

Journeys of Discovery

Friday March 20, 2020

Plenary Session – Sandstone 3

Welcome 8:30-8:45 AM

Keynote

Sharon Kaplan Roszia M.S.

The Ethical Traps in Building Families through Adoption and Permanency

8:45 AM-9:45 AM

The process of disassembling relationships and the formation of new family units can be cause for celebration or an experience fraught with pain, trauma, suffering and regret that has implications intergenerationally. The constellation of birth/first parents, adopted individuals, adoptive and foster parents and relative caregivers as well as everyone's extended families are greatly impacted for life by all professionals with whom they interact over the years. The mental health professionals, social workers, nurses, lawyers, judges and doctors involved in this process hold great power to harm or heal the individuals touched by adoption and permanency. Their training, biases, life experiences, and monetary pressures can all influence their ethical decisions. Our time together will use the seven core issues of loss, rejection, shame and guilt, grief, identity, intimacy and mastery and control to link the emotional issues with the ethical snares lying in wait for all of us. This workshop will examine professional guidelines; provide ethical roadmaps and point out where most ethical quagmires surface as we share this life path.

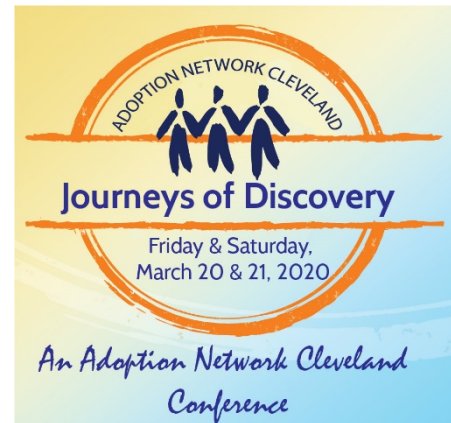
Panel: 10 AM-12 PM

A powerful panel of professionals will each also address specific life aspects of our journey such as search and reunion, open adoptions, third party reproduction and other topics where ethical quicksand can swallow us.

Panel Members:

- Victor Groza, PhD
- Kate Livingston, PhD
- Traci Onders
- Tom Rogat, PsyD, MBA
- Erin Smith
- Zoe Breen Wood, PhD

Facilitated by Sharon Kaplan Roszia M.S.



Workshop Session 1 – choose one offering (1:00-2:30 PM)

1a. Addressing the Traumas of Adoption: Using Scriptotherapy to Explore the Experiences of the Triad, Suzanne M. Swiderski, PhD

Writing in the form of scriptotherapy has long been used to address the traumas that individuals have experienced in their lives (e.g., Pennebaker, 1990, 1997, 2004). To encourage their clients to express their thoughts and feelings in words, mental health professionals have employed scriptotherapeutic techniques for the past 30 years because they have recognized the power of language, as crafted through writing, to assist with the processing of an individual's psychological turmoil, (e.g., Riordan, 1996; Sloan & Marx, 2017). Scriptotherapy has not, however, been widely applied to the field of adoption studies, particularly to the traumas experienced by the members of the adoption triad that have become known as the “seven core issues” of adoption and permanency (Silverstein & Kaplan, 1982; Roszia & Maxson, 2019). And yet, it can and should be: All members of the triad – birthparents, adoptees, and adoptive parents – can be familiarized not only with the common rhetorical purposes for writing, identified in classic texts from the field of composition, but also with various writing activities, originally designed for the field of English Language Arts, so they can use these therapeutic writing techniques to explore adoption-related issues from their perspective within the triad.

1b. Post Placement Services for Birthparents, Lori Scobee, LSW

This workshop will take a closer look at post placement services available to parents who choose to make an adoption plan for their child and why these services are vital to achieving best possible outcomes for birthparents, adoptive parents and individuals who are adopted. Workshop participants will gain an understanding that post placement services for birthparents are an important component in improving the quality of life for birth parents and that these services are best received when presented and facilitated by other birthparents with similar experiences. Participants will develop greater empathy for parents who make the difficult and life changing decision to allow someone else to parent their child. Attendees will leave with a list of post placement services available locally, to any birthmother, anywhere in the country.

1c. Is It Just ADHD? Understanding the Adopted Child's Behavior, Dr. Elaine Schulte

For a multitude of reasons, children adopted domestically, internationally and from foster care are at increased risk of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Additionally, they are more likely than children who are not adopted, to be diagnosed – correctly, or incorrectly – with ADHD. This workshop will review ADHD symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment – including a discussion of stimulant medications and evidence-based therapies for managing attention challenges. When standard treatment isn't effective, providers typically jump to adding more medication. While this can be helpful, it's important to consider coexisting conditions such as anxiety, depression and learning disorders. We will review each of these, and discuss how they affect attention. Finally, we will review other diagnoses – such as PTSD, RAD, and conduct disorders that can mimic attention challenges. This workshop is designed for both professionals and parents. It will be case-based and interactive, and provide plenty of opportunity for participants to ask questions.

1d. From the Unknown to Known: Living in Complexity after the Search, Barbara Lynn Robertson, LMSW

You have received information that may lead to the discovery of biological origins. This is what you wanted! Or did you? Now, suddenly you are experiencing emotions that make no sense. “What is going on, why am I feeling this way, and what can I do about it?” In this workshop, there will be discussion about pursuing Search/reunion, the implications of complex emotions that may result, how they can serve a purpose, share tips on how to survive and thrive in this new adoption chapter in spite of the outcome.

Workshop Session 2 – choose one offering (2:45-4:15 PM)

2a. Supporting Positive Identity Development, Amanda Schranghamer, LSW

This workshop will help participants understand the importance of supporting identity development for youth who are in foster care or are adopted. Participants will become familiar with various models of identity development. This workshop will help participants consider how to support the child’s identity development with a focus on youth overrepresented in the child welfare system, including those who identify as LGBTQ, youth with disabilities, and youth of color.

2b. How Guidelines Provided a Path Toward Reunion and Healing, Marni Hall, adoptee, Karen Uphouse, first mother

Reunions of first parents and the children they relinquished are complicated. Each have lived separate lives with different families. Each may be at different stages of processing the grief of their respective losses. This workshop explains how one reunited mother/daughter started their reunion with a plan and created boundaries they call their guiding principles. Using these guiding principles, they created a list of topics to discuss in order to move forward. This process took time and hard work. Five years later, they realize there will always be triggers that arise, but now they have the skills to deal with them.

2c. Ask Away!, Casey Durkin, LISW, Tom Rogat, PsyD, MBA, Licensed Psychologist

Do you have a new or lingering question about separation or adoption after attending a presentation? This is the place to get it answered. This workshop is an interactive round-table where participants can inquire about any aspect of the emotional and psychological experience of Adoption Triad Members. For example, questions may address the psychology of adoptees across developmental stages of life, considerations for adoptive parents, navigating reunions, or how to start healing from the trauma and grief associated with losses and separations. Questions will be answered by two clinical psychologists with decades of combined experience helping those touched by separation and adoption.

General Discussion Meeting (4:30-6:00 PM) (Optional)

An opportunity to share and listen. Conferences can be a powerful experience of personal discovery. Join us in this facilitated meeting to gain support and learn from others’ perspectives. The meeting will have an open discussion format and provide a safe place for people to share their feelings and experiences related to the day’s topics.

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A Secret in Plain Sight, Kevin Gladish

Evening Performance 7:30-9:00 PM

Open to all full conference and one-day conference registrants

A secret in Plain Sight is a solo storytelling performance that chronicles the journey of a man who discovered he was adopted at the age of 43. Loosely based on a blog that Kevin began writing in real time shortly after discovering his adoption, the show follows his long road toward uncovering the truth, finding birth family, and most importantly, finding connection with others through telling his story.

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Saturday March 21, 2020

Plenary Session – Sandstone 3

9:00-9:15 AM Welcome

Keynote

April Dinwoodie

Openness in Adoption: Understanding, Embracing, and Engaging the Extended Family of Adoption

9:15 AM-10:15 AM

A combination of research, changing social norms, and the advocacy by those who have been affected by a closed adoption system have led to a new openness in adoption. Openness is an opportunity for the extended family of adoption – first/birth families, adoptive families and adopted people – to honor all of these important connections and embrace them as a means of ensuring healthy identity for all family members (most especially the adopted person).

- Understand common feelings about openness in adoption and learn the history surrounding openness in adoption as well as definitions of the concept of openness.
- Embrace openness within family relationships, explore strengths and challenges in building relationships, and develop skills.
- Engage in practical dialog about openness as it pertains to different members of the extended family.

Workshop Session 3 – choose one offering (10:30 AM-12:00 PM)

3a. Parenting Challenges: Cultural, Ethnic, and Racial Awareness, Dr. Cecilia Jarmon Davis-Jackson, MEd, MCC, DD

This workshop aids prospective adoptive parents, adoptive parents, and introductory professionals with differentiating and promoting the value of multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-racial heritages within adopted children and their families, thus helping to build bridges of endearment and acceptance while dispelling myths and offering strategies for embracing identities.

3b. Reading Birthmother Memoirs, Marianne Novy, PhD, Kate Livingston, PhD

Memoirs are literary representations of memory that often invite readers to examine critical questions of culture, politics, and history. How do birthmothers remember relinquishment and its aftermath through memoir? In this workshop, participants will be introduced to birthmother memoir as a genre and examine major themes in works by Margaret Moorman, Lorraine Dusky, Janet Mason Ellerby, Jan Waldron, and Amy Seek. Participants will develop a 'reading toolkit' of methods and critical questions that will help readers compare, interpret, and gain insight from birthmother memoirs.

3c. Life after Family Separation, Erin Smith and panel

The effects of family separation can last a lifetime; just ask adoptees. This panel of adult transracial adoptees will compare and contrast the complexities of family separation at the border with the separations in adoption. They will discuss coercion, the savior narrative, and ways to prioritize family preservation within broken systems. Childhood trauma frequently is the catalyst for mental illness, addiction, alcoholism, incarceration, homelessness and even suicide. Panelists will share how the trauma of family separation plays out in their lives as adults and will offer advice on how to minimize the long-term effects for children through adoption.

3d. My Journey from a Party of “one” to a Party of “Thirteen”, Cathy Herron, MBA, PMP

I always knew I was adopted. My parents said I was special because I was "chosen". Adoption is only spoken about in hushed tones and kept as a guarded secret to this day. As I entered my early teens my appearance and personality no longer resembled my parents. I struggled to change who I was to be more like them to feel accepted and numb my feelings of shame. The more I tried the more I fell short. But I remained loyal and grateful that my parents "chose" me, but in reality they had chosen a fantasy. On March 20, 2015 my life changed. I quietly observed from the back of the room the first birth record being unsealed. Ohio's Opening Day was an awakening for me and the catalyst for personal growth and acceptance of who I am. This is the story of my journey to finding my courage to be true to myself and stop trying to fit into a genetic mold that was never designed for me. I'll share the defining moments of my path to healing, learning to accept and love who I am, and where I came from.

Workshop Session 4 – choose one offering (1:00-2:30 PM)

4a. BEHIND ME / BEFORE ME, Leslie Pate Mackinnon, LCSW, Clare Allen, MSW, Jennifer Frederickson, Carrie Thompson, LPC

Adoption is not just an occurrence in the life of one individual. Generations reverberate from the loss of a family member. There is a cycle of inherited family trauma to which both Freud & Jung referred. And as we've conquered new vistas in understanding the brain, we have confirmed yet another characteristic of humans that gets transmitted through the DNA. Trauma is inherited just like other traits and illnesses. Participants will learn to recognize the impact of generational trauma and be introduced to ways to put an end to it.

4b. The Urgency of Seeing Color in Adoption and Foster Care, April Dinwoodie

Given the history and current culture in America surrounding differences of race, class, and culture we can no longer rest on the utopian idea of a “color-blind” society. It is more important than ever before that families are hyper-vigilant about the impact of these differences on children in their care. This discussion will outline key areas of focus for parents and professionals, including the need for ongoing conversations about race and diversity, needed behavior changes, and creating a culture where professionals and families embrace the realities to protect the emotional, psychological, and physical safety of children and young people in their care. Transracially-adopted person April Dinwoodie will share her personal experiences and facilitate a robust and candid discussion surrounding the ongoing racial tensions that continue to surround us in the United States and the need to be tuned into these real-time events in order to protect and support the healthy identity development of transracially adopted persons and foster youth.

4c. Decoding Your DNA Identity, Amanda Reno, Traci Onders

DNA and genealogy are powerful tools to help you fill in the missing pieces in your family tree. Tests such as Ancestry DNA and 23 and me, as well as others, are being used to help solve for unknown parentage and find birth or biological family for individuals who are donor conceived or have misattributed parentage. Join us for a review of the basics including; how to formulate a testing plan, important terminology to understand, relationship possibilities based on amount of shared DNA, how to make the most of your test results and the powerful tools available at the testing companies, successfully communicating with DNA matches and a guided workshop where you can work with your own DNA results. Be sure to bring your laptop/tablet and user names and passwords for your results for the workshop!

4d. Let’s (Learn How to) Talk about Sex! An Adoptive/Kinship/Foster Parent’s Workshop, Holly Spencer-Trueman, Mdiv

It’s Ok! You’re not the only one that feels unprepared to talk to your children (however they came to you) about sex. But add in there a history of trauma and loss and you are treading a delicate landscape. As our children grow up they developmentally begin to understand things in more complex ways and their story of arrival into their family then becomes fraught with landmines of loss, grief, betrayal, trauma and LOTS of questions. Our young people need brave adults that are willing and able to take on the hard stuff beyond just the plumbing! Come, and let’s talk together about how to do this, as well as, how to address other special issues, like, adoptees creating blood family through teen pregnancy, our LGBTQ youth, the question “can one learn to have healthy sexual thoughts and feelings after sexual trauma,” pornography and more.

Workshop Session 5 – choose one offering (2:45-4:15 PM)

5a. Feminist Perspectives on Adoption, Kate Livingston PhD

Is there ‘a feminist perspective’ on adoption? In what ways might feminism be useful as a framework for thinking about adoption experience, adoption policy and adoption practice? In this interactive workshop, gender studies scholar and birthmother Dr. Kate Livingston will introduce major feminist questions in the study of adoption, with a special focus on issues of motherhood, gender, sexuality, reproductive justice, and the concept of ‘nature vs. nurture’. Participants will be invited to use feminism as a ‘tool’ that can help us examine relationships of power in adoption. This session involves active learning exercises including small group discussion, individual reflection and brainstorming. No prior knowledge of feminism is required.

5b. Challenges of Identity and Intimacy for Constellation Members, Sharon Kaplan Roszia, MS

The losses that all constellation members experience through being touched by adoption, kinship, or foster care may trigger feelings of shame, fear of rejection, guilt, and the need to immerse themselves in grief work. All these deep feelings impact future relationships and trust-building and may diminish attachment skills. To successfully master this crucial task of building a solid identity, constellation members must develop a cohesive narrative, resolve questions, and illuminate secrets. Individuals must have a solid sense of self, identity, and self-worth before they can fully embrace intimate connections. This workshop will explore identity building for those who have a history of loss and the creation of intimacy with the self and others. Specific tools and techniques will be shared for the use of attendees.

5c. Transforming Trauma: Resilience and Healing for the Adoption Community, Lesli Johnson, LMFT

Lesli, an adoptee and adoption informed therapist and coach, will share useful ways that members of the adoption community can become resilient and heal. Her presentation includes ways to work through trauma including: talk therapy, journaling, art, finding community, yoga practice, mindfulness, EMDR, Brainspotting, and group therapy. Lesli will share professional cases as well as what she's found helpful in her own healing. There will be an experiential EMDR resourcing exercise that the audience can participate in. Additionally there will be plenty of time for Q&A.

5d. Writing Around, In, and Through Your Adoption Journey for a Memoir, Kate St. Vincent Vogl

If the one sure thing you've discovered along the path of adoption is that you've got to write about it, this workshop is for you. Wherever on the constellation you started on your journey, however far you are in your search or reunion, this workshop is designed to provide guidelines needed to best write the story of how adoption and its iterations have affected your life. Maybe you've started writing (and maybe you haven't), but now you're stuck, wondering how much to include and what all to leave out. How can you most effectively use your journaling to create a book? How much of the family history should you tell? And what do you do about that big family secret? Perhaps most importantly: In what way can writing your truth offer healing? This class provides real world solutions to the questions faced in writing memoir. Discover tips on how to grab your readers' attention from the start, how to capture dialogue effectively, and how to provide the most powerful ending to your story—without making anything up. Learn the essentials of writing your truths so you can bring your concept to completion. Discover the tools needed to help you remember and the resources to help you navigate the most difficult steps of a writer's journey so you can finally tell the story only you can share.

General Discussion Meeting (4:30-6:00 PM) (Optional)

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