



Thursday, October 29, 2020

## ATSA 2020 Conference

**By Kieran McCartan, PhD, David Prescott, LICSW, & Kasia Uzieblo, PhD**

The year 2020 has been a strange and challenging year personally and professionally; we have all had to adapt to new ways of working. One of the highlights of the normal research and treatment calendar is the annual pilgrimage to ATSA, which was meant to be in San Antonio but, like many other major conferences in psychology, criminology, social work, and across the social sciences it moved online.

ATSA 2020 was delivered via an online platform running on 21- 23 October on Pacific Standard Time (PST) with all the talks and workshops being captured and placed on demand. The conference had a full day of pre-con sessions on Wednesday with the conference proper happening on Thursday and Friday with 2 plenaries (Shannon Moroney & Michael Seto) with over 45 workshops, 30 poster presentations, online discussion/interest groups, an exhibition hall, chat lounge, online book store and a virtual hospitality suite. The fact that the conference was online didn't mean that the awards presentations were canceled, instead, they were pre-recorded: So congratulations to Drew Kingston (Early career researcher award), Briana Ponte & Ariane Faerman (Pre-doctoral student research award) as well as Michael Miner (Lifetime significant achievement award)!

The platform was easy to access and navigate, with the on-demand function allowing people to attend as many workshops after the fact, which is particularly relevant for international delegates because of the time difference (for instance, Kieran is based in the UK and 8 hours behind PST and Kasia is based in Belgium 9 hours behind PST). Additionally, it meant that you could view as many workshops as you wanted to means that you could engage with the whole program, not just a few as the on-demand service is available until the 26th of November. What follows are some of our individual conference highlights.

Shannon Moroney's plenary on the reality and impact of being the ex-partner of a person convicted of a sexual offense – she was unaware of his offending behavior and not directly sexually abused by him herself,



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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 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.*

but she was impacted by and victimized as a result of his actions– was excellent. Understanding the experiences of non-offending partners is an important area of research and practice. It is encouraging that this under-researched experience and this too-often unsupported population was given a voice. The second plenary address, by Michael Seto, crystalized where we are at as a field in understanding online sexual offending, which is particularly salient given the current pandemic.

One of the most obvious highlights was the improved poster presentations and sessions, being able to watch the video footage, view the poster, and have an online Q&A with the authors was brilliant. Attendees felt that they could experience these sessions at their own pace, take them in, and not feel rushed. This is part of the online conference experience that improved upon the in-person version. As such, it begs the question, do we need to adapt the traditional poster sessions?

Other highlights included an excellent presentation by Apryl Alexander on cultural humility. In it she examined sociocultural factors that are relevant in the assessment and treatment of people who sexually offend. Ainslie Heasman presented on ethical considerations with minor-attracted persons. This is an area of great concern for many professionals. There is the possibility of helping people who recognize that they have an attraction to people to prevent acting on their interests. At the same time, there are mandatory reporting laws, which can vary from one state to the next, and from country to country. Ainslie Heasman reviewed relevant ethical codes and statutes and presented three case vignettes to explore the possibilities and perils of this work. This list of highlights is certainly not exhaustive. As we'll view the on-demand sessions, we'll certainly be inspired by many more.

ATSA 2020 participating from home and working remotely was an innovative approach to a very real problem. The ATSA staff and conference team did a brilliant job of pulling together a successful conference, in an innovative way, that allowed the ATSA family to reconnect in troubling times. As we look to ATSA 2021 we start to think about what that holds, will it be the same as ATSA 2020, be more like ATSA 2019, or a hybrid of the two?