's shoes is empathy personified. In a country that is **polarized** along so many different lines, the **capacity to express empathy** is sorely needed if our representative democracy is to survive, let alone thrive. Yet too many elected officials apparently lack the ability to empathize. Integrity-preserving compromise in the public square demands recognition of the position of one's rival or opponent.^{5,6} A house divided cannot stand.

The editor in chief and editorial board members of the *AMA Journal of Ethics* have been trained in caring disciplines and have committed our professional lives to promoting the health and welfare of the public. As we approach the end of an election year like no other, exercising our civic duty and **voting** for the common good are imperative.⁷ All of us are called upon to support candidates who personify respect, compassion, and empathy if we hope to realize a more fair and just future.

References

1. Equal Justice Initiative. A history of racial injustice: essays on people and events in American history. <https://eji.org/news/tag/history-of-racial-injustice/>. Accessed October 7, 2020.
2. Tankersley J. How sexism follows women from the cradle to the workplace. *New York Times*. August 19, 2018.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/19/business/sexism-women-birthplace-workplace.html>. Accessed October 7, 2020.

3. Siegel E; Starts With a Bang. The COVID-19 pandemic exposes the harm of denying scientific facts. *Forbes*. April 1, 2020.
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/startswithabang/2020/04/01/the-covid-19-pandemic-exposes-the-harm-of-denying-scientific-facts/#18cc87c03aab>. Accessed October 7, 2020.
4. Bardon A. Coronavirus responses highlight how humans have evolved to dismiss facts that don't fit their worldview. *Scientific American*. June 26, 2020.
<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/coronavirus-responses-highlight-how-humans-have-evolved-to-dismiss-facts-that-dont-fit-their-worldview/>. Accessed October 7, 2020.
5. Benditt TM. Compromising interests and principles. In: Pennock JR, Chapman JW, eds. *Compromise in Ethics, Law, and Politics*. New York, NY: New York University Press; 1979:26-37. *Nomos*; vol 21.
6. Kuflik A. Morality and compromise. In: Pennock JR, Chapman JW, eds. *Compromise in Ethics, Law, and Politics*. New York, NY: New York University Press; 1979:38-65. *Nomos*; vol 21.
7. Kao A. Health of we the people. *AMA J Ethics*. 2020;22(9):E753-E756.

Audiey C. Kao, MD, PhD is editor in chief of the *AMA Journal of Ethics*.

Citation

AMA J Ethics. 2020;22(11):E979-980.

DOI

10.1001/amajethics.2020.979.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank the *AMA Journal of Ethics* editorial board for their thoughtful reviews and support of this viewpoint: Julie Aultman, PhD, MA; Jay Baruch, MD; Clarence Braddock III, MD, MPH; Art Caplan, PhD; Helen Chapple, PhD, RN, MA, MSN; Austin Chiang, MD, MPH; Marion Danis, MD; Art Derse, MD, JD; Teresa Hartman, MLS; Kathryn Huggett, PhD; Louise King, MD, JD; Mark Siegler, MD; and Katherine Watson, JD.

Conflict of Interest Disclosure

The author(s) had no conflicts of interest to disclose.

The viewpoints expressed in this article are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the AMA.

Copyright 2020 American Medical Association. All rights reserved.
ISSN 2376-6980