The counseling field is a rewarding profession that also involves highly distressing and sometimes traumatic circumstances. Many counselors find their personal or professional lives impaired at one time or another with results that can range from mild problems to major disasters. Human beings are social creatures that can be deeply impacted by the experiences of others, so counselors need to recognize this natural tendency and monitor it through personal insight, reflection, and supervision.

Impairment can manifest itself by life becoming so overwhelming that it interferes with work or vice versa. Burnout, compassion fatigue, substance abuse, and relationship problems are just some of the conditions associated with a counselor becoming impaired. Counseling relationships with people in crisis is stressful work, so it is critical that counselors consistently take stock of their own health status in order to remain valuable to their clients, family, and themselves.

(Continued on page 2)
Struggles for the inexperienced and experienced alike

New counselors come into the profession with enthusiasm and a sense of boundless energy to make a difference for their clients, but reality soon hits. Burnout and compassion fatigue are often seen in new graduates. Lacking years of experience, they are particularly susceptible because many hold assumptions that they are personally responsible for therapeutic change, that their professional competency is the sole factor in therapeutic success or failure, and that they are the only accountable agent for change in the client’s life. Knowledge and skills may be well developed, but finding a balanced perspective on who they are and what they can realistically accomplish is no easy task. It is all too easy for new counselors to become overwhelmed with tension and exhausted from work interrupting the rest of their lives, resulting in potentially harmful situations for themselves and their clients.

As common as burnout and compassion fatigue are in the inexperienced counselor, they can also strike the veteran. Experience is a great teacher, but it comes with its own traps. Even the most energetic, skilled, and practiced counselor will periodically run up against the hazards of the profession. Too many clients with difficult problems can combine with new personal relationships, traumatic personal experience, and family needs to create inordinate stressors at any time in one’s career. Counselors may react to these in ways that make them less effective in some or all aspects of their lives.

The Impact

Burnout and compassion fatigue can occur together, but are experienced in somewhat different ways. Burnout is generally accompanied by emotional and physical exhaustion that impacts excitement about a profession that once brought a sense of joy and meaning. Compassion fatigue is often experienced within the context of the therapeutic relationship when counselors become overly impacted by highly stressful or emotionally challenging content in therapeutic sessions. This is most common with counselors working with trauma survivors, but it can happen with any counselor. They may report feeling anxiety or hopelessness, have trouble concentrating or being productive, or they may lose their sense of pleasure and self-esteem.
Both burn out and compassion fatigue can negatively impact a counselor’s mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing. Counselors can notice this change manifested in their personal and professional lives, impacting close relationships, and jeopardizing treatment efficacy. This causes ethical problems as the likelihood of a counselor making serious moral and ethical errors increases dramatically under these conditions. Counselors may lack the motivation to effectively address ethical concerns, or their awareness can be compromised enough to recognize ethical dilemmas as they present themselves.

Burnout and compassion fatigue also greatly impact a counselor’s ability to develop an empathetic therapeutic relationship with the client, and implement appropriate interventions. Counselors struggle with being fully present, employing skills, or being creative and spontaneous with their clients. This can be particularly psychologically damaging to clients who are putting their trust in a professional counselor’s ability to be fully functioning.

**Counselor Self-care**

Counselors who find themselves vicariously impacted by clients’ experiences should immediately seek the necessary outlets to help remedy the situations. Seeing another counselor and having someone available for supervision are the cornerstones of the professional support system.

There are several key steps that counselors can take to reduce or eliminate burnout and compassion fatigue. The American Counseling Association emphasizes that the most important skills counselors can learn in guarding against these impairments include the regular practice of self-monitoring and self-care activities. Self-monitoring includes counselors paying close attention to and regularly evaluating how they contribute to their own burnout and assessing their personal vulnerability to compassion fatigue. Strategies to assist in preventing these impairments include receiving supervision, varying caseloads, staying current with professional knowledge through scholarly literature and trainings, and developing organizational skills. Counselors also need to engage in the same self-care they advocate for in their clients in order to combat these dangers. Those wellness activities that help clients and counselors alike include hobbies, spending time with friends, exercising, and engaging in spiritual practices. Counselors need to model the best of what they seek for their clients.

The goals for facing these impairments start with regaining a sense of fulfillment in the counseling work and joy in one’s personal life. It is a great profession when one can continue to see the reward and value in what they do and who they are, to feel personally competent, and to develop and utilize their physical and psychological resources to maintain a healthy sense of self while doing the best of work in support of clients.
LOIS EHRMANN CREATES AN AGENCY IN HER OWN VISION OF Kinder and Gentler Therapy

By Laura Anne Copley

Past the gentle demeanor and composed manner, there is a strength and determination possessed by Dr. Lois Ehrmann (Ph.D., 2007). She is a woman on a mission. Lois has been active in the counseling and mental health field for over 25 years, immersing herself in various professional outlets from private practice and research, to teaching and advocacy. Her credentials include the following: Registered ATTACH Clinician, Certified EMDR Clinician, Certified Attachment Focused Family Therapist, Approved Clinical Supervisor, and National Certified Counselor. She also had in-depth training on body and energy systems of healing and neurofeedback. Despite her extensive training and experience in the field, she contributes the direction of her career to a very special and inspiring child that came into her life.

Lois adopted a baby who suffered serious trauma and neglect. After exploring various psychotherapies with different mental health professionals, they discovered change and healing from an attachment-focused approach that also included holistic modalities. It was because of this experience that Lois decided that the next step in her life would be to return to school to pursue the research behind concepts of trauma and attachment. She enrolled in the Counselor Education and Supervision Ph.D. program at Penn State and found that it provided the information, skills, and experience she needed. She identifies this time in her life as “a stellar experience that I look back on endearingly.” After earning her degree, Lois embarked on a new mission that would incorporate her specialized knowledge. In 2009, she opened her new agency, The Individual and Family CHOICES Program, which focuses on healing wounds of trauma and attachment through a holistic program of care.

Lois is proud of the development of her center, which is located in State College, Pennsylvania. “We offer traditional individual, couple, family, and group counseling along with other modalities that make the center unique. These extras are the specialized and holistic approaches such as mindfulness, therapeutic massage, music, emotion-focused therapy, bilateral stimulation, eye movement desensitization and reprocessing, play therapy, reiki, neurofeedback, and more.” Lois stresses the importance of her center always coming from a place of empathy and understanding when implementing all therapeutic techniques. She reports that these holistic modalities do more than just help manage symptoms; they actually facilitate emotional expression and healing at a deeply felt place.

Another important goal for Lois is to utilize her agency and expertise to contribute to the counseling field and give back to the Counselor Education program at Penn State. She says, “Offering CHOICES as an internship site for graduate level counselors was my way of advocating for the value of professional counselors. It was my way of saying that the field does

“CHILDHOOD TRAUMA DOES NOT COME IN ONE SINGLE PACKAGE.”
—Asa Don Brown

(Continued on page 5)
Lois is passionate about providing counselors-in-training the opportunity to work with serious clinical issues in an agency that values and incorporates supervision and consultation, collaboration and networking, and professional wellness.

The foreseeable future for Lois is highlighted by continued involvement and advocacy in the field. She plans on continuing her work as a therapist while stabilizing and cementing her agency in the community. She has plans for one book on how clinicians use internal family systems and self-awareness, and has already started a children’s book. As for CHOICES, Lois would like to gradually develop it into an employee-owned center. In the meantime, Lois will continue developing CHOICES into her idea of a “kinder and gentler human service agency that promotes healing and caring relationships.”

“FROM WHAT WE GET, WE CAN MAKE A LIVING; WHAT WE GIVE, HOWEVER, MAKES A LIFE.” —Arthur Ashe
A Leadership and Service Club for Middle School Students Makes a Difference

By Jessica Koltz

The role of the school counselor might typically be identified as upholding duties relating to conducting individual and group sessions or guidance-related lessons, but in Wake Forest, North Carolina, the school counselor goes above and beyond these typical counseling roles. Mike Meyer, a graduate from Penn State’s School Counseling program (M.Ed. 1999) and current counselor at Wake Forest-Rolesville, has developed a very special extracurricular program in his middle school that keeps him connected to Penn State.

This unique group, known as the Social-Organization and Service Club (SOS), consists of students in grades six through eight. During their weekly meetings, the club discusses charity projects, business development, fundraising, and management strategies as well as plans to travel to New York City and Penn State. SOS also focuses on professional improvement by teaching interviewing skills and business card creation.

Mike started the project when he began to recognize the needs in his community. “The Wake Forest-Rolesville area is a low-income area where students may not be aware of certain skills relating to job readiness such as dressing for success and interview skills.” He thought his middle school students might just be the right group to develop these abilities.

Mini-THON

In addition to student development, SOS has a mission of helping students focus on becoming responsible, independent, and caring citizens. The club collaborates with other local organizations to have a dance marathon each year that is similar to Penn State’s THON. The club website makes it clear that “members learn how to run the project much like a small business using free enterprise and teamwork to accomplish [the program’s] goals.” SOS students choose to be part of various support committees. There is something for everyone, from marketing and design, to communications and set-up. Students choose committees that fit their individual personalities, interests, or skill sets.

THON was an important part of Mike’s experience at Penn State, and he loved the idea that THON could unify everyone. “You see a lot of fighting and not getting along between groups of people, and THON is a place where different groups come together to support and feel good about the same cause. It is a uniquely valuable experience for middle school students who are constantly thinking of the patients’ stories that remind them why they are doing it.” Mike’s students from SOS plan to attend THON in 2014.

A good thing keeps on growing

Mike introduced the SOS program to Wake Forest-Rolesville Middle School in 2005, expecting that the program would only run for a year. The program grew on Mike when he started meeting parents and patients. “It changed my view on life. I was a perfectionist in the past, but began to realize that the little
Hair-Splitting Tale of a Latina

By Meritza A. Tamez

Embracing one’s natural hair texture is nothing new. There has been a growing movement among women of color to proudly don the hairstyle with which they were born sans the relaxers and perms, but this trend has not always been widely accepted. Growing up as a young Latina with a natural afro did not make for a particularly pleasant childhood. Because of my early experiences with bullying, I spent years feeling ugly and uncomfortable within my own skin.

Beginning at the age of 8, I was regularly teased and taunted by my peers for the cloud of curls that sprouted from my scalp. As a result, I grew to despise not only my hair, but myself in general. I envied the smooth, straight strands flowing from the heads of the White girls and experimented with various processes from chemical relaxers to ironing just to make my hair more like theirs. I wanted desperately to be accepted, but it seemed my hairstyle was too kinky to be welcomed by Latino groups, my skin too light to fit in with Black groups, and my overall being too ethnic for White groups.

After spending years fighting and loathing the texture of my hair, I was eventually successful in my early adult years to get it to look more mainstream and wore it straight daily in an attempt to hide my true identity as a girl born with unruly curls. Even though I was able to adjust my hairstyle to match more conventional styles, I found that I still was not fully embraced by my fellow Latinos for various reasons. I was either too güera, or light-skinned; too educated, which apparently meant I was trying to “act White”, or not fluent enough in Spanish to meet their expectations.

Over time, I gradually came to realize that I was unknowingly and falsely conditioned to believe that straight hair was a pinnacle of beauty. Similar to identity struggles of other young girls of color, I had based my ideals of beauty on the White media portrayals that surrounded me. These dominant White standards not only influenced how I desired my hair to look, but also extended to my overall appearance. Thus I starved myself to be as thin as the girls that I saw in magazines, wore colored contacts, and placed myself in harm’s way by undergoing cosmetic surgical procedures all for the sake of appearance.

Now in my early thirties, I am much more content with my hair and have grown to appreciate the uniqueness it brings me. My curls have since relaxed due to all the chemical processing and flat ironing I put them through, and surprisingly, I actually miss the curlicues that I once possessed. Most importantly, no longer will I conform or whitewash my appearance for the sake of acceptance into any group. The fact remains that I am more than my hair, more than my skin color, more than my weight. Simply put, I am more than what you see. I am all of the above and everything in between.

Meritza is a third-year doctoral student in Counselor Education.
INTEGRATION OF SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEMS

By Hyoyeon In

Students are increasingly experiencing mental health issues that significantly hinder their success in school, but resources and support available have been limited. To better meet the mental health needs of students, the SUMMIT project, funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, aims to maximize collaboration between schools, community agencies, and families in the State College Area School District. Dr. Liz Mellin, associate professor of Counselor Education, has been a major force in the development and implementation of the SUMMIT project.

Starting in September 2010, the SUMMIT project began identifying students’ mental health needs, available resources within the school and our local community, and how we can bring those community-based supports into schools. The data collected from students and parents at elementary, middle, and high school levels showed that depression, anxiety, and stress in students increased with age. “There are multiple opportunities in elementary and middle schools to prevent students’ mental health problems, but there is no program for preventing mental health problems in most schools,” Liz said. She describes how many students in the school district expressed feeling academic pressure that impacts their mental health: “Data told us that students in this school district are really stressed. This is a school district where about 85-90% of students go to college. Some students cannot even schedule lunch break because they are taking a lot of advance placement courses.”

Not surprisingly, anxiety and depression were found in students. Liz indicated that about 25% of seniors said that they thought about killing themselves in the past year.

One strategy to better meet mental health needs of State College students is implementing a universal screening program for depression once or twice a year. If results show that students need support for dealing with depression or anxiety, counselors in schools and in the local community would collaborate to get students the help they need. Liz said, “Health curriculums are generally all about physical health and [do] not include discussion of mental health.” The SUMMIT project is designed to broaden the health curriculum to include attention to mental health issues for students. The project has also tried to centralize the process of matching families with mental health care providers in the community.

This year, SUMMIT is conducting a variety of training sessions for teachers and parents. Training for teachers addresses subjects such as how mental health problems could interfere with students’ learning, signs of a student experiencing depression, and the appropriate follow-up. Other training programs for school professionals in 2012 focused on suicide prevention and intervention. In addition, a series of training sessions has been implemented for parents on having conversations with their children about various mental health-related issues from depression to child sexual abuse.

Liz hopes to see a regional focus on integrating school and mental health systems beyond the State College Area School District in the near future: “Different school districts in the area have very different needs, but they all have some significant mental health needs. What we would really like to see happen in the next couple of years is for this initiative to expand to other school districts in and around the Centre County region.” The SUMMIT project will continue its commitment to promoting students’ mental health and helping them reach their potential through collaborations between schools, families, and community agencies.
Imagine swimming nearly a half mile in the Penn State Outdoor Natatorium, biking twelve miles to the University Park Airport, and then running just over three miles all in one hour and ten minutes.

That was how Jessica Koltz spent one of her Saturday mornings. The feat earned her first place in the women’s division at the 2012 Happy Valley Sprint Triathlon, her first competition of this kind.

Jessica is a second-year master’s student in the Counselor Education program with an emphasis on elementary school counseling. An avid swimmer throughout childhood, she was recruited for the Division I swim team at the University of Buffalo. She trained more than three hours most every day during her undergraduate years. This was in addition to completing a double major in Psychology and Early Childhood Education, maintaining a part-time job, and still having time for a social life. Jessica was no longer competing while in graduate school, but she utilized her training experience to help her stay in shape. Then in the spring of 2012 a friend asked if she’d be interested in competing in triathlons. It was a natural next step for a swimmer who enjoyed biking and running.

Jessica stepped up her training, never taking more than one day off from any of the three exercises: biking, swimming, or running. She joined the Penn State Triathlon Club and the Master’s Swimming program. She has since competed in five triathlons, three of them sprint distance, which are the length of the Happy Valley Triathlon. The last two were Olympic distance, which are twice as long as a sprint distance triathlon. Most recently, Jessica competed in The Nation’s Triathlon. It is the largest in the country and very competitive. Jessica placed second in her age division.

How does Jessica balance graduate school, internship, and training? “I am much more time conscientious than ever before,” Jessica said. She is committed to her goals and the vision for herself. Using her free time to study and work on papers, she reduces the time spent on non-productive activities such as watching television. She also engages in self-care. Two times a week, Jessica participates in yoga to relax her mind and body. She finds that the exercise helps to increase her awareness and pushes the body in ways different from her regular exercise routine.

Jessica’s upbeat attitude is contagious. This is particularly manifest in her counseling work with elementary children. Jessica’s internship supervisor says the kids gravitate to her because of the good vibe that she gives off. The children are excited to have the chance to come talk with her and even run with her—yes, one group of special education students does a run and talk with her each morning.

Many of the kids she works with struggle with low self-esteem. Jessica pulls from her own experiences of success in sports and academics and can see the potential in the children she works with. “It’s hard to see them struggle. I want to help them see what they are capable of doing and being.” She focuses on the positive in the children, and they love it.

Jessica is enjoying this latest venture in competitive sports. She enjoys both the social aspect of the sport and the individual training. “It’s exciting because it is so new and different from what I’ve been doing. I can keep doing this until I’m 80.”
KOREA AND PENN STATE COUNSELOR EDUCATION:
Expanding Cultural and Academic Boundaries

By Young-An Ra

The Counselor Education program at Penn State attracts a broad range of students, so it is not surprising that Young-An Ra, Hyoyeon In, Zi Young Kang and MinJung Chae have traveled all the way from South Korea to take part in it. These four women have come here for a variety of reasons, but they all share the goal of advancing their careers as well as the profession of counseling in their home country, which speaks of their strength and commitment.

Studying in the U.S.

All four Korean students obtained their degrees through the same master’s educational counseling program at Seoul National University. After graduating from this master’s program, they all decided to study at Penn State.

Young-An decided to study in the U.S. because she hoped that doing so would broaden her perspective, especially with regard to multicultural counseling. “The U.S. is a refreshing change from my home country, which is a racially and ethnically quite homogeneous culture,” Young-An says.

Hyoyeon also spoke to why she decided to study in the U.S.: “Studying in the U.S. led me to be aware of diversity and cultural issues in the counseling field. I was able to view myself as a racial being, and think about how my racial identity might affect my interactions with diverse clients.”

Alternatively, Zi Young pointed to the differences between the two countries’ counseling programs as her reason for coming to the U.S. “Counseling programs in Korea are not as specialized as in the U.S.,” says Zi Young. “I am interested in the field of counselor education, and the counselor education program at Penn State was the right fit for me.”

Cultural Differences

Students who go away to college struggle to some extent, but what is it like for international students in a different culture? This is an especially important question in the case of those students who are studying abroad for the first time. MinJung explains that being unfamiliar with cultural differences is quite a challenge: “Since I didn’t have any experience living abroad, I did not recognize cultural dif-

‖WE CAN WORK TOGETHER FOR A BETTER WORLD WITH MEN AND WOMEN OF GOODWILL, THOSE WHO RADIATE THE INTRINSIC GOODNESS OF HUMANKIND.‖ —Wangari Maathai

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ferences well at the beginning. So I was a little bit worried that this would affect my academic and personal life.” Other common difficulties include language barriers, which all four students felt were quite significant since counseling is a field based on communication.

What these women discovered is that interactive student groups provide great help to international students. “I was fortunate to be in a supportive cohort that often held group activities for all,” says Young-An. “Participating in these activities helped me gain a sense of belonging, and my English and familiarity with culture improved greatly.” The group activities help international students make friends from a wide variety of cultures, which broadens understanding of multiculturalism and diversity for them and for their peers.

**Future Goals**

These young Korean women are all very ambitious, and all have clear ideas about their future. Most of them would like to start a career as a professor in the U.S. and then move on to teaching younger generations in their home country. “Upon completion of the Ph.D. program, I would like to have a faculty position in a Counselor Education program in the U.S. because I think it is an ideal setting for me to continue to pursue my research interests and interact with excellent scholars, as well as build up my foundation of international activities as a counselor educator,” says Hyoyeon.

She also has specific ideas about what she wants to accomplish in Korea: “Korean society is now rapidly moving toward a more multicultural society and thus faces numerous emerging issues dealing with this transition. My future research and advocacy activities will be centered on the career development of multicultural populations in Korea.” MinJung has similar plans: “I want to begin by building a career as a professor in the U.S. and then to return to Korea with more knowledge that can aid younger generations.”

**Being Together**

Living in a foreign country is no easy task, especially when one has a hard academic schedule to follow. These four women have luckily found support in each other. “I am very excited about having four Korean students in the program. We can share some academic adjustment issues, transition experiences and other difficulties in our native language,” says Young-An. As Zi Young adds, “That I am not alone here means a lot to me. It really helps me feel relieved. It is so great that we can support each other.”

The four women have found comfort in each other as well as students of different cultural backgrounds. These connections will add support and opportunities to develop themselves together, and they will continue to grow as professionals in counselor education.

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**Where Some Recent Graduates are Working**

| Julie Bates, Ph.D., Assistant Professor in the Department of Counselor Education at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. |
| Katie Buhr, M.Ed., Mental Health Practitioner, Cedar House, Jordan, MN |
| Aimee Chase, M.Ed., Rehabilitation Counselor for the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, York, PA |
| Corey Cook, M.Ed., Rehabilitation Counselor for the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Allentown, PA |
| Elyse Debillis, M.Ed., Mental Health Counselor, Keystone Family, State College, PA |
| Nicole Freed, M.Ed., Elementary School Counselor, Claysburg-Kimmel School District, Claysburg, PA |
| Stephanie Graboski, M.Ed., Mobile Therapist/Behavioral Specialist, State College, PA |
| Tamara Hinojosa, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Texas A&M University-San Antonio, San Antonio, TX |
| Eva Letwin, M.Ed., Intensive Outpatient Therapist at Rehab After Work, State College, PA |
| Lindsey Nichols, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Counselor Education, University of Montana |
| Maura Quinn, M.Ed., Elementary School Counselor, Bucks County Intermediate Unit, Doylestown, PA |
| Stuart Roe, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Counselor Education, The College of New Jersey, Ewing Township, NJ |
| Jennifer Sharp, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Counselor Education, Northern Kentucky University, Highland Heights, KY |
The Girl who Kicked the Hornets’ Nest

Jerry Trusty  
(Faculty)

This is the third book in the series by Stieg Larsson, the Swedish writer. The first is *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo*; the second is *The Girl who Played With Fire*. This is an often gritty book with several adult topics, including sexual abuse, family violence, and abuse by “helping” professionals. It is a mystery that includes government corruption, international spying, investigative journalism, the Swedish legal system, and organized crime. The book highlights intentional and unintentional discrimination against people who do not adhere to social and cultural norms. The level of violence is high.

The God Particle: If the universe is the answer, what is the question?

Steve Shephard  
(Master’s student)

The author is Leon Lederman with Dick Teresi. It is a history of particle physics, written in a humorous way, as a narrative of all the discoveries leading up to the discovery of the Higgs Boson Particle. It is a fascinating study written in a way that even a non-particle, non-physicist like myself can understand.

Essays in Love

Elif Cimsir  
(Doctoral Student)

Alain De Botton provides a philosophical picture of falling in love, experiencing love, and thinking about love through the story of the writer and his girlfriend. The book is so remarkable and charming that it gets me thinking about how I have been silently having some of these ideas for years, but never had a way of expressing them through such a philosophical yet precise language. Reading the book is like reading a case study that has philosophical and psychological components of love.

Other People’s Words

Kim Trostle  
(Master’s Student)

I experienced this quick read by Victoria Purcell-Gates as an undergraduate where it was then and remains now inspirational and insightful. It is the case study story of an illiterate Appalachian family where the parents, unable to read for themselves, attempt to break into a world of literacy with the author as their guide. The story is an illustration of diligence, dignity, and hope as the family is transformed. It is a reminder that literacy (and, by extension, learning) is a right and a privilege in society. Even within the print-saturated world of America, there are those who are denied this privilege.

“READING IS A BASIC TOOL IN THE LIVING OF A GOOD LIFE.”  
—Mortimer J. Adler
Faculty Updates

Publications:

JoLynn Carney cited in “Confronting the Culture of Bullying”—cover story for American Counseling Association’s publication, Counseling Today (2013, vol 55.8) ct.counseling.org/category/cover-stories/

