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## ATSA Annual Conference 2017

**Kieran McCartan, PhD, David Prescott, LICSW, & Alissa Ackerman, PhD**

The annual ATSA conference took place from the 25<sup>TH</sup> – 28<sup>TH</sup> of October in Kansas City. The conference was a real mix of research, practice and engagement with international colleagues from countries including the USA, Canada, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, Germany, Hong Kong, Netherlands, Belgium and Israel to name a few. In this blog we are going to take you on a whistle stop tour of the event.

The two of plenary sessions that bookended the conference addressed the challenges of the work that we do in preventing and responding to sexual harm. Patty Wetterling opened the conference with a very emotive and personal narrative about her story and experiences. Maia Christopher, Pamela Mejia and Nicole Pittman closed the conference with a debate on how we engage with the media and the public around sexual harm. These two plenaries highlighted how far we have come and how much we still have to do. They provided a positive message and a timely reminder.

ATSA 2017 kicked off with another public engagement event prior to the start of the conference. It was hosted by the Kauffman centre in Kansas City and had speakers discussing the myths around sexual perpetration (Kieran McCartan, UWE), the reality of sex offender treatment (Michael Miner, University of Minnesota), the challenges of working with juveniles that sexual harm (Rene McCreary, Metropolitan Organization to Counter Sexual Assault) and the reality as well as impact of registration and disclosure (Seth Wescott, Clinical Associates). After the presentations there was a great question & answer session that reinforced the importance of the event and the topics discussed. Also this year we had the first ATSA gives back event where by ATSA members volunteered in the community with organisations that support victims of sexual harm, this year it was with Sunflower House.



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### SAJRT Bloggers' Profile

We are longtime members of ATSA dedicated to furthering the causes of evidenced-based practice, understanding, and prevention in the field of sexual abuse.

*The Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers* is an international, multi-disciplinary organization dedicated to preventing sexual abuse. Through research, education, and shared learning ATSA promotes evidence based practice, public policy and community strategies that lead to the effective assessment, treatment and management of individuals who have sexually abused or are at risk to abuse.

*The views expressed on this blog are of the bloggers and are not necessarily those of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers, Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research & Treatment, or Sage Journals.*

Kieran attended an international roundtable on risk management which included speakers from 9 countries, including, UK, USA, Canada, New Zealand, Belgium, Italy, Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands. The roundtable was well attended, highlighting the similarities and differences in sex offender management internationally, reinforcing the need to greater knowledge exchange and professional collaboration. This reflected the core theme of the conference, balance, and reinforced the range of topics covered in the pre-conferences and main workshops, including topics like, the broad spectrum of people who commit sexual harm (adults, adolescence, people with learning difficulties and mental illnesses), different types of therapy (group therapy, one-one one sessions), risk management, community reintegration, risk assessment, desistence, RNR/Good Lives, sex offender policy and media engagement.

The notion of balance reinforced the importance of knowledge exchange and professional collaborations which includes the recognition that user voices are key to preventing sexual abuse and reducing harm when victimization does occur. This was the biggest take away for Alissa as she reflected on the ATSA conference. She collaborated and co-presented on four talks that drove home the importance of knowledge exchange that transcends academic and clinical knowledge.

These presentations included: 1) voices of individuals who have sexually harmed who continually live in fear (with Danielle Harris and Jill Levenson); 2) "Survivor Scholars" who utilize their personal experiences and professional expertise to impact policy and prevention efforts (with Alexa Sardina); 3) effectively using vicarious restorative justice to help individuals who have sexually harmed and individuals who have experienced sexual harm to gain empathy, insight, and a common humanity (with Jill Levenson), and 4) Using professional expertise to answer questions from the general public in a way that is accessible and meaningful (with Danielle Harris, Gwen Willis, and Jill Levenson).

David found himself involved in five presentations, of which four were collaborations with others: Gwen Willis, Jill Levenson, Robin Wilson, Marshalee McQueen, Erin Bresee, Liam Ennis, Laurie Rose Kepros, and Kevin Nunes. Likewise, AUDIOPhilia was back, having performed at virtually all the opening night receptions in 2004. On this occasion, the band featured, Robin Wilson, Liam Ennis, Kevin Nunes, Andrew Harris, Tony Beech and David Prescott. This is particularly salient in respect to Tony Beech as he is retiring and ATSA 2017 will be one of his last academic appearances; Tony has been central to the sexual abuse research community across his career and will be missed. As a membership organization, ATSA has its very roots in collaboration, dating back to the 1980s when researchers and practitioners first assembled to share their perspectives, resources, and ideas.

The primary take-away from these experiences for all of us is the importance of working together towards common goals... "creating balance" as the conference theme described it. The ATSA conference, and the ability of so many people to come together, is an excellent illustration of the saying, "Alone, I travel faster; together we travel further." Some of the themes in these presentations included the role of certainty and uncertainty in assessment, treatment, and legal proceedings; applications of motivational interviewing and the good lives model; and new perspectives and approaches in trauma-informed care.

In the end, we are all at our best when we can discuss the issues of the day, acknowledge differences, come together to establish new ideas and goals, and make them happen; next year its Vancouver, Canada!!

