

Bridge is a journal designed to provide Bay Area professionals with contemporary articles and resources to help us help others.

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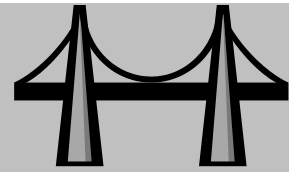
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As a therapist, when I meet new people, say at a party, I get all sorts of reactions. Some people chuckle knowingly, or draw back a little, or even make the sign of the cross: "Don't analyze *me!*" Often they're full of questions. Like: "Are you able to leave your clients' problems at the office?" (Yes.) Or: "Don't you ever feel like going out with your clients." (No!) Or: "How do you manage to listen to clients when you've got problems going on in your own life?"

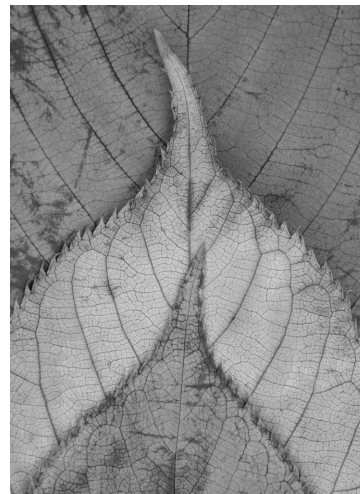
Hmm. Now there's a question after my own heart.

As therapists we make a profession of it, it's how we're trained: You maintain awareness of what's going on inside you, you put it aside to be dealt with some other time, you get outside advice if you need it, and you return your attention to the client. It's called managing your countertransference. But what do you do when your countertransference is leaping off the charts, and it's not being elicited by the client in front of you but by life itself? A loved one's medical emergency. A relationship meltdown, a financial debacle. Or, God forbid, a medical crisis of our own? What do you do when, on that particular day, you might be needing therapy more than the person sitting in front of you?

In the interest of all of you folks out there who just may be better at taking care of other people than of your own precious self, here are a few pieces of advice:

1. Give yourself a mental health day – or week.

Come on, follow your own advice to clients. Of course you're tough, but don't try to soldier through this. You owe it not only to yourself, but also to



"Follow Your Own Advice."

them. Once, as an intern, I went in to session the day after my beloved cat had died suddenly, unexpectedly, in the night. I went in anyway because, it's just a cat, right? Wrong! I was totally unfocused. I was grieving! And my client noticed. He confronted me with my distractibility, and when I told him what had happened, he asked

me why on earth I hadn't cancelled. Good point.

2. Rally the troops.

Your world has been rocked. You need something to hold on to, and you need a little positive energy from outside. You need it for yourself, and pretty soon, when you go back to work, you're going to need it for your clients. Rally your support system. Enlist your partner or your closest friend. Be sure to check in with someone on a regular basis, don't let yourself disappear into a black hole of isolation.

3. Go easy.

Okay, sooner or later you're going to have to go back to work. But consider yourself a convalescent, and be gentle. The usual recommendations for self-care for people dealing with crisis or burnout definitely apply: Gentle exercise, yoga, tai chi, walks in nature, eating good food are all important. Who knows, you might even go get some therapy yourself! But in addition, you should lighten your load as much as possible. See what's absolutely essential, put the rest on hold. Prioritize, but don't let yourself go completely: Letting the dishes

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∞ Self-Care for Therapists ∞

by Jodi Perelman, MFT

Self-care is an essential part of working as a therapist, yet sometimes our lives get too busy, and we lose connection with the center of our compassion and wisdom. During these times, we can benefit from creating a space to slow down, rest and reconnect with our energy for this work.

This winter I'm offering a half-day workshop in San Francisco for therapists of all backgrounds to practice self-care together in the form of restorative yoga, meditation, and guided imagery. I was inspired to create this workshop by talking with therapist friends and colleagues and recognizing the stressors that we all experience. I'm also inspired by the positive impact that self-care practices have had on my own life and work.

Before graduate school I trained as a teacher in the yoga therapy tradition with Joseph LePage, and more recently, with Judith Hanson Lasater, the leading teacher of modern restorative yoga.

Here is some background information on therapist self-care and burnout, and on the benefits we can derive from practices such as restorative yoga.

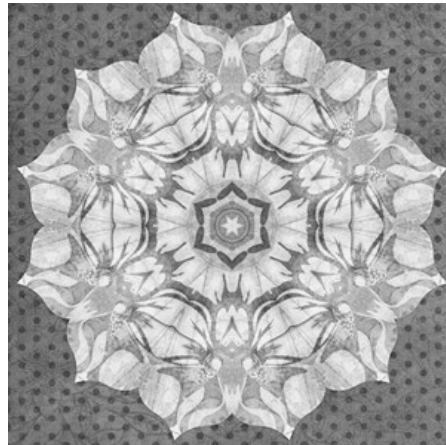
Burnout and Self-Care

The Maslach Burnout Inventory Manual defines burnout as a syndrome of depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and a sense of low personal accomplishment that leads to decreased effectiveness at work. Emotional exhaustion can include feelings of apathy, dissatisfaction, hopelessness, irritability and emptiness. Many professionals who share an intense involvement with people — such as doctors, nurses and educators — experience overwork and burnout.

Tracy L. Wityk of the University of

Calgary writes in her article, "Burnout and the Ethics of Self-Care for Therapists," that self-care is one of the primary methods of preventing and treating therapist burnout. Since we can't always control the systems in which we work or the amount of work necessary to support ourselves, self-care strategies can be the most available means for reducing the experience of overwork.

In a study published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, the authors found a clinically meaningful association between resident physician burnout and



self-reported suboptimal patient care practices. The personal coping strategies that doctors reported as most significant included talking with family, significant other and colleagues, physical exercise, and "a survival attitude." Therapists may find their own unique ways, and Wityk writes that self-care can protect both therapists and clients from ethical problems resulting from burnout.

In fact, the Feminist Therapy Code of Ethics specifically focuses on self-care as it relates to therapist well-being. The Code states, "A feminist therapist engages in self-care activities in an ongoing manner ... she recognizes her own needs and vulnerabilities as well

as the unique stresses inherent in this work ... she is also willing to self-nurture in appropriate and self-empowering ways."

The Practice of Restorative Yoga

In her article, Wityk lists several methods for therapist self-care, including self-awareness, improving physical health, leisure activities, and having a support network.

One of the most effective and enjoyable forms of self-care that I have come across is restorative yoga. Judith Hanson Lasater writes, "Restorative poses help relieve the effects of chronic stress in several ways. First, the use of props provides a completely supportive environment for total relaxation."

In restorative poses, we use blankets, bolsters, blocks and eye pillows to sink comfortably into supported postures and remain there, in stillness, for long periods of time. Props support the body and allow any muscle tension to release.

Restorative practice looks different from your usual yoga class, which tends to include a lot of stretching and movement. Roger Cole, a psychologist and yoga teacher, explains that stretching activates the muscles, which is the opposite of conditions we create in restorative yoga. Therefore, we may do light stretching to warm up, and then sink into supported postures that have very little outward movement at all. Yet, internally, a lot is happening and releasing.

Lasater emphasizes the four cornerstones of a restorative yoga

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Balancing Motherhood A Women's Retreat: Self-Reflection & Connection

Filling your own well is not a luxury but a necessity in order to give freely from a loving heart. Why is it in mothering others we forget (or do not make time) to nurture ourselves? We will focus on reconnecting with your deepest self; your needs and the ways that you can best care for yourself and your family simultaneously. Bring a journal, your lunch and please dress with comfort in mind.

**Saturday, September 25, 2010
9-4 at 315 Sanchez St in SF, CA**

Or

**Saturday, October 9, 2010
9-4 at 1240 Powell St in Emeryville, CA**

Space is limited, and pre-registration required. Cost is \$95.

Lori E. Opal, MFT provides psychotherapy, consultation, and supervision in both San Francisco and Emeryville locations. As a mother of two, Lori is passionate about helping women (and their partners) prepare psychologically and spiritually for pregnancy, labor and birthing, the transition into motherhood, and the ongoing joys and challenges of parenting. You can find her suggested bibliography and articles on aspects of Conscious Initiation into Motherhood at www.loriopal.com.

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∞ Therapists in Need of Therapy ∞

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pile up is one thing, letting the bills pile up is something else.

You probably have a lot of things to deal with, but by leaving some time for yourself, you are also building energy for your clients.

4. Get present.

If as a therapist you have somehow missed the Mindfulness movement's gentle transformation of the therapy world, at least in the Bay Area, there's no time like, uh, the present, to jump on the bandwagon. As so many researchers on therapies for trauma, anxiety, depression, stress and chronic pain are telling us, there is nothing like Mindfulness to unite body and mind, to help a person face their pain with a little more equanimity and, over time, arrive at acceptance. When you are overwhelmed and hurting, if you don't start practicing some Mindfulness, you will not be able to keep your mind present in your body and in the moment there with your client, and at best you will be no more than a talking head, devoid of any real emotional connection. At worst you will start acting out your countertransference – feeling resentful or subtly trying to get needs met by clients. Don't! It's much more healing for both of you to just let yourselves be present with your emotions, painful as they are. Only if you do this will you be able to reap the benefit of these painful experiences for your work as a therapist: compassionate understanding.

5. Dwell in your compassionate heart.

Yes, I realize we're getting pretty Buddhist here. You can translate it

into any spiritual or altruistic idiom you like, but you probably know that "passion" comes from the Latin word for "suffering", and that "compassion" means "suffering *with*". Our suffering makes us more open to understanding and suffering *with* our clients, to finding and, yes, dwelling in, our compassionate heart. And that is the heart of healing. We might never tell the client whose mother just had a stroke that we have been through the same experience – cau-



"Our suffering makes us more open to understanding and suffering with our clients, to finding and, yes, dwelling in, our compassionate heart."

tion! Self-disclosure should be used very judiciously here – but that client will feel our compassion and understanding without a doubt.

And yes, there are instances where sharing the joint experience with a client and sitting together in the emotion of it is exactly the healing experience they are needing. When we are mindful we can trust our therapist intuition on this, and our own ability to be there for ourselves, to take care of, to "cuddle" (in the words of Mindfulness master Thich Nhat Hanh) our difficult emotions.

Sometimes, to get that compassion connection flowing, I adapt another Bud-

dhist exercise, namely, walking through the world imagining that every being we encounter is an Enlightened master. Instead, I try to imagine that each client is a spiritual teacher with some important message for me – that whatever they are telling me about their problem, their pain, their suffering, has absolute relevance for me personally, is expressing some issue of mine that I need to bring awareness to. Sometimes the connection is very obvious, sometimes it is more subtle but very rewarding once I find it. Then the work is, feel into that aspect of myself, bring mindfulness and compassion to it, then turn it outwards again toward the client to enable more attunement and understanding and, ultimately, healing.

Nobody ever said it was easy.

But if we really want to help people (and if we didn't want that, surely we'd make a better living being investment bankers or something instead), with maybe a little bit of healing for ourselves to spare, then there's no way around the work of dealing with the hard stuff as it comes up for us, and weaving it back into our way of working with people. And if we do that, then at that next dinner party when we're asked what we do when life deals us its curveballs, we can say this: "I welcome it. Because it makes me a better therapist!" ∞

Katie Cofer is an MFT in private practice in San Francisco. She specializes in working with depression anxiety, stress and trauma. She is trained in somatic approaches, including the Hakomi Method and EMDR. Katie can be reached at **415-826-2951**, and please visit her at www.katiecofer.com

∞ Mixing up Your Ideal Practice ∞

Making the Spatula Work for You

by Samantha Zylstra, MFT

“Dig in and make the spatula work for you.” Thirty years ago as I frustratingly flung cookie ingredients out of the bowl, spatula in hand, my mother looked at me and said, “Dear girlie, don’t let the spatula work you, you must make it work for you.” With angst in my eyes I stared down that spatula until I was able to successfully mix up quite a lovely batch of chocolate chip cookies. Fast forward twenty four years no longer with a spatula in my hand but a degree in marriage and family therapy and an unknown list of ingredients for building my desired private practice. I knew that I had changed careers to be a therapist in private practice, but I didn’t quite know how to make the dream a profitable reality, especially as an intern. I heard my Mother’s advice and decided to “dig in and make private practice work for me.” Fast forward six more years, I now own a very successful private practice that works for me.

Three Main Ingredients: Passion, Skill, Resources

I love making (and eating) chocolate chip cookies, but I prefer my special recipe that’s just right for me over every other cookie. Just as it took me some thought and practice to develop the most ideal “Samantha” cookie, it also took thought and practice to develop my business. I have found the most important practice building ingredient to be passion. Take a few minutes to put words to your passions. There isn’t a wrong answer so try not to judge or filter your response. Just write what pops into your head when you ask: What am I passionate about? The answer to this question can be almost anything and as you use this passion in your practice you’ll find not only does your passion lead you to success, it’s something you enjoy doing.

I am passionate about people. More specifically, I love to talk to and listen to people. I knew starting graduate school that I wanted to work with people who wanted to learn to be comfortable in their own skin and develop positive experiences with food. I wanted this passion to translate into my business because I knew I was going to spend a lot of time and energy on building my practice and I wanted to like and enjoy the end result.

Over the past few years many people have contacted me wanting advice on building their own practice. They often tell me they’ve been trying for awhile and they feel burned out and don’t know where to turn next. When I ask them what they’ve tried they unenthusiastically tell me, “Well, I fell into treating x client and I do that ok. So, I thought I’d just focus on them.” There’s no passion or heart in their explanation and that translates into very few clients in their practice. If you have fallen into a pattern of the passionless practice building, you’re not alone and you’re not without options. Take just a few minutes right now to put a few words to anything you’re passionate about. It may feel like a small start but it is a start that will begin moving you in the right direction.

Skills

In addition to passion you need to know what skills you’re bringing to the mixing bowl. I mentioned earlier, when I started this process, I had a degree but no license, so I could use my degree but didn’t want my practice to be lacking because I was beginning without a license. I decided to not let the lack of a license limit me in any way. I had other skills that would be sufficient. I had a certificate in treating people with eating disorders and skill in public speaking. I knew that I

enjoyed talking to people about eating disorders, body image and food related struggles. So, this went right into my bowl. What skills do you bring to your bowl? Are you a writer, dancer, creative thinker? Put those skills directly into your bowl. Don’t worry if you don’t have what someone else has, focus on what you do have and what you have to put into your bowl.

Resources

The final main ingredients are your resources. As an intern, my supervisor was a huge resource for me. I knew I needed someone who wanted to work with me and walk beside me as I built my practice and encouraged me to be the best therapist I could be. You probably have more resources than you realize. Take some time to brainstorm what you have in your life for support, help or aid. What organizations are you part of? Where do you spend your time? Who will come along side of you and help you mix your ideal practice?

Accountability can be a very important resource. I attended an SF CAMFT annual dinner in 2004. I struck up a conversation with the woman sitting next to me, and as it turned out, she was just starting her private practice as well. We decided to meet regularly and strategize ways to grow our practices. Ten months later marked the birth of this publication. Where can you find or ask for accountability? You may want to start by attending an SF CAMFT monthly meeting or contact the SF CAMFT mentoring program director. As you look for accountability, remember that the key ingredient is passion, so your accountability should feel fun, not burdensome.

Do you like to read? If yes, see the literature resources at the end of this article. I found reading how other people

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∞ Self-Care for Therapists ∞

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practice: still, warm, dark and quiet. By creating these conditions, we trigger the relaxation response in the body and quiet the fight or flight centers. Think of this as a “recovery phase” from all the active work we do in the world.

The best way to understand the positive effects of restorative yoga is to simply try the practice. Many local yoga studios offer weekly classes, and I invite you to join me for the therapist self-care workshop that I’ll be leading this winter. Feel free to contact me for more info. ∞

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Jodi Perelman, MFT, RYT, has a private practice in San Francisco and holds a certificate in yoga therapy. She works with adults, couples and families, and offers consultation for fellow therapists. Her style of working is warm, genuine and collaborative. You are welcome to contact her at jodiperelman.com or 415-435-7559.

∞ Mixing up Your Ideal Practice ∞

Continued from the previous page

built their practices to be energizing and enlightening. I found it hopeful to read that other people had made their business work. The literature presented ideas that might work for me as well as recommendations for what not to try.

Do you like to talk? If yes, contact someone you respect in private practice or someone who is using their passion in a way that inspires you. I’ve met with many folks who just needed a place to brainstorm out loud to get them started or hear some ideas to get their recipe going. There wasn’t any magic in the coffee we drank while we talked, they just needed someone to hear them as they put words to their passions.

Making Your Spatula Work For You

So you’ve got your bowl full of ingredients. How are you going to mix those ingredients into your desired practice? As I discovered as a small child, just having the right ingredients didn’t automatically mix up my pre-

ferred cookie. You must make that spatula work for you and mix just right for you. My spatula or process for mixing my business took my passion for people with issues with food and skill for public speaking and my resources and put them all together into speaking engagements for groups wanting to know more about eating disorders.

I mixed in accountability and my passion grew because accountability included meeting with someone to talk to and build my business. As I mentioned earlier, that accountability turned into this publication which has been going strong for five years.

You may be thinking, “Great, I have my passions but I don’t know how to make them into something tangible.” If you are feeling stuck and don’t know how to move forward, call your accountability. Tell them what you are thinking and work with them to begin mixing. Just as I needed advice from my mom to work the spatula, you may need your support to help you know how to mix your practice. As a rule of thumb, I think it takes about a year of diligently focusing on your practice and materializing your passions for

you to taste success. So, don’t rush, give yourself that year and daily, diligently mix those ingredients.

Never lose sight of making that spatula work for you. It may seem difficult and awkward at the beginning but when it is a reflection of your passions it will grow into something that feels natural and you can take pride in. ∞

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Samantha Zylstra, MS, MFT is in private practice in San Francisco. She specializes in helping people overcome issues around food and their bodies. She holds a certificate in the treatment of eating disorders. Samantha is a consultant for professionals seeking guidance while building or rejuvenating their practice. Please contact her at www.samanthazylstra.com, samanthazylstra@um.att.com, or 415-585-3132.

Professional Focus



Samantha Zylstra, M.S., MFT (#44677) has a private practice in San Francisco. She provides services for couples, adults, and children who desire healing in their lives. Samantha believes therapy is an opportunity for personal growth and lasting positive change.

Samantha’s approach to therapy is informed by her desire to meet each client where they are, creating space for them to strengthen their core self. Her role, as she sees it, is to listen deeply and to respond empathetically, facilitating opportunities for insight and client

-directed choices for change.

Samantha has a certificate of specialization in the treatment of eating disorders. She has run art therapy groups for people who struggle with issues of food and body image. She has worked extensively with individuals and families struggling with the devastating experience of an eating disorder. Eating disorders are treatable, so please don’t hesitate to call if you or someone you know needs help.

For more information regarding her therapeutic approach or groups please call **415-585-3132** or visit **www.samanthazylstra.com**

Jodi Perelman, MFT (#45307) is a licensed psychotherapist with a private practice in the Potrero Hill neighborhood of San Francisco. She works with adults, couples and families, and offers consultation for fellow therapists. Her style of working is warm, genuine and collaborative.

Areas that bring people into her practice include relationship issues, self-esteem, anxiety, depression and healing from loss.

Jodi has a certificate in yoga therapy and is a Registered Yoga Teacher (RYT) with Yoga Alliance. She received a Masters degree in Counseling Psychology from the California Institute of Integral Studies and participates in advanced training and education in many diverse areas.

For more information and any questions, you are welcome to contact Jodi at **415-435-7559** or **www.jodiperelman.com**.



Katie Cofer, MFT (#35856) is a licensed marriage and family therapist in private practice in San Francisco. Her work is based on a fundamental belief in the interconnectedness of mind, body, heart and spirit. She integrates relational talk therapy with somatic, transpersonal, and expressive arts approaches. She is trained in the Hakomi Method, an experiential, mindfulness-based and body-centered psychotherapy approach. She is also a practitioner of EMDR, a powerful

technique that facilitates the clearing of traumatic memories and emotional stuck points. Through these processes of self-discovery and healing clients may feel more connected with their core self and regain access to their innate vitality and creativity. Some of Katie’s areas of expertise include trauma, depression, anxiety, phobias, unresolved grief, blocks to creativity, and cross-cultural issues. Katie also works with children and adolescents and is fluent in Spanish and German. She can be reached at **415-826-2951**, or **www.katiecofer.com**.

Lori E. Opal, MFT (#35754) views life as a spiral that is always moving us towards healing and wholeness. From this perspective, the symptoms that bring us into therapy or consultation are not really problems, but the healing impulse of our psyche loudly declaring that our awareness and growth are required. Therefore, as life inevitably presents us with transitions and loss, each unique circumstance becomes an integral part of what awakens us into the fullness of our human experience. This is the focus of transpersonal psychotherapy.

Lori is trained in EMDR and has expertise in trauma, depression, anxiety, self-esteem, relationship issues, couples therapy and spiritual matters, including spiritual emergence/

emergency. With her Masters degrees in East West Psychology and Integral Counseling Psychology, Lori enjoys utilizing the rich wisdom traditions of the East: Buddhism, Sufism, & Hinduism with Western Christian mysticism in her healing work with clients. She often weaves into sessions body awareness, mindfulness practices, teaching stories or her special love of mystical poetry, as inspired.

As a mother herself, Lori values helping women prepare psychologically and spiritually for pregnancy, the transition into motherhood, and the ongoing joys & challenges of parenting.

Lori is available in San Francisco and now Emeryville for psychotherapy, consultation, and supervision; she can be reached at **415-503-0522**, or at **www.loriopal.com**.



◆ Samantha Zylstra

◆ Jodi Perelman

◆ Lori Opal

◆ Katie Cofer

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Bridge Journal, Fall 2010 Issue

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