

BETTER TOGETHER

2018 ATSA Conference | Friday October 19 | 1:30 PM – 3:00 PM

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Are We Listening?: Valuing All Individuals Impacted by Sexual Victimization

Symposium Co-Chair: Alissa R. Ackerman, PhD
California State University, Fullerton

Symposium Co-Chair: Kieran McCartan, PhD
University of the West of England

This session focuses on all individuals impacted by sexual victimization, including individuals who have perpetrated, those who have been victimized, and the broader community. The aim of the session is to question whether all the different “actors” are listening to and learning from each other. In our field, it can be easy for perceptions and ideologies to override evidence. As such, emerging and promising practice can be overlooked or obfuscated. This session will exam the attitudes and perspectives of people who have experienced sexual victimization, policy makers, practitioners, and people who have perpetrated a sexual offense about their voice and role in policy and practice. The session will discuss their experiences, attitudes to the system/process, whether they feel heard and whether emerging trends could be utilised by them (i.e., Restorative Justice etc).

Learning Goals:

- To elevate the voices of all individuals impacted by sexual victimization
- To create space for dialogue among various constituents
- To discuss ways to continue dialogue beyond ATSA

In this symposium, six presenters will spend 10 minutes discussing a specific voice and perspective. Each speaker will integrate research and practice, highlighting important issues, potential responses, and honouring the experience of the unique perspective being discussed. We will then facilitate an open discussion with the audience relating our talks with their work and identifying ways to relate our work to their practice. Simultaneously, we will listen to their experiences, identifying ways to include their perspectives in our future work.

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Gwenda M. Willis, PhD, PGDipClinPsyc

Labels such as “sex offender” and “abuser” are commonly used by professionals working to prevent sexual abuse, including clinicians, researchers and policymakers. I will highlight how such labels contradict core ethical principles in professional codes of ethics, create barriers to help seeking for clients at risk to abuse, and ignore the heterogeneity of individuals who have abused – thus reinforcing the very misperceptions we seek to correct. I will offer alternative, respectful language that engages all persons impacted by sexual abuse.

Learning Goals:

- Draw attention to the widespread use of derogatory and stigmatizing labels to refer to persons who have sexually abused
- Consider the ethics of labelling individuals on the basis of criminal convictions, past behavior or psychological phenomena
- Offer alternative, respectful language to use in place of derogatory labels in every day and professional conversation

Gwenda M. Willis, PhD, PGDipClinPsyc is a Clinical Psychologist and founder/director of the Advancing Sexual Abuse Prevention (ASAP) research group at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. Her research and clinical interests focus on sexual abuse prevention and strengths-based approaches to working with clients who have sexually abused. She has given several invited keynote and workshop presentations in North America, the UK, Europe, Asia, Australia and New Zealand on strengths-based approaches to rehabilitation and reintegration. Her recent presentations and publications explore the ethics of labelling individuals on the basis of criminal convictions, past behavior or psychological phenomena.

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Danielle A. Harris, PhD

The recent growth of narrative and convict criminology has allowed the field to return to its individualized, story-telling roots. In the broader community, from the introduction of the victim impact statement to the rise of the #metoo movement, we are increasingly giving a voice to survivors, and allowing them to tell their stories on a wider platform. We have also begun to see a few individuals speak up publicly with the alternative perspective – that of perpetrating sexual abuse (“South of Forgiveness,” #ididittoo, and “Just Like Trump”). This presentation shines a light on the powerful voice that is often silent in the growing public discussion on the experience, understanding, treatment, and prevention of sexual offending. There is much to be gained from a stronger commitment to collecting, curating, analyzing, and sharing these stories.

Learning Goals:

- Participants will learn about the premise and the promise of narrative and convict criminology
- Participants will learn that desistance (or *not* offending) is the typical outcome for the majority of men convicted of and incarcerated for sexual offenses.
- Participants will explore the value of storytelling as a research tool.

Danielle Arlanda Harris is the Deputy Director-Research of the Griffith Youth Forensic Service and a Lecturer in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Griffith University. She holds a doctorate in Criminology from Griffith University (2008), a Masters in Criminology and Criminal Justice from the University of Maryland (2004) and a Bachelor of Arts (hons) in Justice Studies from the Queensland University of Technology and the University of Westminster (2001). She has published more than 25 articles and book chapters and has given over 50 presentations at international conferences. Her research examines sexual aggression through a life course perspective, examining onset, specialization/versatility, desistance, and related public policy. Her first book—which draws on the narratives of 74 men convicted of sexual offenses and released from custody—was released in December.

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Kieran McCartan, PhD

Policy makers, politicians and government officials have multiple and often complex audiences to appeal to; therefore, more often than not, they are seen as making the wrong decision. The way that evidence is collected, used and merged with ideology is often challenging and problematic. This is particularly relevant in respect to criminal justice policy, especially sexual abuse policy. This paper will present the perspective of policy makers discussing how policy is made, what it involves and the impact that research and ideology have on the process as well as the outcome.

Learning Goals:

- An understanding of how different professionals conceptualize and use narratives on sexual abuse
- Understanding how to relate to different professionals in establishing joint working practices.
- Understanding how to effectively use evidence to help develop policy and practice around sexual abuse.

Dr McCartan is an Associate Professor in Criminology at the University of the West of England and an Adjunct Associate Professor in Criminology at QUT, Brisbane. He has a track record of public, academic and professional engagement on criminological issues, including the origins and causes of sex offending, and societal responses to sex offenders. He has experience of qualitative, quantitative and mixed method research from funders including Ministry of Justice, Cabinet Office, Public Health England, ESRC, The Leverhulme Trust, Bristol City Council & various UK police forces. Dr McCartan has a number of academic outputs, including, 75+ publications (incl., Journal Articles, Books, Book Chapters, External Research Reports & Professional/Practitioner publications); 85+ blogs & online publications; generated over 1/2 million pounds in external research funding; has given 120+ presentations at national and international conferences; as well as taken part in numerous media interviews and debates. Dr McCartan serves on the editorial boards of Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment, is the lead blogger for the Sexual Abuse blog and the NOTA Prevention blog. He is a member of the ATSA Executive Board and has recently been co-opted to the NOTA executive board.

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Jill Levenson, PhD, LCSW

Today's offender was often yesterday's abused or troubled child. This doesn't excuse or condone offending, but helps us to contextualize the development of interpersonal violence so we can formulate evidence-based solutions. This session will challenge attendees to think about offending behavior through the lens of trauma, so we can enhance our approaches to facilitate personal change. Based on the interdisciplinary and cross-theoretical research literature, trauma-informed care can help us to develop the most relevant and successful programs and the best methods for delivering them. Trauma-informed frameworks provide an innovative approach to sexual abuse prevention and reduced recidivism risk.

Learning Goals:

- Conceptualize sexual abusing through a trauma framework
- Identify ways that childhood adversity impact adult cognitive schema and behavior
- Reframe offending as part of a larger relational pattern

Dr. Jill Levenson, Professor of Social Work at Barry University in Miami, is a SAMHSA-trained internationally recognized expert in trauma-informed care. She has published over 100 articles about policies and clinical interventions designed to prevent repeat sexual offending. Her groundbreaking research on the link between childhood adversity and sexual offending has paved the way for innovations in rehabilitation programs that now utilize a trauma-informed approach. She has also been a treatment provider for over 25 years, using a scientist-practitioner model to inform both her research and her work with clients. She has been invited to present as a keynote speaker about trauma-informed care in clinical, correctional, and forensic settings in 15 states, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. Dr. Levenson has co-authored four books about the treatment of sex offenders and their families, including the recently released book *Trauma Informed Care: Transforming treatment for people who have sexually abused*, co-authored with Gwenda Willis and David Prescott, and published by Safer Society Press.

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David Prescott, LICSW

Professionals who treat and supervise people who have abused often have a complicated relationship with the nature of their work. This section of the symposium explores the dynamic nature of professional attitudes towards their clientele. It describes not just the impact of doing this work, but the processes that are often involved in determining what sort of effects each professional will experience. It borrows from relevant research from within our field as well as what psychotherapy research demonstrates about the nature of professional development.

Learning Goals:

- Participants will explore empirical findings about professional attitudes towards people who have sexually abused.
- Participants will learn about the impact of this work and the need for high-quality self-care.
- Participants will learn about rarely discussed aspects of professional development, including self-improvement strategies as well as problematic aspect such as self-assessment bias and regulatory capture.

David Prescott is the Clinical Services Development Director for the Becket Family of Services. He also provides consultation to agencies around the world. Mr. Prescott has produced 17 book projects and numerous articles and chapters in the areas of assessing and treating sexual violence and trauma. Mr. Prescott has lectured around the world. He also serves on the editorial boards of two scholarly journals, the Journal of Sexual Aggression, and Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment. Mr. Prescott is also co-blogger for the Sexual Abuse journal and co-editor of the NEARI News, which are read by thousands of professionals each month.

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Alissa R. Ackerman, PhD

Current sex crimes policy and practice rarely leaves individuals who have experienced sexual victimization feeling heal or whole. A restorative justice framework offers an approach that can help heal the trauma and pain of sexual abuse and violence. In this talk, I discuss multiple restorative approaches for cases of sexual abuse, while offering narrative accounts of how restorative justice has shaped healing for numerous survivors.

Learning Goals:

- Participants will learn about the promises of restorative practices.
- Participants will explore restorative justice as framework for healing.
- Participants will experience the transformative power of giving voice to the pain of sexual victimization.

Dr. Alissa R. Ackerman, Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice at California State University, Fullerton. As a sex crimes policy expert and public survivor, Dr. Ackerman has been an invited speaker and restorative justice trainer in multiple U.S. states, Australia, and New Zealand. She has published extensively on topics related to sexual victimization. She is a co-blogger for the *Sexual Abuse* blog with Kieran McCartan and David Prescott. Her most recent co-authored book, *The New Campus Anti-Rape Movement* will be released in early 2018.