



Pioneer Dr. Theresa Reid: Paving the Path with Passion

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Theresa Reid, PhD

Recently, I had the honor of sitting down virtually with Theresa Reid, PhD, one of the pioneers of the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC). The following is a reflective review of that conversation along with consideration of and insights on APSAC's evolution and contributions to the field of child maltreatment under Dr. Reid's leadership.

Dr. Reid became involved with APSAC in 1988 and would remain connected with the organization for approximately 10 years. Dr. Reid described her journey into the professional field of child maltreatment as a meandering path. After obtaining her undergraduate degree in English and Women's Studies from the Ohio State University, Dr. Reid worked in the field of direct service with children who had experienced various forms of maltreatment in Ohio. At the time, the children were referred to as "pre-delinquent," a perspective that Dr. Reid noted as indicative of the time. The focus, as Dr. Reid explained, was on the child's behavior as a fault of the child, as opposed to a reflective consequence of the youth's traumatic experiences. After this relatively brief direct practice work with children in residential schools, Dr. Reid obtained her masters' degree in English from the Ohio State University, where she would go on to teach comparative literature and freshman composition courses. Dr. Reid would later earn her PhD in English from the University of Chicago.

While in pursuit of her PhD, Dr. Reid served as the managing editor of the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* and later the director of APSAC. As Dr. Reid recalls, the founders of APSAC were focused and passionate; however, they were all volunteers and were limited in their availability to direct the day-to-day operations of the organization outside of their roles on the board. Prior to Dr. Reid taking the helm of APSAC, the day-to-day operations were overseen by a contracted management firm. Dr. Reid said that while the contracted management firm served an important role in the initial formation of APSAC, the firm's surface level investment was inadequate to truly move the organization in working to meet its vision and mission. What APSAC needed was leadership that was dedicated to the cause. Dr. Reid was able to provide this meaningful focus and passion necessary to further develop the organization.

During our conversation, Dr. Reid stated that she was drawn to the organization because she was intrigued by the mission and vision of the founders of APSAC, which were an accurate reflection of the impetus of the organization. As Dr. Reid recalls, the role of APSAC was in response to co-founder Bud Cramer's vision and focus in spreading the model of a collaborative network of professionals responding to child maltreatment. In partnership with the board and invested allies, Dr. Reid embarked on a practical path laying the foundation and building the structure of an organization that would continue to be molded to meet the needs of the professionals in the field and ultimately impact the response to children experiencing maltreatment.

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Following Dr. Reid's time at APSAC, she went on to complete her PhD in English, using the latter portion of her experience at APSAC as a basis for her dissertation, entitled *An Ethical Analysis of Discourse on Child Sexual Abuse from 1850 to Present*. In 2006, Dr. Reid published *Two Little Girls: A Memoir of Adoption* with Penguin Books. The memoir chronicles the grueling, overwhelming, and invasive—albeit rewarding—labor of love that went into becoming a parent to her daughters, Natalie and Lana. In it, Dr. Reid relays an honest and frank description of the challenges (emotional, legal, and beyond) that an adoption can entail. As a professional writer, Dr. Reid understands the power of words and the importance of effective and meaningful communication to engage others, generate change, elevate awareness, and educate the masses. In addition to Dr. Reid's literary works, she also served as an editor, along with John E. B. Myers, Lucy Berliner, John Briere, C. Terry Hendrix, and Carole Jenny, in the publication of both the first and the second editions of *The APSAC Handbook on Child Maltreatment*, a resource for instructors at the collegiate level.

Ever the advocate for victims of adversity and injustice, Dr. Reid served for three years as the first board president for the Chicago Children's Advocacy Center, a natural transition from her role at APSAC. But her activism for a better society did not stop there. Dr. Reid has gone on to serve as the county chair for Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America. She also currently serves as the cochair for precinct organizing for the Washtenaw County Democratic Party in Michigan. While Dr. Reid has left the field of child maltreatment, she still recalls the instrumental work and influence APSAC has on the field.

Insights on APSAC's History and Accomplishments

Drawing on her time as director of APSAC during its infancy, Dr. Reid provided oversight of this organically evolving organization. As Dr. Reid recalls, she felt she was operating "by the seat of my pants," as she labored and created organizational

structure and capacity, all while facilitating the development of some of APSAC's notable contributions to the field of child maltreatment. Through communication with the broader professional community, actively attending and representing APSAC at child abuse conferences, and establishing a financial structure with the board of directors, Dr. Reid helped the evolution of APSAC and its influential contributions to the field to come to fruition.

Dr. Reid noted that some of the most meaningful contributions of APSAC at the time were the *Journal on Child Maltreatment*, the newsletter, the *Advisor*, the Practice Guidelines, the Colloquium, and the budding Chapter Network. These were some of the larger projects she was engaged in during her tenure, and ones she believed furthered the mission and vision of the organization. As with any organizational body at such early stages of development, it proved difficult to accurately measure the impact of the material and resources being provided; however, it was clear that APSAC was making a mark on the professional lives of those charged with the responsibility of meeting the needs of children. Of particular note is the exponential growth in membership APSAC saw during the ten years that Dr. Reid was at the helm. This growth illustrated the need for collaboration and communication across disciplines, and APSAC was at the forefront of meeting that need.

One could argue that prior to availability of relevant resources and facilitating the networking of a diverse group of professionals with this common responsibility, the level of communication was limited between disciplinary boundaries. Dr. Reid identified these challenges in communication across disciplines and found places where efforts were incongruous, placing a child at risk of not receiving adequate or proven interventions. Through the initiation and evolution of the standards of practice, collaboration between professional disciplines across research and direct services, and the dissemination of invaluable information, Dr. Reid was able to help APSAC effectively enhance professionals'

approaches to meeting the needs of children experiencing adversity and injustice.

Undoubtedly, Dr. Reid recognizes the power of communication to generate awareness, establish best practice, and incite change. In addition to her leadership role with APSAC, Dr. Reid has composed and edited multiple publications that give a focused, diligent, and considerate voice to survivors, the facts, and the challenging realities facing professionals within the field of child maltreatment. For example, prior to departing APSAC, Dr. Reid was provided the opportunity to engage in a meaningful dialogue by informing the public and the professional field of notable discrepancies in *The Revenge of the Repressed*, a controversial, two-part publication authored by Fredrick Crews and published in the 1994 *New York Review of Books (NYRB)*. In the January 1995 publication of *NYRB*, Dr. Reid was one of multiple authors featured in a response to Crews' publication. The response, entitled "*Victims of Memory: An Exchange*," refuted Crews' claims that the criminal justice system is quick to believe accusations as well as charge, prosecute, and excessively sentence offenders of child sexual abuse; that there is a lack of a standard of therapeutic practice in the field of child maltreatment; and that there are inconsistencies surrounding the concept of repression. Of those authors, Dr. Reid articulated that while there were aspects of Crews' arguments that one could agree with, there were more resounding discrepancies in the ideas Crews was proposing; Dr. Reid would not permit these inaccuracies to go unaddressed.

Throughout Dr. Reid's response, she cited empirical data to refute Crews' claims and cited the standards of practice developed by American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and APSAC, which denounce the utilization of coercive or suggestive questioning practices that could lead to inaccurate information. Finally, Dr. Reid highlighted Crews' failure to inform readers about the modes by which memory, specifically traumatic memory, operates; this was especially concerning since by that time an increasing knowledge and scientific literature was

freely obtainable to provide vital insight surrounding memory lapses and the broad definitions associated with such concepts on memory. Dr. Reid drew attention to the research surrounding trauma-induced amnesia as it relates to combat veterans, survivors of natural disasters, and survivors of maltreatment in childhood and other traumas.

In short order, Dr. Reid and the other authors of the publication exemplified the importance of collaboration, communication, and the reliance on empirical data and standards of practice to respond to attacks on the creditability of victims of child maltreatment. Dr. Reid raised concerns regarding Crews' reliability on the topic and proposed that readers of his published review were not presented with all the actualities surrounding disclosure and the ways in which memory can operate. This publication, and Dr. Reid's response, with its reliance on empirical data and developed standards to support the work of professionals in the field, reflects APSAC's important role.

Incidentally, it would be this controversial topic and discussion that would serve as a basis for Dr. Reid's dissertation. It was around this time that Dr. Reid parted ways with APSAC in order to complete her PhD, dedicate more time to her family, and pursue other professional aspirations. While this was the end of Dr. Reid's time with APSAC, however, the foundation of growth was cemented and primed for the next pioneers in the field. In considering where APSAC can continue to make progress and generate new strides, Dr. Reid cited the importance of education for legislators as well as ensuring children have access to professionals who operate under the standards of practice proposed by APSAC. Finally, Dr. Reid encourages APSAC and its future pioneers to "continue to fight the good fight."

Author's Reflections

As I reflect on my conversation with Dr. Reid and my review of her publications, I am reminded of how the child maltreatment professional arena can become so interwoven into the fabric of one's existence. Engaging in the challenging work of

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responding to child maltreatment, whether it be from an administrative, legislative, scholarly, or direct services perspective, is both difficult and admirable. As a forensic interviewer, former director of two Children's Advocacy Centers, a board member of the Children's Advocacy Centers of Pennsylvania, and now an assistant teaching professor in the Child Maltreatment Advocacy Studies minor at the Pennsylvania State University, I am grateful to the APSAC founders and pioneers like Dr. Reid and those who will continue to follow in their footsteps and make new tracks while also contributing to the herculean task of understanding, identifying, designing, delivering, and implementing resources that support evidence-based approaches to respond to the needs of children.

Furthermore, we must continue to respectfully communicate across disciplines and give voice

across systems, from the micro to the macro. We must cultivate the field in such a way that when the standards of practice are planted, the fruits of the toil bear a healthy outcome. We must recognize our work is never done. This work takes endurance and passion, elements that cannot, and should not, rest on only one individual's shoulders; the burden should be carried by many with varied perspectives and insights. As we know, child maltreatment is a multifaceted issue requiring a multifaceted response; therefore, all involved in the response must work in a collaborative, cooperative, and coordinated effort and never lose sight of the mission and vision of the organization. I encourage all those in this field to press on with the research that informs practice. Those in direct contact with children depend upon it, and the children they are serving will benefit in immeasurable ways.

About the Author

Kristina Taylor-Porter, MA, is Assistant Teaching Professor in the Child Maltreatment and Advocacy Studies minor in the Human Development and Family Studies Department at the Pennsylvania State University. As a Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts in the Sociology Department at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Professor Taylor-Porter focused her studies on the challenges facing children and families within society. Professor Taylor-Porter served as the executive director and forensic interviewer at The CARE Center of Indiana County and in 2013 became the founding executive director at the Children's Advocacy Center of Centre County, Mount Nittany Health.

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