

## Surviving and thriving as a trauma therapist

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## The Lives of Therapists Psych Today poll, 2008

- 98% reported they usually found work fulfilling
- Most rewarding aspects:
  - Seeing improvements in clients, Functioning as a free agent, Educating others on mental illness/reducing stigma, Financial compensation, Feeling better able to navigate our relationships
- Most frustrating aspects:
  - Insurance companies, Financial compensation, Difficult clients, Solitude of profession, Creating a client base

## Potential challenges (Psych Today Poll, 2008)

- Threat of lawsuits
  - Financial/Billing/Insurance
  - Ethical Dilemmas
  - Fear for personal safety
  - Split public and private persona
  - Suicide of patients
    - 25% psychologists, 50% psychiatrists
- (American Academy of Suicide Prevention)

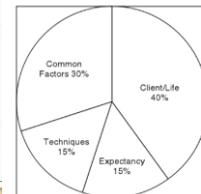
## Potential Hazards to the Family

- Members received less emotional support, felt minimized
- Interpretations/Jargon used in parenting
- Confidentiality vs. sharing patient stories
- Jealousy
- Home office

## How can chronically sitting with suffering affect us?



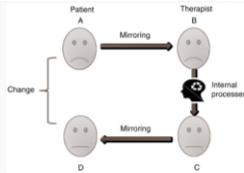
## As therapists, the largest piece we have direct access to....



### Consistent Findings:

- Cuijpers, et al, 2012
- Lambert et al, 1993
- From Bergin & Garfield, 2004

## Lending out your frontal lobe



## Overview of Today's talk

- Overview of Concepts
- Experiential Exercises
- Individual Strategies
- Organizational Strategies
- Further Resources

## Defining Constructs

- Stress
- Emotional Contagion
- Empathy
- Compassion (fatigue)
- Secondary/Vicarious Traumatization
- Burnout
- Resilience

## Burnout & Vicarious Trauma

- Burnout: Sense of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and feelings of inadequacy.
  - Maslach, 1996
- Vicarious Traumatization/Secondary Traumatization
- Compassion (Fatigue)
  - Figley

## Stress

Environmental demands or internal demands that tax the adaptive resources.

Is Stress bad? If you think so...

- Health and Mortality (Keller et al., 2012)

Challenge vs. threat appraisal

- Polar Plunge (Blascovich & Mendes, 2000)



## Facial, Affect Mimicry

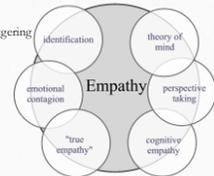


## Emotional Contagion



## Empathy

- Emotional resonance
- Observing or imaging another's affective state, triggering an isomorphic affective response.

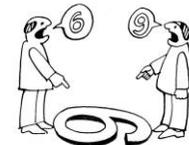


## Role play

- Client Actor, Therapist and Observer
- Actor give background and answer questions
- Simulate a therapy session
- Share reactions from both sides and inferences the therapist would make, are they projections? Observer share perceptions.

## Empathic Accuracy

- Accuracy inferring the thoughts and feelings of another person
  - Blindness Study (Silverman, Quinn, & Bowman, 2014)



## Rationale for empathy

- Sustained empathy is associated with improved performance
  - Fuller histories, higher provider ratings, fewer malpractice complaints, increased treatment adherence (Halpern, 2012)
  - Increased provider ratings of health, wellbeing and professional satisfaction.
- How much does it matter for treatment outcome?
  - Outpatient psychiatrists
    - Substance Use Disorder Treatment, Depression (Imel TBP; Krupnick et al, 1996)

## Costs of Empathy

- Resource competition with other cognitive demands
  - Increased errors
- Increased sympathetic and cardiovascular arousal
  - Chronic stress effects
- Increased depression/anxiety
- Increased vulnerability to burnout
  - Decety, 2012



## Compassion

- Deep awareness of suffering and a wish to relieve it. Sense of warmth, shared humanity towards another's pain.
  - Neff, 2015
- Compassion is not being a doormat
- Mindful, Non-Judgmental Stance, Non-attachment to outcome
  - Skillful/unskillful
  - Effective/ineffective

## Lending out our frontal lobe

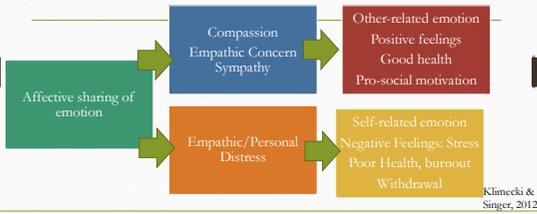
### fMRI Studies



### Social Baseline Theory

- Neural pathways and hormonal stress responses for ER less active with actual or anticipated social support.
  - Hostinar et al., 2012
  - Coan et al., 2006

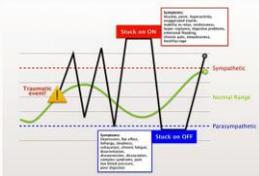
## Pathways for Compassion



## Putting it all together

		Fx	Example	Outcome
Contagion	Emotion mirroring w/o awareness	Social synchrony	I feel pain	Avoidance, dysregulation, problematic
Empathy	w/ awareness	Provides information, motivates action, builds rapport	I feel your pain	Shared experiencing
Compassion	Sense of caring and desire for shared positive welfare	Promotes healing	I want to alleviate our suffering	Expressions of love and kindness.

## Sitting with traumatized clients



## Interoception Experiential Exercise

## Our own trauma histories

- Trauma History tunes nervous system upward (Porges, 2011)
  - Recruiting our vagal break
- Dialectical impact
- Need for therapist to feel secure in the room.

## What is Resiliency?

Use of resources to respond to stressor & conservation of once stressor has passed.

- Elite performers  attuned to body signals

Phillippe & Selzer, 2005



## Common Reactions to Burnout

- Exposure control
- Emotion Suppression

## The problem of avoidance

- Dissociative strategies in managing adversity
- Overreliance on avoidance
- What are classic psychologist avoidance strategies?

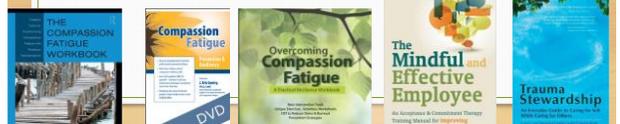
## Can I just fake it?



- **No avoiding**  
experiencing one's own emotions were associated with problems in empathy (Singer, 2014)
- Expressive suppression (Gross, 1998a), leads to adverse social outcomes.

## Programs to Reduce Burnout

- Accelerated Recovery Program
- Acceptance and Commitment Treatment
  - R RCTs including hospital workers, social workers, substance abuse counselors
- Compassion Training (Klimecki, et al., 2012)



## Yoga Break



## Small Picture Options

- Active Management throughout the day
  - Regulating Breathing
  - Snacks (willpower)
    - (McGonigal, 2014)
  - Movement/Breaks
  - Sense of control/mastery
  - Awareness of expectation/intention
  - Humor/play/give in your schedule

## Big Picture Options

- Diverse life interests
- Radical Acceptance (your superpower comes with a few cons)
- Sense of control
- Social support
- Self-care
- Self-compassion
- Meditative/Contemplative Practice
- Ongoing therapy

## What are the barriers?

- Awareness
- Vague goals
- Skill deficit
- Problematic contingencies
- Environmental factors are overwhelming
- Intense Emotions
- Unhelpful beliefs
- Willingness

Linchan, 2014

## Action Plan for Wellbeing

BURNOUT AWARENESS AND ACTION PLAN			
Thoughts	Behaviors	Situations/Feelings	POSSIBLE RESPONSES
Green			
Yellow			
Red			

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## Organizational Factors

- Tension between factors that prevent burnout and trends in modern capitalism and corporate culture.
  - Reliance upon quantitative indices for performance.
  - Decreased direct social interaction
  - Drive for expediency
  - Reinforcing outcome over process

Moss & Couchman, 2012

## Environments that curb burnout

- Realistic Job Demands
- Employee perceived fit with position
- Recurrent rewards
  - Personalized reinforcers
- Sense of control
- Perception of Justice/Fairness
- Social cohesion

## What we do

- Awareness of Burnout
  - Infused at every meeting
- Link tasks to employee's values
- Supporting social cohesion,
- Sense of control, empowerment with agency
- Challenge vs Threat framing (affects ability to utilize social support)
- Incentivize self-care
  - Dbt Board
  - Health voucher
  - Green yellow red at CCC

## ProQol



## Self-compassion test

**SELF-COMPASSION**  
Dr. Kristin Neff

HOME ABOUT WORKSHOP/EVENTS RESEARCH PRACTICES RESOURCES CONTACT

Test how self-compassionate you are

Please read each statement carefully before answering. To the left of each item, indicate how often you believe in the stated manner, using the following scale:

Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	2	3	4	5

*Whoever battles with monsters had better see that it does not turn him into a monster. And if you gaze long into an abyss, the abyss will gaze back into you.*

-Nietzsche

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