

Stealing Minutes: A Tri-Study
of Reconstructing Self-Care
for Mental Health Professionals



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Stealing Minutes: A Tri-Study of Reconstructing Self-Care for Mental Health Professionals
Using Research As Daily Practice, Case Study, and Grounded Theory

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STEALING MINUTES: A TRI-STUDY OF RECONSTRUCTING SELF-CARE FOR MENTAL
HEALTH PROFESSIONALS USING RESEARCH AS DAILY PRACTICE, CASE STUDY,
AND GROUNDED THEORY

DISSERTATION

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Summary

The majority of approaches to self-care in the mental health field revolve around activities that take place outside of the work environment or on supervision and policy level approaches. Using social constructionist and narrative principles, I created, implemented, and studied a series of workshops focused on intra-day approaches to self-care. Using Research As Daily Practice, Case Study, and Grounded Theory approaches I was able to gain insights at each phase of the project and provide richer resources for moving forward with the goal of constructing a new approach to self-care. This study may benefit therapists, educators, and other helping professionals in reducing stress in the workplace through providing simple and effective tools to use with clients, students and others.

Keywords: self-care, qigong, mindfulness, meditation, relaxation, stress reduction, burnout, compassion fatigue, research as daily practice, case study, grounded theory

Samenvatting/Summary of this Thesis in Dutch

De meerderheid van de zelf-zorg benaderingswijzen binnen de psychische gezondheidszorg betreffen activiteiten buiten het werk of betreffen begeleiding en benaderingen op beleidsniveau. Door gebruik van sociaal-constructionistisch en beschrijvende principes heb ik een serie workshops gecreëerd, toegepast en bestudeerd die zich toelagen op de dagelijkse zelf-zorg benaderingswijzen.

Door verschillende Daily Practice, Case Study en Grounded Theory methoden toe te passen, was ik in staat om inzichten te verkrijgen bij elke fase van het project en meer betekenisvolle bronnen aan te leveren om het doel te bereiken: om een nieuwe zelf-zorg benadering te creëren.

Therapeuten, docenten en andere deskundigen in de zorg kunnen er hun voordeel mee doen: om zelf de stress van het werk te doen verminderen, via simpele oefeningen, die tevens door cliënten, studenten en anderen kunnen worden toegepast.

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Without my colleagues who signed up to attend a pilot group on self-care this research would never have come to light. I would like to thank Ken Potter for the countless hours of conversations about narrative therapy that have so deeply influenced my work. Many thanks to Roger Hatt for volunteering 2-years of his time to support my career. Without Ken and Roger this project would not have been possible. I owe many thanks to my mom and others for financial support that allowed me to give this project the time and attention it deserves.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Preface

Throughout graduate school, and a 2-year residency as a therapist that followed, I was often surprised to discover that self-care in the mental health profession revolved primarily around activities that take place outside the work environment. This appeared to me to place an additional and unnecessary burden on already limited personal and family time while most likely pre-disposing employees to a higher risk of burnout and fatigue. My curiosity and concern about this issue helped me decide to draw on my personal experiences in mindfulness and qigong in an attempt to help my colleagues. The next challenge for me was to find ways to increase the accessibility and effectiveness of the practices in order to begin integrating them into the work day.

The project continued to grow and deepen over time and eventually included three phases which consisted of curriculum development, teaching workshops to mental health professionals, and studying the responses and experiences of the participants. In the following section I describe the chapters that follow to help the reader develop a working map of the territory we will journey through together in the coming pages.

Mapping the Territory—Chapter Outlines

Chapter One—exploring the landscapes and possibilities of self-care approaches.

In the first chapter I describe some of the territories I journeyed through, as well as teachings and experiences I gathered along the way that pre-disposed me for embarking on this project. I then describe how I recognized the opportunity for a different way forward. Without this richer description of my context, the language games and forms of life (Anscombe, Hacker, Schulte, & Wittgenstein, 2009) I have encountered, and how they influenced the questions that drive the following three studies, the reader might be left with a thin description that may not be as easily replicated in other professional settings.

Chapter Two—using daily practice to create a new approach to self-care.

In this first of three studies, I tackle the job of describing my attempt to use social constructionist and narrative principles to create the materials and approach for reconstructing our relationship with self-care, as well as reconstructing self-care itself. In this chapter I rely on the literature of narrative and social constructionism in response to a lack of literature on experiential approaches to self-care that can be used in brief moments throughout the day. I describe my process of using Research As Daily Practice (Wulff & St. George, 2014) as my methodology and explore the creation of each self-care practice. This part of the chapter recounts my journey back to the origins of each practice as well as the process of adapting it for my current audience. Once the materials and approach were developed, I carried out an 8-week 1-

hour class with a pilot group of six therapists and psychologists. My experiences and findings from the pilot group make up the remainder of Chapter Two and prepare the foundation for moving forward with the second study of the project.

Chapter Three—a case study of facilitating the workshops.

In this chapter I use a case study approach to examine the contexts and demographics of each workshop. I describe the continuing research from an additional 45 hours of trainings across eight more workshops with 80 additional participants. Many changes and evolutions occurred in the practices, the language, and the approach to teaching throughout the 6 months that these workshops took place. I explore what worked, what did not work, and how my method of “folding it in” evolved. In the latter part of this chapter I explore themes I interpreted from my field notes and session notes to begin building a foundation of understanding. This emerging understanding encouraged me to seek further enrichment through a third study. I describe this final study in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four—exploring the interviews with grounded theory.

During the last month of my 10-month research project, I interviewed 16 of the participants and transcribed the recordings. In this chapter I follow a grounded theory course through the 16 hours of interviews to find emergent themes and develop a theory about approaches to self-care in order to help provide more guidance for the journey forward into new territories.

Chapter Five—discussion and conclusion.

In Chapter Five I share my understanding of the implications and limitations of the findings from the three studies and discuss possible areas for further application and research, new directions, and unexpected outcomes that emerged from the project. In the next section I share a few stories that more richly illustrate the journey through this project and the benefits some of the participants experienced.

A Note on Use of the “Self” and “Self-Care”

The irony is not lost on me that, as a social constructionist and narrative practitioner, I have made the word “self” so ubiquitous throughout this project. Instead of choosing a new word for “self-care,” I intentionally adopted the phrase because of its broad acceptance and use in my field. While I accept the concept of “self” as a social construction, I also see value in the social utility of the concept (Gergen, 2009a). I believe this utility can be safely leveraged when “self” is approached as a “rhizomatic story” (Sermijn, Devlieger, & Loots, 2008) by looking for the many roots, offshoots, and unseen connections beneath the surface of the socially performed versions of the self. I work towards a non-reifying engagement with the concept of “self” by intentionally leaving space open to encourage complex and poly-vocal approaches.

Similar to other culture-specific constructions such as love (Gergen, 2009a), I recognized the social utility of “self” and chose to leverage it in lieu of fighting against it because I think the term has social capital. I made this decision with the understanding I was pushing the debate about “self” to the background to bring the opportunity to share helpful resources with my colleagues to the foreground (St. George, Wulff, & Strong 2014).

As a reflexive practitioner following a collaborative and experiential approach, I decided to create space for preferred identity within culturally accepted naming conventions instead of diverting my resources to confronting the name itself. I was unwilling to risk creating tension or conflict in my field in the name of increasing well-being. Having seen the broad use of the term in education, supervision, publications, and codes of ethics in my field, I felt it better to work from the inside out rather than risk politicizing my goal of improving the personal and professional lives of my colleagues. I felt that facilitating dialogue about self-care would better assist us in experiencing a more relational reality (McNamee & Hosking, 2012) than engaging in political and intellectual discourses about the name itself.

I chose to work at shifting the approaches to self-care instead of fighting the current term for it. Being aware of the impacts of language on power and knowledge (Wulff & St. George, 2014) and focusing on the utility of the construction as it stands, I chose the goal of enriching an existing tradition versus standing counter to it (McNamee & Gergen, 1999). What concerned me most was my attraction to challenging the illusion of a self that is disconnected from the whole (Besthorn, Wulff, & St. George, 2010) in order to encourage my colleagues to encounter their multi-faceted selves (Gergen, 2009b) to help restore some complexity to their lives as a beneficial and therapeutic act.

Weather is composed of measurable elements such as humidity, wind speed, and temperature, and yet, it is also a social construction (Seligman, 2011). For example, it does not take much thinking to remember a time when you disagreed with someone’s assessment of what is good or bad weather. A conversation between a surfer and an ice climber might invite such a disagreement. In choosing a constructionist approach to self-care, I also have metrics such as stories and shared experiences that I can track through our conversations in the workshops. Although mostly anecdotal and in the form of practice-based evidence (Wulff & St. George, 2014), this information is the bread and butter of a Research As Daily Practice stance (Wulff & St. George, 2014) and the foundation upon which I built the materials and approach for the *Stealing Minutes* project. I am not convinced that moving against the name of a thing can be as effective in countering its negative impacts as helping to expand our experience-base in order to deconstruct reified understandings (Epston & White, 1992; Freedman & Combs, 1996). I chose the latter over the daunting task of replacing that thing with something completely new (McNamee & Gergen, 1999).

Please note that throughout this paper I use the convention of putting my dialogue in italics. This applies to both spoken words and thoughts.

In the following section I describe the influences, experiences, and observations that helped me build the foundation for this project. Without this section it could be difficult for the

reader to fully understand how the project came to be and how the integration of social construction and narrative with mindfulness and qigong came into being.

Situating Myself in the Work

Undertaking this project has been a deeply personal process for me. Much of the material for it is a distillation of over 2 decades of study and practice. Given that the materials came from my life experience and that I am the primary medium through which they were filtered on their way into being, I feel it is important to describe some of the key contexts of my life that brought me to this point in time and helped shape the life philosophy and perspectives from which I approach this project. Moving forward with the caveat that I am not the originator of these ideas but a shaper of them, I am happy to claim my role in modifying them on their way to hopefully be changed again by others.

Although I have been blessed with a rich and adventurous life, and a broadened understanding of it that my involvement with social constructionist thought has helped me attain, I will limit myself to the most relevant elements for this project. While having enough material and insights for an auto-ethnography, I chose a more diverse methodological approach across three mini-studies because I hoped it would capture more of the process and be more generative for myself and others.

This being human is a guesthouse.

*This being human is a guesthouse
 Every morning a new arrival.
 A joy, a depression, a meanness,
 some momentary awareness comes
 as an unexpected visitor.
 Welcome and entertain them all!
 Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,
 who violently sweep your house
 empty of its furniture,
 still treat each guest honorably.
 He may be clearing you out for some new delight.
 The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
 meet them at the door laughing,
 and invite them in.
 Be grateful for whoever comes,
 because each has been sent
 as a guide from beyond...*
 ~ Rumi (Barks & Rūmī, 2005)

The metaphor of Rumi's guest house (Barks & Rūmī, 2005) has been a guide for me through many passages in my life. In this one poem he captures the power of gratitude and the value of remaining open-minded. For me, he speaks to the importance of honoring our multi-beingness (Gergen, 2009a) and how we can recognize new opportunities only when we are liberated from the fragility of carrying single stories (Frank, 2010) into the events of our lives. For many years now, I have seen myself as both living in Rumi's guesthouse, as well as embodying the guesthouse metaphor myself.

Looking back on my school and internship years, on the models and received doctrine of my chosen profession, I recognize that the modes of thought that I carried with me helped me become a successful therapist as much as attending graduate school. Rumi's poem also resonates with the more tragic, and blissful, elements of my life. Studying Rumi helped me learn to carry myself more fully into my work and draw on my experiences to be more present with clients who are in existential crisis (Whitaker & Ryan, 1989) in ways that following a therapeutic model alone did not. In the next section I carry my experiences with Rumi's writing into my current project.

“I don't think I was old enough to have a sense about it.”

During a narrative interview of me (see Appendix A) with some of the research participants as a reflecting team, the interviewer asked me, “Do you have a sense for how you fell in love with the mystical?” Without hesitating, I responded that, *I don't think it's a process that happened while I was old enough to have a sense about it. I think it was there by the time I became aware of it.* Following this question set me on a journey of contemplating and writing about the role of the mystical and spiritual in my life. By tracking, exploring, and having conversations about it, I have been better able to recognize its role in my relationships, work, and in this research project. This project would not have been possible without my fascination with the mystical. Again, Rumi sums it up eloquently for me:

*Do you think I know what I'm doing?
That for one breath or one half-breath I belong to myself?
As much as a pen knows what it's writing,
or the ball can guess where it's going next.
~ Rumi (Barks & Rūmī, 2005)*

This poem, my encounters with social constructionism and narrative, and trainings I had with the Public Conversations Project on the power of dialogue (Herzig, Chasin, Public Conversations Project, & JAMS Foundation, 2006) reminded me to put my energy into preparing instead of planning. This opened the door for me to carry my curiosity for the unexpected and my love of the generative nature of groups into this project. Using the perspectives of social

constructionism, narrative, and Eastern philosophy, I felt an opening for new approaches to self-care and moved into that space to see what I could accomplish there.

Four funerals and a wedding—my ashes work.

Nothing shaped my life, or played a bigger role in my journey to where I am today than the year and a half that I cared for my wife, Shannon, as she dealt with terminal cancer. Her illness, our 18 months of being together every day, and her passing at 36 years old changed my life in more ways than I could convey in writing. It was through this process that I undertook what I thought about as my ashes work (Bly, 1990; Campbell & Moyers, 1988). Robert Bly and Joseph Campbell both use the metaphor of ashes to describe various journeys of transformation—often through loss or some other dark and shadowy elements of the human experience. Growing up, I saw this mythological image of transformation through life experience, especially loss and hardship, played out in old martial arts movies as a key part of the tempering of the main character.

Being immersed in traumatic loss had a way of holding me in the present moment that transcended any meditative practice I had engaged in before. My future felt frozen in time. I stopped adding to its narrative creation because it was a different story than I was living, and my favorite main character, Shannon, was not going to be in it. While immersed in the role of caregiver, I shifted slowly from seeking insights into the meaning of life to prioritizing the experience of being alive (Campbell & Moyers, 1988). During Shannon's illness, both my grandmothers died, marking the last of their generation on both sides of my family. My father was diagnosed with stage-four lung cancer a few months before Shannon died. He died just a few months after she did. During Shannon's illness a very good friend of ours was diagnosed with stage-four cancer and died a few months later. This was a time of previously unimaginable challenge, loss, and profound emotional and spiritual experiences.

Shannon and I maintained our sense of humor throughout her illness, often to the shock of others who expected us to be more serious and morbid. This combination of intimacy and humor helped us let go of much of the drama around us (Chödrön, 1997). One of our biggest joys was to continue with our plans to get married despite her illness. It was a powerful and healing day for many of our friends and family, as well as for us. Many of us could not tell where the laughs began and the tears ended, but many healing conversations took place that day that carried on through our community for years after Shannon's death.

Carrying grace—the wounded storyteller as practitioner.

The work I am doing around creating and sharing self-care approaches with as many people as I can is a practice of carrying forward the love and emotional openness I experienced through loving and losing Shannon. Recognizing how the experience transformed me helped me decide to make a commitment to try to carry these new ways of being in the world forward with me. Many of my friends talked about how loss had changed their values and priorities, helped

them let go of trivial things in life and be more emotionally engaged, yet they also spoke of how the effect faded over time.

Out of this, I decided I would continue my journey as a wounded storyteller (Frank, 1995) and engage with this work partly to honor the loved ones who cannot be here helping others in the flesh. I carried them forward with me in spirit to such a degree that never once have I envisioned myself as working alone. It was this journey of the wounded storyteller that brought me to graduate school at 40 years old with the dream of finding a career in the helping professions. There I discovered social constructionism, narrative therapy, and language that I used to better understand the important differences between my stories and practices of self-care and those of my colleagues.

Surviving the loss of my wife and my father left me in a new state of fearlessness that helped me find the courage to embark on a new journey (Chödrön, 2005) because I was confident I was unlikely to face any uncertainties I could not handle. Throughout my studies, internships, and work experiences, this fearlessness has been a consistent source of strength, and an occasional surprise for me when I look at the challenges I accepted in the ensuing years. Having my wife die in my arms did more to make me the therapist, student, and person I am today than 6 semesters of graduate school and 2 years of internships. I cannot overestimate the role of loss in transforming me into the person I am today. As a practitioner, the person that I am is the core of this project.

Looking to the East—living in the West.

From a young age I was drawn to Eastern thought. Having been raised by a non-practicing Quaker and a former Catholic turned atheist, my upbringing left me wide berth in which to choose and develop my spiritual leanings. My life philosophy, while shaped by the people around me, was also shaped by my love of nature and my luck of growing up in 100 acres of woodland on a small homestead where we raised vegetables, fruit, chickens, and pigs. By the time I was 10 or 11, I had a deep love for nature and had also been listening to old tapes of Indian gurus that one of my relatives gave me. Then I discovered Taoism and the doors to the East opened wider for me. My interest in Taoist philosophy, and my attempts to practice strength through yielding (Laozi & Mitchell, 2006), and to find myself by losing myself (Liu & Cleary, 1988) eventually inspired me to seek out teachers of Qigong and other Taoist practices. I started in the tradition of master Mantak Chia and then moved to a more philosophically grounded lineage under Western master, B. K. Frantzis, and eventually became an instructor in that system.

In college, my philosophy professor, with whom I developed a friendship, suggested I go to some monastic retreats at a nearby Buddhist center. I went to numerous retreats, some silent and some educational, and incorporated much of the teachings of Theravadan Buddhism into my life. I also found hierarchy and politics in Western Buddhism that did not appear in Taoism and as a result, I never fully embraced that tradition. Both traditions show up strongly in my current project. I trace their origins more closely in Chapter Two as I describe the development of the

self-care practices. By carrying a beginner's mind (Suzuki & Dixon, 1970) approach into the workshops I was able to open up a dialogic space that assisted in creating transformative experiences for some of the Christian participants. Observing their willingness to speak up about their faith and how the practices were fitting and not fitting with their beliefs, helped me develop a more inter-faith friendly approach to the workshops. I explore this more in Chapter Two.

On becoming a marriage and family therapist.

The preceding experiences played a significant role in my decision to go to graduate school for marriage and family therapy and in how I made sense of my time there. Given my background, I quickly gravitated towards postmodernism. I was disappointed that my instructors talked briefly about the concepts of self-as-therapist and self-care yet offered no constructive advice, resources, or practices. Nor was it a part of our training, supervision, or peer consultations. It was in this environment that I noticed myself experiencing less stress than my fellow students and I began to question why. Over time, I came to realize that Qigong, meditation, and other practices I incorporated into my life were useful for mediating the stressors of balancing work and school. With this understanding I planted the seeds that later grew into the project of creating a new approach to self-care.

In graduate school I came to admire the postmodern models of family therapy (Nichols & Schwartz, 2010) and the emphasis on acknowledging the impact of social pressures on families, the importance of the role of spirituality and faith in peoples' lives (McGoldrick, 1998), and the increasing role of social constructionism and narrative in developing approaches to working with families in crisis (Price, Price, & McKenry, 2010). The focus on outreach and multi-systemic approaches (Boyd-Franklin & Bry, 2000) to therapeutic challenges also made sense to me and I used these ideas to reach out to my colleagues with an idea for improving our quality of life and not just the quality of our work which is often the primary focus of professional trainings and peer consultation.

Having a B.A. in English from 20 years earlier, I was pleasantly surprised to discover that narrative perspectives had spread to the fields of therapy, coaching, and mediation. My life-long love of language, poetry, and metaphor helped drive my attraction to narrative therapy. I was excited to be reminded again that words can be magical (de Shazer, 1994). Reading Michael White's talk about deconstruction and reconstruction (White & Denborough, 2011), how stories can determine the meanings we attribute to experiences (White & Epston, 1990), and unique outcomes as a potential gateway into alternative territories (Epston & White, 1992) felt like a coming home to me.

Along with Michael White, reading Ken Gergen's book, *Invitation to Social Construction* (2009a), contributed to making my remaining 4 semesters quite difficult to complete because I was by then in love with narrative and social constructionism, and spending all my free time reading about it. Reading Gergen helped make the idea of a socially constructed world more accessible and exciting. It enriched my understanding of narrative therapy and introduced me to

the Taos Institute. I also discovered The Public Conversations Project in Gergen's writing and went to their center in Watertown, Massachusetts, for trainings in transformative dialogue.

In the language of narrative and social constructionism, I found a new form of expression that described much of how I moved through the world. Before that, only Taoism, and occasionally Buddhism, resonated with me on this level. What linked these schools of thought together for me was that in each was an opportunity for engagement with the world through applying them. It was on these margins of application and experimentation that I felt most alive. In this way, these schools of thought helped me feed my newfound focus on experiencing life versus searching for intellectual evidence of meaning. By valuing the direct experiencing of life I felt compelled to incorporate a strong experiential focus in my workshops. I wove the language-worlds of narrative, social constructionism, Taoism, and Buddhism into the frameworks for conveying it.

Why social constructionism?

Delving into social constructionism I encountered a number of important insights that helped me move towards this current project. One was the idea that we are capable of constructing a reality that denies us (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). Through my Eastern orientation I had come to the belief that we have created a world that denies our humanity and our spirituality, but I had not come across anyone speaking to the underlying social processes until encountering social constructionist thought. As I moved into the world of mental health, I was disappointed to encounter some old stories I had heard before in the business world such as, "Work hard and pay your dues," "You have to make sacrifices to be successful in this field," and the old sports metaphor of "You play hurt if you have to because it's all about winning."

Often I experienced these constructions as denying my preferred approach to being a helping professional. Considering these ideas as socially constructed gave me hope I had not previously experienced when coming up against such dominant cultural narratives. Social constructionism helped me reframe them from a different perspective, and one I knew well from the martial arts: "the bigger they are, the harder they fall." As I came to value the relational after years of studying and practicing in solitude, I realized how much of what I called "I" was composed of many other people (Gergen, Schrader, & Gergen, 2009) and many narrative resources that were not uniquely mine (Frank, 2010). Later in my reading I encountered Karl Tomm's work and began to understand these internalized others (Collins & Tomm, 2009) as resources I could draw from in the same way therapists were approaching the concept with clients. The constructionist concept that what we take for reality is really just a matter of habit (Goodman, 1978) inspired me to keep exploring until I found the idea of multi-being (Gergen, 2009b) which helped me create a fertile conduit between the ideas of social constructionism and the warnings from the narrative realms about the dangers of a single story (Adichie & TED, 2009; Frank, 2010) which heightened my concerns about the monocultural environment of the psychotherapy world in which I was immersing myself (White, 1997).

Why narrative therapy?

Having become enamored with social constructionism, I set about exploring the ways it was being applied in the world. The most expedient tool I had available in that moment was narrative therapy with its deconstructionist approaches to dominant discourses (Epston & White, 1992) and co-authoring of alternative stories (White, 2007) to nurture and support the emergence of a person's preferred identity (Freedman & Combs, 1996) while building on his/her unique local knowledge (White, 2007). In narrative therapy I found a resonance with my previous studies in English literature and my first application to engaging with many of the socially constructed dominant cultural narratives I had been reacting against for much of my adult life. Seeing these dominant discourses as socially constructed narratives reduced much of my antagonism towards them after I realized we all share a relational responsibility for their creation and maintenance (McNamee & Gergen, 1999) as well as an obligation as therapists to be consistently aware of their presence in the room and the power differentials our assumptions invite us into as "experts" and "authorities" (Foucault & Rabinow, 1984; White, 1997).

The Self-Pay Clinic—doubling down the years.

My first step in embarking on this project was to take on, and succeed, in another project that grew out of my inability to find post-graduate job opportunities in my region that matched my philosophy and ethics. My belief in the idea of a community-counseling clinic was strong enough that I gave up most of my 2-year pre-licensure period working to create it. Although successful, it was difficult watching my classmates get licensed while I had another 1½ years to go. The financial sacrifice has been even more staggering but the payoff, in terms of meaning and fulfillment, has made this journey worthwhile. Choosing my own way and co-creating an environment in which I can more freely choose my approach brought more meaning (Frankl, 1963) and satisfaction to my life than I initially hoped to get from this work.

The Self-Pay Clinic is both an experiment in creating a new work environment for post-graduate therapists and a community-focused low-cost counseling clinic. The co-founders and I set about to create a resident therapist opportunity that would satisfy the state requirements for a pre-licensure job in a private practice setting instead of an agency. This was specifically in response to the needs of adult learners who lack the resources to work 60-70 hours a week in an agency setting, as well as an answer to my goal of finding a job that matched my approach to therapy. Many agency jobs in our area required long hours for very low pay and often included mandatory use of specific evidence-based models. Taking on this ambitious project helped me to come up with the concept of *playing with my tribe* and helped me be accepted as a peer so that I could see them as my tribe. By conceptualizing more experienced therapists as my tribe, I found the confidence to propose my next big project—offering self-care trainings for mental health professionals.

Playing with my tribe—growing where I am planted.

As luck would have it, narrative ideas had migrated into the coaching world (Stelter, 2014) which led me to seek out friends who were coaches to help me set up the Self-Pay Clinic. Later, I recruited them to help me with the nuts and bolts of developing and promoting my early self-care workshops. It was through coaching with the former chair of the Antioch New England University Green MBA Program, that I first heard the idea of playing with my tribe (P. Chandler, personal communication, October 2013). This became the organizing principle through which I promoted the Self-Pay Clinic and worked to build a referral network. Through this same referral network I was able to attract enough participants to run my first pilot workshop. A long-time friend, and former social worker, shared her expertise in organizational psychology and developing effective business models. It was within the model she helped me create for the Self-Pay Clinic that the workshops were promoted and sustained.

My willingness to reach out to anyone who might be able to help stemmed partly from the fearlessness I spoke of earlier and from the newfound value that adopting social constructionist thought helped me place on the importance of others in everything we do. Without time in the crucible of my dark night of the soul (Moore, 2005) and taking up social constructionist principles into my approach to life, I may not have been able to move this project forward.

Bumping Up Against the Problem

Exploring and engaging with definitions of self-care.

My first challenge with self-care was to find a definition of it that made sense to me. Given that I am not a believer in a single individual self or “bounded being” (Gergen, 2009b) makes the attempt trickier because any definition of self-care would need to include a relational component as well as a nod to the multi-faceted nature of the self. By looking for definitions I was able to find some interesting common factors among many different fields (Cox & Steiner, 2013) which show promise for informing this project. Cox and Steiner relay some of these findings in their book *Self-Care in Social Work* (Cox & Steiner, 2013).

Self-care is situation and culture specific.

This opens the door for variations on self-care approaches from within organizations that honor the local knowledge of staff over the nationally devised codes of conduct and ethics from professional governing bodies. This also opens the possibility that grassroots approaches to self-care may travel back up the chain of command and better inform policy-making.

Self-care involves the capacity to act and to make choices.

During my experiences in graduate school and internships, and in the stories I gathered from former classmates in the field, I have not seen this concept being incorporated. Perhaps this is one area where self-care can be opened further. I rarely hear of the collaborative nature of self-care choices made available to mental health professionals in agency settings. Recognizing the

need for a capacity to act has been a motivating force for me in creating an accessible approach to experiential practices that can be used effectively across a wide variety of situations.

My hope is that if therapists have a handful of quick and effective self-care practices available to them, it could help them increase their resilience to stressful environments with limited room to act and opportunities to make choices. The practices I created were designed in part to help inoculate mental health professionals against these stressful work environments from which they often feel unable to leave (e.g., financial, licensure).

Self-care is influenced by knowledge, skills, values, locus of control, and efficacy.

While I agree with this finding in general, I have caveats regarding knowledge and efficacy. If knowledge, as used above, is defined by authorities and drawn from dominant discourses, I would consider it counter to self-care because it does not honor people's local knowledge (White, 2007) or how that local knowledge relates with what they know about the world they inhabit. In fact, this finding could be in direct conflict with the first finding that states that self-care is specific to culture and situation (Cox & Steiner, 2013).

A similar risk emerges with the metrics used to measure efficacy. Are they qualitative and subjective or evidence-based and quantitative? The yardsticks used to measure efficacy may not respect the local knowledge, culture, and situation into which the self-care recommendations are being introduced. Here the lessons of social constructionism can help us avoid the risk of increasing problems that emerge when one community claims its local truth is a universal one (Gergen & Gergen, 2004).

By creating and utilizing metaphors such as *Stealing Minutes*, I am hoping to continually invite the deconstruction of our sense of the taken-for-granted (Gergen et al., 2009). By encouraging participants to share their experiences with each other we can determine our own collective sense of efficacy and co-construct metrics for measuring it. We asserted our own locus of control by attending voluntary workshops and by having access to practices we could then lean on in almost any environment we may find ourselves. I designed this mobility of the practices partly as a response to the often-limiting nature of a physically-centered and hierarchical locus of control, such as those sometimes found in the workplace or classroom.

The group setting is similarly useful for allowing participants to develop their own ideas about their skills and values while providing a useful reflective surface to share unique experiences with each other. The only skills and knowledge that I assume the group is bringing into the room is each person's expertise in his/her lived experience (Monk, 1997). My hope was that through this collecting of local knowledge we could participate in a dialogic and relational dance that moved us forward together into a new relationship with self-care.

The adult learner—a stranger in a strange land.

As a builder, investor, world traveler, graduate student, intern, and therapist, one thread ran through all of these territories. That thread was the feeling that I was unable to fully assimilate into whatever reality I was traveling through, yet I could immerse myself in it, learn its language and concepts, and often speak it fluently. Whether speaking the native tongue in

Thailand or talking building codes on the job site or kite-surfing terms at the beach, I was usually able to speak the dialect of the language game I was immersed in, but I never felt fully at home in any one of those realities.

As I learned the language of social constructionism I was better able to articulate this feeling—along with often feeling like a stranger in a strange land who really was from another world (Heinlein, 1961). I later coined the term *fluent outsider* for the experience I felt of being an outsider while speaking and acting like an insider. One of the benefits of being a fluent outsider was that it opened the door for me to be a conduit for importing new ideas into a nested system by translating it into the insider language. Had I not had a lifelong love of language and a passion for social constructionism, I doubt I would have achieved this level of awareness. Recognizing that importing and translating outsider language could be a vehicle for reconstructing our relationships with just about anything, I chose my first application to be a study of using language practices to create a new approach to self-care. In Chapter Two I describe this process in greater detail. Through exploring my role as an insider with outsider knowledge, I was able to introduce a different way to approach self-care to my colleagues and garner enough interest to put a pilot group together. I describe my experiences in the space between insider and outsider knowledge in the story *The Beer Fairies* in Chapter Two.

Learning the hard way—the pain management metaphor.

When Shannon and I were at the radiation oncologist for palliative radiation sessions, the nurses would often remind us that pain medication should be taken on a regular schedule and not to wait for the pain to get so bad that it drives the decision to take the painkillers. The nurses and doctors advised us that once the pain gets over a 5, on a scale of 1 to 10, it takes exponentially more medication to bring it down. We learned this lesson the hard way a few times before becoming more consistent with her medication management. The medical professionals were correct, at least in Shannon's case, and once the pain got out of control, no amount of medication would get it back under control in a timely manner. Given that she was taking narcotics, she could not take enough to bring the pain under control without getting sick or having other negative side-effects.

This lesson informed my thoughts on self-care and thinking about it got me wondering why people in my field had never come to focus on intra-day self-care approaches. I had seen many people burn out by the end of the day and call in sick the next morning and I wondered why a night off was not enough to recover from a rough day. Some colleagues were complaining that their weekends revolved around managing physical, emotional, and relationship fallout from the excessive demands of the workweek. The pain management lesson I learned from being a full-time caregiver was a valuable lens for me as I carried it forward into the mental health profession. From the beginning, I incorporated it as a key concept of the self-care trainings and a part of the language I use to talk about deepening our experience of self-care. For me, the pain management metaphor captures a spirit of self-awareness and pragmatism towards self-care that I expected to already be in place in our field before I arrived.

Self-as-therapist as self-care—why didn't we think of this before?

“Self-as-therapist” is a term my supervisors used in graduate school to refer to the inner resources, strengths, and experiences of a therapist and how we can improve our work with clients if we understand and bring them carefully into our sessions. While the notion of “self” is again used in a sense of the bounded being of Western individualism (Gergen, 2009b), and the capitalist-based constructions of “strengths” and “resources” (White, 2012) are still present, this term has a long history of use in the field of mental health. Paying attention to the broad use of this term in my field, I decided to carry it forward with a focus on the process of what I could do to make change by re-interpreting “self” as multi-faceted and complex instead of searching for a new word to replace it. My approach to “self-as-therapist” is similar to my approach to “self-care” which I outlined earlier in the section titled *A Note on the Use of “Self” and “Self-Care.”*

By exploring some of the differences between my approach to my work and that of my classmates, I realized I was carrying something into the work that I wanted to know more about. I explained most of what I was carrying with me in the above sections. In this section I describe how I was able to carry that forward in a way that enhanced my resilience and fascination with my work to such a degree that I felt compelled to incorporate it into the self-care workshops.

Two of my supervisors in graduate school encouraged me to draw from within myself and learn to use those resources as a therapist. This, they believed, is what was originally meant by the term self-as-therapist. One of them, Tim Lowry, was a fellow student of Eastern philosophy, especially Taoism and Rumi. He encouraged me, directly and through example, by quoting Lao Tzu, Rumi, and Hafiz in our supervision sessions. Previously, I had been struggling to put aside my “non-related” passions and interests out of fear they would conflict with the models and systems of thought I was learning. Being invited to lean back into myself opened a door that shifted my experience, and effectiveness, as a therapist. To this day I still enjoy exploring safe ways to bring more of my multi-faceted, rhizomatic self into my work.

Tim was also a dedicated Bowenian therapist. One area I have little fluency in is the language of modernism, structuralism, and the received view of science (McNamee & Hosking, 2012). While we shared a common interest in Taoism and Sufi mystical poetry, our understandings of the world, of therapy, and our theories of change could not have been more different. Finding myself in a relational dynamic in which I was able to fall back on my experience and worldview opened new levels of meaning and engagement with my work as a therapist. Through this interaction I learned about moving more intentionally into stances of genuine curiosity to find multiple ways of explaining and listening to the same thing in order to better understand others. At other times I felt an instinctive impulse to not pursue an idea out of the concern that, as Ken Gergen asserts, talking about it any further could have reduced our clarity about it (Gergen, 2009a).

The second mentor who invited me into the realm of self-as-therapist was Stephen Price. Steve was my 2nd-year professional seminar supervisor for my off-site internship at a residential program for adolescent boys. He was the first person to bring my attention to the usefulness of

what he called my “non-judgmental curiosity” and my ability to “take esoteric theories and apply them in concrete ways that are effective to particular clients” (S. Price, personal communication, May 2012). I had previously been unaware of these two ways of being in the world. Steve’s ability to recognize and articulate them back to me was a real gift. These skills serve me on a daily basis now, and I have been able to leverage them in the creation of the Self-Pay Clinic and this self-care research project in ways I never could have imagined. Although Steve talked at commencement about my “broad perspective and ability to think outside the box,” it was those traits in him that allowed him to be so helpful to me. He saw value in some of the contexts I had come from before graduate school and could recognize instances from my case studies when I was drawing from them. He encouraged me to be more mindful of their use, as well as more articulate in explaining how I was using them to inform my work. A few years later, using these skills helped me develop the materials and approach for the *Stealing Minutes* workshop.

You can lead a horse to water but you cannot make him think.

These experiences came together in my process of recognizing a need for a new relationship with self-care, more experiential and effective approaches to self-care, and the realization that I may have something to offer on this front. Without the experiences, teachers, insights, and tools I described in the previous pages, all that takes place in the following pages would probably not have been possible.

Missing in action?—the ethics of self-care.

Two of the self-care trainings I facilitated in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, were part of a full-day ethics and self-care workshop. The 3-hour morning presentation was a talk on *The Ethics of Self-Care* given by a colleague. I learned much about the current state of ethics and self-care in the therapy world. While much of her talk about self-care was in the form of critique, her unpacking of the various codes of ethics among the therapy professions later inspired me to apply for Ethics Continuing Education Units for the *Stealing Minutes* workshops. What was most striking for me about her presentation was how she showed the lack of clear language around self-care in the codes of ethics. It was clear from some of the codes that self-care is an ethical mandate that we are expected to engage in but rarely was a definition offered. Some codes laid out particular rules around mandatory peer supervision and attached it to licensure requirements. *Is that self-care? Is that even ethics?* I wondered.

Listening to my colleague examine the codes of ethics one by one, I realized on my second run through her 3-hour presentation that my path lay in working on reconstructing our relationships with self-care from the ground up instead of focusing on policy and naming. Because I lack tolerance for policy and politics and watching good ideas turned backwards in the process of becoming rules or codes, I gravitated to where I was the most comfortable: the grassroots and conversational levels where I could play with the fresh and emergent properties within the relational process of groups.

Following my ethical standards as described in the previous sections, I assumed that developing and sharing new practices of self-care would be of the highest of ethical approaches that I could take so I set about trying to get approved to issue Ethics Continuing Education Units to the participants of my next *Stealing Minutes* workshops. To my surprise, after opening up the language used in our previous trainings and including language that challenged the current codes of ethics on how they deal with self-care, I was approved by the New Hampshire Division of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy to issue Continuing Education Units for my next three 8-week workshops. These three workshops became the basis for my research project. This gave me the boost of confidence I needed to begin to talk about self-care as an ethical issue, as well as a personal and professional issue.

Can you take a bubble bath with a glass of wine at your workplace?

Although I intentionally chose to work in a private practice setting for the freedom and flexibility it affords, even there I am unable to take a hot bubble bath and have a glass of wine in between sessions. I also cannot do many of the other often recommended self-care practices at work such as have sex, go for a jog, or cook a fancy meal. Yet fully 24 of the 27 recommended self-care practices collected in a recent poll were located in the landscape of personal life (Cox & Steiner, 2013). Being out in nature, shopping, and gardening are great ideas and I encourage them wholeheartedly. My concern is that not only are they unavailable during work hours, but many of my colleagues complain that by the time they get home they are too tired to engage in these well-intentioned recommendations.

Let us unpack the only three self-care recommendations for the workplace that made it on the list: getting help from coworkers, bringing your true feelings to supervision, and taking lunch breaks consistently (Cox & Steiner, 2013). How often are co-workers in agency settings available, and possessing the energy and goodwill to be helpful? Sometimes yes. Often no. What if stress in the workplace is chronic? Can you rely on your co-workers to meet your self-care needs? What if you are on the licensure path, as so many of us are, and you feel the need, for personal reasons or due to the culture you work in, to not share your true feelings with your supervisor? From what I have heard, it is a rare situation where a supervisee, even with a close and positive connection, feels able to share his/her true feelings with a supervisor. Next up is taking lunch breaks consistently. I think this is a great idea but is that the best we can do? And why do they have to be *taken*? What does the language of taking tell us about work environments? Of the three, only this last one could be seen as a consistent practice that could be incorporated into our daily lives.

Exploring this conundrum inspired me to wonder, *what if we had a whole series of practices available to us? What if these practices could be done in short amounts of time to help address the perception that time management and self-care are interlocked* (Cox & Steiner, 2013) *and often mutually exclusive*? These are the questions that I developed from bumping up against the problem and used to help me carry my inquiry forward.

When I look at the two territories where I often hear self-care talked about—personal and professional lives—I wonder if maybe there is a false dichotomy here. If we carry our stories of who we are and how the world is (White & Epston, 1990) back and forth between the two landscapes, and if we are multi-beings who transform in response to the people and environments we interact with (Gergen, 2009b), then perhaps compartmentalizing our lives into two potentially polarized identities does not seem like such a good idea. Thinking about this suggested to me that we could benefit by extending the concept of self-care to the levels of our stories and our social constructions of self, as well as our stories and constructions of self-care.

This is why I lean so heavily on narrative and social constructionist thought in my attempt to create a new approach to self-care. In fact, self-care as a concept did not exist until the late 1970s when it was “discovered” by academics (Cox & Steiner, 2013). Given almost 4 decades of consistent use, I decided to embrace the term and work towards shifting the concepts within it instead of constructing a new name in reaction to it. The tension between professional language and policy on self-care versus the apparent deficit of helpful, collaborative, and flexible approaches is the environment I stepped into while carrying the local knowledge I outlined earlier in this chapter. In this context, initiating a new approach to self-care seems almost fateful.

That which you are seeking is causing you to seek.

The journey to realizing the need for a new relationship to self-care has been a deeply personal one. As my free time began to shrink through graduate school and later while working as a therapist, I started to play with shortening many of the practices I had known for so long in their more complex and time-consuming formats. Doing this reminded me that I did it back when Shannon was sick and I often had limited, and unpredictable, time slots in which to practice. Being a stakeholder on this journey towards reconstructing our relationships with self-care means I am seeking that which I hope to co-discover (Huber, 1991) and share with others. My personal investment in the process contributed to many heartwarming experiences with my colleagues. The brief stories that follow are included to provide an additional perspective into how deeply moving the workshop experiences were for both myself and the participants.

Vignettes of a New Approach to Self-Care

There in your pocket when you need it the most.

“The story about the gratitude, that’s a pretty powerful one too,” she said as I leaned forward and found a clear space on the pad to take more notes. “And that was directly from the self-care group,” she continued. She now had my undivided attention. “The story goes back to December,” she told me. “So it was the first round of the self-care group, and I was going in to sign the divorce papers, and I really didn’t think I was going to make it.”

What do you mean? I asked.

She took a deep breath and continued a little more deliberately, “Driving there, I really did not think I was going to be able to not be crying through the whole process. I just was not

able to stop crying the whole way in and just didn't think I was going to be able to calm down at all and I was really just grasping for, 'okay, what can I do because I can't go in like this!' because it wasn't like, 'oh, just a little teary.' I was completely out of control. So the gratitude, and focusing on the kids really helped calm me down in a way I don't think I've ever had to reach for exactly before."

Wow, was all I could say in that moment. Her story, and the possibility that the self-care approaches I was sharing with the group could have this kind of positive impact in people's lives was deeply touching for me, and beyond my wildest imaginings of how far this project could go. She continued, "I think that will stay with me because I think that was the most powerful experience of really refocusing my feelings as much as I could at that moment to what I could feel the most completely, purely positive about, and of course, it was related to what was so upsetting, so that's what made it so powerful."

"And again, that was a practice that really did not work for me previously, emotionally. I thought it was a great idea, but when I was having a hard time that did not work for me at all really. I have a very easy time feeling filled with gratitude about any spectrum of things when I'm in a good place." We had a good laugh and then she shared a thought that inspired me to continue this project for many months longer than I had anticipated. She paused, and thoughtfully added, "I had not before that, I think, had a really strong experience of how it can get you out of a really, really hard place, or at least pull you together a little."

These are the kind of magical moments that emerged over my year-long project to create a new approach to self-care. I drew heavily on my life experience in Eastern philosophy, Qigong, and meditation while using language influenced by social constructionist, narrative, and collaborative perspectives. In the following chapters I explain the process of how I got there and what I found, but first, another story.

LP, a participant in one my trainings, emailed me a week after the workshop asking if I would consult with her about encouraging positive and self-care focused culture shifts in her workplace. Over lunch, she shared a very touching story with me that reminded me of the one I shared earlier. As she talked about her long and contentious divorce process, I could see her becoming more animated, and her face looked flushed at times. This seemed to be a very tough topic for her. She talked about the Loving-Kindness Meditation that we did in the workshop and how she had struggled with the part where we send loving thoughts to someone with whom we are having difficulty. It was through our lunch conversation that I finally figured out why her colleagues were all looking at her after we finished the exercise that day.

"It was the day of the court session and I was sitting in my car in the parking lot. I couldn't go in. I needed something to help me get through this and I tried the Loving-Kindness Meditation and it led to a real breakthrough experience for me," she said. "I discovered this time that I could have positive feelings for him and see him in a softer light that allowed me to go inside and make it through the process. I was even able to make eye contact with him across the room, and I could even smile."

This cannot be happening, I thought to myself at first. It seemed too good to be true that practices I had learned in the context of multi-week trainings and monastic retreats were having a positive impact in people's lives after the first or second time trying them. This helped me alleviate some of my self-induced guilt about filtering these practices out of their original contexts without much of the philosophy, complexity, and dogma that went with them. Often, and only half-jokingly, I would tell the participants that I was now a heretic in every tradition with which I had been involved. In the beginning, I was worried that I might be throwing the baby out with the bathwater by adapting and simplifying these practices. *So far, so good*, I thought to myself.

Almost every week I would tell the participants, *These practices can be carried with you wherever you go*, and I would say things like, *They are in your pocket when you need them the most*. On some level, I thought I was tilting at windmills by encouraging people to carry these practices into other areas of their lives when I was not sure they would even be effective in the workplace. A week later, I was wrapping up another self-care group when VM stopped at the door and said, "This stuff has changed my life, Lafe (my nickname). On many levels."

These three moments are linked across time for me because they represent the path through which I realized that this was a project I wanted to continue. I found the emerging benefits to my colleagues too compelling to resist. My near term goals of helping my colleagues now looked promising; the more ambitious ideals I was holding about influencing social change and reshaping the approach to self-care in the mental health profession were also coming into the light, and looking more hopeful.

Earning your soft belt in self-care—the playfulness comes back to me.

After the first 8-week pilot group on self-care with my colleagues, I gave everyone terrycloth belts as tokens of my appreciation and to bring in a little more of the Eastern traditions that inspired the practices. They were a big hit and I still see them many months later hanging in offices throughout our group practice. This spirit of playfulness is one of the building blocks I incorporated into this project. The following is just one of many stories about how that playful approach came back to me during the workshops and interviews.

My colleague, PK, has a Yoda doll that he keeps on the top of his filing cabinet; I am of the generation that grew up with Star Wars and it had long been an object of my admiration. My father took us to see the first movie when I was a 7-year-old and, since then, I have considered Yoda as one of my spiritual teachers. I often quote him in my workshops. So it was quite an honor to walk into PK's office and see his self-care belt wrapped about his Yoda doll and draping down in front of his file drawers full of hand-written narrative session notes. During our interview, PK shared with me that one of his clients, a young boy who practiced martial arts, asked him about the belt hanging on the Yoda doll. PK told him, "Oh that? It's my soft belt in self-care. I was just awarded it last month by my teacher when I graduated from the first level. Do you have a soft belt too?" He related to me how this conversation opened up a connection between the two of them, as well giving a more meaningful and more youthful identification

with self-care to the point that the boy began inquiring about specific practices and how they are done. He asked how he could earn his soft belt and PK said the odds are good because one of the things he loves about the trainings is, “You can’t fail self-care class!”

I dug up a diamond.

*“I dug up a diamond, rare a fine.
I dug up a diamond, in a deep, dark mine.”*
~ Mark Knopfler (Knopfler & Harris, 2006)

These stories are the appetizers for the main course that unfolds in the coming chapters. I have been consistently surprised, inspired, and nurtured by this journey and am hoping you will be as well. As the stories about experiences with the practices continued to flow in, I realized I had stumbled onto a more universal and helpful approach than I had anticipated. Stories began streaming in from participants about their experiences with this new approach, how it was impacting them in their workplace, personal lives, and even as therapeutic applications with their clients.

I have felt blessed to be able to dig up this diamond in my quest to find new ways to approach self-care for mental health professionals. While I feel lucky that it became clear it was a diamond early in the process, it took many more months of experimentation and exploration to dust off the remaining facets, like finding a dirty old disco ball and beginning to clean it off (Bohm & Nichol, 1996). In the following pages I explore how this story, in the wild and trickster ways that stories do (Frank, 2010), gains a life of its own, not only in my presence, but in the spaces and interactions between myself and others. These practices have also wandered to corners of the world, and territories of life, where I have never been. I am thankful for the stories of those who took them there and brought back their experiences to share with me.

Chapter Two: Using Daily Practice to Create a New Approach to Self-Care

*First
The fish needs to say,
“something ain’t right about this
Camel ride -
And I’m
Feeling so damn
Thirsty.”*
~ Hafiz (Hāfīz & Ladinsky, 1999)

Introduction

So damn thirsty—the emergence of a burning question.

Through the graduate school and work experiences I described in Chapter One, I eventually began to ask myself questions about the role of self-care in the field of applied psychology. Over the first two semesters, I began to wonder why so many young and healthy-looking students were talking about how much stress they were experiencing. This also seemed to be consistent across the age ranges of my cohort, which raised questions for me about what we were all carrying into the program with us. It was from these questions that I gravitated towards social constructionism and narrative therapy for answers.

In the following sections I explore some orienting assumptions from social constructionism and narrative therapy that resonated with me as I looked for new ways to approach the issue of self-care in my field. As I became more aware of the value of my background in Eastern philosophy, meditation, and Qigong, I began to contemplate the possibility of distilling an approach that could be more easily taken up for use by my colleagues. I began to explore processes of meaning-making to develop adaptations of complex practices with long learning curves. This exploration inspired me to search for ways to use the language of mental health to share a set of practices and ideas that would have been hard to get across in the language and context in which I first learned them.

The question that I used to carry this first of three studies forward is, *“Can I come up with a collection of self-care practices for mental health professionals that draws from my lifelong study of Qigong and meditation and filter it through social constructionist and narrative perspectives while prioritizing preventive approaches that can be useful in small moments throughout the day?”* In the following sections I describe the 8-month journey from asking the question to facilitating my first self-care workshop for mental health professionals. This will set the stage for a case study in Chapter Three of the following 10-month journey of facilitating additional workshops to build a richer understanding of the potential.

Self-care for mental health professionals revisited.

The concept and practice of turning our attention back to ourselves in our role as therapists to examine our experiences in therapy sessions played a major role in linking my interest in what I was bringing to the field with my concern about high levels of stress and burnout. The first time I heard narrative therapist, Pamela Smith, talk about “reversing the gaze” (personal communication, November 2012), it resonated with me. In our narrative discussion group, we have a long history of playing with word-smithing (Strong, 2006) and phrase-smithing (K. Potter, personal communication, August 2012). As soon as I heard about reversing the gaze, I took it up for use in my practice and began to look at how I approached therapy, life in general, and work relationships. Eventually, I began collecting observations about how much genuine curiosity I had about my clients, how less judgmental I was of the people I was helping than some of my colleagues seemed, and how the way I used language might have been helping me to be more resilient and positive.

Language practices as a foundation for a new approach.

Out of this appreciation for the power of how language was used to construct new ways of being together (Gergen, 2009b), I eventually decided it was through language practices that I would be able to bridge the world of meditation and Qigong with the world of mental health. Each world had its own language as well as its own dogma and doctrine, and I discovered that although I was carrying a more subjunctive approach from the world of Eastern philosophy, it was not necessarily the most common language used in that territory.

Months of reflection helped me realize that in both worlds there was subjunctive language as well as dogmatic and polarizing language. Being drawn to the subjunctive and more tolerant approaches in both worlds, I felt more comfortable with language that opens up space, honors local knowledge over professional knowledge (White & Denborough, 2011), invites the presence of our inherent complexity (Gergen, 2009b), and welcomes uncertainty as a generative tool. With this awareness of a possible common language between the two worlds, I set about using language, and especially subjunctive phrasing, to build a bridge for us to journey back and forth. I include examples of this language transforming process in each of the upcoming sections about the practices.

Situating Myself in Relation to the Issue**Introduction—what I was thinking and why.**

With little relevant literature available about starting experience-based self-care training for mental health professionals using social constructionist and narrative principles, I turned back to the literature of social constructionism and narrative for inspiration. Following the scholar/practitioner approach, I also turned to personal experience as an additional guide going forward. This informed my decision to try to bring as many of the practices I already knew into my current environment by applying social constructionist and narrative principles to help me

separate the practices from the sometimes complex and inflexible traditions in which they were situated. I knew I wanted to try to help my colleagues increase their resilience and I knew there was something about my approach to life that helped me be more resilient. In the following sections I describe the process of how I drew from these areas to build a structure I could move forward with, as well as how this approach opened up opportunities to feed input back into the creative process.

Revisiting the problem of self-care for mental health professionals.

As I described in Chapter One, exploring the current approaches to self-care left me searching for a concept, and eventually a set of practices, that would be more effective across the workday than the current compartmentalized approach. It was through working with other therapists in my position at Warren Street Family Counseling that I began to recognize the value of bringing my experiences out in the open to share with my colleagues. After the fourth or fifth person mentioned that maybe these practices and concepts could be helpful for many of us, I set about searching for a way to share my intra-day approach to self-care. Throughout the process, from the emergence of my first question to the creation of the workshop, most of my ideas could be clearly traced to a conversation. From the beginning, this project has been a relational process and my awareness of that helped me choose social constructionism as my primary organizing influence in stepping between two worlds to begin to explore how to translate across them.

Going there and back again—from student to intern to therapist to student.

As a student, intern, and therapist, I discovered that self-care, and the lack of self-care, were common threads across many environments of work and learning. I often heard self-care talked about in these settings yet was surprised that no experiential components were taught, and no resources were provided. The dominant narrative on self-care seemed to have come from a detached origin that reminded me more of the received view of science (McNamee & Hosking, 2012) than a community of helping professionals using their skills and awareness to support each other. I learned through interviews that many of my older colleagues remember an era where this culture of helping and a sense of community that I had expected when I came into this field used to be more widespread. As I discovered evidence of a work-culture I had envisioned before I came into the field, I made an effort to learn as much as I could about what my older colleagues loved most about those times. This turned out to be one of the themes that I extrapolated from my field notes which I cover more in the latter part of Chapter Three.

Seeing the need for intra-day approaches to self-care.

Current approaches to self-care in the workplace are few and often limiting. Most of the self-care approaches offered are situated within the domain of the therapist's personal life. As I shared in Chapter One, in one case, only 3 of 27 self-care tips offered were related to the workplace and none of them were practices that could be used in small moments throughout the day (Cox & Steiner, 2013). Most of the self-care recommendations I heard about in school were

also situated in the context of our personal lives. These included taking a hot bath, getting a massage, going for a walk, or taking a vacation. When recommendations for self-care on the job were mentioned, I noticed they often revolved around supervision, managing caseloads effectively, and taking time off (Cox & Steiner, 2013). What seemed to be missing were tools we could use throughout the day, and a language that could help them be taken up for meaning-making and integration into our daily lives.

Social constructionism—orienting assumptions.

Having described in Chapter One why I chose social constructionism as an organizing principle that guides the three studies of this project, in this section I cover specific orienting assumptions that have been important in helping me move forward. Following the assumption that we construct our worlds together (Gergen, 2009a), I decided to choose five assumptions from Kenneth Gergen's book, *Invitation to Social Construction*, to use as an orienting and philosophical guide in my project to create a new approach to self-care.

1. *The way in which we understand the world is not required by "what there is."*

This assumption resonated deeply with me because it represents a view of modern academia awakening to existing concepts from the world's spiritual traditions. The narrative psychiatrist, Lewis Mehl-Madrona, talks about this as Western academia catching up to the Lakota (Mehl-Madrona, 2011). I connect it to my lifelong immersion in Taoist philosophy and the many teachings I received that encouraged students to question the received view of the material world in favor of a more open and malleable awareness of what we know in each moment. This flexibility has been a buffer for me against the winds of dominant discourses that blow through all of our lives. It often inspired me to question the assumptions and "Truths" passed on to us in graduate school. These "Truths" of modernist therapy models and medical approaches to psychology were unpalatable to many other students beside myself.

The difference I noticed is that by questioning the way the originators of these ideas understand the world, I felt more free in my ability to choose what I would take up for making meaning while casting the rest gently aside versus reacting against it in ways that seemed to take up much of my classmates' time and energy. Thinking about this experience influenced me to include language about each practice that encourages workshop participants to take it for what it is to them in the moment, to feel free to change and adapt it to make it more comfortable for them, and to explore the practice separately from the tradition from which I took it. For example, while practicing the Loving-Kindness Meditation in brief moments between meetings, I was able to create a much shorter version that still had a profound impact on my day. For over 20 years before that I had been practicing this meditation exactly as it was taught to me. My adherence to tradition contributed to me often choosing not to do a practice unless I had what I thought was enough time to complete the process as it was originally taught.

2. The way in which we describe and explain the world are the outcomes of relationship.

Approaching this assumption from both directions, I realized first that much of the stress and burnout in my field was partially an outcome from relationships. I also figured that it was through relationships that we could reinvigorate ourselves and hopefully shift the culture of our workplace to be more healing and collaborative with a more palpable sense of community. My first step in that direction was to focus more closely on how I would approach the use of language in describing and teaching the practices I was developing. This concept of focusing on how we describe and explain the world linked up with my practice of narrative therapy. Throughout the process, I found that social constructionist assumptions and narrative assumptions often overlapped, just with different terms. I explore this more in the coming section on narrative.

3. Constructions gain their significance from their social utility.

Having accepted that the current approach to self-care was a construction and the high levels of burnout I was seeing were also outcomes of constructions, I decided it was through providing utility to my colleagues that I could increase our chances of relationally constructing an approach to self-care that would have staying power. While I recognized we were going to be co-constructing these approaches and our understandings of them, it was by keeping an eye on utility that I was able to, in solitude, shape a collection of practices that could be effective, simple to learn, and useful in the times when we needed them the most. This principle is especially evident in the later stages of this project as certain practices were taken up eagerly by the participants and others were rejected. Although I kept an eye on social utility while creating the first version of the practices in solitude, it was through relational engagement that their social utility was better unveiled.

4. As we describe and explain, so do we fashion our future.

Adopting this assumption encouraged me to increase my commitment to a collaborative approach to the workshop—and specifically to incorporating witnessing practices (White & Epston, 1990) into each session to give the participants a chance to describe their unique experiences. It was only together, I believed, that we could create the future of self-care through witnessing each other's experiences while having our experiences acknowledged and validated. This emphasis on groups and witnessing practices played a vital role in the emergence of possibilities I had not anticipated when I launched the first pilot group.

5. Reflection on our taken-for-granted worlds is vital to our future well-being.

Out of this assumption I generated a number of dialogic approaches to self-care that I talk about more in the next chapter. The relevance I saw in this concept for the creation of the workshop was the inspiration I drew to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about our world through experiential approaches with the hope that people would eventually begin to reflect on

the issues themselves. The quiet application of this assumption underneath the veneer of teaching specific practices has been more useful than I anticipated. By including time for reflection through inviting participants to share their experiences after each practice, we created a culture of reflection that grew stronger across the series of workshops. Regular reflection together on our experiences with the practices eventually evolved into discussions about cultural influences which interfere with our ability to take better care of ourselves.

The narrative lens—inspirations and guideposts.

Similar to social constructionism, narrative perspectives permeate most of what I do and how I think. In this section I describe five narrative assumptions that I incorporated into the creation of my first self-care workshop.

1. *Meaning-making is influenced by available narrative resources* (Frank, 2010).

Drawing from the field of narrative therapy and from the writing of Arthur Frank, I used the idea of how we construct meaning in our lives as a guidepost for developing an approach that creates space for meaning-making by including room for dialogue about personal experience. I achieved this partly by leaving out much of the philosophical and didactic content I learned with these practices. By recognizing that we build our stories from available narrative resources (Frank, 2010) I have been hesitant to introduce ideas and concepts that could interfere with the experience of the practices themselves. I did this in order to let more of each person's unique experience with the practices emerge. My hope was that new narrative resources would then be generated within the group and made available for meaning-making alongside the existing narrative menu we carry in with us from the culture at large. An example of this is my removal of the technical aspects of traditional Chinese Medicine from the Finger Holds exercise so participants can directly experience it without me providing story elements that may pre-suppose them to particular outcomes. An opposite example of this principle in action would be when I told positive stories about the impacts of a practice before teaching it in order to provide a range of more helpful and encouraging narrative resources for participants. I did this more often in the shorter single-day workshops than in the 8-week workshops.

2. *Modern power is thinly held.*

The phrase above is Michael White's description of why he was so excited when he read the works of Michel Foucault (K. Potter, personal communication, April, 2013). The idea that modern power is partly a façade that is thinly held (Foucault & Rabinow, 1984) has always fascinated me, but until speaking with Ken Potter, I had never found a phrase to capture what I was experiencing. Holding the idea that modern power, including managed care, insurance companies, capitalist business models within the helping professions, and the medicalized approach to psychology for example, are thinly held, gave me exactly the hope and confidence I needed to tackle such an ambitious project as reconstructing our relationships with self-care. I

saw these themes of modern power again in the group conversations over the course of the second phase of this project. I speak more in-depth about them in Chapters Three and Four.

3. Honoring local knowledge over dominant discourses.

As a child, I found it especially uncomfortable when an adult denied the magical worlds I was imagining and tried to displace them, with the best of intentions, with a dominant discourse they themselves had been wrapped up in by others at some point in their youth. Somehow I never let go of this understanding of the world and have been thankful to discover a line of work into which I could carry that perspective. As a therapist, I tend to keep a keen eye out for the dynamic tension between our local knowledge and the dominant narratives around us (Epston & White, 1992). Bringing this awareness into my approach to self-care has opened up space for the many philosophies and epistemologies that co-exist in the room together. This open stance helped me carry forward the idea that it could be this same narrative dissonance (Frank, 2010) that brings clients to therapy in the first place.

When reversing the gaze, it is a short leap to the idea that narrative dissonance affects therapists as well. In developing the workshops, I softened and played with my language to avoid creating additional narrative dissonance between what I shared with participants and the stories they brought with them. Since I had little foresight into what stories participants were carrying into the conversation, I usually erred on the side of caution and left out any material I felt uncomfortable introducing to everyone in the group. Intentionally opening up space for local knowledge and openly honoring it have played a significant role in building a stronger sense of community. Early in the pilot group some of the participants were already talking about how, after many years together, they were surprised and delighted at the things they were finding out about their colleagues.

4. Reinvigorating the stream of consciousness.

The idea of reinvigorating is a common theme throughout narrative therapy (Epston & White, 1992; Flaskas, McCarthy, & Sheehan, 2007; Madigan, 2011) and in my monthly conversations with our local narrative discussion group. Along with Michael White's idea of reinvigorating the consciousness, I have adopted my colleague Ken Potter's concept of reinvigorating the imagination (personal communication, September 2012) as a practical narrative approach. From Ken Potter to Bessel Van Der Kolk I have heard a number of times that trauma and other psychological challenges can be, at least partly, traced back to a lack of story: imagination shock according to Ken Potter (personal communication, December 2012) and "a paralysis of story" in Van Der Kolk's words (van der Kolk, 2014).

While I agree with these assumptions, and approach self-care in the spirit of responding to a type of trauma that has limited our imagination, I also envision our imaginations as a major source of our sense of agency and possibility. This idea comes into play in a more applied way in the next chapter as I describe how facilitating the workshops contributed to adding more practices with a focus on invigorating the imagination.

5. *Witnessing practices can solidify and validate our unique experiences.*

In keeping with the understanding that we build our stories and preferred identities from available narrative resources while holding the goal of honoring local knowledge over dominant discourses, I wove narrative witnessing practices (White & Epston, 1990) into each session. The most common way I facilitated this was to ask for the sharing of experiences and thoughts after each exercise and then de-centered myself (Epston & White, 1992) to let each participant speak to his/her unique experience. Sometimes I asked questions looking for richer descriptions (White, 2007) if I thought the person's description was a bit thin, but only if I had the sense from asking him/her, that he/she would be comfortable with those questions. These richer descriptions often became narrative resources for other participants' approaches to self-care. In one example of this, a participant was so taken by another group member's changes to one of the practices that he decided he liked her version better than the one I originally shared with the group and adopted it for his daily practice after a few minor modifications.

The advantage of working with a group versus individuals, or just giving handouts to people, is that we have a natural environment to capitalize on the opportunity for engaging in witnessing practices. While I was building this structure to invite each person to be more likely to take up these practices into daily life, I was pleasantly surprised by the other consequences that I found. These unanticipated effects included a stronger sense of community along with a noticeable and sustained culture shift in our organization.

Exploring the narratives of therapists' lives.

While I drew much of the inspiration for this project from personal experience, the project itself would not have come to being if I had not read Michael White's book, *Narratives of Therapists' Lives*. This was the beginning of my shift from being client-focused to striking a balance between focusing on those I am helping and reversing my gaze to look at the experiences of my colleagues and myself as well. The fact that White was getting so much feedback from therapists in his workshops about their despair and fatigue that he wrote a book in response to it gave me a confidence boost to take action to address what I was seeing among my fellow therapists. I wanted to find ways to offer them some of the invigoration and richness he described some therapists as experiencing (White, 1997), and that I had experienced firsthand.

Through shifting my focus to myself and other therapists, I came to realize the possibility that the monoculture of psychotherapy (White, 1997) with its limiting thin descriptions might be causing negative effects on therapists' lives as well as on our clients' lives. Without turning to look at the narratives we carry with us as therapists I may not have seen the high level of despair among my colleagues or thought to find ways to nurture more hope (Flaskas et al., 2007). While informed by narrative perspectives and techniques, I believed that the road to hope was better traveled with experiential practices that would invite people into their own narrative and relational transformations.

Weaving social constructionism and narrative together.

Given the constructionist origins of narrative therapy, I sometimes have difficulty considering the two as separate modes of thought. In this section I connect a handful of constructionist shifts towards relational realities with the underlying narrative ideas that I tried to employ within those shifts. Professor Sheila McNamee presented the following nine shifts (in italics) in a presentation on October 10, 2013 in Durham, New Hampshire.

Moving from foundations of practice to flexibility of standpoint.

In this shift I left behind any assumptions of how each practice should be taken up by others and whether the practices could survive on their own outside of the language world in which they were taught. My original, and incorrect, assumption was that many of these practices could not be sustained outside of the traditions in which they were embedded. For me this connects with the narrative concepts of opening up space and honoring local knowledge (White, 2007) as well as the constructionist assumption that our understanding of the world is not dictated solely by what is (McNamee & Hosking, 2012). By leaving out much of the philosophical assumptions of each tradition, the practices seem to have been more quickly taken up into people's lives than they would have if they came with more rules and guidelines. For example, quite a few participants spoke about practices they did not take up into their daily lives, from yoga to mindfulness meditation, because they experienced them as too complex and time-consuming for them to learn and continue to use in their daily lives.

Moving from professional expertise to a collaborative stance.

My goal in creating the workshop and materials was to help my colleagues, not to set myself up as an expert or authority figure. I made a point to separate myself, and my knowledge-base, from the practices I had adapted. I did this with the hope of making it easier for others to engage with them without feeling the need to keep coming back to me for more guidance. From a narrative perspective this was my way of carrying the de-centered position of the therapist (White, 1997) into another form of interaction to give the participants room to bring their voices into the construction of a new story of self-care. In the upcoming sections on Qigong and the Inner Smile I describe two cases where I strayed from this path and explore the negative consequences of reverting to a stance of professional expertise.

Moving from an exploration of "what is" to an attentiveness to constructing.

By assuming the current approach to self-care in my field is itself a construction and that I could help build a new one by paying attention to what it is we are co-constructing together in each meeting, I gained the confidence to engage with deconstruction and reconstruction. Only after we had a clearer picture of what it is was we were responding to with our new approach did it help us to deconstruct the previous approach to self-care. From a narrative perspective, my hope was to build an alternative story of self-care alongside the existing dominant story, which I considered a problem saturated story (White, 2007). This would give participants two stories to

compare and contrast. My hope was that working with clients to help them change their stories about self-care might help them change their self-care practices (Mehl-Madrona, 2011).

Another narrative perspective I carried into this project was the goal to help people change their preferred identities (Freedman & Combs, 1996) of self-care. For example, some participants shifted their value of self-care in such a way that they were willing to take more time during the day to do self-care practices. This also illustrated the importance of the connection between significance and social utility.

Moving from value neutrality to value consciousness.

In this shift I carried over another approach from my work as a therapist by incorporating self-disclosure into each session. As one participant later put it after successfully reaching for a self-care practice during a very difficult moment, “I think something about you helped me get there. I think because you wove your personal story into it.” In many conversations with the group I made my values clear to the participants; this usually created a positive resonance and a newfound willingness to talk about the toughest challenges in our field from a self-care perspective instead of a political one. By asking questions about how these practices could help us not only better deal with our therapeutic relationships but our professional and cultural ones, we opened up self-care to many levels of value consciousness. I chose this approach as a way to encourage community through more open communication and a vehicle to help me avoid the habit of value neutrality that pervades many of our constructs of “professionalism.”

Moving from exploration of the mind/individual to attention to interacting.

By honoring the interactions between us in each session more than the material and by openly countering such cultural ideas as “doing things right” and “learning from an expert,” we opened up opportunities to share with each other that may have been limited in a more traditional setting. For example, instead of exploring the mind we were able to share our experiences with each other and build a much richer story about these practices and where they could take us.

Often, it was people’s interactions with each other and with the practices that determined whether, and how often, they shared them with others. Participants reported that it was the practices they felt most connected to and used most often that they shared with others. This was validation for me of choosing a predominantly experiential and collaborative approach in each session. It also resonated with my earlier shift from focusing on meaning in life to experiencing being alive. This freedom from focusing on the individual and the mind later allowed us to give more attention to the interactions between the practices themselves, which sometimes helped us co-create new practices in the moment. Through these co-constructed new practices, we unlocked a synergy that I describe more in the case study in Chapter Three.

Moving from assessment of the problem to the exploration of resources and prospects.

For me, this shift most closely resonates with the narrative concept of moving from the problem-saturated story to an alternative story that honors local knowledge (White, 2007). In my

experience, problem-assessing approaches create problem-saturated stories (White, 2007). This modernist and structural approach is useful if people are seeking to “hallucinate their preferred reality into being” (Madigan, 2011 p. 56) but it rarely helps in the goal of fostering the growth of a new story of self-care and inviting participants into a new relationship with self-care.

Moving from an emphasis on self to a focus on relationships as origin.

While resonating with my social constructionist perspective, this shift also speaks to my love of systems which inspired me to carry into this project a healthy respect for the generative and emergent properties of groups. I recognized early on that doing this work outside of a group setting might significantly limit the chances for success, as well as limit the new ideas and insights needed to move forward to the future phases of the project. Relationships, and my fascination with relational dynamics, were the foundation upon which this project was conceived and built.

Moving from the singular answer to multiplicity.

This is a theme I incorporated throughout my approach to self-care and it was a common answer to many questions from participants about what time of day to practice, where to practice, and how long to do each practice. By avoiding singular answers and encouraging all participants to explore the practices, play with them, and find their own answers for that moment, I was trying to avoid the reification of these adaptations so they could continue to evolve. Avoiding the replication of the hierarchical powers structures in which I learned most of them was also part of my approach. One of my principal goals in this project was to honor all participants as multi-beings (Gergen, 2009a). I speak more in Chapters 3 and 4 about the results of my approach of using simplicity to invite renewed access to our inherent multiplicity.

Moving from the generation of insight to creating actions.

My emphasis on experiential practices in the workshop grew out of my shift from trying to generate insights to wanting to co-create actions that could spread among people more easily than concepts might. My hope was that actions would be more available to people when they were struggling emotionally. This shift was the reason I made direct experience a primary focus of the workshop. As one participant put it, “I had no idea I’d actually be doing so much in an ethics workshop. It was so nice to not sit in front of a PowerPoint presentation for a change.” Another participant told me, “This is the first ethics workshop where I spent as much time with my eyes closed as open.” The emphasis on creating actions was one of my inspirations for developing the concept of folding it in, or reflexivity-in-action (Wulff & St. George, 2014) which facilitated many transformations and breakthroughs over the coming months.

Why I chose the scholar/practitioner approach.

I first learned about the scholar/practitioner idea in my M.A. program in Marriage and Family Therapy. It was originally presented to us as the idea that therapists should read some

articles and journals regularly, and maybe write an article if so inclined. As with the current approach to self-care, I found this approach to be too thin for the way I prefer to engage with the world. It was the scholar/practitioner model that drew me to the Taos Institute. My habit of immersing myself deeply in what I am doing for work made this an attractive project for my dissertation.

Engaging with the roles of a student and a practitioner on a daily basis brought a deeper level of meaning and satisfaction to my daily practice. I owe a debt of gratitude to the scholar/practitioners of the Taos Institute for sharing a fuller and more engaged definition of this concept with the world. This was the rich description I was looking for, and it fit so well that a few like-minded colleagues were drawn to the program through watching me live out my daily practice on both levels. It was this growing awareness of my reflexive and analytical processes as I was engaging them in my daily practice that fed my affinity for choosing my daily practice as the context for my research.

Methodology—Research As Daily Practice

Exploring five processes of Research As Daily Practice.

While I followed a constructionist and narrative approach in arriving at my research question and in adapting many of the practices I learned over my lifetime into self-care approaches, and while my move to testing the materials and approach through an 8-week pilot group was inspired by action research, my chosen methodology for this phase of the project was the Research As Daily Practice approach of Sally St. George and Dan Wulff (Wulff & St. George, 2014). In this project I relied on five research processes outlined by Wulff and St. George in their chapter in *Systemic Inquiry: Innovations in Reflexive Practice Research*. These five processes are holding and valuing curiosities, developing relationships, observing-examining, making sense, and reflecting-in-action. Though I utilized each of these processes in every part of this project, some stood out more and are highlighted in some of the following sections. I describe each process briefly below and explore its role in this project.

Of the five processes, I seemed to have already been engaged in holding and valuing curiosities. My curiosity was a motivating force for me to begin contemplating taking practices out of traditions they appeared bound to and begin modifying them. This process is well-suited for practitioners and is a frame of mind I often hold. I engaged with developing relationships on multiple levels by bringing in my longstanding relationships with the practices I was adapting as well as developing new relationships with colleagues and mentors. Later, through the interviews and further studies, I developed relationships with the participants' experiences and ideas.

Another valuable asset for a practitioner is the process of observing and examining. Holding this goal in mind influenced my decision to create field and session notes to better track my responses and data during the workshops. The process of making sense of my graduate school, internship, and professional settings is the foundation from which I looked more deeply into my past for resources for this project. Engaging in this process helped me move forward,

choose which practices to keep and omit, and come up with questions and methodologies for the following two studies. Reflecting-in-Action inspired my approach of folding-it-in and helped me pull the many pieces of this puzzle together to create a foundation to move forward from the pilot group to eight more workshops over the following year.

Mining the past and exploring the present.

Although this approach has often been used from a present moment focus, I found it a useful lens to reflect on my daily practices of the last 25 years in order to better choose what worked well for me and what I thought would work well for others. Through looking back on how I engaged with these practices in the past, and which practices were most useful across different contexts and experiences, I was able to highlight practices that I thought might be better candidates for incorporating into the *Stealing Minutes* approach. For example, I found many of the practices I was able to continue using through my wife's illness to be more effective for my colleagues than practices I was more engaged with during longer retreats or less busy times of my life. This helped me in my search for new practices to adapt and bring to the group. I found the Research As Daily Practice approach helpful for looking backwards into the past, applying and studying what I am doing in the present, and imagining new ways to move forward.

The multi-beingness of daily practice.

Research As Daily Practice has recently been defined by St. George and Wulff as "Systematically examining our curiosities and information from our own clinical work in order to better understand what we *do* and what we *could* do" (Wulff & St. George, 2014). To prepare for examining what I do in my clinical work, or in this case group facilitation work, I first needed to take the methodology back a step into another facet of my life.

Having more than one area of my life involved in this research project, I decided to stretch the Research As Daily Practice approach in multiple directions. Before creating an application I could study, I needed to examine my own curiosities and information from a lifetime of studying Eastern philosophy, Qigong, and meditation to see what I have been doing, and how I could change it to make it more accessible. One of the elements that appeared to be making a difference in my lower stress levels as compared to some of my colleagues was my daily practice of Qigong and meditation. At this point, many of these practices had become second nature to me and I lacked a language to explain them. It made sense to first examine the 2 decades of daily practice that led me to this project. I describe this process in the following section on the development of the practices.

By carrying a genuine curiosity with me on a daily level during my experiences in graduate school, internships, and my work as a therapist in a group practice, I eventually came up with the idea of introducing a new approach to self-care. Without having a name for it, I was engaging in Research As Daily Practice by studying myself as well as the environments I was immersed in, while comparing the differences and looking for what could be done in the spaces between. Once I became aware that this pragmatic, engaged, and curious approach could be

applied to a research project I adopted it as my chosen methodology for the first phase of my investigations.

My engaged curiosity, personal practices, and what I was doing daily in a professional setting were all parts of my life, so it made sense to me to avoid artificial distinctions between research and practice. I struggled with finding a methodology that honored my local knowledge and the way I was living my life until St. George and Wulff introduced me to Research As Daily Practice. I had already stepped out of the traditional approaches of translating research into practice and was instead, researching through practice, and practicing through research. Making distinctions at that point, I think, would have greatly limited the outcome of the project. By avoiding excessive distinctions I was able to keep the process more responsive.

The next step in following a Research As Daily Practice approach was to run a pilot group for 8 weeks while taking session notes (a sample is located in Appendix B) during the group and writing field notes (the form is located in Appendix C) afterwards to have a more organized record of my observations as well as a structure that helped me be more systematic in examining my curiosities and insights. Often I would change the practices and the approach immediately as I received feedback from the participants. For example, when a participant reported during group check-in that she had been struggling to learn a complex yoga practice and was finding it adding stress to her life, I responded by leaving out even more of the already reduced information for the Qigong movement and encouraged the group to simply explore the movement and what it felt like for them.

Sometimes I would not be aware of making these changes until after the session and sometimes I would notice it in the moment but had little time to examine it. Being reflexive and flexible enabled me to create rapid transformations in the material and approach. The downside was the risk of losing the information in the responsive and collaborative stream of consciousness I often slipped into while facilitating the groups. Keeping session and field notes helped me track the changes over time. An added benefit was the moments of silence sprinkled throughout the sessions because I was writing down insights and quotes. While I sometimes regret choosing not to record the sessions, it was clear that a sense of intimacy and connection was forming. It was exactly for this reason that I chose to record only the interviews and not the group sessions.

Preparing for action—stumbling on a change project.

During my search for a methodology that resonated with my project I was inspired by many of the aspects of action research. Although Research As Daily Practice is closer to how I am working, reading the language of action research helped shape my inquiry and my practices. The concepts of moving from creating maps to constructing worlds and from theory to practice stood out the most for me (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Exploring these concepts helped me articulate the process I had already adopted while inspiring me to continue on this path in the face of occasional criticism by more traditional and theoretically focused people. Action research and Research As Daily Practice share a goal of creating change through engaging in practices.

From the language of action research I gravitated towards the term “change project” (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 167) and from Research As Daily Practice I adopted the concept of doing both research and practice as inquiry in order to make a difference without sacrificing the potential for innovations (Wulff & St. George, 2014).

Choosing research for social change.

The second area that informed my approach to Research As Daily Practice was the writing of Sheila McNamee and Dian Marie Hosking in *Research and Social Change*. Learning that being more relationally responsive could lead me away from the emphasis on design and methods (McNamee & Hosking, 2012), I found the confidence to follow the path that was already unfolding for me through practice and application. I did not want to abandon my hard earned skill as a reflective practitioner, nor did I want to create or adopt a method that told me about my work and participants before the process even started. My attempt to see my work as a legitimate form of research (McNamee & Hosking, 2012) inspired me to choose Research As Daily Practice as a vehicle to bring the inquiry I used as a daily practice in my clinical work into my approach to research (Wulff, & St. George, 2014).

Research as future forming.

A recent article by Ken Gergen arguing for a vision of research as future forming (Gergen, 2014) helped complete my process of enriching the description of how and why I was taking a scholar/practitioner approach. Sometimes the right word or phrase can initiate an organizing power in my mind and it was Gergen’s concept of research as future forming, as well as my use of future talk (Gergen et al., 2009) in therapeutic contexts that became a catalyst for articulating my commitment to a project that turned away from a focus on an assumed aspect of reality to an inquiry into my attempt to create a new approach to self-care. Through the concepts of St. George, Wulff, McNamee, Hosking, and Gergen, I found the inspiration to engage in a “change project” (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 67) that focused on using inquiry in the service of the “re-unification of forced separations” (McNamee & Hosking, 2012, p. 14) to “privilege the local knowledge of practitioners” (Wulff & St. George, 2014, p. 279) in the moment with the hope of “creating societal futures” (Gergen 2014).

Letting self-care breathe—opening space with socio-narratology.

Reading Arthur Frank’s gentle approach to sharing what he has observed while reminding us that he is always listening for another theme to add to the list influenced me to avoid the temptation to pick out the most obvious themes and instead, stay open to those that may arise later in the process. This approach of preserving as many of a story’s multiple possibilities as possible (Frank, 2010) encouraged me to tell less of the origin story of each practice in order to leave more space for each participant to develop a unique relationship with it. Frank reminded me that “we become deeply invested in the point of view from which we first hear a story told” (Frank, 2010, p. 106). It was with his caveat in mind that I carefully chose a

few stories for each practice to have in my pocket in case I got the urge, and the opening, to share them in the group. Being aware that the power of stories can also make them dangerous (Frank, 2010) I chose more personal and open-ended stories to share with the group.

What this brought to the fore was my existing interest in having most of the stories emerge from within the group because “our access to narrative resources depends more on our social location than on us” (Frank, 2010, p. 13). By realizing that I was operating in a crossroads of narratives in a diverse group of people, I began to limit the stories and history of the practices to focus on facilitating direct experience with them first. I avoided trying to describe each practice in a singular and concrete way in order to tread lightly through “the slipperiness of meaning at play among multiple perspectives” (Frank, 2010, p. 87).

Re-Storying self-care—counter-practices, deconstruction, and decentering.

After using narrative counter-practices in therapy, I felt that they could be applied alongside other narrative approaches that I was employing. I created many of the practices as direct responses to negative cultural impacts on our field such as lack of time, increased paperwork and administrative loads, and limitations on approved methods of working. I carried my narrative focus quietly into the groups with the wish that the processes I was hoping to see would emerge unforced.

One of my goals was to initiate the beginning of a deconstruction of the dominant discourses around self-care to foster the emergence of a new story of self-care. I realized I would need to bring in as little of the new storyline in order to re-story self-care using a collaborative approach, that is, letting it emerge from within the group. From a narrative and constructionist perspective, I felt that my story would be too thin and singular to move beyond the group and make sense to a larger community. By taking a decentered position in the group while holding my position as expert lightly, I attempted to invite deeper layers of local knowledge, direct experience, and meaning-making opportunities for the participants. I chose this as my path to a reconstruction of the concept of self-care that could have a life of its own.

From hypothesizing to possiblizing—going experience-near.

The shift from hypothesizing and theorizing to engaging in healing conversations is a key element in my current project. By stepping out of theorizing and reducing the risks of assumption, I took steps to increase possibilities. For example, I made an effort to increase my use of questions in the workshops and decrease my use of statements. My colleague, Pam Smith, calls this act of opening up space for increased opportunities “possiblizing” (personal communication, August 2013) and along with my local narrative tribe, I have adopted possiblizing as a verb. Much of the following section on the creation of the self-care practices grew out of my intention to “possiblize” the practices I was creating.

The Beer Fairies—the adventures of a fluent outsider.

In the previous section I described the convergence of ideas that constitute my approach to this study. Perhaps a story would further illuminate where I am coming from and help the reader move into a closer connection with me as we journey forward together. It begins on a hot summer day in Moscow during my first trip to Russia.

On this trip I was visiting my wife, Anna, for the first time since our separation 5 years earlier. She had been living in the U.S. for graduate school when I met her and she later moved back to her homeland after we separated. We knew each other quite well and were happy to be spending time together as friends.

We were walking along a busy sidewalk in the Moscow suburbs with her friend, Igor, just near an open air market along a busy main road with traffic rushing in both directions. Standing out up ahead in the crowd and looking very uncomfortable and awkward were two tall blonde Russians, a young man and a young woman, dressed in striking red and white outfits and carrying packs on their backs. They looked around at the people shuffling by and tried occasionally to smile at people, but as we approached I noticed they had been unsuccessful in getting anybody's attention.

Earlier in my trip, I had been so baffled by the response most Russians had to the smiles of a stranger that I began experimenting to see how many people a day I could encourage to cross the street to get away from me by smiling warmly at them. Anna later informed me that in Russia, it seems, smiling is seen as a fairly consistent indicator that someone is crazy. Having observed that few Russians smile out in public, especially at strangers, I guessed that these two young people were getting paid to be there. Knowing the difference between the two worlds I was in, one that I was walking through, and one that constituted my worldview from the inside, I recognized an opportunity to have some fun with my hosts.

Look at the beer fairies up ahead, I said to Anna and Igor while trying to sound surprised. "What?" was their combined response.

Look at those two in the red and white outfits. They're beer fairies! Go talk to them and they'll give you beer, I exclaimed with the excitement of someone who had not seen a beer fairy in a very long time, but knew quite well what they are. My encouragement met with an outright refusal at first along with questions about my sanity. Eventually Anna approached them and came back with a perplexed look on her face to report that the beer fairies said they would indeed give her beer if she deleted two text messages from her phone.

"Why do they want me to delete text messages?" she asked. She was starting to seem a little distressed by the situation, as well as seeming unnerved by my air of confidence and authority in a world where I was supposed to be the "outsider."

I don't know, I said, *but beer fairies always have a reason for everything they do. Just trust in the process, do what they tell you, and they will give you free beer.*

So she deleted two text messages and returned to the still uncomfortable and awkward looking people in their loud outfits. They thanked her for reducing her workload, opened up their

backpack coolers, which were completely full by the way, and gave Anna two bottles of Amstel Light. She walked back over to us shaking her head in disbelief and said, “only with you.”

As we walked away, I kept an eye on the beer fairies. Although many people had watched us approach them and get two free bottles of beer, nobody else approached them for the two blocks that I watched them until they faded out of sight.

Igor, who is also Russian and has traveled widely for years as a journalist in the arts, had no idea what was going on through the whole process. Anna was also well-traveled. Why did certain elements of the situation seem to leap out to me but not to my two equally intelligent and worldly companions? Anna was well-acquainted with my love of the mystical, to the point where she often joked that I watched *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings* as documentaries. In the other direction, I was well-acquainted with Russian folklore and their culture’s affinity for superstition. Anna was aware of my wacky sense of humor because it was something we shared in common, so I had to strike a delicate balance between being light and playful while sounding like I was serious, and I had to do it in a world in which Anna and Igor were the “experts.”

This all combined in an instant without effort as the scene unfolded and I recognized what I thought was happening. I was familiar with the marketing strategy that was trying to be employed in this situation, and understood many of the idiosyncrasies of Russian culture that would make such an approach very challenging on the streets of Moscow. I had been noticing and playing with those differences throughout my previous weeks of travel around Russia so I was primed, as a fluent outsider, and already playing in the intersection between the two worlds.

Anna and Igor had both been in the country for over a year at that point, and were taking me on a tour of Moscow and the culture of Russia, which placed them in a role of experts. Both have a working knowledge of Western capitalist cultures and have probably walked by people promoting products on the streets of London, Boston, and New York. Here at home, in the position of experts on Russia, perhaps they missed the awkward, and unsuccessful attempt to import ideas from another reality and fell back on a typical human response of ignoring things that do not make sense to us. To make the story even more humorous, we were on our way to the store to get a few beers to enjoy over dinner at Igor’s apartment. This humor, playfulness, and open-minded stance of the fluent outsider is what I carry into the approach I take with my self-care groups, as well as use to inform my adaptation of practices that in their original form could look to folks in the mental health world like two uncomfortable Russians standing on a street corner trying to smile at strangers.

Creating four criteria for analysis.

As I moved forward with the development of the materials and approach to a new way to engage with self-care for mental health professionals, I drew heavily on four key criteria. First, in all of the materials and in my approach to teaching, I followed a goal of looking for ways to open up space between the group and myself and also between the participants and the self-care practices. I leaned on many sources for this opening of space approach but it stems primarily from the work of Arthur Frank and Michael White. From my training as a narrative therapist, I

often look for ways that I may be opening up space within a conversation, or closing it down (K. Potter, personal communication, September 2013).

The second criterion I followed is the narrative approach of taking up practices that are counter to those which may be harmful or contributing to the problem. By situating myself in an environment where there was little self-care, and excessive burnout, I was able to look from within that context towards the culture at large in order to identify and respond to some of the cultural practices that I felt were contributing to our lack of self-care. These practices included working too many hours to make ends meet and giving too much of ourselves to others.

The third criterion is the idea of the fluent outsider that I described in the story, *The Beer Fairies*. In the story I was able to have one foot in each world and experiment with the interplay and tension between the two of them. I carried this approach forward by carefully choosing elements from my 25 years experience with Qigong and meditation while offering it to my colleagues in a language they found comfortable. Many participants noticed this and commented how much easier it was for them to bring these practices into their lives than other self-care practices they had learned. The playfulness of the fluent outsider stance helped me embrace what I joked once to the group as *becoming a heretic in every tradition I have ever studied*.

A fourth criterion for analysis and reflection that I carried forward from the context I was situated in is the habit of “going experience-near” (K. Potter, personal communication, May 2012). Staying close to a client’s experience and to his/her own description of it, is a narrative therapeutic practice that I highly value. Having a genuine curiosity for the world and for the people I share the world with, I often make a point to ask questions of participants and invite them regularly to share their experiences with the group. Complementing an experiential workshop with experience-focused dialogue felt like a natural combination to me. Growing out of the orienting assumptions and principles of social constructionism and narrative practices, these four criteria became my primary organizing influence as I developed the materials and approach that eventually became the pilot group in late fall of 2013.

Developing the Materials and Approach

Making sense and developing relationships.

Building on the life experiences I described in Chapter One, and my desire to avoid introducing uncomfortable Russians into the already complex and confusing sidewalks of self-care, I leaned heavily on the social constructionist and narrative approaches I outlined earlier in adapting the practices to be as simple, flexible, and engaging as possible. The practices outlined below represent the first round as I created them over the course of 2013, and shared them with the pilot group in November and December of that year. The original handouts describing these practices can be found in Appendices A-I. In each of the following sections on the practices I point the reader to the specific appendix location of its handout.

Although I had already begun playing with adaptations of these practices during Shannon’s illness, I had not thought about sharing them with others. Over the course of 2013,

while recovering from a skiing accident in February, and reconstructive knee surgery in May, I began experimenting with these practices again. This time, however, I had the dual awareness of needing them for myself and wanting to make a difference in my field. Recognizing that many of the resources we import into the present moment are anchored in our relational history (Gergen, 2006), I am thankful for the caregiving and medical situations that helped bring these into being and for the teachers and mentors who taught me these practices.

Restoring complexity through applied simplicity.

Having learned from personal and teaching experience that introducing even a little slowness into our lives can represent a sea change in our attitude (Honoré, 2004), I took an approach to simplicity that strived to create materials and exercises that were outwardly simple yet also left the door open to be inwardly rich (Elgin, 1993). The challenge for me was to leave out most of the internal richness that I had accumulated around these practices for over 2 decades and leave room for the participants to build their own. Recognizing the price of choosing seriousness, I continued to carry forward my lifelong playful approach to serious problems (Freeman, Epston, & Lobovits, 1997). I had collected enough evidence about the limiting effects of seriousness that I understood its role in creating a reality of the “wrong” and decided to get more engaged in the role of encouraging shifts away from more rigid thought patterns towards inviting indeterminacy (Gergen et al., 2009) back into our lives.

Coming in sideways—mindfulness as an organizing principle.

Having practiced mindfulness for over 25 years, I was pleased to discover it had found its way into the world of applied psychology in the form of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) which even included an approach to interpersonal mindfulness (Stahl & Goldstein, 2010). As I read through the materials of MBSR and other approaches, I was pleased to see how much of the language I knew from that world had come into the world of counseling and therapy. Revisiting mindfulness after having explored the concepts of social construction and narrative therapy, I was inspired by the similarities between the three modes of thought. In all three I detected hints of the interpersonal, relational, and indeterminate nature of the social environments we move through on a daily basis.

By the time I was developing the self-care practices I describe below, I had also collected a number of responses from people in conversations about how they had found the mindfulness practices taught to them to be too complex or time-consuming. Other colleagues reported that they were finding the approach to mindfulness was moving too much in the direction of evidence-based practices. They were concerned about it becoming codified into a model. When I asked a school psychologist who is a fan of mindfulness and who uses it daily in his work whether or not using mindfulness had led to any kind of a culture shift at his workplace he replied that it had yet to reach that level of integration and at the moment was more of an add-on.

Given these responses to mindfulness and the risk of introducing complexity by trying to teach it head on, I decided to incorporate it into each practice while not teaching it as a stand-

alone approach. For example, I used mindfulness-oriented language such as *awareness*, *attention*, and *where is your mind right now* without having to fall back on a didactic approach of teaching an evidence-based approach to mindfulness. With the framework of mindfulness in place, it became less intrusive to continually remind participants to come back to their bodies and use their senses (Kabat-Zinn, 2012). Mindfulness has been a valuable resource, and one that I will use more in future incarnations of the *Stealing Minutes* approach.

Interdisciplinary materials with an inter-faith approach.

Over the course of drawing from the practices I had been involved with, I came to realize that some of the traditions I was drawing from might lead participants to perceive the exercises as religious practices. This was as far from my goal of an open-source and accessible series of self-care practices as it could get so I set about taking a closer look at some of the language around these practices. What grew out of that was a clearer vision of what a simple, friendly, and non-dogmatic set of exercises would look like. Looking through this lens I recognized that words and phrases about the way the world should be, the way a practice needs to be done, and even words like “Buddhist” and “Taoist” might be uncomfortable to some people. Even phrases that never set off my emerging language filter, like “May I live with ease,” still managed to offend some people.

In Chapter Three, I explore how this inter-faith approach became clearer as I folded in the responses and struggles of the participants as the practices and the language around them bumped up against their faith. I felt lucky that the comfortable environment we had created provided room for the participants to share these struggles. The consistent playfulness and innovation invited them to change the practices into something that worked better for them. I explore these transformations in more detail in the findings section of the next chapter. Below are my descriptions of the original practices from the pilot group and how I came up with them.

Qigong—finding the move and playing with the language.

My goal for teaching Qigong as a self-care practice was to carry forward the goals of simplicity and accessibility. To facilitate this, I kept the Qigong component of the workshop to one single move. I chose just one movement to make it easy for participants to learn the basics quickly while leaving room for practicing that move from many different approaches such as body awareness, breathing, and incorporating Taoist Qigong concepts into the practice. We practiced the same movement each week, but from a different angle. Well-versed in 10 different Qigong forms, each of which consists of three to seven moves, it still took a few months of experimenting and talking with my teachers to find one that I felt could fulfill this goal. The move I settled on came from movement seven of Gods Playing in the Clouds, which I learned from Bruce Frantzis and studied further with his student Bill Ryan, who has been my primary Qigong teacher for 15 years. It is also part of the practice of Heaven and Earth Qigong and the humorously translated Marrow and Brain Washing Qigong (Yang, 1989).

Having helped Bill create a more accessible and easier to teach curriculum for Dragon and Tiger Qigong, I was already familiar with the goal of making Qigong accessible to a Western audience. Dragon and Tiger Qigong was known in our lineage as the practice that, at least in the beginning, gave the practitioner the most back for what he/she put into it (Frantzis, 2010). It was this perspective, and concerns about the declining health of Americans, that inspired Bill to spread the form to a wider audience. Our ambitious and national project, called *Moving Tiger*, was not successful. Ten years later, I carried these lessons into finding an even simpler and more accessible form for busy professionals to apply in the small “stolen moments” throughout the day. My previous engagement with the challenge of finding more accessible language for a Western audience while preserving the concepts of Qigong helped me move forward with an even more ambitious adaptation of a wider range of practices. In fact, I had been pushing for even simpler terminology and approaches in the *Moving Tiger* project and was eager to try my ideas out with a pilot group.

While a fan of the traditional approach to Qigong of taking ongoing classes, I realized that a large swath of the population who would never choose that option might still benefit from a little Qigong. The move I chose consists of raising the hands out to the side while turning the palms up and raising the arms up over the head, then bringing them back down with the hands in front of the body. This simple move had many benefits over most of the other possibilities.

First, it is symmetrical and so it stands alone without a balancing move to go with it. Second, it is simple enough that participants could learn it quickly and take it home with them after the first session. It was my hope that this simplicity would lead to early learning successes for the participants. This, in turn, could provide the confidence and curiosity to open the door for adding on many layers of understanding that could be explored in later sessions. Third, this move involves as much of the body as any other move I could find without requiring excessive leg movement or balancing which could make the practice less accessible for anyone with physical disabilities. This awareness came from working at Bill’s school, Brookline Tai Chi, and talking with instructors who had adapted many Tai Chi and Qigong forms for people with injuries and disabilities. Once again, the resources I imported into this project carry the traces of my social and relational history (Gergen, 2006).

Due to an unexpected interest in the energetic components, I included an additional Qigong practice I call the Feeling Qi Exercise. I had not planned to include this exercise and simply taught it one day in response to a few group members asking for more information about the role of energy, or Qi, in Qigong practice. I had forgotten how I came to introduce this practice until I read my field notes from March 03, 2014, and saw my answer to the question *What stood out?* I had written, *FH sharing her personal practices and requesting I go more into the energetics, and others agreeing, so I took the group right into the Feeling Qi exercise.* I had been struggling with the idea of teaching Qigong without the energetic component and was pleased at the invitation to bring it back into the group.

The Feeling Qi exercise is an effective and useful practice for beginning Qigong students because it often leads to the experience of sensations of qi movement in the hands on the first try.

This is also a useful practice for continuing to develop sensitivity in the hands and is one I have often taught, with positive results, to friends in the bodywork and massage field. This exercise incorporates the breath which helped it fit with my goal of gathering together a collection of practices that interacted with and improved each other. The Feeling Qi exercise consists of holding the hands a few inches apart in front of the belly with the palms facing each other. As you breathe in, slowly move the hands a little bit apart. As you breathe back out, slowly move the hands closer together again. This is another simple movement that is easy to remember yet can become the foundation for many layers of understanding and awareness to be added to it over time.

Of my four criteria for analysis, I felt what Qigong needed most was the opening of space in the approach to the practice itself as well as in the dialogue about it. My decision to choose one movement grew out of my goal to create a more inviting practice and provide early success to participants while leaving room for incorporating other Qigong principles during our future practices of the movement. I kept the movement mechanics simple to assist the participants in staying close to their experience without the frustration and intellectual engagement of learning a complex series of movements. I failed in my initial attempt to open space in the practice because I provided all of the Qigong concepts up front and gave too many instructions on stance, posture, and how to do the movement in the beginning. I recognized in hindsight that I had slipped into an expert stance and was teaching Qigong as *what is* and *this is how it should be done*. The lack of initial positive response, and my disappointment with it, helped me stay focused in the future and eventually contributed to a significant increase in the popularity of Qigong. In this case I realized it was not the practice that was creating barriers to self-care, it was my approach. Stepping off the path of the four criteria has been a consistent source of learning for me. The handout *Qigong Principles* is located in Appendix D. An additional handout I provided on the research and benefits of Qigong and meditation can be found in Appendix E.

The 70% Principle and The Down Creates the Up.

Along with the many other handouts I created for the pilot workshop, I developed a collection of Taoist Qigong Principles that I had gathered over the years. The 70% Principle is the Taoist approach to doing our practices and work to 70% of our capacity in order to safely and consistently move forward without exhausting or harming ourselves. This idea is quite a departure from the contemporary discourse of “putting in 110%.” It seems fitting that one of the dominant discourses for effort in our culture is debt-based. From the Taoist perspective, this behavior is counter-evolutionary and unnatural.

“The Down Creates the Up” was our favorite saying at Brookline Tai Chi. It was intended as a counter-practice to our cultural focus on upwards and outwards. This Taoist principle took on new meaning when applied in a culture that was active, visual, and cerebral. Over the years, many students at the school talked about how refreshing, and even liberating, these ideas were. Although I brought one or two principles into the Qigong practice each week and talked about them while we were doing the move, it was my hope that participants would

read the principles, experiment with them on their own, and come to the next session with questions that would lead to a group dialogue about engaging with that principle within and outside the practice of Qigong. I describe the outcome of that later in this chapter. The full list of Qigong Principles can be found in Appendix D.

Of all the Qigong principles I describe in the handout, these were the two I felt had the most inviting and open context. Some of the principles could be experienced as closing down for some people. For example, one person had difficulty understanding the concept of “eyes neutral” and became frustrated with it while another participant struggled with the more abstract concept of “strength in yielding” and felt delayed in accessing the benefits of Qigong until he was able to understand how the concept was applied to the move. Without these abstract concepts in the beginning, I feel that the Qigong movement could have been more helpful. I introduced Qigong as a counter-practice to the frenetic pace of our culture by emphasizing smooth and fluid movement and linking it with the breath. My introduction of too much information and instruction interfered with keeping the practice experience-near. By refocusing on being a fluent outsider and taking a more reflexive stance, I was able to revise the materials and approach to better fit the goals of this project by removing more of the didactic elements. These concepts are included in the handout *Qigong Principles* in Appendix D.

Loving-Kindness Meditation—going local.

My first invitation to Loving-Kindness Meditation, or Metta, was during a retreat at the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies in Barre, Massachusetts, over 20 years ago. I have been practicing it ever since. Over the years I adapted the practice to fit moments when I did not have an hour to sit through the entire traditional approach that took the meditator on a journey through feeling loving-kindness for the self, then a friend or acquaintance, followed by an enemy, and then out to the town, state, country, world, and to all beings (Stahl & Goldstein, 2010). While a wonderful and often transformative journey, this was not a short or simple practice. Nor was it usually something I could reach for on the run if I was struggling. This fell under what I call the “butt on the cushion” category. If you wanted to “do it right,” you needed to set aside some time and space for the practice. While I am an ardent supporter of setting time and space aside for meditation, I realized over the years how rarely that approach has worked for myself and fellow students. The often touted false dichotomy that dictates we either make the time commitment or we do not meditate has left a bad taste in my mouth ever since.

My next challenge with Loving-Kindness Meditation was its somewhat rigid 2,000-year-old structure. In leaning towards narrative and social constructionism, I decided to incorporate the concept of multiple interpretations (McNamee & Gergen, 1992). Since Loving-Kindness Meditation had not been interpreted differently for a long time, I thought maybe it was worth a try. For example, my first adaptation was to remove the word “enemy” from the language and replace it with *someone you may be having a difficult time with or recently had a challenging interaction with*. I had never been comfortable with this aspect of the original practice and I included this new language to open space for the participants to choose from a wider range of

people. I created the new phrasing to stand as a counter-practice to a conflict-based metaphor (St. George & Wulff, 2012) like “enemy,” to introduce more relationally-focused language, and to invite a more experience-near engagement with the person being visualized.

Throughout the years I practiced Loving-Kindness Meditation, I found it to feel like a relational practice; I was hoping that others would experience the relational quality of this practice that invites us to work mentally with people we cannot be with in person. Recently, Loving-Kindness Meditation has joined the ranks of mindfulness, Tai Chi, and Qigong as an evidence-based practice. Barbara Frederickson (2014) has carried out a number of promising studies that show the value of this practice in enhancing social connections, encouraging more genuinely positive social sentiments, and reconditioning habitual responses towards others.

Of my four criteria for modifying the practices, I relied heavily on imagining Loving-Kindness Meditation as a counter-practice to a culture that I feel often lacks empathy and relational awareness. I recognized the frenetic pace of modern life and assumed the practice may spread more readily if I made it more accessible. Although it may sound counter-intuitive in light of contemporary culture, I chose to return our focus to the self at the end of the exercise as a counter-practice for mental health professionals who often think more about the people they are helping than themselves. I realize this might not be a beneficial adaptation for all demographics.

By using shorter phrases and inviting participants to change them at any time, I feel that I have opened up space in a practice that has been carried forward for centuries without being questioned or examined. As a longtime practitioner of Loving-Kindness Meditation, I was able to comfortably sit in between the Buddhist tradition and the mental health field as a fluent outsider who understood enough about each tradition to develop a bridge of practice between them. I adapted the practice to have more subjunctive language and chose a collaborative approach to sharing it with my colleagues. In this way, I intentionally shifted the structure of both the original practice and the way information is often shared in the mental health profession. The handout *Loving-Kindness Meditation* is located in Appendix F.

The Jin Shin Jyutsu Finger Holds.

The Finger Holds are a practice prescribed to me by my friend and teacher, Betty Jean Wall. A marine biologist, Roling body-worker, and practitioner of the healing art of Jin Shin Jyutsu, she is an advocate of the concept that we have the power to heal ourselves (Wall, 2009). Betty was the first scholar/practitioner to cross my path and I observed the way she could live in both worlds without compartmentalizing either; that was another inspiration for me to go back to graduate school after Shannon’s death. The Taoist idea that you could be invited to practice in the court of the emperor but choose to continue sitting by the river where the learning, richness, and freedom were greater (Laozi & Mitchell, 2006) had been with me since my late teen-aged years. Experiencing someone who lived that life was even more motivating for me than just holding the concept. I envisioned the Finger Holds as sitting by the river, and the diagnostic and technical information that accompanied it as serving in the court of the emperor. From this

perspective I began to separate the elements into a simple practice and a handout with the information.

To perform the finger holds exercise, you take one hand and gently wrap it around the thumb of the other hand. Then progress through the fingers and on to the opposite hand. This can be done with a timed structure, or a more open structure of waiting to feel a pulse or rhythm in the finger being held before moving on (Wall, 2009). Traditionally, the Finger Holds are done for 3 minutes per finger. For the self-care workshop, I changed the timing to 1 minute per finger and joined the participants in the practice using an app on my phone that let me build custom timers with gongs at adjustable intervals. This was the only practice I introduced to the group that had no spoken guidance during the process. My thinking behind this decision was that it would be a gentler way to introduce silent practice without giving big explanations or leaving participants feeling confused—and with nothing to do during the time we were being silent. I added the somatic component of holding the fingers because I felt it would be a good first step into the silent space.

My primary concern about the Finger Holds practice was that it would be laughed at and dismissed. The practice of the Finger Holds is so simple that I almost left it out of the first workshop while paring down the options. As I describe in the coming chapters, this would have been a big mistake. I was nervous about sharing these practices because they had long been a part of my life and identity. Peeling away the vestiges of authority and expertise exacerbated my worries about how the workshop, and my identity as a professional, would be perceived by others. Aside from intentionally removing all instruction about the corresponding energy channels along with the associated organs and emotions that are linked to each finger in the Jin Shin Jyutsu tradition, I did very little to modify this practice from the way it was taught to me. I experimented with reducing the time spent on each finger to see the impact and decided it still seemed helpful in shorter durations. The practice was already accessible and helpful. While I avoided teaching about the complex diagnostic tradition behind the practice, I did include that information in my handout. Few participants engaged with that information and only once did someone ask about it in a workshop. The practice seemed beneficial regardless of whether one understood the underlying philosophy and theory. I recognized the Finger Holds as a counter-practice to our fast-paced, outward-focused culture and brought it into the *Stealing Minutes* materials mostly because of the somatic component of encouraging people to hold their fingers. The handout *The Jin Shin Jyutsu Finger Holds* is located in Appendix G.

Exploring the landscapes of gratitude.

Having explored various approaches to gratitude within spiritual traditions over the years, I have been an eager follower of recent research on gratitude, especially the work of Martin Seligman in promoting the addition of specificity by using gratitude journals and connecting the practice to positive shifts in people's worldview (Seligman, 2011). My initial attempt to incorporate gratitude into the self-care workshop was to create a handout that gathered together a number of approaches to gratitude and explain them in the simplest terms I could. I had just

finished reading two books that covered gratitude and I was in a more intellectual than engaged space with it. I shared the handout with the group and read some of the options out loud to them. This backsliding from experiential approaches to didactic ones happened a few times during the pilot group. I share how it went and how things changed because of the responses from the group in the final section of this chapter.

In my unsuccessful approach to gratitude I found a weakness in my four criteria for tracking my approach to adapting new self-care practices. Of the criteria, all four could lead to the inclusion of experiential components, but none of the four actually call for it. In languaging and talking about gratitude I tried to open space, present a counter-practice, go experience-near by encouraging people to write about recent events, and I wore my fluent outsider hat as someone who regularly practiced gratitude and spoke the language of mental health. What I missed was the opportunity to interpret staying experience-near as necessitating an experiential component. After the pilot group, I included an experiential component in every self-care practice. This was quite a challenge with some practices and influenced the omission of others I had planned to use. The handout *Gratitude Practices* is located in Appendix H.

Progressive relaxation—the Inner Smile.

Progressive relaxation techniques were no stranger to the therapy crowd. Five of the eight participants in the pilot group had used them before. My approach to progressive relaxation was to teach the Taoist Inner Smile. My attraction to the Inner Smile was that I was already stealing some minutes with it because it was one of the few practices from my Qigong training that I could do in public without drawing attention to myself. This concept of using the time we spend each day waiting (Chia, 2008) as an opportunity for self-care practice was something that resonated with me when I first learned it in my late teens.

Whether it was the number of years I had been familiar with the practice, or the context I learned it in as a teenager, or something else, I was very optimistic this would become a perennial favorite of the *Stealing Minutes* toolkit. The Inner Smile is performed like many other progressive relaxations. Starting at the top your head and working downwards, you smile into each part of your body. Included in the practice is the generation of the smiling energy and thankfulness for each part of the body that you visit with your awareness (Chia, 2008).

With the Inner Smile I made a number of mistakes in the context of my four criteria. Due to time pressures, I carried the practice forward in a very similar form to the original. I was unaware of the impact of this until I started getting negative feedback in the pilot group. I saw the Inner Smile as a counter-practice to what I felt was a growing culture of seriousness and lack of playfulness, especially in the mental health field where I spent most of my time. While I tried to keep the practice experience-near by guiding participants through it, the language itself was too limiting and restricting for some of them. Again I discovered the role of a fluent outsider balancing between two worlds is not enough to guarantee success. Mindfulness of where I was on the spectrum between the two worlds would have helped me better catch some of the underlying materials that slipped through these filters. My optimism and my assumption that the

practice would be successful contributed to my lack of ability to interpret the negative feedback from participants as a sign to let go of this practice. Instead, I carried it into future workshops. I describe the results of that in the next chapter. The handout *The Inner Smile* is located in Appendix I.

Breathing—Taoist and Buddhist approaches.

My first attempt to incorporate breathing practices was twofold. First, I created a short adaptation of a mindfulness breathing exercise by Bob Stahl and Elisha Goldstein from their book, *A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook*. I did this partly to pay homage to mindfulness, and partly due to time constraints that forced me to choose a few practices that did not need as much adaptation. For my second approach I created an additional handout outlining the key components of the Taoist breathing practices I had learned, such as belly breathing, seamless breath, and using the breath to carry the awareness deeper into the body (Frantzis, 2009). As I did with mindfulness, I incorporated breathing into every session by bringing it into the Qigong move and other practices. I had been overlapping and integrating practices in my own life for many years and hoped to bring this experimental and innovative stance to the workshop. In order to have the breathing available for as much of the workshop as possible, I placed it in the second session after the introductory session when I shared the Qigong move.

My approach to breathing was probably the most space opening of all the practices. I rarely presented it in the same way from week to week and often incorporated it into other practices like Qigong and Loving-Kindness Meditation which gave it a fluid and flexible feel that was not as evident in my initial approach to Qigong and the Inner Smile. Breathing is my favorite counter-practice to a culture that tends to invite shallow breaths in order to support the fast-paced mind states we associate with “success” and “normal.” Deep breathing, especially from the belly, can be useful in slowing down our mental processes and has been useful in the workshop because it adds a richer experiential element to many other practices. The handout *Breathing Practices for Self-Care* is located in Appendix J. The handout *Mindful Breathing* is located in Appendix K.

***Stealing Minutes*—can you meditate in the bathroom?**

The first time I used the *Stealing Minutes* concept was in a handout I gave the group in which I had been collecting my ideas about how to find time throughout the day by getting creative with opening up and recognizing opportunities for practice. The ideas I included ranged from more traditional approaches such as standing in line at the bank to the more playful and challenging such as meditating in the bathroom. The title was so well-received that a number of participants suggested I rename the workshop, which I did for the additional workshops that grew out of the success of the pilot group. The name I chose for the workshop the pilot group attended was *The Self-Care Lab*. The original *Stealing Minutes* handout can be found in Appendix L.

Once I felt comfortable that each of the above practices and approaches had been addressed from the standpoints of opening space for a simpler approach to self-care, countering potentially harmful cultural practices, engaging the playfulness of a fluent outsider, and working towards an experience-near stance, I found the confidence to plan and promote an 8-week workshop to test these new self-care practices and my approach to sharing them.

Field Testing the Materials and Approach

Observing, Examining, and Reflecting-in-Action.

*We join spokes together in a wheel,
but it is the center hole
that makes the wagon move.*

*We shape clay into a pot,
but it is the emptiness inside
that holds whatever we want.*

*We hammer wood for a house,
but it is the inner space
that makes it livable.*

*We work with being,
but non-being is what we use.*
~ Lao Tzu (Laozi & Mitchell, 2006)

Like the spokes of a wagon wheel, each practice I created was transformed through the process of becoming part of a group of materials that bumped up against each other over time and through dialogue. By taking a stance of observing and examining, I was able to engage reflexively in ways I did not anticipate. I often found myself changing the practices more while I was guiding people through them than I did in my long hours at the computer. For example, I created a plan to cover two of my Taoist Qigong Principles in each session, yet by the end of the 8 weeks I realized I kept returning each day to just a handful. I felt constantly amazed as I watched the ways that interactions changed each of the practices—as well as every person in the room.

When someone spoke about choosing to focus more on herself during the Loving-Kindness Meditation because she felt like she needed it, another participant sighed with relief and admitted she had too but was now feeling guilty about it. I was able to encourage a discussion about taking care of ourselves in order to be of help to others. We reached a general

consensus that looking after our needs is helpful on many levels. Like throwing and firing a clay pot or building a house, it was coming together in a group that enabled magical and transformative experiences to emerge. We came in as professionals in a group practice, all of us a little too caught up in the bounded being of an individualist culture (Gergen, 2009b), and we all agreed as we finished, that we were leaning a little more into our multi-faceted nature in deeper, richer, and often new ways.

Over the remainder of this chapter I explore the outcomes and findings from running the pilot group. Following through with the Research As Daily Practice approach, I explore what I did, what I could do, and continue the spirit of genuine curiosity and pragmatic inquiry that has been the grounding for this study. I end the chapter with a reflection on where this phase of the research took me and how and why I decided to continue the journey into the next phase.

The Self-Care Lab—an 8-week pilot group.

After planning and promoting two 3-hour workshops and having nobody sign up or show up for either one, I used the 6 hours I had to myself to ponder other formats and approaches to self-care workshops. Using this time to collect my thoughts, I came up with an 8-week format that involved an hour per week at lunchtime with the goal of attracting more colleagues from within my practice instead of trying to attract mental health professionals from across the Concord, New Hampshire, area. My goal, if this workshop was well-received, was to test the materials and approach with a more diverse audience. At this point I was still unsure if I would be moving forward after the pilot group.

Instead of my momentum being stopped by this challenge so early out of the gate, I decided to ramp up the stakes and aim for a format that I thought would encourage the integration of the practices, the possibility for culture shifts in the organization, and the opportunity to invite the emergence of a community of practice. To increase the attractiveness of the workshop, I redesigned the flyer to better clarify the benefits the workshop offered to potential attendees. The result was eight participants, all Warren Street partners, signing up for a workshop costing \$95 in tuition for the 8 weeks and offered no Continuing Education Units. The people who signed up seemed to resonate strongly with my new message. The revised flyer for the pilot workshop is included in Appendix M.

You did what with it?

By the time we reached the halfway mark in week four, all the participants had shared at least one of the practices with a friend or family, and a few had used them in sessions with their clients. By the last week of the pilot group, all participants had used the practices in sessions with clients and some had started asking me for copies of the handouts to give to their clients. Neither of these possibilities had previously occurred to me, at least as something I could dare to encourage, or hope to achieve so quickly. I had never shared any of these practices with a client, and rarely spoke about them with anyone outside the traditions in which I learned them. When I

started this project, I would have been pleased if just half the participants had taken some of the practices up for use in their own lives.

The speed and ease with which these practices slipped into the relational flow between colleagues, between work and personal lives, and between therapists and clients reminded me of my earlier thoughts on the false distinctions between work and personal life and between expert and client. While I lacked the confidence to openly encourage such transport of the practices in the first workshop, I had created a structure for it—which I outlined in the second part of this chapter on weaving narrative and social constructionist ideas together—and quietly included them in an applied way without speaking directly to either. The idea, it seemed, was working.

Reflexivity in motion—folding it in.

During the 8 weeks of the pilot group, I often changed upcoming practices based on feedback I was getting in the current session. Each week I found myself re-writing the schedule for the upcoming weeks after the session ended. This feedback came mostly from my observations during the groups, my session and field notes, and from conversations with group members outside the workshop. I also found myself changing the practices and the language around them in the middle of a guided exercise if I thought I was seeing someone struggling to grasp the material. The advantage of being a researcher engaged in a practice and a practitioner researching his own practices was that I could make changes in two or three directions at once. Some of the changes grew out of my collaborative approach to adapting the practices for my target audience and some from their responses to the exercises.

Other changes grew out of my vision for what this project could accomplish. When I thought something I was doing was falling short of that goal, I would adjust in the moment and try a different approach. For example, when I felt that a participant was struggling with a practice, I would try to shift to softer language and include less specific instruction until I felt he/she was more calmly engaged. These decisions were motivated mostly by direct feedback from participants during the group. I was looking for practices that would be accessible, simple to learn, and have noticeable benefits. When a practice did not meet those expectations, and when a practice did not seem to be fulfill my four criteria, I would keep adjusting my approach and shift the language until it seemed better received by the participants. Much of this process occurred in the spring of 2014 while I was teaching three separate *Stealing Minutes* workshops three days in a row. By juxtaposing different approaches from one day to the next I was often able to create my own temporary metrics for them and decide which one to continue with for the remainder of the session or make mental notes to carry into the session the next day. Often I came into the week with a new practice and by the end of the week it had changed dramatically. For example, the breathing exercises started as a handout that I read from for the first group on Tuesday. By Thursday I was spontaneously leading a breathing awareness exercise and telling stories of the profound experiences shared with me in the Tuesday and Wednesday groups. Each time someone shared his/her experience of the exercise I realized it could go deeper than I expected and I spoke to that potential in the next group.

Often my first decision or shift turned out to be the most effective and rarely needed later adjusting (Gladwell, 2005). After 6 months of creating these practices in solitude, I was amazed how quickly they grew, changed, and inspired new practices within the group setting. This turned out to be the case even months later over eight more workshops. From a relational standpoint, I discovered the shifts that took place while I was in the group were more likely to be effective than shifts I made while I was alone in my office editing the materials.

Discussion

What went well and how I carried it forward.

The participants reported enjoying the Qigong move and talked about how simple and accessible it was while having room to add more layers and concepts when they were ready. A few people shared the move with clients over the course of the 8 weeks, yet when asked, only a few reported doing it for themselves in between sessions. I included the move in this section because three people took it up into their daily practice and reported calming and grounding benefits between client sessions as well as when doing it in the mornings before going to work. These people also shared the move with clients over the 8 weeks and were beginning to create a conversation around which situations they were using it for and how it was helping their clients. While the other participants seemed to be enjoying the Qigong in the sessions, they rarely talked about using it outside of the group. In later workshops, and especially through the interviews, I discovered why that was happening and was able to fold in more changes that increased its use. I describe more about that in the case study in Chapter Three.

The Feeling Qi Exercise was something I worked into the first workshop the night before on a whim and I thought I would do it once to help facilitate a more direct experience of Qigong; it seemed so well-received that I continued to use it for the next 7 weeks and made it part of future workshops. Everyone in the group reported some kind of sensation in their hands and many of them found the practice to be captivating. I kept this exercise in future workshops partly because it was energizing for me to watch so many positive reactions when people first practiced it. I found inspiration in the surprise and excitement of others and it helped me get through my long days. I initially left out all mention of *energy* or *spirit* but later realized that even those in the group who were not particularly interested in the aspects of Qi still found the exercise “calming” and “centering.”

The 70% Principle and The Down Creates the Up were the two Taoist Qigong Principles that seemed to stand out the most for the participants. The 70% Principle in particular was a big hit and generated significant conversation from week to week about how to use it in each practice. A few people also reported in the group that they were carrying it over into their personal lives and applying it in their diets, relationships, and finances. While many of the more practice-oriented principles did not seem to have much resonance with the participants, the 70% Principle received enough positive feedback that I decided to separate it out into its own concept and work it into future workshops with more emphasis. We often talked at Brookline Tai Chi

about applying the 70% Principle across many areas of our lives but I was hesitant to bring that into the group because of my worry of introducing complexity and distracting from the practices themselves. I was excited to see people take the concept into their personal lives and encouraged conversations about it without the weight of a more didactic approach.

The Jin Shin Jyutsu Finger Holds were the unexpected hit of the entire workshop. Much to my surprise, and the surprise of the group, everyone found the practice to be calming and helpful. When I told the group the week after introducing it that I almost left it on the cutting room floor during the pre-workshop editing process, I was met with a round of gasps and exclamations about how thankful they were that I included it. All eight participants used the Finger Holds regularly at work and in their personal lives. They had also all shared it with friends and family and used it with clients.

The second most popular practice was the Loving-Kindness Meditation. Most of the group reported having some level of profound experience during their initial engagement with the practice. A few spoke to the relational aspects of the practice and how using it helped them through a tough time with a colleague or loved one. The second story at the beginning of Chapter One speaks to how we can use it effectively in brief moments when we need it the most. This was my fondest wish for the Loving-Kindness Meditation along with all of the practices. I was excited to see my adaptation of an exercise that normally takes 45-60 minutes help someone de-escalate in 3 to 5 minutes from intense emotional upset to be able to function in a situation in which she might not have otherwise been able to function well. I find these stories to be hopeful evidence for the future of this adaptation. Most of the participants adopted this practice in their personal lives as well as their work with clients.

Three of the eight participants had experienced the Loving-Kindness Meditation before and they all reported how much they liked the adaptations of removing the potential burden of generating loving-kindness for the entire world in the middle of a work day, changing “enemy” to *someone you may be having difficulty with*, and bringing the awareness back to the self at the end. They reported this was more helpful for them during the day when they had limited time and energy and needed something to help them feel more relaxed, connected, and present for the next meeting or client.

The two approaches to breathing were both popular among the participants and led to some fascinating conversations. The responses to the breathing exercises varied widely from questions about posture and length of the breath to reports of feeling connected to everyone in the room. One participant reported reduced anxiety because, for her, within the breath was the possibility of not breathing and that encouraged her to come to terms with the inevitability of her own death. She found this freeing and attributed the insight to the breathing exercise.

What did not go well and why I am grateful for it.

To my surprise, the Inner Smile was a total flop. While I was touched that one person took the practice home and tried to use it with her children that evening, it was a flop with both of them too. The feedback, however, was clear and useful. In my rush to bring the practice into

the group I failed to run it through the same filters and adaptations that I used with most of the other practices. I let much of the traditional, limiting, and forceful language slip through my filters. I became aware of this sense of limitation and forcefulness as I was guiding the group through the exercise and tried to change it while in motion—but was unable to save it. Participants reported feeling stress around having to generate smiling energy and they talked about how the exercise did not make sense for them. Apparently, after 3 weeks of building trust and creating an open and collaborative environment, I brought in a practice that was as successful as two awkward and uncomfortable Russians standing on a street corner promoting Dutch beer.

Out of sheer stubbornness, I brought the Inner Smile into a second self-care workshop and it was even less successful. After that, I omitted it from the *Stealing Minutes* toolkit and replaced it with two other progressive relaxations, a progressive muscle relaxation, and one using imagery that was accessible and open enough for the participants to take it up in whatever ways were most comfortable for them. I did not make handouts for the progressive relaxation exercises and often changed them depending on the group or my mood.

Gratitude as a concept was a hit with the group. However, except for the story that I opened this chapter with, none of the participants actually used the gratitude applications I had created. In hindsight, this makes sense because I failed to generate any direct experience with gratitude. All they had was a handout and a half-hour of being talked at about gratitude. In most of the other practices I shared an exercise that took them somewhere and then facilitated a conversation about their experience. This was one of the most valuable lessons for me from the pilot group. First, it strengthened what I already knew and was working towards around the value of direct experience and collaborative sharing versus didactic approaches and secondly, it reminded me how easy it is to stray from acting on what I already know.

To keep the materials in one place, impress the participants, and I think partly to show off, I gave them a big fat handout on the first day with the materials for all 8 weeks. Having slipped into a more didactic mode in that moment, I thought anybody who was so inclined could read ahead and come in prepared for the next session. Nobody read ahead. Also, most of the folks forgot their handouts from week to week and I ended up bringing in one handout each week that was relevant to just what we were doing that day.

At the request of the group, I made PDF versions of the handouts and emailed them to everyone so they could have them available whenever they wanted and could print them out in their offices for clients. That was the beginning and the end of the big handouts. Having already committed from the beginning to avoid technology, Power Point presentations, and anything that could be distracting or confusing to the participants, I was pleased to realize early on that the handout had become a burden and happily stopped putting them together for the future 8-week workshops. In the 3-hour and 4-hour workshops I found they were useful for giving participants something to refer back to since they would not have the chance to meet with me each week.

Limitations of this study.

As an inquiry into the possibility of a new approach to self-care for mental health professionals, this study and the question it is organized around appeared to have a generative and sustaining power that carried across the 8 months of building practices, developing an approach, and testing it over 2 months with a pilot group. As I was inquiring within a personal and reflective stance of drawing information from my past experiences, I was limited mostly to anecdotal evidence on what worked for me in the past as well as on my ideas about how this approach might be helpful to others.

Although the pilot group answered the primary question of whether or not I could create a body of work that would be useful towards creating a new approach to self-care, by its nature it was unable to provide a diverse or large enough body of data to further extrapolate trends, patterns, or theory. In this case the limitations were built into the approach because it was intended as a foundational exploration that would, based on the results, give either a green or red light for the continuation of the project.

Areas for further investigation.

While the limitations were better known going into this study than in the following two studies, the areas for further investigation seem almost unlimited. Many of the known areas for further study are explored in the following two chapters. There are three unexpected areas for further investigation that I thought of in this first phase. I began to realize the possibility of creating culture shifts in organizations by building communities of practice during the pilot group as participants began to talk about how much they were enjoying getting to know their colleagues on deeper levels. Most of the participants in the pilot group had been working together daily in a group practice for more than a decade. This came as a surprise to me and drove home both the power of using a Research As Daily Practice approach as well as the generative nature of relational approaches. The possibility of culture shifts and communities of practice is a theme that carried through the 10 months of workshops following the pilot group and is explained more in the next chapter. In Chapter Five, I cover the topic of culture shifts and communities of practice more in-depth.

The second unexpected area that inspired further study is the potential of the *Stealing Minutes* self-care practices for use as therapeutic tools. Within the first few weeks I was getting feedback from participants about which practices they shared with clients and how they were received. This approach was consistent across future workshops, opening the door for tracking and reflecting on how the practices were experienced by clients as well as therapists. Over time, the feedback from clients that was shared in the groups inspired as many changes in the practices as the feedback from the participants. In the next chapter I describe some practices that grew out of client and participant feedback.

The third area of further study is the potential for these practices to be applicable for a wider audience than I initially intended. During the course of the pilot group, participants shared these practices with clients, families, and friends. The reports of these experiences were positive

and often sparked discussions about new ways of presenting the practices, as well as innovations of the practices. I felt encouraged from feedback in the pilot group to think about creating workshops for wider audiences. The enthusiasm of the pilot group led me to expand my planned workshops to cancer support groups and educators. In the case study in Chapter Three, I describe my experiences with running the workshops across this wider demographic.

Conclusion

Constructing meaning together while honoring local knowledge.

In the section earlier in this chapter called *Weaving Social Constructionism and Narrative Together*, I introduced a series of shifts from a presentation by Sheila McNamee. I incorporated these shifts as part of a Research As Daily Practice inquiry into how I can use my role as a practitioner, “doing what makes sense to generate new knowledge for better practice” (S. St. George, personal communication, April 2014). I revisit these shifts below and describe how using them influenced the project.

The movement from *foundations of practice to flexibility of standpoint* appears to have been a generative one. Adhering to many of the contexts and structures in which I learned these practices would have meant taking a year or more to teach them one hour a week. Carrying a *flexibility of standpoint* into the preparation and group phases allowed for a better flow of adaptive change and helped me make these new approaches more effective for the people I was trying to help.

The movement from *professional expertise to a collaborative stance* was a success but it had some rocky moments. The way I introduced the Inner Smile, for example, and the form in which I shared it, came from and expert as opposed to a collaborative stance. As I look back on the most successful practices, like the Finger Holds and the Loving-Kindness Meditation, I find that they were those I approached with the most collaborative and non-expert stance. A review of the handouts in Appendices A-I will give the reader a more in-depth tour through these successes and failures.

While moving from an *exploration of what is to an attentiveness to construction* (McNamee & Hosking, 2012), I generally reached my goal with most of the practices. In some cases I arrived there before I came upon the idea of a self-care workshop. Examples of this would be how I reconstructed the Loving-Kindness Meditation and the Finger Holds while I was a primary caregiver for my wife and again while recovering from knee surgery. Where I sometimes failed in this intended shift was with practices I knew the most about and had received the most teaching in, like Qigong. In retrospect, I realized that I had fallen back on teaching Qigong as “this is what it is and this is how you do it.” This approach contributed to hesitation among some of the participants to engage with it outside the group because it felt too complicated and they reported worrying that they would “do it wrong.” Carrying the idea into their personal lives of being able to do Qigong wrong was fairly compelling evidence of my failure to accomplish the intended shift with that particular practice. It was also a wonderful

lesson, and its sting was lessened by my successes with the Finger Holds and Loving-Kindness Meditation. As a practitioner, I value these lessons for the guidance and humility they encourage.

In moving from *assessment of the problem to the exploration of resources and prospects*, I found that I managed to stay in this stance throughout the facilitation of the workshop. This shift was one of the most important for me in the early stages. Adopting a stance of exploration helped me turn away from the urge to continue to study the problem anymore than necessary in order to identify it as an issue to which I would like to respond. Shifting to *exploration of resources and prospects* helped me reach out to colleagues to talk about prospects as well as reach into my life experiences for potential resources.

The most exciting shift, and one I had experienced in other areas of my life, was the movement from an *emphasis on the self to a focus on relationships as origin*. It was a joy for me to consistently forget myself in the workshops and become more responsive in the service of the participants. In this way, I felt the materials and language were flowing through me from their static existence on the paper where I stored them, to the conversations in which I shared them. Here in the space between us, the practices underwent yet another transformation that I could not have foreseen. I later realized that I had been benefiting from my intentionally experiential approach to the workshop and that many of the changes I made to the practices were influenced by this approach.

This shift into “the space between” is something I have enjoyed playing with at many times in my life and can be seen in my story *The Beer Fairies*. Being able to hold this perspective for one hour at a time in the service of the group brought a deeper sense of meaning and excitement than my previous experiences of focusing on *relationships as origin* in the role of a curious scholar/practitioner. Moving from a singular answer towards multiplicity has felt natural to me for a long time as a narrative therapist with a constructionist perspective. This shift became challenging for me when participants asked questions about the practices which called upon my 25 years of experience. For example, while my answers were almost always in a subjunctive stance, and I avoided diagnosing or declaring certainty, I also noticed that I was often being intentional about it. While the move from singularity to multiplicity is something I have integrated intellectually for years, the movement to consistently engaging with others from that perspective has required consistent effort.

The times when it takes the least effort seem to be when I am prepared. In those more deconstructionist and poly-vocal moments where I embrace multiplicity, I experience a feeling of joy at being subversive yet helpful. Sometimes I even felt a hint of joyful subversiveness when I scrapped my own plans in response to feedback from the group. When called upon without preparation to tap into my personal knowledge base, it seems to take more effort to resist the call of the singular voice of the authority. I notice the pressure here from the pull of the expert role, as well as my desire to help others by giving them the clear answer they sometimes seem to be seeking. For example, people often asked me how long they should practice, how slow or fast they should move, how many times a day, and what time of day is best. To all of these questions I would first respond with another question such as *What works best for you right*

now? I use this questions for two reasons. Firstly, it helps the person think about his/her direct experience instead of reverting to me as an expert. Secondly, it gives me a quick response that often redirects my temptation to give them the specific answer they are seeking when there is no correct answer. I could have told them a number of conflicting answers depending on which expert from my past I was drawing the information.

The most dynamic shift for me has been the *movement from the generation of insight to the creation of actions*. For much of my life I have been engaged in seeking insight and have mostly done it as a solo practitioner who would use classes and retreats to help me get to the next level and then go off to practice more deeply on my own. I was missing the relational component and after completing the pilot workshop, I felt more than a bit sheepish about the 2 decades over which I kept my experiences and skills to myself instead of sharing with others to spread the benefits and gain the personal benefits of relational engagement. This realization of the joy of sharing with others and the power of the relational generation of unexpected actions have been a humbling and life changing transformation for me as a former proponent of the myth of the solo practitioner.

Patching the quilt—co-constructing a new self-care approach.

Through my transformation to a more relationally-focused practitioner, I discovered that my career had accelerated through the connections I was making with this study. I soon realized I had reached a point I had previously expected to be 2 years further into the future. Within a few months of doing Research As Daily Practice, I surpassed my career goals. I decided to stop setting goals and just focus on the relational creation of actions.

In light of that shift, what stood out the most for me from this study was how significant a role the group and the interactions between us played in the shifting of the practices and the language used to describe them. It became clear at the end of the 8 weeks that we had all witnessed each other change in positive ways and we had managed to co-construct second-order change in the territory of self-care. For example, many of us reported that some of our friends, family, colleagues, and clients had benefited from the work we did together.

Without the crucible of a group of people willing to experiment with learning these practices in an environment that supported openness, vulnerability, and sharing, this first of three phases of my research would have been the first and last phase. Together we found the loose patches on the quilt. We repaired some while others were replaced with stronger components with the hope of strengthening the whole. Along the way, we changed our stories, and our self-care approaches changed with them (Mehl-Madrona, 2011). As collaborators, we became models for each other (Gergen, 2009b). By sharing our reflections with each other on the new forms of life we were participating in (McNamee & Hosking, 2012), we became linked in this work as witnesses (White & Epston, 1990) to, and for, each other. As we related, so did we fashion our future together (Gergen, 2009a).

Charting a course for the next leg of the journey.

In this study I searched through curiosity, practice, and inquiry, for an answer to the question: *Can I come up with a collection of self-care practices for mental health professionals that draws from my lifelong study of Qigong and meditation and then filter it through social constructionist and narrative perspectives while prioritizing preventive approaches that can be useful in small moments throughout the day?* The answer was “yes.” This initial study built the foundation, confidence, and inspiration I needed for moving forward with a bigger commitment to action and application. In the next chapter I use a case study approach to describe the transformations that I observed from engaging in an additional 45 hours of facilitating self-care groups across eight workshops with another 80 people over a period of 6 months.

Chapter Three: A Case Study of the *Stealing Minutes* Workshops

Introduction

Looking back and thinking ahead—what I did and why I continued.

In Chapter Two I explored the process of moving from an idea about a new approach to self-care to running the first pilot study. Once it became clear the self-care practices I was developing seemed to meet my goals of being adaptable, accessible, and flexible, I moved forward with an 8-week pilot group to test the facilitation of these practices in a group setting. I was so inspired with how well the practices were received that by the middle of the 8-week course I began planning other workshops and started reaching out to my professional network with offers to teach at their locations.

The journey I began in the summer of 2013 evolved into an adventure that I never could have imagined. By the time I reached winter of 2014 I had trained over 90 licensed mental health professionals in my first year of pre-licensure as a resident therapist. Drawing on my past experience while speaking the language of my peers led many to assume I had been in the field for decades. Without using the social constructionist and narrative approaches I describe throughout this dissertation, I doubt I would have made the advances and impacts that I did.

While attending a Taos Institute workshop in Durham, New Hampshire, I had the good luck to visit with a friend who is a co-owner of a group practice called Harbor Point Therapy. She had heard about my pilot workshop and we talked about the need for a new approach to self-care in our field. Our discussions eventually led to a *Stealing Minutes* workshop at her group practice in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The workshop was so oversubscribed that we ran a second one a month later to meet the demand.

Another member of the pilot group invited me to co-present at a prostate cancer support group at Concord Hospital. The staff and patients were excited about the self-care approaches and asked me to come back on my own a few weeks later. I worked with multiple cancer support groups over the following months and showed self-care practices to the oncology social workers so they could continue to share them with new patients. As word spread through the hospital grapevine to the director of the Concord Hospital Family Health Center, she became curious about the work I was doing. She was also in charge of Continuing Education Units accreditation for the New Hampshire Chapter of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists. When my application came across her desk she got a chance to read the materials and become more familiar with the project. A few months later she asked to bring her department to me for a self-care workshop. Out of this second opportunity to work with a group from one organization, the possibility for culture shifts and communities of practice began to emerge. I discuss communities of practice more in depth in Chapter Five.

One of the clinical psychologists in the group is also a school psychologist at a local special-education school called Parker Academy. His work in the area of relationships, mindfulness, and neuroscience in educational settings (Olson, 2014) was an important influence

on my approaches to incorporating mindfulness to create accessible self-care practices as well as focusing more on relationships than technique in facilitating the workshops. He had been in discussions with Parker Academy administrators about reducing stress and burnout among school staff and started sharing the practices he had been learning in the *Stealing Minutes* groups. The school principal later invited me to run a workshop for the first day of their staff retreat. This opportunity expanded the diversity of my experience in different settings and demographics. Working with educators was the beginning of my expansion of this work to a wider audience.

Through the workshops and settings, I was consistently surprised, inspired, and deeply touched by how much the participants benefited from these practices. As a practitioner with a Research As Daily Practice stance, I welcomed every opportunity to share these practices with a new group because it was there in the crucible of co-constructing our reality together (Gergen et al., 2009) that my approaches changed, the practices themselves evolved, and my mind was fed in a way I was not able to find anywhere else.

On the ethics of self-care.

Although I was finding meaning and fulfillment in this project, I had initially decided to forego any forays into the ethics arena while still an unlicensed therapist. That stance changed when the organizers at Harbor Point Therapy added my workshop to their existing application in order to present a full day of Ethics Continuing Education Units. The excitement of issuing Ethics Continuing Education Units for teaching people new ways to feel better, manage stress, and increase resilience was something I had only dreamt of a few months before. I built on this breakthrough by applying to get my workshops accredited for Ethics Continuing Education Units without being attached to another workshop that focused on professional codes of ethics delivered via a 3-hour Power Point presentation. I wondered how I would get a more experiential and collaborative workshop approved for Ethics Continuing Education Units when the majority of ethics workshops were presented by lawyers and had a reputation of leaving the participants more worried than they were before attending.

Expecting a rejection, I drafted a flyer with language about self-care practices as ethical practices in their own right while including bullet points about challenging the existing codes of ethics and how little they address self-care. To my surprise, my workshop was approved and the officials from the issuing organization showed interest in sharing the information with their colleagues. While still a grassroots movement, I feel hopeful this new approach to self-care has the potential to shift our professional codes to include more specific language about the importance of self-care while expanding the definition of it to include many of these practices. A copy of the promotional flyer, application, and evaluation form needed to run accredited workshops for Ethics Continuing Education Units are included in Appendices N, O, and P respectively. I have also provided two of the testimonials from pilot group participants that were required for the application process in Appendix Q. A sample of the Ethics Continuing Education Units certificate I awarded participants can be found in Appendix R.

Ethics Continuing Education Units workshops are mandatory in our field and generally approached with dread. Over the course of these workshops, I was consistently thanked by people who said it was the first ethics workshop they did not leave feeling more anxious than they were before they arrived. Others told me it was the first time they had something to take away from an ethics workshop besides fear. The thankfulness people have shown me for presenting a playful and helpful ethics workshop has earned me goodwill in my field and opened many doors not usually open to a resident therapist. For example, it was shortly after the second round of workshops at Warren Street Family Counseling Associates that they agreed at a board meeting to pre-approve me to become a partner in the organization. A colleague reported to me that this was a milestone because it was their first pre-approval of a candidate in their 20-year history.

The narrow road to the interior—everyday is a journey.

*Don't ever forget –
In the middle of the thicket,
blossoming plum
~ Matsuo Bashō (Bashō, 2000)*

While I was often advised by friends and colleagues to continue my data collection only until I reached saturation, I continued my journey because I never reached what felt like saturation. As an author and reader are united (Gergen, 2009b), I often found the more space I opened up between myself and others, the more generative our interactions were. For example, while talking with a participant about a trauma client having trouble with just the Finger Holds practice, we came up with the idea of combining practices to be more engaging. Some trauma clients were reporting the Finger Holds were relaxing but not helpful for during more anxious moments. They later reported that adding the Loving-Kindness Meditation to the Finger Holds was more helpful and engaging. Observing through a lens of my past experiences, I realized the joy of sitting with curiosity among multiple voices and interpretations of reality (McNamee & Gergen, 1992). Genuine curiosity helped inoculate me against further backsliding into using the more didactic approaches in which I learned.

Like the poet Bashō's journey into the interior of Japan (Bashō, 2000), many roads are taken and many experiences are gathered along the way. Also, like Bashō who embarked on his journey to emulate a hero of his who had made the same journey, I too am following in the footsteps of those who came before me. Incorporating mindfulness, poetry, meditation, social constructionism, narrative practices, and Qigong has helped me make my journey richer. On my journey from structure to uncertainty, whether I sat in a room with 2 participants or 30, inevitably the thicket fell away and every person, every observation, every question, and every challenge we faced became a plum blossom to me. As I continued adding workshops and months to my timeline, I realized it was the journey that was feeding me, not the destination.

By choosing an experiential and playful approach to teaching, I often found myself doing the self-care practices while I was sharing them with the group. Without my field notes to remind me, I might not believe that every session I facilitated left me feeling more peaceful and energized than I was before I started. In the following section I share a story that captures one of moments from my work that inspired my approach to facilitating the self-care workshops.

Failing Zen—*The Bouncing Ball Meditation.*

“I was part of a Zen Buddhist community but I was asked to leave,” SB told me during her therapy intake session at Warren Street Family Counseling Associates. She went on to describe experiences of “depersonalization” and “derealization” and told me how she was disturbed by her “dissociative episodes” during meditation with her group. She described a process of trying to learn a structured system of meditation and philosophy and felt like she was failing because her experiences were not congruent with the more contemplative experiences reported by other members of her group.

Having had a few decades of meditation training and a handful of experiences that sounded a lot like what she was describing, I began to unpack the differences in languaging our spiritual experiences with the hope of helping her recognize the different language-games (Anscombe et al., 2009) she was moving between and their influences on her. As a mental health professional, SB was familiar with the language of psycho-diagnostics, although not yet comfortable with the possibility that she was using that language in a way that appeared to be negatively impacting the construction of her preferred identity (Freedman & Combs, 1996). As we continued our dialogue, she became more open to the possibility that Zen was not a tradition well-suited for her approach to life. We talked about other ways of engaging her spirituality and came up with some alternatives that she found successful.

During our first three sessions I struggled to avoid giving her advice about meditation practices. Instead, we explored her life story, her daily routines, her worldview, and drew inspiration from the increasingly rich story of who she is and where she is going. This led us to a unique personal practice we named the Bouncing Ball Meditation. While having a conversation about what she does to relax, a picture of her evening walks with her boyfriend began to form. We explored the many facets of her walk from what she saw, heard, felt, thought, and said. My curiosity not yet exhausted, I asked, *what do you do with your hands during these walks?* She replied that she sometimes holds her boyfriend’s hand but that she is usually bouncing a ball that she brings with her each time. She described how the tactile sensations of bouncing the ball and the rhythmic nature of this practice helped calm her. Through further dialogue we discovered that bouncing the ball often helped her into a more contemplative state which she felt enhanced her awareness and appreciation of the environment around her. It sounded like a counter-practice to feeling “not herself,” or “not in her body.” She told me she felt like she had already been meditating in her own ways. We went on to discover similar activities that she was already practicing.

Our conversation shifted to ways she could adapt these practices to help soothe her in stressful environments such as her job working on a locked ward with too few staff to give patients the care she felt they deserved. In the fourth session, she terminated therapy stating that she felt she was happy with whom she was and that her experiences were not as scary as they sounded when she had given them names from the language of psychopathology. She reported feeling satisfied with the levels of introversion and anxiety she experienced now that she had been able to lower them to tolerable levels.

Giving her room to succeed, and giving Zen room to fail changed the relationship between her philosophy and Zen. She said maybe someday she will go back and read about Zen but that she has her own way of being contemplative in the world and that is enough for her for now. My talks with SB inspired me to be more careful about presenting the self-care practices as structured or formulaic methods that need to be done the way they are taught. Taking the time to explore her worldview and her lived experience with genuine curiosity uncovered a wealth of pre-existing resources in her life that I would have missed with a more conventional approach.

In those four therapy sessions I learned another valuable lesson: *try not to create a system in which participants can fail*. I set about developing a playful, hands-on approach with a toolkit of practices that overlapped so anyone could choose the ones that resonated the most with him/her and still find something useful. Six months later, I was consulting with a therapist and his client about self-care approaches for anxiety when some of the impacts of how I carried my experience with SB forward became evident to me. The therapist said, “You know what I love the most about Lave’s teaching? He never says “go work on this” or “here is how this has to be done. He sets up his workshops so that you can never fail at self-care.” Those statements inspired me to stay on track and reminded me that what I was doing was working.

Methodology—A Case Study Approach to Research as Daily Practice

The answer leads to another question.

The affirmative answer to my research question in Chapter Two about whether I could adapt a body of self-care practices using social constructionist and narrative principles inspired me to continue into the second study of my research project. In this study, I continued to apply and test the practices and approach to explore the possibilities. The question I built this case study around is: *What impacts would it have if I facilitated this training with as many mental health professionals across different settings as I could find over the next 6 months?* To my surprise, the journey lasted 10 months and is continuing as I write. Applying this question led me into situations where I might not have gone if I had not held a question feeding my curiosity about the potentials and limitations of this workshop. Through the workshops, field notes, and session notes it was the question that kept me moving forward with curiosity and excitement.

Due to its potential to traverse the gap between researching and practicing (Sprenkle & Moon, 1996), and its usefulness in studying cases of unusual successes (Patton, 1990), I chose case study as the methodology for this investigation. With my focus on Research As Daily

Practice and my commitment to create space for the further evolution of the practices and approach, I was drawn to the lack of standardized structure or formatting of the case study approach (Creswell, 1998). I have chosen to follow a rhetorical structure based on Stake's recommendations (Creswell, 1998) and in the coming sections will identify the program and the boundaries of the case I am studying, speak to the issues and context at hand, give a description of the case across three areas that stood out the most for me and explore assertions and interpretations I drew from experience and data.

With the emphasis on using detailed descriptions as a form of analysis (Baxter & Jack, 2008), case study is consistent with my goal of further developing the workshop material into a more widely available resource. It fits well with the narrative and social constructionist approach I outlined in Chapter Two because it leaves room for emerging stories to grow and breathe (Frank, 2010) while allowing me to develop a more multi-voiced approach than some of the more structured research methodologies allow. Case study offers the opportunity to glean generalizations and ideas I can learn from and apply to a wide range of other cases (Creswell, 1998) in which the goal is to create new and more effective approaches to self-care.

The program and its boundaries.

The program being examined in this case study is the self-care workshop I call *Stealing Minutes*. I chose this name to create a container for the principal idea of building a cultural counter-practice to the issue of not having enough time to engage in self-care while reminding myself and others that the practices taught in the program are created to be helpful in just 3 to 5 minutes of spare time.

Although this is technically a multi-site study (Sprenkle & Moon, 1996), I consider it a single case because the presented workshop materials and approach were consistent across the five settings. The materials and approach evolved across the multiple settings and presentations and so I use a single case study approach to highlight the process of change instead of breaking the study down into more compartmentalized units of focus. The boundaries of the study consist of five organizations located in the cities of Concord and Portsmouth in the state of New Hampshire in the United States. The workshops included in this study took place between January and October 2014, and were built upon, but do not include, a previous project of creating the materials and approach and testing it in a pilot group in 2013. The first phase that took place in 2013 is covered in Chapter Two.

The context and issues of the case.

In addition to the personal, historical, and professional context of the case outlined in Chapters One and Two, I explore some specific contexts of the case from each of the five settings where the workshops took place. Within the context of the broader culture, I have been inspired to create this workshop as a cultural counter-practice (Epston & White, 1992) to many of the dominant cultural narratives I feel are adding to what I see as increasing levels of burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious traumatization in the mental health field. Some of the cultural

influences that inspired me to design this workshop later emerged as themes from the participants' discussions around barriers to self-care. I explore these themes in more detail later in this chapter in the section titled *The Emergence of Themes from Within the Group*.

The biggest issue at work in this case is what I perceive to be a lack of practical, accessible, and effective self-care being taught in my field. In graduate school and in my internships, I noticed high levels of stress and burnout. Before graduating I conducted a research study with some of my classmates on students from the cohort one year ahead to assess their experiences in pre-licensure jobs (Briggs, Campbell, Coppola, Elliott, Feely, 2012). Our presentation, *Pre-Licensure Employment: Experiences of the Transition from Graduation to Licensure* caused quite a stir among the faculty who had been denying any negative reports from the internship and resident settings. The most consistent finding was high levels of stress that, in many cases, was interfering with family lives, relationships, and health. While many of these stressors could be addressed only through political or legal action, I began to realize that helping people manage their *responses* to these stressors was an area that had been lacking attention and resources.

Through the interviews and analysis I conducted for that study, I realized self-care seemed to be a key moderating factor for reducing stress in the workplace. Of the four top moderating factors we discovered, self-care seemed one I could do the most about. I began to notice that of the identified moderating factors, self-care seemed the most capable of positive influence on the four identified risk factors of work hours, finances, lack of personal/family time and sex/gender. Figure 3.1 below shows the relationships between stressors and moderating factors in pre-licensure work settings.

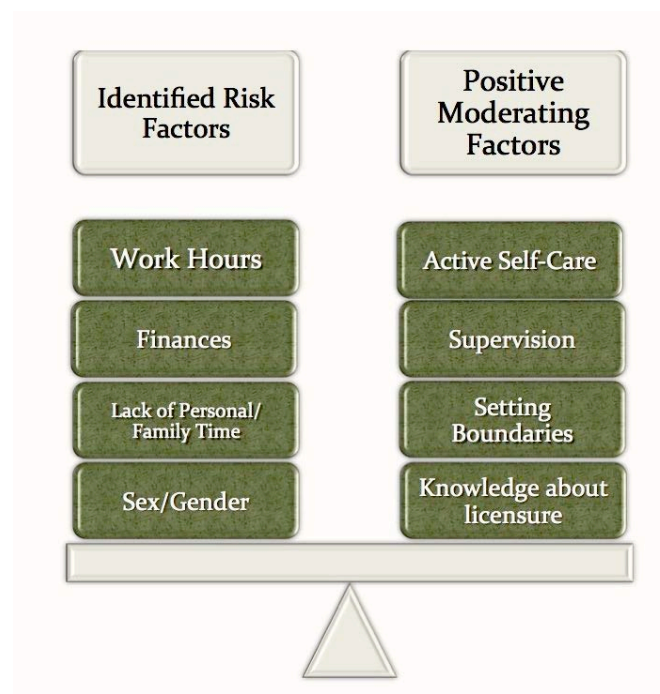


Figure 3.1: Balancing Factors in Pre-Licensure Work Settings

One issue I recognized was how superficially I felt self-care was being addressed in academic and professional settings. The frequent comments by seasoned professionals in my workshops asking why they have never been taught effective and helpful self-care practices like these before is a testament to how pervasive this issue might be in the training and supervision of mental health professionals. The possibility that most of us were failing self-care as it was constructed and taught was a compelling pull for me to embark on the inquiry I conducted in Chapter Two. My goal in that inquiry was to dig into my past to share resources that were helping me become more resistant to stressors inherent in our field. This chapter explores the further application and evolution of what came to be called the *Stealing Minutes* approach.

Data collection—session notes, field notes, and interviews.

For data collection on this project I relied on session notes that I wrote down during the workshops and field notes that I wrote in private after each group. I kept the session notes unstructured and recorded the responses and ideas that caught my attention in each moment. The end result was a record of my internal reactions interspersed with many of the experiences shared by the participants. I found the session notes to be a valuable collection of responses and experiences shared by people in the moments after first practicing the exercises. Having these notes to read over during more quiet moments provided me with a rich tapestry of experiences to explore in more detail than I could have by trying to recall from memory. For example, at one point PK reported: “I was trying to dissolve my allergies and all of sudden I felt really connected to the trees!” While engaged in facilitating the group and focused on teaching the Taoist Dissolving Qigong, I was still able to record multiple insights that I did not have the time to weave together in that moment.

This participant wandered off from the practice as I was teaching it and had a profound experience. He reported feeling a new peacefulness with both his allergies, and the trees that were producing the pollen to which he was allergic. I was able to reflect on the value of intentionally inviting this sense of playful experimentation into the group. By scanning over the notes, I also connected PK’s report to other participant experiences. Many of these reported experiences seemed more profound than I had seen from these practices in their original contexts. Without the piles of session notes spread across my desk and office floor, I would not have had the opportunity to recognize these patterns, build connections, and bring ideas back to the group to inspire new conversations. This process of taking the notes in session, reviewing the notes from a more contemplative stance, and then bringing the stories and ideas back into the group for discussion is partly what became prompts for the emerging themes that I discuss later in this chapter. My session notes were mostly scribbled pages of quotes and observations with participants’ initials next to them interspersed with ideas that were sparked as I listened to their ideas and experiences. A sample page of my session notes can be found in Appendix B.

My field notes follow a more structured format that I filled out after completing each class. From this action I could explore my experiences with a more consistent subjective measure

across the workshops and settings. With the help of Ken Potter, Sheila McNamee, and Sally St. George, I came up with a list of insight-generating questions as a guide into a broader inquiry of my experience. After each group I stayed in the room and asked myself these questions: *What shocked or surprised me? What was I expecting that didn't happen? How did this session sit with me?* On the back of the form I kept a journal of reactions and arresting moments to explore beyond the seven questions I put on the front of the form. I often turned to my notes for inspiration before leading a new group. For example, before introducing a new practice, I was inspired by reading my notes from the week before when I introduced Loving-Kindness Meditation. On April 08, 2014, I wrote that what resonated the most with me in this session was *How well received, and effective, my changes in the language and structure were. There's no need to keep sharing it the way it has been for centuries. . .the changes helped people significantly today.* My field notes form is located in Appendix C. The field notes form provided is blank because my notes contain personal information including first names of participants.

I chose to avoid audio or video recording of any of the workshops due to the intimate nature of the practices and what I felt was a risk of discouraging the more open sharing I was hoping to foster. I felt that recording the group sessions could interfere with my goal of fostering rich and unique understandings of self-care for each person in the room. In retrospect, I feel that this was a good decision although I have no data or comparison to back that claim. The few people I asked said they were thankful there was no recording and that it would likely have led to them sharing less with the group.

The third level of data collection for this study is interviews with participants. These interviews were most often conducted in participants' homes or offices. Most of them took about an hour. While I followed a list of open-ended questions, I left space open for interviewees to wander in order to invite a more personal and less structured response. The results were far richer and more deeply personal than I had anticipated. While some of my fellow students had been telling me they reached saturation of themes and ideas around their seventh or eighth interview, I was still going strong at 16 interviews when I stopped due to time constraints around work, transcription, and organizing additional workshops to gather more experience with culture shifts and communities of practice. The list of questions I used for the interviews can be found in Appendix S. A sample interview transcript is located in Appendix T and the interview consent form is located in Appendix U.

I feel the nature of the workshop, the approach I took in facilitating the interviews in the participant's homes or offices, and the loosely structured list of open-ended questions all worked towards the success of the interviews. In this chapter I draw on the session notes, field notes, and occasionally the interviews to support the description of the workshop materials and approach by letting the participants speak as often as I can. This is most evident in the section title *The Evolution of the Practices*. While this case study draws mostly on the field and session notes, ideas and insights from the interviews have not been excluded. In my third study in Chapter Four I rely exclusively on the interview transcripts.

Arresting moments—the value of field and session notes.

In my attempt to listen more closely to the voices of the participants (Katz & Shotter, 1996), I relied on three forms of recording their voices. My session notes consisted of feedback that stood out the most to me during the workshops. My field notes included feedback as well as other impressions I recorded after each session. In the interviews I found an even richer and deeper exploration of some participants' experience of the workshop. There was valuable information in all three forms of data but the session notes in particular had an excitement to them that I attribute to having been written in the moment the ideas arose.

It was from the session notes that I most often drew my inspiration for further changes to the materials and approach. These notes were only one step removed from my thinking during the workshop whereas the field notes were written in reflective solitude after the workshop was over and the interviews were often weeks later. By gathering information from different points in time, and from within different contexts, I was able to achieve more rigor in my data gathering. I found this most helpful when I noticed something in one context and could then go searching for confirmation of it in the others. While the interviews provided a rich source of information, I found myself leaning heavily on the field notes and session notes for this case study. Most of the participant quotes in this chapter are recorded in my session notes. Their scribbled intensity spoke to me even months later and the circles, arrows, and exclamation points reminded me how the ideas were affecting me in those moments. A sample of my session notes is located in Appendix B.

Three key areas of analysis and description.

This investigation is organized into three key areas. These are: *Facilitating the Workshops*, *The Evolution of the Practices*, and *The Emergence of Themes Within the Group*. I have arranged this chapter to follow these three areas. I start by describing the settings and demographics of the five locations where I facilitated workshops to create a clearer picture of the contexts, and to situate each group. In the second section I describe how the practices and my approach to facilitating the workshops changed over the 10 months of teaching. In the third section I share themes that I created from dialogue, session notes, field notes, and interviews.

In the beginning of each of the three following sections I outline four key areas of analysis and description that I use to tie each part of it together. At the end of each of the next three sections I share my assertions and interpretations on that part of the study. In the discussion and conclusion of this chapter I begin to tie the three areas together and address other issues like the limitations of this study and areas for further research.

Facilitating the Workshops Across Five Settings**Introduction—criteria for description and analysis.**

In this section I use the following four criteria to look at each of the five settings where the workshops were held. First I describe the setting, demographics, and organizational structure.

Second I explore how the workshop was received, what feedback I got from conversations and evaluation forms, and how it felt for me. In the third criteria I discuss the number of people present and explore its influence on my assessment of how well the workshop went. Finally, I discuss the biggest challenge of each setting.

Choosing a bad business model as a cultural counter-practice.

“So you’ve intentionally designed a series of practices that are easy to learn, easy for us to share with others, and instead of a proprietary approach you’ve left them open and encourage us to change them to meet our needs,” said one participant during a group discussion about what dominant cultural narratives we were responding to in our work together. “Yes,” said another student who had just been commenting on the influences of profit-centered mentalities in the mental health field, “That’s what many people would call a bad business model. You’re giving away your product and your authority up front. What are you going to do to keep this going and make money at it?”

My response was to explain that I had never thought of teaching self-care for money. I was pleased to discover that my adaptations of the practices and my approach to teaching were being taken up by some of the participants as a counter to current dominant social influences. I hoped during the inquiry phase that I could create an alternative to the dominant business model by making the self-care materials as fun, accessible, and effective as possible. My goal in starting this project was to accumulate stories, connections, and goodwill, not money.

What has grown out of that goal is an opportunity to create a body of work that could be accessible to a wider audience through publishing a book or workbook. The increasing frequency of invitations to teach workshops and consult with organizations about self-care that have grown out of this project also speaks to the power of following a bad business model. I chose first to “play with my tribe” (P. Chandler, personal communication, February 2014) instead of marketing myself. If people took up the practices I presented, made them their own, and used them regularly, then I planned to come up with new ones. I saw the possibility of giving away the information as an invitation to a process of continually adapting and experimenting with new practices. This was my intent behind the original name of the pilot group, *The Self-Care Lab*.

Setting 1—Warren Street Family Counseling Associates.

Warren Street Family Counseling Associates was the home of the pilot study for the original self-care group. I later facilitated five more workshops over the following 10 months that met one hour a week for 8 weeks each. Warren Street Family Counseling Associates is a large, collaboratively organized group practice in Concord, New Hampshire. Some of the partners own the building in which the practice is located. There are three suites which we call pods on the first floor and two on the second floor. The remainder of the second floor and the entire third floor are rented out as apartments, which provides revenue for the practice and lowers overhead.

Over 20 years ago, a group of family therapists left a local human services agency to start a more client-centered approach to delivering services. They chose an old brick building in downtown Concord, New Hampshire, with separate suites to avoid the busy and sometimes overwhelming feeling of the large waiting rooms used in medical models of care delivery. The founders chose a collaborative approach to structure their practice. All partners take turns sitting on various committees. In most cases unanimous approval is required for significant decisions such as bringing in new partners and making significant financial changes. It was in this collaborative and democratic organization that we figured out a way to facilitate my proposal to build a community-counseling clinic and resident therapist program, The Self-Pay Clinic. This is how I came to be a resident therapist at Warren Street Family Counseling Associates as well as a facilitator of the self-care workshops. My initiative, drive, and concern for others were known by many partners through my attempt to create The Self-Pay Clinic. This probably helped make my offer to teach a self-care workshop attractive enough to entice eight people to sign up.

Warren Street Family Counseling Associates is comprised of over 20 partners whose ages range from late 20s to mid-70s. Most of the founding partners are in their 60s and 70s while newer partners range in their late 20s to late 30s with some partners in their 40s and early 50s who joined over the last 10 years or more. The full-time office staff, one office manager and one business manager, are both in their 60s. As a latecomer to the mental health field and to graduate school, I was in my mid-40s by the time I joined the organization.

In one of the pods, just down the hall from the staff kitchen, is a group room that once was someone's living room—and a wake room during the flu pandemic of 1918. It was here, with a stained carpet and an old television on a metal cart, where we sat in aging metal and fabric chairs and conducted our self-care groups. From the beginning, the workshops felt well-received. Much of the feedback came from conversations during the group sessions as well as what I wrote in my session notes. Participants reported and discussed their experiences of the practices after each exercise and over time became increasingly open about their experiences. This encouraged them to share what was and was not working for them. Having this information was the first step to making changes in the materials and approach from day to day.

In the spring of 2014, I conducted three *Stealing Minutes* workshops at Warren Street Family Counseling Associates, which allowed me to apply feedback from one group to another session in the same week. The three groups, on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, had two, five, and six participants respectively. Noticing the differences between the 2-person group and the other groups led me to begin thinking about what levels of participation might be necessary to affect a change in the culture of an organization. While the 2-person group felt very comfortable, and private, I noticed over time that I would have preferred all 13 people in one room together because the 2-person group seemed the least effective at influencing the organization as one of the members was from outside the practice. This meant the group lacked the opportunity for witnessing practices (White & Epston, 1990) that could influence the organization the way we were in the other two groups. For example, two partners who were in the workshop were able to help a colleague who was struggling by sharing one of the self-care

practices with her. She then joined the next workshop. From experiences like this I recognized the value of having two or more people from the same organization relating together.

On a number of occasions participants said how nice it would be if everyone was together in one group. After realizing how much they had each learned about their colleagues, participants became curious about the experiences and stories being shared in the other groups. With everyone's permission, I became a *liaison of stories* among the three groups. Participants reported that this helped them better appreciate the practices by learning about how others responded to them. It also encouraged the request to come together in one group, which I responded to by offering one workshop over the summer and another that autumn.

The process of transforming from three groups to one group evolved into a community of practice through the creation of a weekly Self-Care Circle at Warren Street Family Counseling Associates. The setting, the number of people in the group, and the demographics all contributed to the co-construction of this transformation. I discuss this process further in the section on culture shifts and communities of practice in Chapter Five. The biggest challenge for me across all five workshops at Warren Street Family Counseling Associates was pacing. As a member of a group of like-minded, educated professionals I often find myself engaged in day-to-day conversations that include a significant amount of assumed knowledge. These conversations often take place in a rushed conversational style due to each individual being on a separate schedule. When I added the 25 years I have been engaged with Qigong, meditation, and mindfulness, I sometimes slipped into a faster conversational and teaching style.

The most common feedback on this style from participants who did not have previous experience with these approaches was that it was overwhelming and stressful for them when they tried to keep up. I seemed particularly prone to this with guided exercises like the Loving-Kindness Meditation and areas where my knowledge base was the strongest, like with Qigong. It was a humbling and important learning experience to realize the occasions when my approach was undermining my goals of helping people be less stressed in the workplace. I describe these experiences in greater detail in the sections where I address each practice separately. This is particularly evident in the upcoming sections on Qigong and The Inner Smile.

Setting 2—Concord Hospital oncology support groups.

The Payson Center at Concord Hospital is our nearest cancer center. Here patients have access to radiation, chemotherapy, doctors, scans, and a variety of support services provided by a full-time oncology social work staff. My colleague, PK, invited me to co-present on self-care at a men's prostate cancer support group in February 2014. One of the oncology social workers at that presentation later joined my self-care workshops at Warren Street Family Counseling Associates. The support groups at Concord Hospital met upstairs in a new and modern wing of the hospital. We sat at plastic tables in a large square shape with one full wall of windows facing west to the sunset over a hill covered with evergreen trees. The groups usually had about 20 people and roughly half of them were the spouses of the men receiving treatment.

While the feel of the setting could not have been more different than the group room at Warren Street Family Counseling Associates, something felt similar to me during these first attempts to carry this work beyond the walls of our comfortable old brick building. There was an ease and flow that I had noticed at Warren Street Family Counseling Associates but did not expect in a hospital setting with people who were struggling with serious medical issues. The feedback in the groups was as immediate and positive as I had seen in the groups at Warren Street Family Counseling Associates. People seemed more moved and thankful than other groups. From personal experience, I attribute this to the often-increased emotional openness of people in their situation, as well to the fact that most of the professionals I was teaching at Warren Street Family Counseling Associates had decades of accumulated experience in self-care and spiritual practices. Much of what I was presenting at Concord Hospital seemed new to the participants and they were openly thankful for it.

Due to limited time, instead of following a prescribed course I brought a handout containing all the self-care practices with me and explained each one briefly to the group. I let them choose which ones we would practice together and which ones they could experiment with on their own. I had already heard their introductions and stories so I adjusted my description of the practices accordingly. For example, one participant had been unable to be in contact with an important caregiver so during the description of Loving-Kindness Meditation I described how some people had been using it to feel connected to loved ones whom they could not be with physically at the time.

The biggest challenge for me while facilitating the cancer support groups was managing my emotional responses. I chose to disclose my history of losing my wife to cancer in the beginning of each group to share my connection with the disease and do my part to foster an open and intimate environment. The challenge that followed was to then use my heightened emotions to help me while not letting it interfere with my ability to stay positive and hopeful with the group. I feel that I struck a successful balance between emotionality and functionality. The positive, heartfelt, and touching feedback from members after the sessions seems to indicate that the mixed approach worked. I chose vulnerability and intimacy as a counterpoint to having been brought in as an “outside expert,” which left me feeling constrained and limited.

Setting 3—Harbor Point Therapy.

The offices for Harbor Point Therapy are located in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, in a modern development of large retail stores, chain restaurants, and office parks. Located on the second floor of a non-descript office building surrounded by a moat of parking lots, the owners of Harbor Point Therapy have done a remarkable job of transforming a dull and cold office space into a warm, quirky, and inviting environment. While the u-shaped layout of long hallways with rooms on the outside walls, and windows that do not open, reminds visitors of the modern, corporate nature of the space, what is contained within it makes an admirable antidote.

The three women who own the practice have painted calming and earthy colors on the walls, re-surfaced the chairs in the waiting room with fabrics of their choosing, and hung tasteful

and attractive artwork on the walls. There are two other offices that are leased to therapists in private practices as well as a kitchen and a conference room on a corner with plenty of glass on two of the walls. The view from the conference room looks out over other office buildings but with plenty of skyline to enjoy an expansive view of the clouds and the afternoon sun.

My first workshop at Harbor Point Therapy was to a full house of over 25 participants which led the organizers to set up the modest-sized conference room with the chairs in classroom style, neatly lined up in rows facing the front. This seemed a natural fit for the first presenter with her PowerPoint presentation but it felt disconnecting for me after having only worked in groups arranged in a small circle. The audience was comprised of mental health professionals and for the first time I was teaching a room full of people only knowing a handful of them. The layout of the room felt like it was restricting my ability to connect with all of the participants because it was hard for me to see the people towards the back.

The second group was half the size with about 12 participants. We were able to leave the conference table in the room and sit around it facing each other. This made it easier for me to project my voice and watch faces for nonverbal cues. I felt more connected to each person in the group in this setting. I noticed that there was more dialogue in the second group. The more personal setting seemed to create space for discussion about how to proceed through the material based on the moods and needs of the participants. In the first group, that opportunity felt less present and I ran the group strictly on my own assessments of how the group was responding or not responding to the material. While the feedback from the first group was positive and often heartfelt, I feel that there is a middle ground in the number of participants that makes for a more intimate setting that better supports an experiential and dialogic approach to self-care.

An important context of the Harbor Point Therapy setting is that the workshops were advertised as issuing Ethics Continuing Education Units to all participants. While the demographics are similar—master's degree level licensed mental health professionals—the early workshops at Warren Street Family Counseling Associates were attended by people attracted just for the self-care. My feeling about the Harbor Point Therapy workshops is that a number of people were there for the Ethics Continuing Education Units. This seemed to manifest in the first workshop with a number of participants who seemed disinterested and reluctant to give feedback. Many of these people could be found sitting in the back row or directly behind someone so they were less visible.

It seems a testament to the materials, and perhaps the approach, that a number of these people eventually began sharing their experiences after the exercises and even started asking questions. The biggest challenge for me at Harbor Point Therapy was feeling a desire to connect with every person in the room and wanting to help each person in some way. While this was my intention in creating the workshops, in that workshop I learned to let go of one or two people who did not seem to be engaged and do my best to deliver a good workshop to as many people as I could. It took me about an hour of nervous sweating and last minute adjustments to the materials to finally reach that point. Thankfully, many of the participants remarked about how

calm and centered I appeared during the workshop and how they felt I was modeling the self-care approach to them.

Setting 4—Concord Hospital Family Health Center.

The fourth setting for the *Stealing Minutes* workshop took place across two locations with the same group of people. The director of the Concord Hospital Family Health Center became familiar with my work by reading my application for Ethics Continuing Education Units. She contacted me to explain that her department had been under a significant amount of stress in recent months and that she would like to arrange training on self-care to help bring them together and alleviate some of the stress.

The Concord Hospital Family Health Center is a busy integrative-care practice that treats medical and psychological issues. Their psychological services department has a wide range of staff from a psychiatrist to social workers, mental health counselors, and marriage and family therapists. They have a teaching division for resident doctors in family medicine and the counseling department maintains a full roster of master's and doctoral interns. This culture of learning and apprenticing is one aspect of the Concord Hospital Family Health Center that I admired, particularly because I have noticed a lack of such a culture in many private group practices. I drew inspiration from their diversity of staff to continue developing the Self-Pay Clinic at Warren Street Family Counseling Associates into a training clinic that can eventually support a wider range of interns and residents who can benefit from the education and experience of our 20 partners, some of whom are experts in their field.

Being integrated with a medical practice on a hospital campus, the culture and approach to therapy at the Concord Hospital Family Health Center is very different from the private group practice cultures at Warren Street Family Counseling Associates and Harbor Point Therapy. For example, the Concord Hospital Family Health Center staff see more crisis calls in a day than either private practice is likely to see in a month. They also take walk-in appointments for any client on their patient list. This can make for a stressful environment with one single waiting room for all patients and no pre-assigned therapy rooms for the practitioners. Each therapist signs out one of a few therapy rooms as needed throughout the day and then returns to a desk in a group office to do paperwork and take calls.

The director asked to bring her team to me in order to provide them with a change of environment. They became the first outside group to meet in the Warren Street Family Counseling Associates group room. The 12 of them barely fit in the space. The participants seemed to enjoy the workshop and talked openly about their experiences with the practices. They often discussed what kinds of clients they were thinking about sharing them with as soon as they got back to work.

With the Concord Hospital Family Health Center staff, I had two advantages. Not only was the number within the range I have come to consider the most supportive of building community while maintaining intimacy, but I was hopeful that working with a group of people from a closely knit organization might create different potentials that were not available in

workshops that were open to the general public. For example, I had recently become interested in the possibility of culture shifts around self-care in organizations. From the workshop, and in the weeks following the workshop, this interest became an opportunity and I later played a role in helping institutionalize self-care practices at the Concord Hospital Family Health Center.

Some of the participants talked about how excited they were to integrate these practices into their work culture and asked questions about how to help create such a shift. They later contacted me to let me know that in the week following the workshop there was a significant improvement in the morale, energy levels, and cooperation in the department, however, they also reported a few weeks later that it was fading back to the old baseline that they had known before coming to the workshop. This return to the previous baseline prompted one of the staff to contact me to request a meeting to consult with her about strategies for moving back toward the shift that occurred in the week after the workshop. After consulting with her twice, we were able to get the director involved in the project. With the director showing excitement and commitment to move forward with our plan, we held a meeting with five of the Concord Hospital Family Health Center staff and developed a plan to help them shift their culture towards a higher prioritization of self-care. This unexpected opportunity and the organizational changes that we created from it are described in more detail in Chapter Five.

The biggest challenge for me with the Concord Hospital Family Health Center staff was figuring out how much to share in the 3 hours we had together in a way that would give them a big enough taste of the benefits of the self-care practices without overwhelming them with information. As I did with the cancer support groups, I put all of the self-care practices together in a 20-page handout and let the group help me decide how to move forward with our time together. While this helped me sort out the best possible approach, I was concerned about the limited time. I was thinking the 8-week approach would be the most effective in creating lasting change for the participants. This led me to worry about the systemic implications of the structure of this workshop and I remained concerned about how I would be able to affect some level of 2nd-order change (Nichols & Schwartz, 2010) in such a short time until I was contacted by participant about helping her with exactly that which I had been concerned—how to extend the *Stealing Minutes* workshop into a vehicle for shifting organizational cultures.

It was challenging for me to lead a group of professionals that included a board member of my field's regulatory body and a prominent psychiatrist who is well-known in the area for his trainings on mindfulness and self-care. As with every workshop I facilitated, once I settled into the material, the thicket became full of plum blossoms again (Bashō, 2000).

Setting 5—Parker Academy staff retreat.

Parker Academy is a private day school in Concord, New Hampshire, for boys and girls with learning or emotional challenges. Most of the children at the school are diagnosed on the autism spectrum and have struggled to adapt to the public school system. The staff has a strong focus on education and do not accept students who have been involved in physical or sexual violence. Being a day school, the students are generally safe and successful at living at home.

My sense of the culture of Parker Academy is one of informal competence. The staff members are friendly and quick to cooperate with each other. They often resorted to humor and playfulness as they went about meeting their daily responsibilities. I discovered that most people at Parker Academy have a deep knowledge about each other's work and personal lives.

A colleague of mine at Warren Street Family Counseling Associates has been a school psychologist at Parker Academy for the last 10 years and has been able to make significant changes in the school's approach to education through integrating mindfulness, neuroscience, and a relational focus into the curriculum (Olson, 2014). Some of the practices he shared with the staff and students came from my workshops and eventually the principal of the school contacted me and invited me to lead the first day of their staff retreat. The retreat took place on a rural farm setting in northern New Hampshire. The entire center was booked for 3 days and provided enough rooms for everyone to stay on site. The rolling hills with a long southern view to the horizon, the mild and breezy summer day, and the relaxed atmosphere of a retreat at the end of a busy school year all contributed to what became one of my favorite experiences facilitating a self-care training. Attached to a beautifully restored old barn was a tent over a stone floor that had a view over the rolling fields. It was open on three sides and exposed to the prevailing southwest breezes that often blow across New England on summer afternoons. Under this tent was a circle of about 25 chairs. It was there that we spent our day learning self-care practices and discussing them in the open-air setting.

This was my second opportunity to work with a group who came from the same organization. While I noticed they had a similar ease and comfort as the Concord Hospital Family Health Center group did with settling into working together, I think the choice of the physical setting and the retreat approach versus the staff training approach opened access to additional levels of willingness to share. I would normally consider a group of 25 people too far up my spectrum of ideal sizes, but the arrangement of the participants in a circle, the relaxed nature of the retreat context, and being outside on a warm, sunny day seemed to go a long way to building intimacy.

My biggest challenge with the Parker Academy workshop was worrying about language and how I should shift it to adapt to this new demographic of educators. The primary reason I accepted the request to facilitate this workshop was to experiment with taking the materials and approach for a test-drive in a different professional culture. I was concerned that by constructing an approach specifically for the world of applied psychology, the limits of my language could mean the limits (Anscombe et al., 2009) of the workshop effectiveness.

As it turned out, the materials and approach were well-received by almost all of the staff. I was relieved to see a similar level of interest, excitement, and engagement with the practices as I experienced in the previous four settings. There were a few people who did not seem to respond to the workshop approach or to the material itself. At one point the school psychologist wisely brought up the "weirdness factor" while speaking to the group and talked about how this material could seem odd at first because it is new and different. He also stressed benefits other people in

the organization had personally reported. I have since adopted this weirdness disclaimer for use in my workshops.

I was interested to discover, especially from a demographic and organizational perspective, that the two people who seemed the least engaged, and who occasionally responded negatively to the material, were both much younger than the rest of the group, were relatively new part-time employees of the school, and were the least integrated into the Parker Academy community. I think the relaxed nature of the Parker Academy culture and the lack of need for Continuing Education Units allowed them to be more outspoken and less motivated to participate than I may have seen in other workshops. This experience helped me focus on teaching the course while remaining more resilient to negative responses.

The value of sharing my story.

“Something about you helped me get there,” said LP as she was describing the positive impacts these self-care practices have had in her life. “I think because you wove your personal story into it,” she continued. This was a shining moment for me because I had intentionally taken the risk of integrating my story into my approach to the workshop. I did this to make it more personal and to open up the kind of space I felt would encourage participants to embrace the practices on a deeper level. Another participant reported that telling my story of how I created these adaptations in response to the stress and lack of time I experienced during my wife’s illness opened her up in a way that helped her feel more connected to me.

At the cancer support groups, this sharing helped me be accepted as one of the group, as indeed I was one of the group. Listening to a person who has come, free of charge, to share what he has learned though such loss seemed to make the material more valuable to the participants. I noticed an increase in questions and requests for more resources once they knew I had one foot in the cancer world and one in the therapy world. I was presenting as a mental health professional, yet I had lived the life of a caregiver and continued living the life of a widower.

Finding a context where I can present myself in a more holistic format that exposes more of my multi-beingness (Gergen, 2009b) has felt like a blessing for me because it reduces the dissonance between my personal philosophy and my professional, presented self. As a proponent of living a life connected to the world around me (Besthorn, St. George, & Wulff, 2010), I try to bring as much of myself as I can into my work. I find it easier to live one flexible and malleable story than to separate my narratives (White, 1997) as a therapist and a person into multiple compartmentalized lives that necessitate the management of borders between them.

In a room full of prostate cancer survivors and their spouses, I sat alone, with an empty chair on each side of me, and told my story of loss. The power of what I was doing became clearer to me when I noticed a number of participants reach for their spouse’s hand as I spoke. When I have the chance to engage in an emotional connection with a group of people, I almost always find myself more fully immersed in the flow of the work (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). I find being in this relational flow (Gergen, 2006) more meaningful, the impacts more dynamic, and the connections more powerful. This shining moment grew out of the dance of courting the

emotions with self-disclosure while staying grounded enough to facilitate the workshop. There may be risks involved with going that deep, but the return on investment are attractive enough to me that I keep following this path.

Folding it in—changing my approach on the fly.

“As we relate, so do we construct our future.”

~ Kenneth Gergen (Gergen, 2009a)

One of the advantages of teaching many workshops across multiple settings is the opportunity to quickly test changes to the materials and make adaptations to my approach within a few days of discovering the opening. This approach of folding the learning in reflexively to improve the workshop has been a key driver of this project. Another advantage that stems from social constructionist and narrative practices is the ability to change my approach within a workshop and the willingness to invite the participants into the decision-making process to help co-construct a better way to move forward together. In graduate school I was taken by the concept that we construct our future together through the ways that we relate with each other (Gergen, 2009a). *I realized then that we are moving into the future together whether we co-construct it or not!*

Out of this awareness, I wove a participatory element into the workshop because I wanted everyone to be there in the future with me when it arrived. Being a practitioner of postmodern therapy models and following their assumption that there is no single truth (Nichols & Schwartz, 2010) invited me back into my childhood philosophy of accepting all people while questioning their truths. This approach helped me extend the practice of folding it in to the participants and seems to have helped build a sense of community through making us all stakeholders in the journey.

Assertions and interpretations—the relational trumps the setting.

An unexpected finding from this phase of the case study is the importance of the relational as a factor in the success of the workshops and how its role seems to have had more impact than the settings or demographics. In this section, I explore the path to this finding. The value of the relational component became evident to me as I read the stories and experiences I had collected. In many cases, the changes I made occurred while hearing another person's experience with a practice or sharing the practice with a friend or client, or while I was guiding the group through a practice. Although I approached each new setting and demographic with an eye for how the location, organization, and number of people could impact the training, in most cases it appeared that there is an accessibility, openness, and effectiveness to the materials and my playfully relational approach that seemed more impactful than any of the contextual differences upon which I had been focusing. This realization led me to begin investing time and energy in exploring other settings where this new approach to self-care might be welcomed

because, until that moment, I had assumed that *Stealing Minutes* would have a small audience. I speak more about this emerging opportunity and where it is leading in Chapter Five.

Another sign of the relational trumping the setting is the evolution of the practices from being taught for the benefit of mental health professionals to their use as therapeutic approaches with their clients. While this speaks to me of the accessibility of the practices, it also provides a second level of benefit to the participants by being able to offer more resources to their clients. Hopefully this will circle back to benefit the participants by helping to lower the intensity of their clients' challenges.

The Evolution of the Practices

Introduction—criteria for description and analysis.

In this section I continue the descriptive approach by using the following four criteria for analysis to revisit each of the self-care practices that I first described in Chapter Two. First, through reviewing my session and field notes, I looked at how each practice has changed over 10 months of teaching it to over 80 people. I also explored why I think those changes took place. My second criteria was to examine how the narrative and social constructionist principles I outlined in Chapter Two carried through into the way I was teaching the practices. In my third criteria I looked at what went well with each self-care practice and how I folded that into my approach to teaching. I relied mostly on my remembrance of group feedback as well as my ongoing relationship with the ideas I wrote down in my session and field notes. In the fourth criteria for examining each practice I looked at what stood out for me about each one across the workshops.

I carried my research question for this study forward as I moved through reviewing the practices. That question is, *What impacts would it have if I facilitated this training with as many mental health professionals across as many different settings as I could find over the next 6 months?* In this section I consider the impacts on the practices themselves from teaching them in a variety of settings. I also describe new practices that I created based on experiences from the first workshops in the early spring of 2014. In each section I point the reader to the specific appendix where the handouts are located.

Saving Qigong—"as we relate..."

One of the most surprising responses to all of the practices I presented in the early workshops was the lack of use of the Qigong exercise. Referring to Ken Gergen's assertion that the ways in which we relate with each other influences the future we construct together (Gergen, 2009a), I went back to my session notes and interviews to find out where I may have gone off course. A number of participants reported not using the Qigong move regularly because they had difficulty taking it up within a framework of understanding that encouraged its consistent use.

It seems that even after 8 weeks of doing the move in each group session, the practice was not available to them on the level I had been hoping. (I described my approach of choosing

one Qigong move that can be taught weekly while layering on additional understandings of it in Chapter Two in the section titled *Qigong—Finding the Move and Playing with the Language*.) Part of my description of these practices during the workshops is that *they are simple enough to learn quickly and there in your pocket when you need them the most*. Clearly, the Qigong move was not sitting in people's pockets the way I had hoped it would. As one participant said, "I don't think I ever reached the level of comfort with it, so I haven't gone to it repeatedly the way I have with other practices, like the Finger Holds." She talked about how powerful and grounding the practice felt when doing it in the group sessions. She also described feeling overwhelmed by too much information about how to do the Qigong move and consequently she found it difficult to do the practice outside the workshop.

Reports from participants who were struggling with the Qigong move kept coming in to me. I heard them talk about "worrying too much about what's happening with my balance," and becoming anxious while practicing and thinking, "What's happening with my feet? Am I on the balls or heels? My knees, how are my knees? Are they locked?" In the words of one participant, "There was too much. If I ignore all that and I just do what feels comfortable to me, I think I get a lot out of it." *Had a participant just reminded me of the philosophy and approach I developed in the inquiry phase 6 months earlier? Did this indicate I had experienced mission drift in my approach to teaching the adaptation of Qigong as a self-care practice?* The answer was yes on both counts.

My changes in the Qigong approach were twofold. First, I reduced the amount of information about what Qigong is and how it is practiced. I did this because I was concerned about overwhelming the participants and also because I felt a strong sense of dedication to Qigong and wanted to find a way to make it helpful for others. Second, when I did offer insights into various ways to do the move, I framed them more as alternatives to explore on their own merit, not as a list of necessary ingredients that all need to be present in order to do the movement properly. While I intentionally tried to avoid a didactic approach to sharing the Qigong movement, the participants sometimes interpreted my inclusion of too much information by trying to digest it all at once.

Here I see that I carried forward my constructionist-oriented goal of encouraging creative ways of engaging with the Qigong movement by presenting many different ways it can be done, and many different ways to be mindful during the practice. It was in the language of the approach where I slipped into a more didactic and expert stance. This happened a few times over the course of the 10 months and without exception occurred when teaching the practices I had known the longest and used the most in my personal life. When I changed my narrative around the practice by encouraging participants to explore the exercise in any way that resonated with them and to discard anything I said that did not help them practice in a calm and relaxed way, the reports of Qigong being used more often began to come back to me.

One of the approaches that went well with the Qigong was my decision to include practicing it at the beginning of each of the eight sessions of the longer workshops. The participants in those workshops, after I folded in the feedback from those who felt overwhelmed,

reported more positive experiences. One participant reported a new appreciation of the exercise when she said, “I just want to move organically. That’s how it’s comfortable for me. That’s relaxing. As soon as I start to focus on any one part, I don’t do as well.” Another participant stated, “I’m definitely using the Qigong for people who are used to exercise and I say ‘okay, it’s great that you’re exercising your body, now try being in your body in this way and see how that is.’” She then spoke about how it helps her clients to begin building a new relationship between their bodies and their minds.

After a later workshop, one participant reported, “What was nice for the Qigong exercise is that you certainly made it very simple, even in the presentation of it, and you gave a few wonderful examples that we practiced like doing it as a grounding exercise, or with the 70% principle. I think it’s a good opportunity for people to understand how one movement can be used in so many ways and can encourage us to think about how we can do it differently and what other ways we can think of.” *Yes, I said with a laugh, without overwhelming them!*

What stood out about the Qigong exercise across the workshops is how much more difficult it was to teach a movement-based practice versus one that draws more on mental processes without engaging the body directly. An expressive therapist in the group told me, “I think it’s because of the self-consciousness. It brings up a lot of ‘am I doing this right?’” She shared similar experiences to mine of finding it harder to get people to do movement-based practices and said, “There’s a little more resistance to standing up and doing that and I’ve noticed people want to stop sooner than with the other exercises.”

As attached as I am to Qigong after 25 years of study and practice, I now toss it out there with the other self-care practices in the *Stealing Minutes* toolkit and leave more room for participants to decide whether or not they want to take it out of the toolbox and play with it, or choose something else. I finally remembered to embrace the idea that the way I make sense of the world is not required by the world itself (Gergen, 2009a).

The 70% Principle—an old idea for a new age.

While the 70% principle itself did not change, my approach to it did. It was consistently the most talked about of the Qigong principles that I shared with the groups. I initially introduced this idea during the Qigong movement but it soon began showing up in discussions about dominant cultural discourses that were interfering with our self-care, in other practices, and approaches to diet, career, and finances. Many of the participants reported finding the concept useful beyond the boundaries of the self-care workshop.

In tandem with the excessive information that I began my approach with the Qigong movement, I gave participants of the early workshops a 3-page handout with many of my favorite Taoist Qigong principles. I tried to include one principle each time I led the group through the Qigong movement, as well as trying to cover how the movement affects certain parts of the body. As I learned from the feedback, this was too much information for most people. Thanks to the feedback from the early groups, I learned that only two of the many Qigong principles seemed popular. The 70% Principle was the first. The second principle that resonated

the most with participants was “The Down Creates the Up.” I included this concept because it reminds us to focus on the downward, and more calming, sections of the movement as a counter-practice to a cultural preference for “up and out.” I learned this from Bill Ryan during my years of study at Brookline Tai Chi in Boston, Massachusetts. From a self-care perspective, focusing on anything that encourages grounding and relaxing is helpful.

I saw the narrative principles shine through with this self-care approach as I watched people use it to help encourage and shape the construction of their preferred identities (Freedman & Combs, 1996) of self-care. I was amazed by how many participants incorporated it into their stories about how they wanted to live their lives. From a constructionist perspective, the spread of this concept reminded me of the relational power of ideas and that there are as many different interpretations of an idea as there are people to interpret it. The 70% Principle has been like a trickster character, wandering into people’s lives and changing their relationships with coffee, food, work schedules, families, and exercise. Like my approach to mindfulness, I made the 70% Principle part of the core philosophy of my approach instead of a practice in its own right.

The Jin Shin Jyutsu Finger Holds.

As I described in Chapter Two, I was hesitant to include this practice in the pilot workshop because its simplicity led me to assume it would be dismissed quickly by the participants as “cheesy” or “new age.” To my continued surprise, the Finger Holds have been as consistently well-received throughout all workshops as they were in the pilot group. One participant captured the essence of the Finger Holds this way: “I think the Finger Holds for me are the biggest effect on my life. Isn’t that funny? It was so frickin’ simple, just holding your fingers. It was the most calming and useful.” Another participant used it effectively for insomnia and reported that he often fell back asleep quickly, and when he could not, he “felt much more relaxed about being awake at 3am.”

People reported doing the Finger Holds in traffic, during difficult phone calls, at the dentist, as a tool to facilitate a deeper experience during meditation, and as a way to reduce anxiety before or after a challenging interaction. Many participants recalled memories of childhood and a few experienced revisiting memories of interactions with their mothers, milking cows in the barn, and nursing as infants. In the cancer support group, an older gentleman reported that he could not do, “the complicated mindfulness stuff that woman was teaching to the group last week but I can do the Finger Holds and they help. I couldn’t do that other stuff but I can do this.”

One of the things that went well with the Finger Holds was the relational transmission of this practice as illustrated by the report from a clinical psychologist who taught his daughter while visiting her and she enjoyed it so much she then taught her daughter. Her daughter then adopted her own shorter version and took it to her preschool where she taught the other children to use it. A practice that can spread across the country and among three generations in a few days while changing form to suit each person or group was exactly what I was attempting to create in the first study.

What stood out through all workshops was how easily people learned the Finger Holds, how effective they were in bringing about a relaxed state, and how quickly they spread into people's professional and personal lives. This practice stands out as the most commonly used by therapists with their clients. Within days of teaching the Finger Holds I had requests for copies of the handout so therapists could share it with their clients. This contributed to a diversity of applications, which fueled the co-construction of new versions that I describe in the upcoming section on hybrid practices. The original handout *Jin Shin Jyutsu Finger Holds* is located in Appendix G.

Loving-Kindness Meditation.

While the Loving-Kindness Meditation was one of the few practices I changed little of over the course of the 10 months of teaching it, it had become one of the most changed practices by the participants. Unlike my approach to Qigong and Taoist Qigong principles, I was able to come up with a more adaptable and flexible version of Loving-Kindness Meditation the first time around and encouraged participants to change any phrases that did not sit well right away during my first presentation of the practice.

This invitation to experiment and play with anything that felt awkward or uncomfortable helped participants to adopt personalized versions during the first time they learned the practice. I invited them to share these adaptations with the group afterwards. Sometimes other participants liked the personal versions better and adopted them as their own. In this way, the practice of Loving-Kindness Meditation changed more from group dialogue than from me folding in what I learned to change the way I approached sharing it. For example, one participant who struggles with focus and attention added “may I be curious” to the practice and another therapist liked it so much he picked it up and incorporated it into his version. In reference to my changing so many of the practices I learned within more complex and traditional systems, and in observing how much further they were being modified by participants, I later joked in one of the workshops, *I think I've now become a heretic in every spiritual tradition in which I've been a member.*

One participant struggled with the phrase “may you live with ease” because the concept of an easy life contradicted her faith. I feel that if I had not been open and inviting of change that she, and many others, may not have shared such sensitive and personal information with me. Another participant reported during a workshop that he struggled with the practice initially because he does not believe in the verb “to be” and he had to search around for a suitable alternative. He eventually settled on “feel” as a substitute for “be.” This invitation to change was also apparent in how therapists used Loving-Kindness Meditation in their own practices. Some therapists adapted it to work within other techniques like Eye-Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing and visualization while others created shorter or more customized versions for children with anxiety. A common denominator in the way the practice changed, both for mental health professionals and their clients, was that the original language did not feel right and was changed as needed.

Another thing that went well with the Loving-Kindness Meditation was the adaptation of coming back to the self. As one participant reported, “This recently helped me going into a tough meeting. I loved coming back to the self.” Another therapist said, “I love that you don’t go to ‘enemy’ like the traditional version. And I really like that you go back to the self. Ending with the world can feel so hopeless.” To me, this adds Loving-Kindness Meditation to the practices that satisfy my goal of following through on the application of social constructionist, narrative, and collaborative principles. For example, a practice that can be adapted to the needs of different people can be used to open up space to a more playful way of embracing self-care.

What stood out across the workshops was the sense of connection to others that people reported when practicing Loving-Kindness Meditation. “It feels so real,” said one participant. “I felt actually connected to the people I was doing it for.” One participant reported shifting over time from “a way to calm and nurture” herself to “using Loving-Kindness to feel connected to people that were not in as much contact with us as we want.” The original handout *Loving-Kindness Meditation* is located in Appendix F.

From letters to maps—gratitude goes experiential.

One of the self-care approaches I changed the most was my approach to gratitude. In the pilot group I had been unable to come up with an experiential approach to gratitude. I provided a handout with a description of a number of ways we can engage with it like starting a gratitude journal, writing a letter of gratitude to someone, or going for a walk while appreciating as much of your surroundings as you can. Similar to other times I simply provided a handout and without including a guided experiential component to a practice, gratitude became the least used and talked about of all the practices in the pilot group. In this sense, it was the lack of feedback that influenced me to change the practice instead of responding to specific feedback. Feeling left with no constructive feedback to respond to, I decided to create something I would like to use for engaging with gratitude. Carrying my affinity for handouts forward, I chose a flowchart for my starting point because it represented a visual structure for me. I wanted to try to create an exercise that people could feel guided and supported with just from the handout. Gratitude seemed like my best candidate for this challenge.

I developed an approach I call Gratitude Maps and brought it to the next workshop. Gratitude Maps is a 2-page flowchart-based exercise that starts with identifying thankfulness for three people, three places, and three things. On the next page I start with one of the choices from the first page and ask for three things to be grateful for about it. In two following sections I encourage participants to explore three things to be grateful for in relation to one of the items of gratitude expressed at the top of the page. I chose this approach to invite the participant on a journey from being grateful about something to finding richer descriptions within an expression of gratitude. I drew inspiration for this concept from the narrative practice of scaffolding into richer descriptions through increasingly focused questions (White, 2007). I also borrow from recent research showing that positive effects of gratitude are more lasting if the practice includes clarifying why one is grateful (Seligman, 2011).

What went well with this new approach to gratitude was that many participants reported finding themselves somewhere unexpected in the journey from the top of page two to the bottom. In just three steps, many participants travelled further into the territory of gratitude than they had previously explored. Many participants reported being familiar with the origins of the practice on the first page that centers around three things someone is grateful for and said they had previously found that practice ineffective. As one person reported, “it’s a way to walk people through gratitude in a way that I think will go deeper than just thinking of three things.”

Patterns that opened doors into participants’ lives sometimes became evident. For example, one person said, “All the places I picked are in my daily life! I am blessed. Right here is a good place to be!” Another participant reported finding his attention focused on his connection to his brother over sharing the loss of their parents. He realized their mutual love for the outdoors seemed to be a big part of sustaining their connection. In keeping track of where people’s focus goes with this exercise, I noticed most people in each group gravitated toward the personal, versus a place or thing, and often ended up exploring a close relationship in a new way. A few times a participant reported doing it for his/her spouse and took it home to share. This sharing often led to an intimate conversation about what each person is grateful for in the other. I later took this idea into my therapy sessions with couples and found it very helpful.

What stood out the most with this practice was the new level of depth and richness participants were quickly and unexpectedly experiencing. After describing the results of her first experience with the Gratitude Maps, one participant said, “I don’t think I could have articulated all that if you’d just asked me off the cuff.” Another colleague reported, “This is fantastic. I picked something I was curious about and it took me someplace really interesting.” I was very pleased with the outcome of sharing this practice and included it in every workshop that followed. Gratitude Maps has become one of the most commonly shared practices with clients. Months later, I still run into colleagues in the office making copies of it for their next session. The handout *Gratitude Maps* is located in Appendix V.

The Inner Smile—a black swan emerges.

After the difficulties the pilot group reported with the Inner Smile practice, I made more changes and tried it again in two more workshops. It was a failure both times and I received yet more criticism about it. With sadness, I decided to let the practice go and stop modifying it under the assumption that I could come up with a version that would eventually be liked. I call this one of my black swan practices because, like the concept shared by Nassim Taleb in his book about the impact of things we assume are improbable (Taleb, 2007), it went against my assumption that it would be one of the most popular of the practices. Holding this assumption allowed me to push a exercise that had consistently received negative reviews. Looking back, I feel lucky that I introduced it to groups where I had established solid rapport with an atmosphere of open sharing.

One participant reported that doing the Inner Smile made her feel stressed and anxious because it was too structured for her. Another reported, “producing a smile felt artificial and forced.” A colleague who had a more positive experience with it during the group later said, “I

did try to share the Inner Smile with the children. That did not go over very well.” She reported that the last time she was trying to show her daughter how to do the Finger Holds she said, “You’re not going to tell me to that Inner Smile thing again are you?”

What stood out across my four attempts to implement this practice was the failure to help people feel better and the consistent negative feedback. While I slowly drifted away from other practices that seemed less accessible or exciting for people, the Inner Smile was the only one that I eliminated completely from the project due to overwhelmingly negative response. A benefit from introducing the Inner Smile as a more exotic version of progressive relaxation was that the group shared stories of experiences with progressive relaxation practices they liked. I was able to gather many new ideas about how to move forward with a more accessible, effective, and easier to learn progressive relaxation exercise. The original handout *The Inner Smile for Self-Care* is located in Appendix I.

Taoist Dissolving Meditation—a bridge to progressive relaxation.

Dissolving Meditation is a type of progressive relaxation that is done while standing (Frantzis, 1993). While Dissolving Meditation is part of a system of Qigong practices and focuses more on energy than visualization, it shares many properties with progressive relaxation and seemed to be a potential bridge between mental practices done while sitting and physical practices that involved movement. I had been thinking about a bridge practice since the beginning. The failure of the Inner Smile along with the negative feedback about it, led me to bring forward the Dissolving Meditation. I applied the same criteria to it that I used in creating the first set of practices. I left out any dogmatic philosophical stances that came from the broader system of thought in which this practice was situated. I left out some of the specificity of how the practice should be done in order to increase its audience and open space for it to have more room to be taken up for meaning-making in different ways by different people. The positive feedback indicated the adaptation of this practice was much more successful than the Inner Smile.

After parsing out some of the more specific and esoteric language, I infused my approach to the practice with a stronger mindfulness component by using the terms, *awareness* and *intention*, as I guided the participants through their bodies from the top of their heads to their feet. During the practice I continually encouraged participants to stop anywhere they were drawn and remain open to thoughts, feelings, and other things they might want to address with this same intention of dissolving. One participant reported that he loved the term *dissolve* because he sensed a gentleness to it that felt counter to the way people “tackle, attack, or blast away at things.” Another person said that while he tried to “dissolve” his allergies, he instead felt a stronger connection and love for the trees that were the source of the pollen that triggered his allergic responses. Two people reported experiencing reduced pain in areas of the body where they brought their “dissolving awareness” and were happy to share a few days later that the benefits were still present. Another person reported, “the experience was very powerful for me. I got dizzy after a while and had to sit down.”

Opening the practice to allow people the freedom to choose how closely they want to follow the original structure as I presented it (which was already modified from the original) encouraged many of the participants to adapt and modify it during their first experience with it. This playfulness, willingness to become stakeholders in a co-constructed performance of a self-care practice, and openness to make meaning of the practice in whatever way fits best for them was my goal for all of the practices I was creating. I was pleased to continue coming up with new practices based on the responses and needs of the group.

Another element that went well with the Dissolving Meditation was its usefulness as both a mental/emotional practice and as well as a physical practice. Participants reported experiences of deeper connections to nature, healing of personal relationships, and incorporating gratitude practices into the Dissolving Meditation. This indicated to me that the practice was situated in a delicate balance between enough structure to teach it to people as a stand-alone exercise with enough open space in my delivery to invite play and adaptation. What stood out about the Dissolving Meditation is the many different approaches to the practice that the group members adopted. At the same time, there was enough shared language around the practice from the way I presented it that we all shared a similar language framework to hold our understanding and provide a platform on which we could then venture into more individual experiences. I address this language framework further at the end of this chapter. The handout *Taoist Dissolving Meditation* is located in Appendix W.

Breathing—Integration Across the Practices.

One of my Qigong teachers, B. K. Frantzis, once told me that he would teach only breathing techniques if people would show up (B. Frantzis, personal communication, July 2004). With that thought in mind, and a growing body of positive feedback about the breathing practices, I began integrating breathing awareness into all practices. In this sense, the breathing practice changed the most because it spread across all self-care practices to become part of the core philosophy in the same way as the 70% Principle and mindfulness were integrated into the system instead of being stand-alone practices. I began to incorporate breathing practices into every group session. This opened the opportunity for me to dig more deeply into my knowledge of Taoist breathing practices and let us focus more closely on one element at a time. I brought breathing into the Qigong movement, the Dissolving Meditation, the Finger Holds, Loving-Kindness Meditation, and new practices in the *Stealing Minutes* toolkit.

Participants consistently reported, and continued to report months later, that the breathing practices were the most powerful and meaningful for them. After learning how to engage the lower abdomen, one participant said, “I had no idea I could take in that much breath. It really freaked me out!” Another person reported “the seamless idea really stood out for me. It works at the beach and I feel the seamless of the waves and of the earth breathing. It helps me be aware of small pleasures.” Other impacts include someone reporting that he decided to reduce his caffeine intake after experiencing a deep state of peacefulness during a breathing exercise. Many participants talked about feeling added energy and relaxation. As one participant

reported, “So this is what it feels like to breathe from your belly! I didn’t realize I was breathing shallowly until I had the sensory experience of both in the workshop.”

As the breathing became another multi-faceted practice that people could experience differently while having a language to share their understanding of it, I realized I had found another way to bring my social constructionist and narrative leanings into self-care. I could see most of the participants bringing the breathing into their local knowledge and preferred identity of self-care (White, 2007) while the practice itself was able to stay unfettered by the limitations of singular truths (Gergen, 2009a) in a way that allowed it to spread quickly as an idea yet retain enough framework of understanding to be useful. This flexibility of meaning and usefulness stood out consistently across the workshops. The handouts *Breathing Practices for Self-Care* and *Mindful Breathing* are located in Appendices J and K respectively.

Handing it over—visualization and letting go.

While facilitating many new workshops, I was also creating new material for the members of the pilot group who had requested I continue working with them. This group provided an opportunity for me to go more deeply into existing practices which helped generate a richer understanding of their impact and effectiveness than I would have gained from sharing them with people for the first time over and over again. One of the practices I brought into this group is called Handing it Over. Originally taught to me in England as part of the Spiritualist tradition, I made hefty modifications to it because the original practice, called Turning it Over to God, ran the risk of offending secularists and atheists as well as members of religions who use different terminology to describe their understanding of a divine being. I added language that includes a wider range of sources to “hand it over to” and adopted the open, flexible, and playful approach that had worked so well with many of the other practices.

Many things went well with this practice. Having been through the challenges with Qigong and the Inner Smile, I brought this exercise to the group with a strong interfaith approach. I found, without exception, that everyone was able to find a source to receive his/her problems. For some it was God, for others it was a river or the ocean, while others chose Goddesses or spiritual beings. Unsurprisingly, there was universal success in coming up with a problem or challenge to “hand over” to someone or something else. I wrote in my field notes from March 27, 2014: *I was surprised how well-received Handing it Over was, how quickly people were able to make relational connections, and how different everyone’s experience was, yet how all reported powerful or meaningful experiences in a short time.*

What stood out the most is how introducing this practice helped bring the topic of religion and spirituality to the surface and led to a more transparent and accepting dialogue between people of different faiths and epistemologies. Being somewhere in the middle of the spectrum between Taoist philosophy and quantum physics I found myself feeling at home in these discussions. I think my level of curiosity, comfort, and non-judgmental acceptance helped invite the group to be more vulnerable in sharing with each other than they may have been in a more didactic or structured setting. The handout *Handing it Over* is located in Appendix X.

Exploring client legacies—re-membering practices for therapists.

Another new practice that I created for the continuation of the pilot group was an approach to contemplating and honoring past clients that I called Re-Membering Client Legacies. The idea grew out of a conversation with narrative therapist, Ken Potter, about the legacies he was developing after his father died (K. Potter, personal communication, November, 2013). He told me a series of short, captivating stories about his father. He ended each with a single sentence legacy his father left behind. Some were meaningful and touching while others were humorous and helped him remember unique qualities about his father that he wanted to hold onto like “you can never have enough butter on your toast.”

I drew further inspiration from Lorraine Hedtke’s work with conversations as re-membering approaches (Hedtke & Winslade, 2004) to bereavement. It was my hope to situate these past client experiences more deeply in our identities as helping professionals, while having those memories more available for fostering inspiration and resilience instead of sadness, loss, or simply forgetting. In this practice I see a crossroads between gratitude, mindfulness, narrative, and social constructionist approaches. Within this mix of influences is a coherent practice that helps us be more appreciative of the past while building a stronger relational component to those with whom we are not physically in contact anymore. I found this helped participants feel more optimistic and inspired in their work which then encouraged them to re-invent their past in a form that was more supportive of who they are in the present. As I was once told, “We’re constructionists, we can create any reality we want!” (R. Cottor, personal communication, November 2012).

What stood out about this practice across the workshops was how meaningful some participants found it and how unresponsive others were to it. I have a tendency to focus on the one or two people who struggle with an exercise or express negative feedback about it. From reviewing my field notes, I am reminded that *I thought this might be a bomb* but I was surprised *how much the group liked the exercise and how everyone managed to come up with lessons/legacies from clients they can carry forward with them*. I am not sure if it is the presentation or the practice itself that contributed to a few people being less engaged with this exercise. This bears further research and I am currently asking questions into the experiences of participants with this practice. The handout *Re-Membering Client Legacies* is located in Appendix Y.

Haiku clinical notes—encouraging poetic awareness.

Using haiku as a tool to focus our awareness through a stance of mindful inquiry for developing new ways to capture and transmit experiences (Harter & Higginson, 1985) was something I put on hold for the pilot group and later resurrected for the spring 2014 workshops. I was hesitant to bring it to the group after my experience with the Qigong movement because I am also a big fan of haiku. I have been practicing it for 2 decades and was afraid of it being

rejected in the same way I was nervous about sharing Qigong because it was such a part of my identity.

However, I could not resist the opportunity to explore sharing a form of inquiry based on the juxtaposition of ideas, and I admired its traditional emphasis on incorporating nature (Bowers, 1996) into the contemplative practice of poetry. I developed a handout with four unique self-care focused approaches to haiku and brought it to the group. The group who had been in the pilot study embraced the idea eagerly and quickly began applying it in the session. Other groups were less responsive which led to me put this on the sidelines for the summer and fall groups in order to highlight the most effective and easiest to learn exercises.

After what felt like a tense 10 minutes of explaining the basics of haiku at the whiteboard, the applications I was hoping to lead the group through changed quickly when someone suggested we write haiku about a story a participant had just told about his experience at a health expo with his martial arts master. While we were not doing what I had prepared, we were doing exactly what I had hoped for by looking at our experiences through the lens of haiku. In my field notes I wrote about *how quickly and naturally we all decided to write a haiku about TP's story then share them with each other*. Below are some of the haiku that participants wrote in response to the discussion. The first poem addresses the story of a blind girl being taught how to break a board by an elderly martial artist. This is followed by a touching clinical experience, a haiku about eating lunch, and a fourth that captures a social worker's feeling during a therapy session.

The cautious blind girl
meets compassionate master –
She breaks the board!

The love of a child
shown in tears for a partner
Leaving strength behind.

A cell phone beckons –
Not wanting distraction
I eat my sandwich

What must I look like?
I was doing all of that
The squishy feelings...

What stood out across the three spring workshops in which I introduced haiku were the resonance with those who recognized the poetics of our work as therapists and the groans of those who remembered poetry as a forced practice they had to do in school and were more than happy to forget. Seeing the negative responses as constructed from unpleasant experiences

instead of as a failure in the practice itself, I decided to continue promoting it during later groups and have continued using it myself to support my goal of being a more contemplative and reflexive practitioner. The handout *Haiku Clinical Notes* is located in Appendix Z.

Co-constructed hybrid practices—The 5-Breath Finger Hold.

While the Finger Holds were the most widely adopted and shared of all the practices, there was also feedback about times when it was not working for people. Hearing this prompted me to ask questions about possible adaptations to respond to those needs. Where the need appeared strongest was with clients experiencing anxiety and those living with the effects of trauma. Some clients reported that the Finger Holds helped calm them down but “weren’t enough” to get them to the calmness and lowered reactivity they were seeking.

Recognizing that the Finger Holds were primarily a physical practice that required little mental engagement, I suggested we add some of the more mental practices to the Finger Holds in order to engage both body and mind. The participants thought this would be a good idea and so I came up with The 5-Breath Finger Hold. I brought Loving-Kindness Meditation into the Finger Holds exercise and linked it to the breath instead of counting or using a timer, to invite the mind to focus on something positive, relational, and compassion-based. By adding an element of focusing on the breath I was hoping to bring an additional layer of calming into the practice.

The practice consists of holding each finger one at a time one while reciting the five phrases of Loving-Kindness Meditation. I incorporated the breathing component to slow down the repetition of the phrases because it encourages taking one full breath for each of the five phrases. This significantly slows down the speed at which one could move through the Loving-Kindness Meditation practice which I hoped would open space for more emotional responses. Having a structure that encourages slowing the mind and includes breathing has been especially useful for people experiencing anxiety as well as providing an additional somatic component beyond holding the fingers which seems helpful with some of the dissociative experiences related to trauma.

This was the first co-constructed self-care practice and it became one of the most popular. Like other practices, many participants have changed this as they used it and applied it in their work with others. For example, some have incorporated gratitude practice into the exercise while others have chosen to focus on relational components while working with couples. What went well across the workshops was how easily participants took up this practice after we had covered the Finger Holds, Breathing, and Loving-Kindness Meditation. I wrote in my field notes: *I’m excited about the potential of the hybrid practices for synergistically building new, unique, and adaptable self-care practices without adding unknown, complex, or difficult material.* It was beginning to look to me like the core *Stealing Minutes* practices could be used as building blocks to create new applications in response to unexpected needs. In many cases, I was able to cover these practices in the time constraints of one 3-hour workshop and still have time for Qigong, dialogue, and breaks. The handout *The 5-Breath Finger Hold* is located in Appendix AA.

Assertions and interpretations—more cheese than holes.

During our Qigong instructor trainings, one of the metrics used in evaluating how well we had integrated the teachings was the Swiss cheese metaphor. We were either told we had “more holes than cheese” or “more cheese than holes” in our practice. In extending the metaphor, I feel the overall feedback and impacts of the self-care practices has been one of more cheese than holes. All participants reported some type of significant positive impact and I am still receiving stories of the positive impacts on their clients.

One of my assertions is that it is possible to create and implement new self-care approaches that are easily understood, effective, and spread quickly without the need for a specially trained teacher to share them with new people. I held this assertion from the beginning and was pleased to see it continue to accumulate evidence across the 10 months of workshops. During the workshops I discovered how quickly and comfortably mental health professionals share these practices with their clients. I completely missed this possibility when I was creating the practices and had been blinded to broader applications by focusing solely on the world of therapists and psychologists. As one participant said, “How could you not expect us to share these with clients? We help others for a living.”

A third point I carry forward from this study is that it is possible to create interfaith friendly practices and approaches that invite everyone in the room to try the exercises as well as share personal experiences of them with the group. While religion turned out to be a blind spot for me in creating these workshops, I was lucky that my approach and materials were initially accepting of all faiths. I later incorporated language that directly speaks to the variety of faiths and beliefs in the room to create a safe space for them be shared without judgment.

Discovering there may be a basic formula to creating practices that someone can change and adapt as he/she learns it for the first time and immediately share it with others has been a constant source of excitement for me. While I uncovered and explored this slowly over time, I am now working on using this information to build an effective model as a base for myself in creating future practices and as a template for others to use.

The most successful practices were the ones in which I allowed for different approaches and interpretations yet retained enough structure to support a stand-alone practice with language that allows it to spread intact from person to person. This last point is important because I shared the handouts with many people who were not in the workshops and did not have the experiential sharing of the practices. These people rarely took them up for use in their lives. The handouts functioned well as a supplement for those who had experienced the practices before reading about them. Participants who use the handouts with their clients often follow the same approach of guiding their client through the exercise and later giving them the handouts to take home. Momentarily forgetting the power of the relational, I had initially expected the handouts to be the medium through which these practices would spread.

The Emergence of Themes from Within the Group

Introduction.

While the previous two areas of study focused on descriptive analysis, I move to a more findings-based approach in this section and will be reporting some of the themes that I discovered during the workshops. I drew these themes together from collecting instances of them in my session notes, field notes, and interview transcripts. During the workshops, I would often write down themes that were emerging in our conversations as well as directly recording the participants' experiences and stories. I would frequently bring an idea that I wrote in my notes more than once to the group and ask them about their experiences with it. For example, one person complained about the stress of dealing with insurance companies while another wondered why these practices were having such a positive impact and why we had not learned them in graduate school or professional trainings. Seeing this juxtaposition of ideas led me to ask the group about dominant cultural influences and how the *Stealing Minutes* approach is situated in relationship with it. I introduce these themes in their raw state in this section to build a foundation for my grounded theory study of the participant interviews in Chapter Four.

Surprised by the generative power of groups.

As a systems thinker and a constructionist, I have long been fascinated with the emergent properties of groups and with the many new doors that open during conversation. What surprised me across all of the workshops was how quickly and consistently the practices, and my understanding of them, changed. While I made many of the changes to the practices myself, the inspiration almost always grew out of an experience I had while facilitating the group. Participants also showed surprise with the generative power of groups as they reported how wonderful it was to better know colleagues they had worked with for many years. Some people were amazed at how their approach to the practices changed as they listened to others in the group describe their experiences.

The request for repetition.

A testament to the usefulness and flexibility of these practices has been the number of requests from participants to re-visit and review practices that have been covered in the group. I think because so many of these practices have the capacity to change each time they are used, people are less apt to get bored with them or assume a level of expertise with them. Even people who previously taught Loving-Kindness Meditation or Gratitude have enjoyed the malleability of this approach and some of them have taken the workshop a second and third time.

Appreciation of community.

Over the course of the workshops, and across all settings, there was often talk about how the workshop was fostering a sense of community among the participants. Participants in workshops comprised mostly of people from one organization often talked about feeling a

renewal of their sense of community and asked questions about doing things to continue this reinvigoration. This consistent appreciation of community and the discussions around it led me to begin exploring ways to transform my idea of self-care workshops into the goal of creating communities of practice that aim for positive shifts in the culture of organizations.

The potential for culture shifts in organizations.

Another theme that I noticed across the groups was the participants' desire for culture shifts in their organizations and agencies as well as within their field as a whole. Through these conversations I realized the community of practice concept seemed the best avenue available at the time to shift from a workshop approach towards building self-care awareness into the daily life of an organization. While some participants reported short-term change in their organizations that faded in the following weeks, others began instituting morning self-care practices and incorporated them into the existing day-to-day structure of their workplace. As I began talking more about this theme in the groups I found myself being invited into some organizations with the goal of helping create a culture with an emphasis on self-care.

Self-care practices as therapeutic applications.

As I described in the earlier section about the development of the practices, many of them were quickly passed on from the participants to their clients. Though I was focusing solely on how to adapt and translate the material in a way that would be as accessible as possible to my colleagues, I missed the idea that if it was accessible and useful enough to one group of people it might be useful to many others. Through the feedback during the groups I began to shift and adjust the practices for various therapeutic applications. When I mentioned to one interviewee how I missed this possibility she said, "How could we not share these with our clients? Helping others is what we do for a living." She later went on to share another important thought that I incorporated into future workshops: "That's actually kind of concerning in a way, that we go straight to thinking about our clients and not ourselves. Maybe you could find a way to remind us with each new practice to take some time to do it ourselves first?"

Playing with the practices—taking them up in their own ways.

Perhaps one of the most hopeful and exciting themes I noticed is how easily many of the participants change the practice to suit their needs once they have permission to play around with different versions if something does not feel right the first time. This has helped many participants continue with practices they may have tried once and walked away from because it was uncomfortable, seemed weird, or conflicted with their religious beliefs or life philosophy.

An advantage of the group setting is that once a comfortable and intimate environment was achieved, many participants shared the changes they made as well as the underlying reason why they were inspired to change it. Some people reported a change due to conflict with beliefs while others did not feel the existing form of the practice suited their needs in the present moment. Some participants adjusted practices according to their aesthetic preferences. For

example, one participant took herself to a river while I was leading a guided imagery session based around being at the ocean.

I think my consistent reminders to play with the practices and explore other ways of doing them is a primary reason these practices have become so popular. Many new versions of each practice have been co-created which inspires me to hope the *Stealing Minutes* concept can be further inoculated against reification and orthodoxy. Some of these new versions have been named and spread through the group like “The 5-Breath Finger Hold” and “ME’s Loving-Kindness Meditation,” while others were acknowledged but remained more individual practices.

“Coming back to myself”—re-invigorating past self-care practices.

Another exciting development is that the materials and approach resonated with many of the participants’ previous spiritual and self-care practices. In many cases, participating in the workshop helped rekindle that practice in some way. One participant who had been dealing with the challenge of choosing between his Buddhist and Christian practices eventually chose both and was able to find peace with becoming a “Buddhiscopalian.” One participant renewed her previous relationship with yoga while another remembered long-forgotten ways he used to calm himself as a child when experiencing anxiety.

Across the five settings, participants consistently reported they often felt reconnected to some way of self-soothing they had practiced in the past. On many occasions, that connection was changed even when it was renewed. Participants often spoke of why they let those practices slide and would compare and contrast the differences between their old practices and the *Stealing Minutes* approach. The most common difference was accessibility. People spoke of the need to go to many months or years of classes to learn a complex practice. They spoke about finding time and how hard it was to perform the various meditations that were taught to them as needing 45 minutes or an hour to be done “right.”

“You can’t fail self-care!”

Keeping a collaborative feeling in my workshops by presenting the materials as a starting point on a journey towards more personalized approaches helped lead to feedback from people about how much they liked the feeling that they can succeed with self-care. In creating this approach I also draw from my earlier life experiences. In art class in elementary school for example, we were usually successful if we showed up and gave it a try. We were encouraged to be creative and explore our own way of completing a project. During those school years, I occasionally drew the ire of my other teachers when I asked them why they cannot teach *more like the art teachers do*.

Barriers to self-care—recognizing dominant societal discourses.

As I processed the feedback from the group I realized these practices were more effective and helpful than I had anticipated. I asked the group one day, *What are we responding to with this new approach to self-care and what is it about the way our culture is working that makes*

these practices so helpful? A rich description of a cultural and professional discourse that was draining, limiting, and demoralizing began to emerge. The responses from the older members of the groups seemed more passionate and bleak. When I inquired as to why, most of them shared that it was harder to be in the mental health culture of today after having been through the culture they worked in during the 1970s and 1980s. As one participant said, “Back then I saw myself as an agent of transpersonal grace.” When I inquired as to how he feels about his career now he said, “Now I feel like a cog in the machine of managed care.” Others talked about how our field was going through a time of “an innovation a week” and spoke of the “excitement, inspiration and intellectual buzz” of earlier eras.

When I asked the group to articulate the dominant culture, they came up with many ways to describe what “we’re up against.” They talked about the “culture of rush” and lamented the philosophy of “playing hurt.” We have all seen professional athletes play with injuries or colleagues come to work with an illness and push through the day. While we talked about images and encouragements that we see regularly in the media, it was also easy for us to come up with examples from within our own organizations.

Another dominant discourse that became more transparent is the influence of managed care and medical models. Participants reported many negative impacts of managed care on their ability to help others and spoke of the increase in paperwork over the years. They talked about the evaluative and financial focus that came to be a priority over delivery of services at mental health agencies. At Warren Street Family Counseling Associates, people spoke of the changes in the 1980s and how that led them to create the organization as a response to the threat of losing the client-centered, compassionate approaches in which they had been trained.

Infectious ideas—the 70% Principle, *Stealing Minutes*, and breathing.

I noticed certain ideas were spreading beyond the group and finding their way into discussions in the workplace. These ideas sometimes came back to me from people who had not been in the workshops but heard them from others and contacted me to learn more about them. I noticed a commonality among the most popular ideas of *Stealing Minutes*, the 70% Principle, the Down Creates the Up, and breathing practices. They were all ideas that I brought to the group to counter the issue of burnout and fatigue that I first started responding to during my master’s degree and later articulated with the help of the participants as dominant discourses that were potential barriers to self-care.

I brought in the *Stealing Minutes* concept to encourage the idea that we could practice self-care from an intra-day approach and that even 3 or 4 minutes of a self-care practice could be helpful. I shared the 70% Principle to counter the notion of “giving it 100%” or the even more exhausting and deficit-based idea of “giving it 110%.” *Just where are they borrowing that other 10% and how long can that last* I often wondered when I heard coaches or mentors encouraging us to push ourselves beyond the range of what I now think of as *personal sustainability* (P. Chandler, personal communication, November 2013).

One of the most widely embraced ideas is one that I did not present as an idea in the workshop. I incorporated awareness of breathing into many of the practices like Qigong and the Finger Holds. Like mindfulness, breathing unintentionally evolved into as much a concept as a practice. People began to talk about how it affects their work, their personal lives, and how they started to notice the changes in their breathing as their mood changed. I think integrating breathing into many of the practices opened up the space for the concept of breathing to become useful as an idea and not just a practice. While I have been pleased with how well-received, flexible, and adaptable the practices are, it was an unexpected success to see that ideas of self-care could spread beyond the workshop along with the practices.

Assertions and interpretations—on Devushkinizing the participants.

Learning to make space
Breathing, focus, getting down deep
into the knowing.
~ Workshop Participant

A theme I carried into the development of the materials and approach to the workshops is one of opening space through allowing participants to share and develop their own stories. The haiku above was written in response to the workshop and captures this feeling beautifully. The author reminds me that, at least in this participant's experience, I was able to reach my goal.

Taking the advice of Arthur Frank, I intentionally avoided Devushkinizing the participants by not telling their stories for them (Frank, 2010). Devushkinizing is Frank's term for how people can feel demoralized and defined when others tell their stories for them. He links this concept with the tension between academic rigor and honoring people's preferred identity (Frank, 2005). Bearing this in mind, I avoided telling people how they should do self-care, who they are, and why they need to do self-care. An important lesson I learned from the emergent themes is the realization that most of the themes may not have been spoken about in the sessions if I had not left the space between us open enough to encourage sharing, creating, and co-constructing our story of self-care together as we moved forward.

Discussion

Introduction.

In this case study I explored three key areas: facilitating the workshops, the evolution of the practices, and the emergence of themes from within the group. These three areas are described earlier in this chapter in the section titled *Three Key Areas of Analysis and Description*. While each of the three key areas includes discussion of the findings, there are a few points that are relevant to the study as a whole. In this section I explore additional ideas that are relevant to all three key areas.

Looking at the context—environments, demographics, and cultures.

Each of the three areas I investigated in this case study bore fruit of some kind. The first section where I explored the settings and context of the workshops has been informative of the kinds of environments that foster culture shifts while encouraging me to look at new ways to foster culture shifts in environments that are not as supportive of it. Had I not undertaken this study, I would not have knowledge about how best to facilitate the workshop and what settings and organizations I would like to move into next. I discuss the impact of the settings on my goals for culture shifts, communities of practice, and reaching wider audiences in Chapter Five. In many ways, all three of the goals above were inspired by the analysis in the first phase of the case study.

Looking at the practitioner—“How did you squeeze all this into one life?”

Carrying out this study helped me look back at myself. In response to the often-asked questions, “How did you squeeze all this into one life” and “How did you learn all this stuff at such a young age?” one of the participants and I came up with the idea of holding a narrative interview of me with a reflecting team comprised of workshop participants. We followed a structure close to Michael White’s outsider-witnessing practices (White, 2000) by having my colleague first interview me and then invite each member of the reflecting team to share his/her experience of listening to my story.

Sharing a richer picture of my life and the contexts within which I learned many of the practices I was sharing with the group led to a new level of closeness that feels noticeable many months later. Having a chance to shift the gaze from the practices to the practitioner helped encourage those present to explore these practices more deeply. Without the opportunity to be interviewed in front of a group of workshop participants, I may not have captured as many parts of my life that are relevant to the workshop as I was able to incorporate into Chapter One. By telling my story in response to the questions of others, I gained a better understanding of my place in this wider story of the workshops and I remembered parts of my history I had forgotten. It was through telling my story that new parts of it came back to life and that I gained the narrative resources (Frank, 2010) I needed to be better situated within my preferred identity of who I am at this point in my life. The full transcript of this experimental narrative interview can be found in Appendix A.

Limitations of this study.

As the author of my session and field notes, I recognize that the shining moments I draw from them are my shining moments—they are what resonated with me. This is why I embarked on the project of situating myself in the work in Chapter One. While I find the information from these notes to be valuable because they contain many comments and quotes from participants, I realize they continue to situate me in the story because the moments I chose to take up for

meaning-making and later picked out as examples can show as much about me as they do about the materials and approach I am studying.

Case study is by nature a description (Patton, 1990) and as the one doing the describing, I acknowledge the presence of an unavoidable auto-ethnographic component to this study. I wanted to focus at some point in this project on the space between me and the workshop participants (Gergen, 2009b). My primary reason for choosing case study was to learn as much as I could about the facilitation, practices, and emerging themes in order to fold that information back into improving the workshops. I accepted the limitations of a case study approach because I saw it as a bridge between the very personal inquiry approach in Chapter One and the more systematic approach I take with the interviews in Chapter Four.

While my biases and worldview were influential in creating the *Stealing Minutes* workshops in the first place, I recognize they are part of me and were present during the case study. My thoughts and ideas were also a source of the inquiry in Chapter Two that led to this case study and to the grounded theory study in the next chapter. Even the responses to the workshop and the answers to the interview questions will have my fingerprints on them as I created the materials and approach for the workshop and wrote the interview questions.

Areas for further investigation.

Through this study I opened a number of doors for further study. The possibility of creating communities of practice around self-care and working to shift organizational cultures towards a more personally sustainable approach was something I realized in this study. I began to investigate these opportunities and report on my progress in Chapter Five. Another area for further investigation is the possibility of reaching a wider audience. From examining my experiences with the Parker Academy staff I began to realize the *Stealing Minutes* approach might have a wider audience than I initially anticipated.

An area I would like to see further investigation is in the realm of neuroscience and evidence-based practices. From the feedback of participants, I think it is possible that measurable results, as well as valuable subjective information, could be obtained from studying the impact of these practices. While this risks limiting the practices by encouraging the spread of the versions used during research studies, I consider it a risk worth taking. A possible carry-on from that study could be to measure the experiences of clients who had therapists who report practicing self-care regularly versus those who do not.

Similar to the way psychotropic medications are often used in the mental health field to help reduce a client's symptoms enough to facilitate more effective therapy, I am hoping the *Stealing Minutes* exercises will also assist therapists and clients with moving forward together in a more effective way. A compelling area of potential study could be to compare the effectiveness of self-care practices with medications in lowering the threshold of client symptoms enough to facilitate improved therapeutic outcomes.

Conclusion

“Because nobody went out there and brought it back.”

A frequently asked question during the workshops was “why didn’t we learn this stuff in graduate school or professional trainings?” Many participants, some with over 30 years in the field, wondered out loud why such effective and useful practices had not been included in any area of their professional experience. In response to that, one participant replied, “Because nobody went out there and brought it back to us in this form, until now.” While still hesitant to take credit for being a pioneer in my field, or for being the first one to bring accessible, adaptable, and intra-day self-care practices into the mental health field, I have yet to find a better looking alternative to counter what appears to be an increase in the presence and awareness of burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious traumatization.

Charting a course for the next leg of the journey.

In the next chapter I focus on my interviews with 16 of the workshop participants. After building a foundation of situating myself in the work, inquiring into how and why I came up with the materials and approach, and studying the workshops that followed, I move further into the project in the next chapter with a grounded theory study based on the interviews in order to shift my stance from going out to meet the information to letting the information come to me.

Chapter Four: A Grounded Theory Study of 16 Participant Interviews

Introduction

“That which can be named is not the Tao.”

~ Lao Tzu (Laozi & Mitchell, 2006)

This third of three studies was conducted to investigate the experiences of mental health professionals who participated in the *Stealing Minutes* workshops. In the first study, I focused on developing a curriculum that represented a new approach to self-care and in the second study, I examined the facilitation of the workshops. In this study, I used grounded theory to carry forward the voices of the participants by intentionally utilizing a framework for analysis while remaining engaged in emergent process throughout the study. Following the methodology to its conclusion and ending with a theory, I occasionally deviated from the common structure of grounded theory and I will alert the reader in those places and explain why.

I chose grounded theory because I felt the emergent qualities and analytical framework would be useful for exploring the material from a new angle (Charmaz, 2014). Being of a more contemplative and introspective leaning, I intentionally chose a methodology that provided a structure that could open doors I may not have recognized without it. My goal was to carry my relationship with the participants from the workshops and the interviews into a new conversation with the transcripts while finding ways to let their voices speak to things I may not have been able to hear otherwise.

As the Taoist sage Lao Tzu explains, we often cannot definitively name that which we are seeking to more fully understand (Laozi & Mitchell, 2006). Even in the Buddhist tradition there are warnings about increasing the risks of becoming attached to an idea or practice once it is named (Trungpa & Baker, 1973) and reified as truth. With these warnings in mind, I journeyed into this study just as alert to the dangers of the “theories” of empirically-based science as I am of the “orienting assumptions” and “principles” of the social sciences. In my experience, both have the capacity to close doors and minds to new ideas.

Methodology

Participants.

In this study I included 1-hour interviews with 16 participants who attended one of the workshops. All participants are licensed mental health professionals actively working in their field. The range of professionals across the interviews includes marriage and family therapists, social workers, clinical psychologists, and mental health counselors. Most participants were in private practices that ranged from one person to small and large groups. A small number of participants in the 1-day workshops work in community mental health agency settings.

Sampling.

Participants for the interviews self-selected from about 90 participants who were emailed after the workshops asking if they would be interested in being interviewed about their experiences with the self-care practices and the workshop in which they participated. I made it clear in the emails that the interview was voluntary and that I would be willing to drive to their home or workplace to conduct it. I also explained that I would be recording the interview, that I would be bringing a consent and privacy form for them to sign, and that I would later delete the audio recordings.

I was pleasantly surprised with the number of respondents and chose to interview all who responded instead of choosing among them. While facing the daunting task of conducting, transcribing, and coding 16 hours of interviews, I felt that each person could bring something unique to the process and together they could all create a richer voice.

Interestingly, the overwhelming majority of interviewees came out of the weekly self-care groups versus the 1-day workshops. The exact numbers were two people from the 1-day workshops and 14 from the weekly workshops. As I later discovered through the coding process, there was a connection between sense of community and response to the request for interviews. This sense of connection began to emerge in the case study in Chapter Three and I explore it more in Chapter Five in sections about building communities of practice and facilitating culture shifts in organizations.

Interviews.

The interviews took place after a number of contacts with the participants. Our first contact was often in the workshop. Others were colleagues of mine who had spoken with me about the workshop before attending. In each case, I conducted the interview at the participants' home or office to help foster a more comfortable setting for a conversation. After having the person sign a consent and privacy form (see Appendix U), I conducted each interview guided by a minimal structure composed of a short list of open-ended interview questions with three follow-up questions for prompting richer conversations around areas I thought were relevant and thinly described (White & Epston, 1990).

I started the interview by asking, *What would you like to share with me about your experience of this self-care workshop?* and ended the interview with the question *Is there anything you've been thinking about, or that's aroused your curiosity that you'd like to ask or share with me?* The three follow-up questions I used for filling out the conversations were: *Could you tell me more about that?* *Could you share a story about that with me?* and *Could you describe more about what that looks like for you?* The complete list of questions is located in Appendix S To see the questions in action, please see the sample interview transcript in Appendix T.

Many of the questions were formulated as open-ended and asked specifically into the territory of the participant's experience to reduce the potential influence of my bias on the material as well to encourage people to speak to the practices themselves. As the creator of the

materials and approach, as well as the facilitator, I was aware of the risk of conversations turning towards my background, facilitating style, or personality as a few test interviews had done.

Data Analysis.

The interviews were recorded and saved as MP3 files on a password protected folder on my personal computer. After transcribing the interviews, I imported them into qualitative analysis software where I conducted open coding and focused coding. Due to working and living in three places and lacking a consistent physical space to lay out, cut, arrange, and view the data, I chose to learn how to use qualitative analysis software. I was also interested in the software's ability to create a trail of connection between the codes and the sections of the 16 transcripts in which they were located. This had been helpful in being able to link back into the text at any time whether I was at work, on the road, or at home. I later deleted the audio recordings and removed the names from all transcripts. I emailed each participant a copy of the transcript of his/her interview.

Open Coding.

Following the structure of fourth generation Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2014), I began open coding line by line in the software by reading through the transcripts and writing a phrase that I felt captured the essence of that line or section. Many of these phrases reflect my narrative and social constructionist leanings, and illustrate the language-worlds I inhabit. For example, next to one section in which an interviewee describes her excitement at having self-care options that do not include going to other therapists, I wrote the code, *Giving therapists other ways to care for themselves than therapy*. My preference for opening space and scaffolding by layers into the data informed my decision to chose a gerund-based approach to open coding (Creswell, 2013) by creating phrases that attempted to capture the essence of an action, meaning, value, or experience spoken about in the transcript. I had tried a single word approach to coding earlier in this process and was unhappy with what felt to me like a thin and superficial rendering of the interviewees' voices. The phrase-based approach grew out of a narrative practice my colleague calls "phrase-smithing" (K. Potter, personal communication, January 2012) which he in turn adapted from Tom Strong's "wordsmithing" practices (Strong, 2006).

My goal was to push the boundaries of rich description in open coding to bring a more narrative perspective into this grounded theory project. While I emerged from this phase with a rich and dynamic picture of the data, I also produced a very large body of 548 codes that I would need to contend with in the next phase. Instead of absorbing any new data into existing codes, I decided to code all interviews independently to gain insight into the many ways of expressing what I was seeing in the interviews. By using a qualitative analysis software program, I was able to open all 16 transcripts separately and continue accumulating codes instead of collapsing them into each other as I added each new transcript. In this way, I could continue being present with each transcript as a unique experience without worrying about how many codes I was creating or how I could fold them into other codes without losing their unique meaning. I was very surprised

when I emerged from this process to see the code count was over 500. If I had been counting the codes from the beginning, I may have been discouraged in moving forward with this approach. I was seeking, and obtained, a large, dynamic, and sometimes repetitive foundation for moving to the next step. While this stage was as inductive as one would expect from grounded theory, it was less reductive than the traditional approach of folding in each new interview to fit into existing categories (Charmaz, 2014).

Following my preferences for rich description and listening for the preferred identity (Freedman & Combs, 1996) of each speaker, I leaned toward a more inclusive approach (Anderson & Gehart, 2007). This approach had some limitations as well. The most noticeable limitation was on the comparative analysis part. For example, I was less inclined to fold codes into other codes as I added each new transcript to the process. The richness and uniqueness of using longer codes contributed to a body of work in which very few codes seemed compatible enough to be melded into one explanation that captured two different voices explaining two different experiences of the same thing. I did eventually use comparative analysis in the open coding process but far less than I expected.

A plus side of this shift is that I felt I opened up space within my coding process for an even more emergent relationship with the participants' voices. I found that keeping an awareness of my relationship with the voices of the participants helped me maintain an awareness of my relationship with them. For example, I rarely collapsed two codes together because it felt like I was reframing someone else's words and lumping two people into a singular description. In some ways, I treated the dialogue from the interviews as if the people were still in the room talking with me, not as raw data sets or numbers to shift around and recombine as I please. Taking this approach helped me feel more comfortable with my pre-existing biases and narrative resources (Frank, 2010) because I was less worried that I might spoil someone's story. I also feel that I was successful in this study with avoiding the temptation to sometimes use methodological structure to engage in the reification process (McNamee & Hosking, 2012).

With one eye on creating a coherent grounded theory study that holds together (Chenail, Duffy, St. George, & Wulff, 2011) and one eye on narrative and collaborative approaches to privileging the multi-being (Gergen, 2009b) of each participant, I found the large body of codes exhilarating in the almost symphonic tapestry of voices. Within the dynamic tension between these two perspectives I began the daunting task of creating categories, and hopefully a theory, from the 548 phrases. I used memos to track relationships, journal about my role in the process, and my emerging interpretations of themes and categories.

Focused Coding.

After reading through the 548 codes, and discussing them with colleagues, I began coding the codes to see what new ways of describing might arise. I did this by printing out the initial codes which I carried with me for a few weeks to review whenever I had the chance. I wrote notes next to most of the codes, as well as arrows and lines connecting codes. I began to see similar themes and patterns as I continued to write more ideas next to initial codes. For

example, after the code I mentioned in the previous section, *Giving therapists other ways to care for themselves than therapy*, I then wrote on the printout, *Offering a different context as a counter-practice to outside forces*. On following passes through the printout I wrote *Wider culture: response to*. These three levels of focused coding eventually contributed to a theme about the wider culture and the corresponding influences on our professional lives.

This process helped me develop a collection of possible themes but I did not assign any codes under these possible themes at this point. Instead, through notes, memos, and recognizing patterns during the open-coding process, I organized the codes into six themes that I felt correlated with and contained all 548 codes. After coming up with six final themes, I returned to the software and entered the six themes as higher level headings in the code directory. I then began dragging each of the 548 initial codes under one of the six theme headings as a second filtering process that refined the work I had been doing on paper. I considered each code individually during placement and then examined it again in relationship with the other codes in its category before I moved on to placing the next code. Although I describe my coding process in the above paragraph, I have also included a sample page of the printouts that I hand-coded on in Appendix BB.

One advantage to this rich description approach to gerund-based coding is the diverse, nuanced, and deeply storied data in each of the six themes. Yet this narrative influence stopped short of creating stories or becoming narrative inquiry. I let the phrases remain as bits of story mingled together in each category, creating six polyphonic stories of 16 voices speaking together on one topic. These voices imbued a liveliness and depth to the categories that I did not expect. When I could no longer condense the categories and was able to fit all 548 codes into them, these six categories became my themes.

I later compared the codes, categories, and themes to word clouds (McNaught & Lam, 2010) that I created from the interview transcripts using the web-based word cloud tools at Wordle.com. I collected all participant dialogue, without mine, and made a word cloud to explore for any words or ideas I may have missed. Studying the word cloud did not suggest anything new or unexpected that could further inform the coding process. I then created a word cloud from all of my dialogue collected into one file in order to search for possible biases or influence on the interviewers. I found similarities in commonly used words but no evidence of my influence on the participants' descriptions of their experiences in the workshop. The interviewee word cloud can be found in Appendix CC. The word cloud of just my dialogue with the interviewees can be found in Appendix DD.

While some of the resulting six themes were not a surprise (e.g., *the influence of the wider culture* and *linking up into our lives*), others were unanticipated (e.g., *simple and profound* and *transformative experiences*). These were not only unexpected, they have been useful in helping me conceptualize ways to improve the materials and approach as well as envision future publications on this topic. I was already seeing actionable information emerging from the process and found that it added additional excitement and inspiration to my work.

Constructing Themes

Simple and Profound.

The most unexpected theme I interpreted from the participant interviews was the appreciation of how simple yet profound the self-care practices are. While this was my original intention, and a primary focus of Chapter Two, I did not expect feedback about this because I anticipated that it would take place in the background and people would be more focused on talking about the practices themselves. In retrospect, I am beginning to realize that the goal of creating simple practices that remain effective has built this theme into the practices themselves.

Participants reported experiencing the “freedom to create” and talked about being in a “flowing through place” once they were able to slow down and “just notice instead of reacting right away.” These same participants also spoke about how simple and accessible the practices were for them to learn and apply. They spoke about the excitement of “finding language for metaphysical stuff” and explained that they embraced the practices because “they looked like they might be doable.”

People spoke about the comfort of “having a map and not wondering when is this gonna end?” as an adjunct to “having a simple practice that can be layered on.” The ability to learn the basics of these practices in the beginning allowed participants to walk away from the first session with a complete practice that could be useful and yet remained open for modification and expansion. Learning the basics and experiencing a noticeable benefit in the beginning led to many people sharing thoughts like “early success helped me try harder and stick with it.”

The *Stealing Minutes* concept itself was often talked about as helpful in carrying the simplicity forward. One participant said, “Come on. Like, it takes a minute. I have no excuse anymore!” One person told me, “Remembering the phrase *Stealing Minutes* helps me do it throughout the day.” While I was interested in the ability of this phrase to capture my intentions in creating the workshop, I did not anticipate it becoming a useful tool in its own right. I initially chose the name *The Self-Care Lab* for the pilot group and had relegated the name *Stealing Minutes* to a handout I created on using time more effectively in the workplace.

Out of the combination of simple exercises that “are right at my fingertips” and are “so flexible and adaptable that I can do it anywhere,” these “practices that can punctuate your day” now seem destined to travel across the boundaries between peoples’ personal and professional lives. Speaking to the simplicity of the practices and the profound impacts they can lead to is the rapid spread of the practices from participants’ personal use to their use with clients. People spoke about the relief of “having effective tools that I’m willing to use” because “a few simple basics are what most people need.” Many therapists have reported that, “Once I understood it I was able to explain it better” to clients and found that “having had a direct experience of it” helped them with “gently encouraging others to do what works for us.”

In capturing the interplay between the simple and the profound, another person spoke about these as “little things you can do that create lasting change.” A printout of the initial coding system divided into six themes can be found in Appendix EE.

Linking Up Into Our Lives.

Another unexpected impact of the workshop was the ability of the participants to link the practices and concepts up with other parts of their lives. Many participants credited this effect with helping them engage with the practices more fully and consistently. People reported experiencing a reinvigoration of past self-care and spiritual practices such as yoga, mindfulness, and rejoining Buddhist and Christian groups to which they had previously belonged. One person shared his sense that “the practices link up with elements of each of us” while another spoke about “remembering and tapping into my abilities.”

Participants reported the practices linking up into their lives with such reports as “this is the beginning of my initiative to reclaim self-care” and “I’m more likely to use what resonates with what I’m already doing.” This resonance with multiple areas of each person’s life often appeared as people reported being “intrigued by how I might use these for my own benefit” while others talked about “noticing and changing my in-between-clients habits” and even “helping my clients in unexpected ways.”

Participants attributed their use of the practices to better sleep, more effective anxiety management, feeling more centered instead of “semi-scattered,” and some even talked about “re-discovering my love of places, of nature.” They reported how these “practices invite innovation and personalization” which “helps me be more present” and creates the freedom to choose “a practice based on where I’m at in the moment.” When I asked about the potential risks of my choice to present the practices as foundational and flexible starting points instead of structured and rigid, one participant emphatically stated, “We’re tweaking it for ourselves, not diluting it!”

The participants’ ability to link these practices up with their personal and professional lives, as well as revisiting some of their past practices, was a surprise each time it was talked about in the groups. Although I asked a question about it in the interviews because the topic of transport and linking with the past had come up many times in the workshops, it was still a surprise to see it spoken about so often through so many unique descriptions.

Transformative Experiences.

The theme of transformative experiences was the least anticipated of all six themes. Perhaps due to my initial goal of seeking a way to help my colleagues reduce stress in the workplace or perhaps from my intentional omission of much of the spiritual and philosophical stances of the traditions I was drawing from in order to create a more accessible body of work, I clearly missed the possibility that these practices could facilitate transformative experiences. This theme is also one that I missed across all of the workshops. There is no reference to it in my field or session notes, nor any sense of it in my interview notes. Yet, here it is as one of six final themes with almost 50 phrase-based codes enriching it.

As I began searching for a categorical home for such comments as “I remember it was transformative” to “it helps me during rough times” and “feeling safe and meaningful” in a setting where we were “learning how to love ourselves and that’s beautiful,” I began to realize

that people were not only spreading these practices into areas of their lives that I had not anticipated, they were also reporting impacts that were more transformative than I had imagined possible. One participant reported, “I’m more aware of my need to get in a spiritual community” because “I’m realizing I’ve been holding back in life, not taking risks.” He reported coming to this realization because, “I think my unconscious is being stirred by all this somehow.” He later reported to me that he has re-joined a Buddhist group that he used to belong to and has purchased tickets to go to talks and conferences nearby, including a day with the Dalai Lama. This same person also credits the self-care practices as “an alternative to caffeine” which had been causing negative impacts on his health and mood.

Many participants spoke about “growing through loss” and of how the “richness in difficult experiences” often “feeds and enriches our lives.” Some people spoke about their losses and trauma as an opportunity to now turn “suffering into something meaningful” by “staying present through grief” and that these practices “take you out of your head and into your heart.” As another participant shared that by “having the freedom to let go,” she was able to “put it all together and the love came back.” This later helped her to have the “courage to go deeper with our clients.”

One man reported that the *Stealing Minutes* practices were “very anti-anxiety for me” and that “this is changing my relationship with anxiety.” He talked about being a “terrible breather” before the workshop and how his experiences with the practices have helped him to find a state of mind he described as “calm honesty.”

As I gathered more phrases like “seeing the needs below my interests” and “feeling safe and enclosed,” I became confident that this was a solid and sustainable theme that accurately spoke to the participants’ experiences of the workshops. One client shared in her interview, “I had no idea what I was walking into” and told me she felt the presence in the workshop of “a spiritual practice that’s unspoken.” It seems that while doing my best to avoid bringing in a specific spiritual or religious focus in order to keep the practices accessible and foster an inter-faith friendly environment, I must have carried across a spiritual and transformative influence in the practices themselves.

Connection and Community.

The theme of “valuing a sense of connection and community” arose as a topic of conversation in many of the workshops. This was particularly present in the 8-week workshops versus the 1-day workshops. While almost all participants found the practices simple and profound, reported some sort of transformative experience, and talked about the practices linking up with something in their lives, it was mostly from the 8-week workshops that the theme of connection and community developed. In the 8-week workshops we were able to “use a language we produced together to bring us closer” in order to help us as an organization to “talk in a way we have not talked before,” while in the 1-day workshops we often remained “strangers because we don’t know the lingo” and didn’t have enough time to develop a common language. Participants in the 1-day workshops also talked about connection and community, but they spoke

of it mostly from a stance of what is missing from their work lives whereas this theme relates to the expressions of appreciation and excitement about the connections and sense of community that I noticed in the longer workshops.

One of the common factors among the appreciation of connection was the sense that much of it grew out of witnessing practices (White, 2007) among participants. Many members of the group reported about how they “love hearing everybody else’s experience” and talked about how “talking out loud about self-care together” opens the door for witnessing that “deepens experience of ourselves and others.” One participant reported that “witnessing others in group helps me with my clients,” while another reported “taking up other members’ innovations for my own practice.”

This positive influence of group members on creating personalized approaches to self-care is a sign of another factor within the connections and community theme—the generative nature of groups. Participants talked about “connections leading to synergy” and how they appreciated the workshop format “letting us spin off from each other.” This led to such discoveries as “it can help the most unlikely people,” which I saw as evidence of the practices helping to deconstruct our limiting stories of others and open us back up to connection and a sense of community instead of the boundary building ideas that certain people will not be able to do well in the workshop.

Under this theme I also placed phrases that attempt to describe the participants’ experience of me and my approach to facilitating the group. Some people talked about the value of my “calming and centered presence” and how it helped them relax and feel connected to me. Others spoke about how important it was to them that I shared some of my story of loss and how I used it to guide me toward creating this workshop. One person said it was meaningful to her that I was “letting us know you get it—being vulnerable.” A participant in one of the workshops in which I felt pressed for time and thought it a good idea to forego an in-depth introduction later said, “I don’t know your story but I find you interesting.” We later shared our stories with each other and I realized the benefit to connection and community building if I share my story.

Influence of the Wider Culture.

During the pilot group, enough people complained about what was blocking our ability to take care of ourselves and what was causing our high levels of stress and burnout that I became curious about the potential benefits of discussing the influence of the wider culture on our approach to self-care. I questioned the group about why this approach was having what seemed to be a significant and powerful impact and asked them if there was something to which this approach was a counter. All six of the pilot group members spoke at length about what they perceived in the wider culture that was negatively affecting our ability to take care of our needs in the workplace. I carried these conversations forward and later added a question about it to the interview question form in Appendix S.

The most common response was that we are “bumping up against managed care and limited sessions” and that “managed care is contributing to loss of connection” which in turn, is

leading to “therapists keeping their protective edges with each other.” Some participants found it hopeful that I am “appealing to people focused on money and success” and talked about “the subversive nature of the *Stealing Minutes* concept” in that it could be used to make self-care more attractive to people in organizational cultures that do not support that perspective.

Participants spoke about the culture of “do more, earn more, and gain material things” and the pressure to “stay busy and look busy.” They talked often about the negative impacts they were experiencing from the ways the culture of business influences the culture of therapy. Our conversations on this topic helped us in “bringing visibility to what they’re counter-practices to” as we began to realize we wanted to create more choices because, as one person remarked, “the only choices available are the ones available.” For example, before the *Stealing Minutes* workshop, the idea of doing little things throughout the day that can create lasting change was not being discussed as a choice for self-care.

One participant described the workshop as “culturally corrective work” with self-care practices that are “bringing visibility to what they are counter-practices to” and talked about the advantage of having the option for “consistent self-care for inconsistent work.” Many therapists agreed that even without the stresses of the influence of the wider culture, our work remains unpredictable, potentially traumatizing, and inconsistent in both the content and timing of our sessions from day to day. This approach, said one participant, is “giving therapists other ways to care for themselves than going to therapy.”

After asking a particularly long-winded question full of big words, one interviewee said, “Holy Crap! Do I get three credits for that?” As I did with my initial presentation of the Qigong practice, I once again had fallen back on highbrow academic and structuralist approaches to this project. I am pleased to say it did not happen often, but when it did the contrast between the two approaches was startling, and the realization that I had been carrying forward a more dominant wider cultural narrative was quite humbling.

As one participant responded when I advocated the advantages of private practice over agency settings, “It’s great to be your own boss but then you’re the problem.” As I have learned firsthand, stepping away from the wider culture does not negate my social and relational history with it. We can cook up our own stories that feel unique and personal, but it often helps to remember where the ingredients for those stories came from (Frank, 2010).

Culture Shifts in Organizations.

The final of the six themes, and perhaps the least formed, is the idea of creating culture shifts in organizations. Creating culture shifts in organizations, like transformative experiences and linking up with people’s lives, was not part of my intention when I started this project. I came up with the idea during the workshops following the pilot group after we started discussing the changes that were taking place around us, not just individually. As colleagues started asking me, “maybe you could start a Qigong group?” and “maybe we could start a meditation group here?” I began to consider the potential of this approach in encouraging positive shifts in the cultures of organizations.

As the participants began talking about how this work “helps you realize there are other ways of being in the world” and “our culture should be healing for us,” we began to hear from the some of the founders who talked about how “we set up something so it’s beneficial for us” and “this can help bridge the generational gap” between the founding partners and the recently added partners who arrived from a different school and work culture. Some partners talked about their perception that the culture had become stagnant in recent years and that this workshop was helping to turn that around by “starting to get people into the habit of being mindful” and addressing “how we trust each other with our vulnerabilities” in order to facilitate closer communication and collaboration.

While acknowledging that it is “not easy to pay attention to the culture of an organization,” and that “it takes one kind of energy to start the change, and another to keep it going,” we realized we had the opportunity to make the necessary shifts for “our culture to be healing for us.” We talked often about how this self-care approach could help “the culture focus on how it’s taking care of us” while “creating a more functional baseline for us and our clients.” Starting each day from a more resilient and healthy baseline fits with my pain management metaphor of keeping the stress below a certain level where it gains enough momentum that it spills over into other areas of our lives, and requires greater and greater intervention as it builds.

Being a collaborative, we lacked the top-down hierarchy to institute mandated change. One participant commented on this and noted that perhaps this approach has been more successful than others because it is working on “shifting from the bottom up instead of top down.” As one person articulated, we are “culture shifting through relaxing together.” I knew the idea of culture shifts in organizations had gained traction when one participant suggested that we should be “bringing self-care into all organizational decision-making.”

Emerging Theory

Instead of trying to come up with a single higher level concept (Creswell, 2013) that sits above the six categories and ties them all together, I chose to focus instead on building a theory through contemplating the relationships among the six categories and how the interplay among them has energized the participants and the practices we have shared over the last year together. Out of this equal and relational valuing of each of the six categories and attending to the relationships among them, I constructed the following theory and designed a visual representation of it for further contemplation (see Figure 4.1):

By sharing simple yet profound self-care practices in a group setting that fosters a sense of community, these practices can link up with elements of participants’ lives and lead to transformative experiences that can act as counter-practices to potentially harmful wider cultural influences which may, in turn, extend the personal benefits into opportunities for positive culture shifts in organizations.

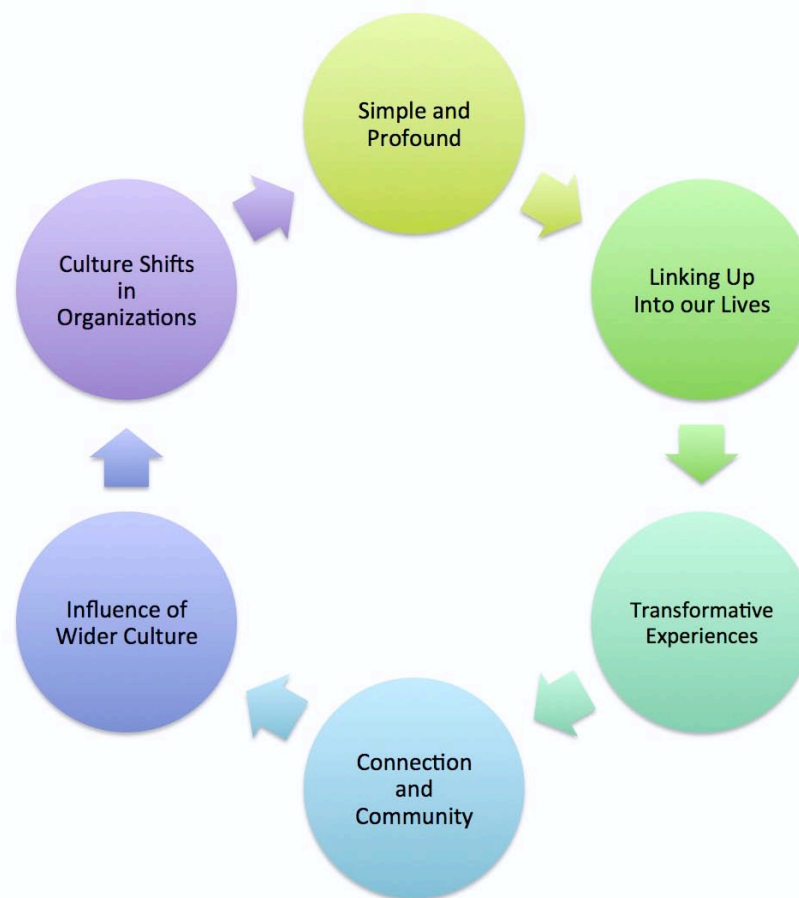


Figure 4.1: Visualizing a New Approach to Self-Care

Starting from a stance that inquiry is a relational practice and that researchers change the world as they examine it (McNamee & Hosking, 2012), I moved into the world of grounded theory with the assumption that there is no single truth (Gergen, 2009b) discernible within the language-games (Anscombe et al., 2009) we co-construct into the relational realities (Gergen, 2006) that we often perceive ourselves as moving through instead of creating together. I emerged from the reality I constructed with the help of grounded theory, with insights and ideas I do not think I would have come up with if I had chosen a different path.

By carrying social constructionist and narrative ideas into grounded theory instead of using them to act against grounded theory, I found a methodology that seemed relatively friendly and unthreatening to those ideas. The risks seem to lay more in the mind of the user than in the method itself. For me, a theory is just another constructed idea like orienting assumptions, principles, or narratives. I think how we use the idea can influence whether the concept of a theory is beneficial or problematic.

I claim my theory only as a working theory and use it as a temporary snapshot of where I ended up in this moment. I make no claims about its ability to capture reality as it is (Frank,

2010) or hold any truths at all. I reserve the right to change, refute, or continue to embrace my theory depending on how well it serves me and others as I move forward with it. For the moment, I find it a useful, yet rough, map of the territory along with some glimpses a little way up the road. This map is useful in organizing my thoughts and concepts into a coherent, yet flexible, framework for supporting further dialogue and exploration into how to proceed with future workshops, trainings, and publications.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to bring the participants' voices into the study of the workshops to get a clearer vision of their experience as well as the initial goal of reconstructing self-care for the mental health profession. The stories, reports, and themes that came out of this project have helped to bring the workshop attendees' experiences more to the forefront as well as establishing a significant indication of the success of the project of creating the materials and approach to encourage a new approach to self-care.

In Chapter Two I described the journey of creating the materials and approach and in Chapter Three I explored my experience of the workshops, however, I felt the success of the project was hanging on the feedback from the participants. Although I already had a sense of the positive responses from conducting the interviews, I discovered many pleasant surprises from using a grounded theory approach to investigating the interview transcripts.

Although I was hesitant to try generating a single overarching concept that attempted to capture the workshop in a word or two, I did find weaving the six themes together into a more flexible and multi-faceted theory to be insight generating. The resulting theory feels like a useful guide for moving forward versus something to be tested, refuted, or argued. I was seeking actionable and useful insights coming into this study and I found them in the six themes as well as in the theory.

Limitations

One of the key limitations to this study is my role as creator of the materials and approach to the workshops, facilitator of the workshops, and investigator in the research projects. I have taken many steps to share my biases in order to bring greater clarity to the process. For example, I chose a collaborative approach for the workshop and consistently invited feedback in each meeting. I also utilized evaluation forms and open-ended interview questions to step back from the process and invite more sharing. I feel I was able to maintain a balance between taking steps to provide a coherent process while accepting my role as co-creator across every phase of this project. I also sat for a narrative interview with the participants of the pilot group after they expressed an interest in learning more about my background.

Another limitation to this study is the growing reliance and insistence in the mental health field on evidence-based practices. While a qualitative study with promising results is a good start to move forward from, it seems some more rigorous approaches to the impacts of these trainings on people and organizations might open more doors. At the moment the practices are spreading

by word of mouth based on the benefits they bring to those who incorporate them into their lives. I am particularly interested in the intersection between these practices and the emerging value placed on neuroscience in the mental health profession. I also believe the abundance of anecdotal evidence is enough to carry this project very far into the future without quantitative research.

Validity and honesty in what the participants share is always a concern in research and I took various steps to encourage open sharing. I started most workshops by introducing myself and sharing the preceding life experiences, good and bad, that brought me to the work. Many people stated that this helped them relax and feel like they were in a safe environment. I also drove to each participant's home or office to interview them in their own space in order to not create any sense of power imbalance between us.

Areas for Further Study

The six themes woven into the theory from this study suggest further investigation into the interplay between organizations and the wider culture, especially in relation to self-care. All participants who were asked about the influence of the wider culture easily came up with a few negative aspects of our culture that they felt were hindering their enjoyment of work, self-care, and quality of life. Learning more about this area could be useful for organizations, policy-makers, and supervisors in the mental-health field.

Further study into the relationships among the six themes, as well as exploration into possible new themes, could be useful going forward. Bringing the theory back into the workshops and facilitating them with this awareness could further shape both the application of the material and the theory itself. Learning if certain components of the theory are necessary while others are adjunct could be useful in exploring their relationships and interdependency which could further shape the materials and approach to help them be more useful.

Due to the growing role of brain imaging studies in neuroscience and psychology research, it could be useful to conduct before and after brain scan studies of participants using these self-care practices. This could enhance the acceptance, use, and spread of these ideas as well as lead to refinements and additional practices that may be more effective. Having evidence behind a practice could also help with the incorporation of clearer language around self-care in the codes of ethics of the major mental health governing bodies.

Further research into outlining a template that others can use to create new self-care approaches from other traditions and for adapting less successful existing approaches to self-care may be useful for practitioners to access their past experiences as a resource once they have a model through which to make that information more available and accessible to others. For example, this could be particularly useful in bringing practices from popular traditions such as yoga into our field to make self-care more attractive to those who are drawn to that tradition. While I have found the approach successful in translating my past experiences into a helpful collection of self-care practices, more people undertaking similar translations help bring new traditions into the self-care camp.

Conclusion

The themes and the theory have already been helpful to me in explaining the *Stealing Minutes* concept to people who are unfamiliar with it. The themes have also provided me with a variety of categories of benefits to draw from to better tailor my conversations to the needs of those I am speaking with and of their organizations. Of the three studies, the ideas from this study appear to be the most useful in taking the next step of sharing this approach to self-care to a wider demographic than just mental health professionals. Without overstating the value of this study, it feels like it marks the transition from exploring possibilities to developing a path for moving forward and building on the success of the first two studies.

In Chapter Five I further explore the implications of all three studies and how they inform the project together. I also describe current developments in creating culture shifts in two very different organizations.

Chapter Five: Imagining Forward from Unexpected Outcomes

Introduction

Surrounded by unexpected outcomes.

Although I started this project with the modest intention of constructing a new approach to self-care for my colleagues, I have come to realize across the three studies that the *Stealing Minutes* approach is a more viable counter to some of the unreasonable expectations of our wider culture than I initially anticipated. Some examples of these cultural influences that were reported by the participants are “you play hurt” and “give 110% in order to be successful.” As a social constructionist and narrative therapist, I am leery of “discovering” this counter-practice and have chosen instead to view it as a collaboratively constructed result of the interactions within the workshops. Many of the outcomes of the three studies were positive and unexpected. I have found further inspiration in the fact that only 2 of the over 80 participants were previously involved in narrative therapy and social constructionism because this indicates to me a stronger correlation between the practices and their positive effects than if the participants and I had shared a deeper philosophical and theoretical stance.

My choice of an intensive multi-study approach was inspired by my desire for a more polyvocal exploration of this project. I was particularly influenced by the concept of people as multi-faceted beings (Gergen, 2009a) who perform varying identities across different environments. To create an approach that could better represent our multi-beingness, I chose a variety of methods in order to invite richer descriptions and a broader investigation into the many territories of meaning-making we inhabit in our daily lives. I found that this approach enabled a much richer telling than a single method approach might have provided. Additionally, I hoped the process of immersing myself in three different methodological approaches could help limit the impact of the biases and assumptions I was carrying into this project. The grounded theory study in Chapter Four was particularly useful for this because it was the furthest from my way of thinking and being in the world. Utilizing this structure—although I modified it to better match my vision of social constructionism—helped me generate insights that had not come out of my initial thoughts on the project or from the first two studies.

Perhaps the most unexpected of outcomes from each study was the continued momentum from positive results that I was able to use as inspiration to propel myself forward. For example, without the foundational information from Chapters Two and Three, it would have been difficult to apply the insights from Chapter Four. These applications are further explored in the upcoming sections on communities of practice and in the conclusion.

Implications and applications.

Throughout the remainder of this chapter I explore the implications of the insights gained in the three studies and discuss the emerging applications that are taking place. In the following sections I share a view into these implications through the feedback of participants and conclude

the section with a description of my experiences as a member of the group. In later sections, I discuss the applications of shifting cultures in organizations and follow-up on the emergent therapeutic applications that I discussed in Chapters Two and Three.

I feel this project has positive implications for the field of social constructionism and I discuss how I envision a continued interaction between self-care and social constructionism. In the conclusion of this chapter I discuss the implications of a broader and more accessible vision for the future of the Stealing Minutes project and explore ways of carrying that forward.

“Little things you can do that create lasting change.”

After more than a year of attending these workshops, one of the participants recently captured the essence of this project eloquently by describing these practices as “little things you can do that create lasting change.” This correlates with the theme of *simple and profound* that emerged from the grounded theory study in Chapter Four. Most of the participants reported realizing at some point during the workshop that it takes less time and energy than we generally expect to create a positive shift in our mind state (Seligman, 2011). My previous experiences with shortening many of the traditional practices I had learned over the years inspired me to bring a more experiential approach to the groups.

I believed that direct experience could be a better counter than a didactic approach to the commonly-stated assumption that many practices were beyond the reach of intra-day applications. The feedback from participants has been supportive of this assumption. As another participant expressed, “it’s like having a reset button—and being able to find it.” This speaks to two separate but important elements of the *Stealing Minutes* approach—it facilitates profound and effective practices that can shift our mental states in a short period of time while providing resources that are within our reach throughout the work day.

An enduring metaphor—keeping it below a five.

The pain management metaphor continued to generate conversation and excitement among the participants throughout the year and is still talked about as often as the 70% Principle and the *Stealing Minutes* concept. The idea of an intra-day approach to self-care with practices that can be done at work has helped make self-care on the job an option for many who previously assumed it was something only available on our own time. The assumption that self-care is only available during personal time has negative implications to the workplace by supporting a false dichotomy that suggests people choose between taking time off for self-care or avoiding self-care if they cannot take time away from work and do not believe it can be integrated into the work-day. It was my response to this belief that self-care cannot be integrated into the work-day that initially inspired me to begin this project.

I think the pain-management metaphor of *keeping it below a five* has the potential to enhance the spread of these ideas across the boundaries of understanding between the many professional and personal territories where a new approach to self-care could be helpful. Participants have reported that this metaphor resonates more clearly with them than the

potentially judgment-laden approach of discussing the ethical, health, or financial implications of lack of self-care in the workplace. I found a useful and complementary relationship between the idea of keeping it below a five and the application of the 70% Principle. Participants who were attracted to the pain-management metaphor responded positively to the idea of using the 70% Principle and the *Stealing Minutes* practices to act on the concept.

The unexpected benefits of being witnessed.

Another benefit that emerged out of this project is the personal growth and insights I have received through my interactions with the participants along the way. I realized along the way that much of my inspiration and excitement to continue after each phase of this project was relationally constructed through my interactions with the group. For example, if I had carried my excitement about this project into the group and nobody had responded positively to it I most likely would have abandoned the project. Recognizing that my excitement was validated and acknowledged by others in the space between us helped give it meaning (Gergen, 2009b) and inspired me to invest more energy in the process. Without this valuable dialogue these ideas may have faded along with many of my past ideas which I kept to myself. By not carrying my ideas into a shared relational reality (McNamee & Hosking, 2012), I was unable to bring them into the world. Another unexpected outcome of this project is that it has solidified my understanding of the generative benefits of acting on my appreciation of relational and collaborative perspectives. I am now resurrecting many of my long dormant ideas and bringing them into conversations that are breathing life back into them while creating opportunities and unlocking potentials I had not previously imagined.

My interactions with the participants reminded me that *I'm drawn to what is underneath* and that I am acting out of a long-standing philosophy of *spreading healing*. One person said she sees me as a matryoshka, a many-layered Russian doll, while another saw me as someone who follows the ideal of teaching people how to fish instead of giving them a fish. As we extended the metaphor through our conversations, this led to a discussion about my goals and how this project encouraged each person to explore many different ways to fish instead of just learning to fish in one specific way that may not be effective in other environments. By directly experiencing both the concepts and the practices of the Stealing Minutes approach, most participants were able to quickly start personalizing the practices to their needs as well as adapting them across multiple contexts. An example of this is how, in one week, the Finger Holds were passed from me to a clinical psychologist in New Hampshire and then to his daughter in California while he was visiting for the holidays. That same week, her daughter took her own version of the Finger Holds to her pre-school and taught other children there. The pre-school teacher then adopted the practice and showed other staff and children.

Having so many opportunities to see myself through the eyes of the participants helped remind me that I was bringing myself into this project in ways that were understandable and resonant for others. I chose to explore my roots and influences in Chapter One with the intention of leaning on my knowledge and philosophy as much as possible in creating the materials and

approach for the workshops. The deep sense of being recognized by others helped me realize that I achieved this goal in more ways than I anticipated.

Social Constructionism—Continuing the Journey

Choosing an open-source approach.

As a long-time fan of the collaborative approach to software development that the open-source community uses, I found this a useful metaphor for developing an approach to self-care that would facilitate useful, easily shared, and non-proprietary techniques within a presentation style that encouraged innovation and experimentation. This resonates with social constructionist ideas around multi-beingness, polyvocality (Gergen, 2006), and the enrichment of existing tradition as an alternative to taking an oppositional stance (McNamee & Gergen, 1999).

While adopting an open-source approach from a social constructionist stance, I employed narrative witnessing practices within the group to work towards honoring multi-being and creating space for diverse expression. Many people reported pleasant surprise at how much they were learning about each other after many years of working together. It seems that the meetings that were best remembered by the participants were the ones in which the most personal connections were created. One of my greatest joys throughout this project was in watching the positive results of applying social constructionist principles in the group setting. I often found the relationship between social constructionism and narrative practices to be one of ideas and insights from the former and paths to application from the latter. For example, I often tried to introduce witnessing practices after each exercise with the hope of encouraging a multi-storied and experience-based description of the practice that would have been difficult to achieve through just teaching the practice. I also told stories of how the practices were being experienced and changed in other groups to provide narrative resources (Frank, 2010) and encouragement to the group to share their stories.

I adopted the goal of fostering and preserving polyvocality in the group and within my research due to the warnings in social constructionist literature about the reality-limiting effects of a single story (McNamee & Gergen, 1999). I intentionally incorporated my appreciation of polyvocality by attempting to take an open and accepting approach. I did this partially by building on the existing language and traditions in my field in order to foster a more inviting and comfortable setting for exploring what was new and unique. For example, while I was advocating taking time during the day for self-care, I also openly acknowledged the busy and often frenetic nature of our working lives without judging or opposing it directly. In this way, I was honoring both the principles of polyvocality and the avoidance of taking on existing traditions in a conflict-based style of direct engagement. I was also informed by my narrative-inspired preference for helping build a new story alongside the older and problematic story in lieu of a direct attack.

Scaffolding into the precious and valuable.

Many of my colleagues expressed disappointment that our profession no longer encourages sharing on the deeper and more personal level that they remember from their work environments in previous decades. An unexpected outcome from applying social constructionist concepts to this project is what some people talked about as the re-emergence of deeper connections in the workplace. Over the course of each workshop I noticed participants would share increasingly personal and emotional experiences they had during and after the practices. Many people reported pleasant surprise at this emergence and asked about how it came to be and how we could carry it forward.

My sense of how it came to be flows from the idea of scaffolding gently into deeper and richer description (White, 2007) that I learned from narrative therapy. Through these gentle dialogical steps we began to collaboratively construct a vision of what our field was like in the past and how we would like it to be in the future. The stories of the mental health profession in the past seemed particularly surprising and captivating to our youngest partners who had not been there to experience them directly. This multi-generational and polyvocal conversation about self-care exemplifies the constructionist principle that new meaning is always a possibility, that we create our future through participation in relationships and that meaning is closely linked to action (Gergen, 2009a). Without my grounding in social constructionism I feel I would have lacked the guidance and orienting assumptions to reach the level of success and helped as many people as I have with this project.

Surprised by how quickly it brings discovery.

One of the primary ways that a social constructionist approach seemed to facilitate discovery was through softening our sense of the taken-for-granted and its usefulness with assisting the transition from a dominant cultural narrative to a more unconventional way of constructing meaning (Gergen et al., 2009). Adopting this stance inspired me to remove as much of the reified and concretized assumptions attached to the traditional approaches to many of the practices I wanted to share with others. Following the lead of the founders of the Public Conversations Project, I tried to create as much space as I could in the materials and took the most non-polarized and non-judging stance I could with the approach in order to help us all prepare for a voyage into new territory (Gergen et al., 2009).

From the Gratitude Maps exercise to the Finger Holds, many people reported how quickly they moved into a new way of being. Most of our meetings included at least a few exclamations of the excitement of discovery. For example, one participant found himself at a completely different insight at the end of the Gratitude Maps exercise than where he had started a few minutes earlier. In another example, someone found herself in a surprising place of peace with a traumatic separation through the Handing It Over exercise. Another participant started the LovingKindness Meditation focusing on his wife and found himself surprised to be reflecting on the boys in a support group he facilitates.

Un-fearing practices—moving towards versus away.

My consistent re-direction of our focus on positive goals and usefulness of these practices led one participant to call them the “un-fearing practices.” He, and others, described them as liberating in the way they could be used to help us quickly shift into a deeper sense of well-being. To begin opening up the opportunity to focus on the personal and positive impacts of these practices, I removed some of the more forceful or limiting descriptions of what the practices are and how they should be done.

While acknowledging the negative ways in which people enact our dominant cultural narratives, I focused on the more promising possibilities of what we are creating in the moment and how we can carry it forward. My internal name for it was *leaning towards the light* but the underlying influence for me is the idea that, in each moment, we are relationally constructing the shared future that we are moving into together.

How can this help social constructionism?

Reversing the gaze from the many ways that living out social constructionist principles has helped me successfully complete this project, acquire new understandings about that success, and informed new ways of carrying it forward, I offer some brief ideas about how this project may help social constructionism. My first hope is that this project has opened a door for social constructionism to enter into a new territory of life—how we take care of ourselves. My hope in applying social constructionist principles to self-care is that, it will have similar positive impacts to other areas where it has been successfully employed such as transformative dialogue (Herzig et al., 2006), narrative therapy (Freedman & Combs 1996), and organizational development (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

My intention is that as this new approach to self-care spreads, the underlying theoretical foundations will attract a new and diverse audience to social constructionism. Through continued contributions to the relationship between self-care and social construction I hope to help cross-pollinate both areas with ideas from the other. I also hope to re-invigorate conversations in our field around opening up the explanations of “self” instead of taking a stance against the concept. I also hope that in some small way I have opened up a little space for the further constructionist-oriented application and adaptation of the research methodologies I used in this project.

Culture Shifting Through Communities of Practice

Introduction.

An unexpected benefit that I became aware of in my later workshops was the possibility of creating communities of practice around self-care. By communities of practice, I mean a group of people who choose to meet regularly to practice and talk about self-care. In the next sections I compare three communities of practice and explore what is working well, and where they might be improved.

As it was with the therapeutic applications of these practices, I had not anticipated the possibility of enough interest to sustain a consistent group without the promise of continuing education credits. Consistent with many of the insights and new practices I came up with over the last 2 years, the idea of culture shifting was co-created in conversation with the participants. Looking back, I am humbled to realize that the majority of breakthroughs and unexpected benefits may not have become clear if I had taken a solitary approach. If I had been asked in the beginning to predict the odds of helping to affect culture shifts and encourage communities of practice, I would have guessed neither would have been successful. Luckily, I would have been wrong on both counts.

At the time of this writing there are two communities of self-care practice that are meeting weekly and one that is emerging. These communities of practice now include three of the organizations involved in my research. The remaining location, Harbor Point Therapy, was a public workshop with a diverse group who did not work together in the same organization. In Chapter Three I highlighted the differences between these settings and described the organizations. In the following sections I discuss these new traditions and their impacts on the organizations that are instituting them.

Warren Street Family Counseling Associates.

The most successful and sustained change so far has been at Warren Street Family Counseling Associates. While other groups tried to build the self-care focus into existing meeting structures, at Warren Street I hoped that encouraging a new weekly peer group would give us a fresher start to creating a lasting tradition that could impact our work culture in positive ways. I saw a number of advantages with creating a new tradition from the ground up and my colleagues also felt that a fresh start would be ideal. This was the only site where I was able to conduct workshops that met weekly for an hour. Other factors mentioned in Chapter Three such as the founding philosophy and collaborative nature of the organization also appeared to contribute to the success of the shift at Warren Street. We named our group the Warren Street Self-Care Circle to emphasize the collaboration and community we were hoping would take root.

We have been mostly successful with this goal but there is room for improvement as many of the attendees who participated in the original workshops continue to look to me for guidance and advice. I accept this role for now, but am slowly shifting to the role of a moderator by inviting others to bring in new practices and initiate more conversations. I believe the ongoing workshops at Warren Street gave the organizational culture over a year to adjust to the concept of more sustained and personal engagement in self-care and so, I am encouraging the same slow and organic growth goals for the Warren Street Self-Care Circle.

The existing culture at Warren Street seemed to play a crucial role in our ability to create and sustain an ongoing weekly group in addition to the two existing weekly peer supervision groups. While my colleagues talk about the positive shifts in the culture the *Stealing Minutes* workshops have helped to create, it is often in the context of a return to what was there at previous times in their history. Perhaps the relative ease with which we created a community of

practice at Warren Street is due in large part to their existing culture and the possibility that we only needed to nudge ourselves back instead of rebuild from the ground up. The influence of the existing organizational culture became even more apparent as I tried to help people create a community of practice in other settings.

Concord Hospital Family Health Center.

The application of a community of practice at the Concord Hospital Family Health Center has met with some ups and downs in comparison to the changes at Warren Street Family Counseling Associates. Some of the reasons for this are becoming clear as I continue to consult with the people who are trying to sustain this change. I think the existing culture at Concord Hospital contributed to the developmental challenges they have experienced in setting up a self-care group. The academic culture of a teaching clinic in a hospital setting that is immersed in medical models and structuralist perspectives appears to be an obstacle to our attempts at initiating culture shifts around self-care.

The director carried her enthusiasm for the idea of a community of practice into their work-day by instituting a 15-minute slot for self-care at the beginning of their weekly departmental meeting. Being mostly administrative, this meeting may not have facilitated an encouraging atmosphere. The director assigned each employee in the organization the task of teaching a new self-care practice each week. This didactic approach, the consistent focus on finding new practices, and the limited time slot contributed to adding enough pressure on the group that the project failed after a few months.

I later shared with them the success of the Warren Street Self-Care Circle and passed on my ideas about creating a separate meeting time apart from existing administrative meetings. I also advised the staff to eliminate the practice of mandatory facilitation and new practices in order to encourage a more collaborative, conversational, and practice-focused approach. The director was attracted to the idea of a Self-Care Circle and embraced the concept of a more open and sharing-focused group for members to share their experiences with self-care and the practices they find most helpful. Finding out that we sometimes do the same practice 3 weeks in a row at Warren Street helped the director and staff at Concord Hospital take a more relaxed approach to fostering a positive culture shift around self-care.

Parker Academy.

Parker Academy is the newest of the three sites undertaking culture shifts through building communities of practice. This is also the group with the most integrative existing approach to self-care due to their incorporation of mindfulness and applied neuroscience in recent years. Following on the positive reception to my one day workshop at their staff retreat, the principal contacted me a few months later asking me about coming to lead groups with the students as well as a group with the staff. I was surprised when they asked me to lead a group with the staff as I had been actively seeking work at Parker Academy as a consulting counselor

running social skills groups with the students. It was during these negotiations that I was asked to lead a self-care group with the staff.

This invitation marked the last of the organizations I held research groups with and provided me with a very exciting 100% conversion rate from teaching workshops in organizations to instituting some kind of culture shift through setting up regular communities of practice. I do not include Harbor Point Therapy as an organization because the setting was a workshop in their conference room that was open to the public and was not limited to the members or a particular organization.

Encouraging culture shifts in organizations.

While I noticed shifts on the individual and group level during the course of the workshops, I still had questions about the possibilities of affecting the culture of the organizations within which I was facilitating the groups. I was able to pursue these questions by starting a group at Warren Street which led to invitations to help start groups at other locations. It appears to me that focusing on the potential culture shifts available through setting up communities of practice through Self-Care Circles is only part of the picture.

Giving more attention to the existing culture the group is being set up in could have been helpful, especially at Concord Hospital where the failure of the first attempt could have restricted possible future attempts due to negative sentiment. I think I got lucky with the resilience of the staff at Concord Hospital and only now realize that the institution of a new tradition could have negative impacts depending on how it is instituted.

Some of the key ingredients that go into initiating and sustaining culture shifts around self-care can be found in the themes from the grounded theory study in Chapter Four. The first theme is *simple and profound*. The practices and concepts which seemed to satisfy both elements were by far the most talked about and used by the participants. I think the foundation of a culture shift is to identify practices and ideas that are simple enough to learn quickly yet profound enough to encourage ongoing practice and dialogue about them.

The second theme of *linking up into our lives* can help remind us that ideas and practices that resonate the most deeply with us are probably more likely to be adopted for regular use. Many participants reported a strong connection to some aspect of a practice or idea that they were benefiting from the most. This linking up was also talked about in relation to the practices people were most likely to share with their clients. Of all the themes, this one seems the most important in fostering the personal connections and information sharing that so many participants have reported to be a valuable part of the project.

Transformative experiences comprises the third theme. Here we take a step beyond the profound and look for evidence of lasting change. Many of the reports from participants sounded like some kind of transformation had taken place. Some people reported shifts in their attitudes toward work and clients while others reported finding balance in their relationships or renewed vigor for diets or exercise. I include any kind of reinvigoration of areas of life that had been neglected as part of this theme. Many of the experiences in this theme are of increased empathy,

compassion, and tolerance for others. Any exercises, ideas, or conversations with this potential could be considered for inclusion in a community of practice.

The fourth theme that can inform a culture shift is *connection and community*. While we often talk about ideas of community and personal connections in the workplace, the level with which we connected at Warren Street went far beyond Friday afternoon barbecues or staff meetings. People learned about the losses, triumphs, and worries of their colleagues in an environment that invited this sharing on a level that had not been achieved in the 2 decades the group has been working together. One of the lessons I learned from this is that deeply personal and caring relationships do not get in the way of running an organization. Finding effective and sustainable ways to foster connection and community seems to be a key ingredient in fostering a lasting culture change.

The fifth theme that can help initiate a culture change is the *influence of the wider culture*. Exploring negative cultural influences and how they impact our organizations as well as ourselves has been an important part of creating a sense of community in our groups while also inspiring hopefulness for change. Recognizing and talking about how our cultural influences are manifesting in our organizations can help us decide where to focus our energies for the best results. Many of the concepts and practices of the *Stealing Minutes* approach have come to be seen by myself and many of the participants as counter-practices to negative cultural influences.

The sixth theme is *culture shifts in organizations*. Holding the goal of creating a culture shift, instead of just starting a practice group or holding an afternoon workshop, can help give the group a large and recognizable target to begin moving towards. The idea of a culture shift can help organize the group around defining what they would like that shift to look like, where they would like it to take them, and what the shift may be in response to. Perhaps this definitional conversation should be the first step in creating a culture shift in organizations. That said, these ideas are presented in the same spirit as all of the *Stealing Minutes* materials and approach: *use them in whatever ways appeal to you, enjoy and play with them, and toss out whatever does not work instead of trying to apply everything*.

The theory from Chapter Four can also be used as a guide for pursuing positive changes around self-care in an organization by weaving the six themes into a coherent baseline for launching a culture shifting project: *By sharing simple yet profound self-care practices in a group setting that fosters a sense of community, these practices can link up with elements of participants' lives and lead to transformative experiences that can act as counter-practices to potentially harmful wider cultural influences which may, in turn, extend the personal benefits into opportunities for positive culture shifts in organizations*.

These are just some of the things that go into a culture shift around self-care as well as keep it going. I recommend these as a place to begin based on what worked, and did not work. When taken as a foundation to start from and not an exclusive and proprietary formula, room is left for the expertise, local-knowledge, and needs of each unique community.

Conclusion—Charting a Course for the Next Leg of the Journey

Widening the audience.

My experience with the receptivity of the staff at the Parker Academy retreat encouraged me to begin thinking about expanding the audience for the *Stealing Minutes* workshops. My first step was to expand the marketing focus from mental health professionals to all helping professionals including those in educational and medical settings. I have also begun discussing the possibility of linking these trainings with existing organizational development and coaching approaches being utilized by a few of my colleagues who work in those fields. While the talks are ongoing, the possible synergy is exciting for all of us involved.

The next widening of the audience came at the request of many of the participants who were using these practices with their clients. They often asked me, “Why don’t you start a public group?” As the demands of this research project began to wind down, I started my first open self-care group at Warren Street. This group has a clinical focus on stress and anxiety and, for the first time, we are able to bill the participants’ insurance for providing effective self-care practices. The evolution of the *Stealing Minutes* approach from a professional development training to a community of practice and then to a therapy group indicates to me it has the ability to play a role in an ongoing culture shift around self-care across the many territories of life we inhabit. I am excited about sharing this helpful and effective material with a wider audience and look forward to continued discovery as we focus the material on specific clinical and cultural issues. My colleagues and I are in the planning stages for another weekly group focusing on depression and a third for adolescents dealing with video game, online pornography, and social networking addiction issues.

My next step after widening the audience for *Stealing Minutes* workshops is to write a book to make this material more accessible while removing the current requirement of having to join a physical group to access these practices and ideas. To that end, I am creating a writer’s platform to satisfy the increasing demands on authors to promote their own work. I have purchased the domain name www.StealingMinutes.com and am in the process of building a website, a blog, email list, LinkedIn profile, and a Facebook page. When these are in place, and I have completed writing a book proposal, I will then seek a publishing deal.

Expanding the *Stealing Minutes* concept.

Through conversations with organizational development experts and executive coaches, I have come up with some new areas I would like to explore. One of these areas is the introduction of a self-care based approach to risk-management in high-risk professions. To that end, I have had conversations with a risk consultant about combining our approaches to see if it helps reduce critical incidents in such high-risk environments as fire-fighting and offshore oil rigs. He has existing consulting contracts in both fields and I hope to have the opportunity to move forward with this project in the coming year. To move further in this direction, I have submitted proposals to a local college for a graduate certificate program based on the *Stealing Minutes*

concept that focuses on building resilience and well-being in the workplace. The president of academic affairs has contacted me and would like to see the program up and running this autumn. I am hoping that teaching these concepts on a graduate level may help enhance their credibility and create further opportunities for research.

I think the *Stealing Minutes* concept is a good match for many of the approaches and applications of appreciative inquiry and would like the opportunity to explore the possible benefits of integrating the two areas. To move in that direction I have begun reading more about appreciative inquiry and have contacted a few organizational development professionals who work from an appreciative stance. While this idea is still new and undeveloped, I feel that it has good potential and am looking forward to exploring the possibilities of cross-pollination of ideas between self-care and appreciative inquiry.

I am also interested in continuing to pursue the possibility of professional development workshops in academic, medical, corporate, and governmental settings. After the success of the Parker Academy workshop, and the encouragement of participants who often spoke of how they would like to see me come teach in their workplace, I am beginning to pursue opportunities outside the mental health field.

Exploring therapeutic applications.

Another area for the next leg of the journey is the continued exploration of these materials as therapeutic applications. I continue to get positive feedback on an almost daily basis from my colleagues about their successes with integrating these practices into their work with clients. This has helped me build a body of anecdotal evidence and insights that I could develop into a workshop or a book about how therapists, leaders, coaches, and managers could apply these practices and concepts to helping others. An emerging side-benefit to the *Stealing Minutes* material becoming therapeutic applications is that many of the therapists who are reporting using these practices with clients also report an improvement in their enjoyment of the work as well as a reduction in stress and burnout. While I am finding this approach helpful in therapeutic settings, I also think it could be a beneficial adjunct to many therapeutic approaches such as trauma work and the brief therapies. Applying the *Stealing Minutes* themes and concepts could help practitioners create brief and effective stand-alone practices that clients could use between therapy sessions to improve outcomes and reinvigorate personal agency. To this end, I am talking with therapists who practice narrative therapy, solution-focused therapy, and EMDR to explore the possible synergies between the approaches. The *Stealing Minutes* concept itself could prove valuable for couples, families, companies, and government agencies as a reminder that we can support respectful, transparent, and mutually beneficial relationships in many ways in the small moments that slip by us all day long.

I find the possibility of mental health professionals benefiting from teaching these practices to their clients—not just using the practices for themselves—to be quite unexpected and hopeful for the continued growth of therapeutic applications of self-care. This goes a long way to alleviate my early concern that helping professionals might jump to sharing the practices

with clients without using the practices for themselves. With the current evidence that sharing the practices helps the person sharing them, I am less concerned about helping professionals missing out on the potential benefits of the *Stealing Minutes* practices.

Looking to the future—conflict and trauma.

I would like to figure out ways to apply what I have learned within the fields of conflict transformation and treating trauma. I am also hoping that it could help both the people working in this field as well as the people with whom they are working. I believe the multi-directional success of this material with therapists and their clients provides encouragement to move forward with this goal. I feel that this material could be useful for increasing resilience in field workers, assisting victims of trauma and oppression, and also in deescalating tension between groups in conflict to help both the organizations working in those areas as well as the people they are helping.

To that end, I have plans to contact professor Gerrit Loots about his work with child soldiers through the Center for Children, David Denborough at the Dulwich Center about their ongoing work in Africa and the Australian interior, and Paul Costello at the Center for Narrative Studies about their ongoing work in areas of conflict. I am also interested in the intersection between social construction, self-care, and transformative dialogue and hope to have conversations with people at the Public Conversations Project about possibilities of working together.

Where do we go from here?

After starting this project to explore the possibility of helping reduce some of the stress and burnout in my field, I am still prone to being overwhelmed by the seemingly endless doors of opportunity that have opened for me through this research project. I am convinced that without engaging in a structured, multi-study research-based approach to this concept it may have remained merely one in a handful of workshops I teach to boost my income and help a few friends and colleagues. I use the word, we, in the heading of this section because I think without the many participants, conversational partners, advisors, and mentors along the way, I would not have been exposed to the richness, depth, and generativity that I have experienced conducting this project. I also realize that I will not be alone in my journey forward. While not sure exactly where I am going from here, I am confident of one thing: I will have plenty of companions on my journey.

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Appendix A
Narrative Interview of Author with Participant Reflecting Team
Using Outsider-Witness Practices by Michael White

05/29/14

PK: Okay we gotta get off and running just cuz we're gonna run outta time here. What I told folks is we would talk for about 25 minutes and then we're gonna turn away to their comments and then after Lafe hears your comments, I'm gonna turn back to him and have him respond to what he's heard. Some things might not resonate, some things connect, but whatever you would choose that stands out. Okay?

Group: Okay.

PK: In narrative practice these are called witnessing practices, but I'm not gonna do narrative bullshit today, this is gonna be neo-Adlerian just so TP doesn't consider this complete bullshit. Okay?

Lafe: Okay. Understood.

PK: Cuz I don't want TP just zoning out on me now. (Laughing) We've done nothing to prepare for this interview. Just so you know. This is literally just a real conversation about this initiative in Lafe's life, which we've all been a part of, so obviously you know a lot about the initiative because you've been here. We could ask a hundred different questions to have a hundred different kinds of conversations about this but I'm just gonna pull a few questions out. Does that sound okay?

Lafe: Sure.

PK: Alright. Well, you know that I've been a fan of your work and I get really interested in all kinds of things but I've been dying to ask you... from here, from where you're sitting today, where you took yourself to from grad school and everything; if you were looking back over your life and could give us an idea of when do you think this whole initiative started to germinate in your life, this whole thing about self-care practices or healing arts or whatever you might call them. Do you have any sense of that?

Lafe: Yeah. A lot of stuff jumps out. This particular initiative is very connected to my experience in graduate school and graduate school's very connected to losing my wife to cancer. But the healing initiative started back in my 20s actually. I did training in Qigong and Qigong healing and 9 or 10 other healing modalities over the course of my early 20s and actually had a practice as a healer.

PK: Mmmm... as a healer.

Lafe: And I actually got scared out of it because a couple people said to me that I can't legally be talking to people when they bring up their problems because you have to be a counselor to do that. Which of course wasn't technically true. But I did actually get scared out of it and I looked into a graduate degree in counseling but I wasn't ready for it so I just moved on to other things. The healing track never went away. I was always interested in it and I always practiced Qigong and meditation and Tai Chi. So I was always there on those fronts but not really integrating it into my professional life or making any kind of a living with it.

PK: Did that word healer or healing fit for you? Did that seem like a good description?

Lafe: I think so. That really sort of called up a string of connected events and interests that go back 25 years for me. And I think that's part of what's behind the self-care work too. It's couched in professional terminology of our field and references and empirically-based connections but I think it's really wanting to help to heal and spread healing, and also the resources for healing. I'm a big fan of exponentiality and creating things that can spread and move forward. Like the whole "teach a man to fish" idea from the Native American traditions.

PK: So you were already in your 20s connected to this idea of helping and healing.

Lafe: Yeah. I think even before that. I was consciously connected to it in my 20s. Seeking trainings and things. I think it's been a part of my life way back before that.

PK: Yeah. You've brought it back even further. Is there some part of your life that you're thinking of?

Lafe: I was always sort of the family diplomat and the one who would pick up on family dynamics and try to calm them down or bring people up when they were upset. I was the only one in the family who didn't have any kind of a sort of Christian understanding of life and death. So when there were deaths in the family it didn't really bother me in the same way. I was able to be more present and be more celebratory of the person's life who passed. I don't even understand what it was but I have grandparents who had said that the way I was able to be with losses in the family was very different from other people in the family. I don't really know where that came from but I connect it a little bit to the fact that the people who said that were very devout Catholics and so they had a different perspective of death as loss, as permanent loss. I didn't quite get that.

PK: And your grandparents recognized that in you? Could you tell us a story about that?

Lafe: They were pretty mystified by my inability, or refusal, to take up the world from what was told to me about what it is. So they would tell me stories when I was in my teens about how when I was six or seven I used to argue with them about the nature of reality and "why is God a man?" and "why is he doing these things?" and "if we're modeled after him than why aren't we mean and tyrannical and vengeful?" I had all these sort of what I see as immunities to logic leaps that seemed to be innate. At least that's what I call them now. So I would often question things. At a very early age my parents started calling me a little Buddha. I don't know why they didn't call me something else, like a little troublemaker or a little Socrates with all my questioning.

PK: And your grandparents and your parents both recognized this? You called it "mystified."

Lafe: Yes. I think they were looking for where it came from back then. They were sort of looking for the origins of it and they would look in the family members and see my mom is a Quaker and my dad's an atheist, and a recovered Catholic, and my sister was in Sunday School at the time and then here I am on a completely different track that couldn't be easily identified or quantified, at least by my immediate family. So yeah, they were a little engaged in thinking about where I came from.

PK: Do you think they would be surprised at where this took you?

Lafe: I don't think my grandmother would be very surprised. She was one of a number of devout Catholic friends that I've known over the years that saw or felt something in me that resonated with what they believe. My grandmother could talk about how this or that person isn't going to heaven and then she could look at me and say "but they'll make an exception for you." (Group laughs) And the new Pope just said that a couple months ago. (More laughter) He went as far as to say even atheists who do good things could get in.

BLJ: Alright! I made it through the loophole.

PK: Do you think that you and your grandmother were stepping beyond the boundaries of your own known spiritualities when you were having these conversations?

Lafe: I think so. I have a really close friend who's a devout Catholic who considers all modern Catholics who go to English language mass to be heretics. But he considers himself a super-naturalist first and foremost which a lot of mystical Christians do and he considers me a super-naturalist but not a Catholic. And since I wasn't baptized and didn't take any vows to then break I can't commit heresy in his eyes. So I'm not a heretic. We have these amazing conversations. And his wife often asked him, "why are you having all these religious and spiritual conversations with Lafe?" and he says, "well, he's more Catholic than anybody I go to church with." From his definition of Catholicism, which stems from his love of the supernatural side of life.

PK: Would you say you have that love of the mystical?

Lafe: I think that's something that's been driving me all my life. I've never been one to take things for face value. I've always wanted to look under the surface, turn the rocks over, etc.

PK: Ah... I have a hundred questions I wanna ask you about that. You got me in trouble here, but I'll just ask one quickly because we don't have much time. Do you have a sense for how you fell in love with the mystical?

Lafe: ...I don't think it's a process that happened while I was old enough to have a sense about it.

PK: Really?

Lafe: I think I was there by the time I became aware of it. I was the kid who my mom could put in a hammock with a little tin cup full of Cheerios and leave for an hour and I take each Cheerio out and look at it and check out it's surface and texture and smell it and put it in my mouth and let it melt and for an hour I could just keep taking them out one by one. I don't remember that. I don't know myself from those times. But I always had this sort of Zen-like flowing through the world type of quality, which my mom also had, and her father had. So it's manifested, I think, in me being a little more reflective and contemplative than a lot of my peers across my life span. And also in me getting in a lot more trouble like when I was 3 years old and my mom had to decide whether to bring me in or the groceries. She chose the groceries, and I stood up on the seat and pulled the shift lever and drove down the hill and up over a VW bug. And of course jumping up and down all excited about it. I wasn't scared at all.

PK: That's so cool. I was trying to think about this sense of the love of the mystical that's been a big part of your life. It got me thinking oppositely about my question so would you describe it now as something that people lose track of rather than find in some way? You had all these people in your family recognizing it and also connecting with this too.

Lafe: Yeah. I think there are hereditary as well as environmental connections with this. But only in the sense, I think, of encouraging or carrying forward tendencies. I still think at the end of the day that it's a vocational skill and that we can all go and develop it. And I've seen that over and over again in trainings. Especially in Europe when I was at Arthur Findlay College in particular. I also think there are other forces at work, what I call Pinching the Straw. There are different lifestyles and different cultures, and family cultures, that don't pinch that straw of mysticism, nature, or mindfulness as much. So yeah, maybe I was born a little bit off center, but I was also raised with no religion, no television, out in the woods on a 110-

acre homestead. You start stacking all that up together and I think I have a lot of social and family advantages as well as far as my spirituality is concerned.

PK: Good soil to grow in huh?

Lafe: Yeah.

PK: When you were pursuing these things as a 20-year-old you got afraid and backed off. Could you say more about the fear? What was the fear that took you away from it?

Lafe: It wasn't really a fear of what I was doing. It was more the idea that you could get in trouble for taking it to where it was going and I wasn't willing to put up with that risk. A lot of people around me were also doing energy work and had been in the same trainings with me and their clients weren't having those responses. So I thought if this is what's happening then I'll go to school and when I gave up on that idea I just went off and did something else. I don't really know the exact process of how I drifted out of that.

PK: So coming back to the more recent process around losing your wife and going to graduate school would you say that was a different chapter of your life?

Lafe: Yeah I think so. There's a certain rawness that you develop when you lose someone like that. There's a shift. And a lot of times people who've been through that can recognize each other pretty quickly. And I ran into somebody who had been through something like that and it was a couple years after and she just asked me if the life I had was enough and I had bought a house on the Cape and renovated it and lived on the bike path right near the water and I had the life I was going for at that time. I was a beach bum and into kite surfing and had some money in the bank and had a pretty chilled existence. But I knew at that time that I didn't want to go back and do healing work. I wanted to do something bigger; was my sense of it. So I chose graduate school because I wanted to be a therapist and help more people but I chose it partly accepting the possibility that I'd have to sacrifice this other part of myself. As it turned out my graduate program was pretty deficient, even on the academic level. So instead of dropping out, I moved up to New Hampshire and joined another supervision group so I ended up doing two practicum groups instead of the required one. The guy who ran that one, who eventually became my friend, TL, is an MFT who also incorporates a lot of contemplative practices and has a love of Taoism and was constantly quoting Rumi and Hafiz and all these other things I was also into. He said "yeah you can bring this stuff in to your work." He showed me I could work this way and then translate it into the language that managed care and computer driven progress notes want to hear and even take on some of the skills of the field and integrate them, especially narrative and collaborative approaches. That became pretty evident when nobody wanted to take the first case in the student clinic and I said, "I'll take it." That goes back to this loss again, I wasn't afraid of anything anymore so I just walked in the room and sat down and within 15 minutes the guy was crying and saying things he had not said before in previous sessions and I walked out and later a few people asked me, "how did you do that?" and "what model were you using?" and "how did you know to ask him this or that?" and I said, "I have no idea." That was his 33rd session if I remember correctly. He had been sort of pathologized as a chronic and intractable case, or, what was it they said... a "professional client."

PK: Last question then we'll go to these guys. You said that you wanted to be doing something bigger. Do you think you're on that road?

Lafe: Yeah. I think what I'm doing right now is actually bigger than I thought I'd be doing. (Group laughs) When I thought about doing something bigger, there were no workshops, trainings, books, or

PhDs involved in that thought. It was more just like “can I go get a master’s degree, be an MFT, and bring in as much of myself as I can?” That was my baseline goal.

PK: Are you okay if it goes really big?

Lafe: Yeah. I wasn’t planning on it going really big but if it’s well-received then I’d be happy if it did.

PK: Well. We’re going to ask Lafe not to talk for a few minutes and I’m going to talk with you guys. We’re going to start with you OK. And just ask you what caught your attention. Was there a particular expression that really grabbed you?

OK: Yeah, couple of them. Love of the mystical. Get drawn to what is underneath things. And that for me kind of grabbed me. I wouldn’t have connected the two.

PK: And why do you think it grabbed you? What is it that it grabbed?

OK: Well, what is underneath or behind things has always interested me and it drew me to the direction of all things scientific. It’s interesting to have that intersection cuz I’ve always been like “what’s behind that?” or “why is that doing whatever?” whether it’s things that people say or the way that people act has always been something that’s fascinated me. I’ve gone both directions. I have a definite mystical part of myself, and interest in that and which includes things more empirical so I’ve put them both together. I don’t separate them out much. So it’s always been, for me, a love of the mystery. And then pursuing discovering more about that.

PK: I love that that phrase, “love of the mystery.” Does it give you any image of Lafe and his life and his journey? Does anything come to mind that’s an image or a metaphor?

OK: I think the image that comes for me is what is happening when he was a child with his relatives calling him Little Buddha. That could be confused with something that’s very specific but that’s not what it meant to me... its more of an image of a Buddha-like or mystical-like person doing what we do here. I don’t have a picture or visual thing I’m more of a word person.

KS: Or a felt-sense person.

OK: Yeah. More of a felt-sense person.

PK: Where is this taking you? Has it encouraged anything or does it take you anyplace or make you think about anything in your own life?

OK: Yeah. It keeps the thread going on the mystical for me. With the book I’m writing, it’s such a left hemisphere process needing to go down the references and all that shit. So that pulls very much towards the scientific left hemisphere processes a lot. And then with Lafe the work here helps me balance my more right hemisphere, non-verbal, emotional part. It creates more balance for me. I certainly want to keep that integration going.

PK: KS? My first question is to pick an expression that really stood out for you.

KS: Well, to “spread healing” and “to teach a man to fish.” That really stood out for me both in terms of the kind of organic process that’s been happening in terms of the self-care clinics. And that ripple effect out into the world and so I like that expression “teach a man to fish.” The idea that people have different ways of fishing and that they don’t all use the same bait and they don’t all go to the same place. It’s like

they can choose for themselves in a way that fits who they are and what they do. I think it's really exciting. I think it's so needed. And I share that with my clients and hope it goes back to their departments wherever they might be and bring people in or bring Lafe to them. So that really struck a chord.

PK: What do you think it is about you that that's the thing that stood out?

KS: I feel like with the Positivity Company, or whatever it is I've done, I've always seen the strengths in people and wanted that to develop. Even back in time when I worked as a guidance counselor and people would be having, I mean they'd go home and they'd found that their mother had hung herself or something of that nature and I'd always see the strengths, I didn't always know how to help with some of the other healing parts to help them get back to where they could stand on solid ground. I think it's putting together both sides of that sort of yin-yang picture as far as healing goes. And realizing that the passion and the parts of ourselves that are the gifts are there from the beginning of time. They're there from the time you're little. And I've always been curious about how can I help people see that and trace it through time and actualize it. To use that ripple effect so the world would be a better place.

PK: Almost a reconnection yeah? Is there an image beyond the fishing image for you?

KS: I used to throw rocks into ponds so I could take a picture of the ripple effect and that's the image that comes to mind as the reflection of the sky and the water as it's going out further and further and further. That's what comes to mind.

PK: Hmmm. Any particular effect for you that maybe takes you a little bit different place in your life or maybe has got you doing something a little differently?

KS: I think probably sharing it with clients as well as doing it myself has also deepened a part of me. So I have access to other parts of myself that I didn't before because it's been more consistent. I think it would be fun to work with Lafe at some point in time in terms of sharing our different experiences so I see it really coming together and I didn't expect that but we've talked about sort of integrating things in a different way. So it feels like the thread that runs through it will continue and the ripple will move on...

PK: Thanks. BLJ, was there a particular expression for you that caught your attention?

BLJ: Yes. "Because of the loss I wasn't afraid anymore."

PK: Because of the loss I wasn't afraid anymore. Yeah. Why do think that one caught your attention?

BLJ: ...It resonated emotionally with me and with how the losses in my life have also transformed me. And when I lose somebody there's this span of time that I am in where things matter but they really don't. I just become fearless. I'm not as attached to anything, good things or bad things, but not in a detached or absent way. People and what they say or do is about them and I don't get caught up in it, my reactivity isn't there.

PK: Did you come up with a particular image of any kind about Lafe and this work and his journey?

BLJ: A matryoshka. The Russian doll in a doll in a doll. And then I kind of laughed because I put your (Lafe's) image on it, kind of like a photograph and it's a little bit distorted because you get fat in the middle. (Group laughter) So I really like that because I like to be serious and things have meaning for me and I've got my process but I'm also irreverent at the same time so that image is perfect. (Laughter)

PK: Irreverent reverence. I like it. And how about any transport for you? Any ways this has taken you in your life that has an effect on you?

BLJ: It validates for me that there is something more to life that I can see and that is a source of extreme comfort. I don't really know if somebody else's religion is more true than any other but all I can say is that my truth is that I know there is something more than I can see and when other people express that they are vulnerable when they take that position because it's not a clinical, measurable kind of therapy. That helps me. It feels like it melts everything that's not me.

KP: Mmmm. Thanks. TP you're last on the list here.

TP: Well after hearing everyone else my mind's resonating with more than my own responses from earlier.

PK: Well now you gotta go back to your specific experience. Keep it small. So what's one expression that required your attention?

TP: It's "I don't think I was old enough to have an idea of it." He was talking about this sense of the mystical, of being a healer.

PK: "I don't think I was old enough to have an idea of it." Why did that expression catch your attention do you think?

TP: Several reasons. First being my own personal life. He mentioned he was raised on a 120 acre farm with no religion and no TV, well I was raised on a 120 acre farm with no TV and kind of a lot of religion, but from different sources. I remember running away one time; I didn't think I was running away, I just wandered off into the woods out back with my dog out in rural Vermont and I was up on top of a hill sitting under one of those big power line poles that go through. I don't know how I found myself there. I was probably 5 years old. And the state police were out looking for me, and the game warden and the neighbors and everybody. I eventually saw my neighbor coming around and didn't think much of it. It's the only time I remember getting spanked by my mother. It wasn't a traumatic memory. I can understand it. At the time though it didn't strike me I was doing anything wrong by just going up there and wandering around. I wasn't running away and I wasn't afraid of being lost. I knew where I was. I could see my house way off over a couple rises there. I knew where I was. I clearly believe I had a faith in God even at that point in my life. It wasn't like the Nicene Creed or anything but it was a clear sense of that. I wasn't afraid of that. And ever since it's been kind of a struggle about "how do I keep that state of mind?" without, not being spanked, but without somebody drawing you in or hauling you in and saying "wait a minute, you can't be that, you can believe this but you can't believe that." Some of the stuff we've talked about. At my age now and coming up on my 50th high school reunion I'm not going to go to all of it because it get's kind of nutty I think. I kind of reflecting on where do I go from here in my life and it's almost calling for more of to be that kid who just walks off and says "I'm fine. You don't have to worry about me. I don't want to die right away but I'm not afraid of death." I have a belief that I won't preach to anybody. I don't need to. For me it's not an unknown.

PK: Well, I don't have to ask you the question of transport do I? (Group laughter) This has clearly taken you somewhere hasn't it?

TP: There are plenty of unknowns but I'm not afraid of what happens when I die. I'm not afraid of that part.

PK: I keep hearing that “not afraid” and un-fearing of things here today. Could you pick an image of some kind that would shine a light on Lafe and his work and his life that would resonate for you?

TP: ...well, you're a country boy at heart. You have that sense of wandering and okayness with it and an earnest curiosity about life that probably draws people to you like the guy you were talking about in the counseling clinic when you first started. You probably asked him honest questions like “Gee, you look sad, what's going on?” or whatever, without a lot of conniving in your head about “what model am I gonna use now?” or that kind of thing. People sense that I think. I remember in counseling clinics a couple people tried to work on me. I could tell it was just bullshit and I thought “I'm not letting this guy into my head. Are you kidding me?”

PK: Do you think you and Lafe can collaborate on an article called The Wandering Country Boy Therapy? (Laughter)

TP: That's a good idea. I like that. Would that be a narrative offshoot? (More laughter)

PK: Well Lafe I want to give you a chance to respond to some of these responses and I want to add my own resonance that for some reason these practices are un-fearing things. That would be the phrase that I would use. These are un-fearing in some way. I'm really fascinated with that. But what have you heard that caught your attention from some of these responses that you want to respond to?

Lafe: I think hearing back some of the things that I said today in other people's voices has been really powerful for me. Being reminded from someone else about the loss that I've been through and how I've been able to turn that into resilience and how I actually worked hard to stay in that state instead of just saying “yeah I've had a loss and am really raw and open for a moment.” And also the sense of this power of feeling non-attachment versus detachment. I made an effort to hold onto that and carry that into my life and not let go of it, not let it just be a phase of grieving. So it was great to hear people speak back to loss. It was really powerful for me to hear people talk about their experiences and what has shifted for them. And also a lot of the things that people spoke about their experiences with the self-care practices were many of the things that were driving me to create them and adapt them for us in the first place. So it's a real sense of coming home for me. I've never been one for the word “success” in traditional terms but it feels like a success to me when I want to do something really helpful and it turns out it really is helpful. That's huge!

OK: It is a success!

Lafe: That's the kind of success my mom would be really proud for me to achieve.

PK: What does your mom think about what you've done or what you're doing?

Lafe: She seems to love it. I think she's really excited about it on a number of levels. My parents always sort of classified me as a “helping person” or as someone who wanted to be of service to others. My dad always wanted me to do it in a very financially secure and comfortable way of course. He gave up on that pretty quickly sometime in my 20s. My mom was much more of that wandering Zen type and she just loves it. She's pretty excited about it.

PK: So she's going on the journey with you?

Lafe: Yeah. And I think she's comforted by the fact that I'm doing a PhD and getting licensed and doing all these things that also help her think “okay, he's gonna be okay.”

PK: Well your dad would appreciate that. (Laughter)

Lafe: He would.

PK: A real license. An actual board of examiners. A real social structure.

TP: Let's not ruin this with the board of examiners please! (Laughter)

Lafe: How funny that I moved into that phase after he died.

PK: Yeah.

BLJ: Right. Right.

Lafe: I finally started taking all that stuff seriously after his death. I started thinking maybe I'll play the game for a while. When I started having this vision of "bigness" I realized I had to actually join existing systems in order to do that. I had a discussion with (my professor) Walter Lowe once telling him all the things I wanted to do and he said, "kid, you're gonna need at least a PhD to get where you wanna go" and I said, "yeah I know I figured that, I've already applied."

TP: You're like the first Karate Kid. He didn't have a belt so he couldn't get into the tournament so he went and found one.

PK: Thank you for all that you're doing and thank you for this conversation.

Lafe: Thank you all for showing up. This has been great.

PK: I tell you. I made this comment earlier that I just feel closer to all of you. That's my transport. I feel close to each of you. I feel very connected to you today, and obviously the two of you, and you. And wandering country boys and Buddhas running around and the left and right getting together and under and over and I feel very connected to you OK because I really love the mystery too and I was afraid of it though in the first half of my life. I think that's been the un-fearing for me is to love it, to really look out into it. I love that sense of not knowing. TP and I have had conversations about different spiritual traditions. Some are going for certainty and some are going for mystery. And we tend to be attracted to the ones that are going for mystery. And it's really touched me that this much community has broken out through this work Lafe is doing.

OK: It's like community has re-broken out. It was getting sort of stale here, for me. And I feel that this has really turned back on again the sense of connection that we've had with each other over the years that helped us set this place up really... Sneaking out during lunch hours and stuff like that.

PK: Well... Thanks so much. I know you guys already know this but you put a lot of work into this. I really appreciate that. You put hours and hours and hours into this work and it shows. I really appreciate all the work you put into this. (Group affirms)

Lafe: Thank you. It's a labor of love.

PK: And I know it has been. I can tell. You know the stuff you want to do...you want to go do it!

Appendix B

Sample of Session Notes

(HF) → hugging your fingers 10 yr old
 she was really into with it
 Basic orthodontic techniques but less useful
 hadn't

(SA) → did PH + ULM
 Is there anything good about?
 That was amazing
 I want to do that again!

(SA) Counter practices to cog/intell approaches
 Giving sucks are more punch } (RA)
 That's when
 tried to let
 weight
 around it (SA)

MV - Send of cars clearly
 "A just sort of get away from it"
 RH - I was there at end

! (HF) → synchrony of heart + breath was in control
 and it passed off (for 7 min) after had to save her

US - helpful to have your voice but want to not need it
 kept me more present

Appendix C

Field Notes Journal FormField Notes Outline for Post *Stealing Minutes* Sessions:

Date _____ Session # _____

1. What shocked or surprised me?
2. What stood out?
3. What was I expecting that did not happen?
4. What was I planning that I did not get to?
5. What resonated the most with me in this session?
6. What would I have done differently?
7. How did this session sit with me?

OVER:Keep journal of my sparks, reactions, and arresting moments after each session: →Personal session journal and overflow area:

Appendix D

Handout—Qigong Principles

The 70% Principle

By only taking our movements in chi gung to 70% of capacity, more room is left to focus our awareness on internal processes and develop deeper insight. When you are not pushing, stretching, and forcing, you can move forward, with less falling backwards. In a culture where 110% is a common mantra, the 70% principle is not only radical and counter-cultural, it is also good medicine. Remember the tortoise and the hare?

The Down Creates the Up

In a visual dominant, up, up, up culture one can see why other energetic and meditative traditions have become more common than Taoist practices. Instead of going straight for the buzz, the end game of the intensity, Taoist methods encourage the building of a strong foundation and the ability to ground and center ourselves first before reaching upwards and outwards. This approach has been especially useful for people in fields prone to burnout.

Preserving the Three Treasures

What are the three treasures? Jing, Chi, and Shen. Or very roughly translated: sexual energy, body energy, and spirit energy. Various activities can drain each of the three key energies from us. (I leave the first to your imagination.) Chi can be exhausted through overwork, poor diet, substance abuse, and injury. Shen can be depleted through excess information input, media, drama, etc. Again, remember the 70% principle and the playful attitude of the Taoists when exploring these areas.

Strength in Yielding

A classic Taoist view that helps us differentiate between power and force. Sometimes a quiet moment in a conversation says the most. Taoists often point out the yes, water flows around the rock in the stream, but eventually it erodes the earth around the rock and flows over it as well. Some places this principle can be seen at play are in collaborative and narrative practices, non-expert stances, self-organized learning environments (SOLE), and appreciative inquiry.

The Wise Person Breathes from the Heels

How deeply into your body can your awareness travel with the breath? Can we breathe up from our feet or down from our head? What about from below our feet or above our heads? When I started I could barely breathe from my nose!

More Energy is not always Better

More nervous or jittery energy than you already have is not likely to be very helpful. As well as the quality of our energies, another key concept is the habitual flow of our energy. Simply increasing energy without awareness or meditative practices can lead to aggravation of existing negative habits and patterns. This is where grounding and centering practices play a role in balancing the increased life energy.

To Feel Energy (and more) Slow Down Your Mind

Chi does not move as fast as our thoughts do in today's information age mind. In fact, very little in the natural world moves at the speed of the modern "monkey mind." As we slow down our movements, we can soothe and calm our nervous systems while gaining insight into our bodies, our minds, and our relationship to the environment around us.

Where the Awareness goes, the chi follows.

Where the chi goes, the blood follows.

This is an old adage that runs across many Eastern movement and energy practices. Try it and see for yourself. The more you focus on a part of your body the more you increase the energy, and circulation to that area. You can also get a cheap biofeedback thermometer and test it for yourself.

Your Lower Tantien and Moving From Your Center

This is the energy center in your lower abdomen that many traditions consider the primary controller and storage area of life energy. Whether you take the energetics seriously or not, you can still benefit significantly from increasing awareness of your core. This is especially useful while moving about and while sitting for long periods. And of course, wherever your awareness goes...

Let the Bottom Carry the Top

How stable are you if you have something heavy on top of something light versus something light on top of something heavy? Is your head dragging your body around with you or is your lower body carrying your upper body around? Are you aware of your legs, feet, and hips while you are moving around?

Eyes Neutral and Soft Eyes

Are you projecting your attention at the things you are looking at or allowing the environment to come to you? This might sound trivial or wishy-washy but just give it a shot and see if you notice a difference. Instead of looking at things as if you are shining a flashlight in the dark, let your eyes receive images, like a camera does. Then play with finding a balance between the two. That is the essence of neutral eyes. You can then free up energy you used for looking to focus more on body awareness. This is great combined with Letting the Bottom Carry the Top.

Sources:

→ Some principles are adapted from readings of the Tao Te Ching. Although there are many versions available, I prefer Steven Mitchell's tastefully and respectfully interpreted version through Harper Perennial.

→ Another accessible and inspiring book to read is Thomas Cleary's translation of Awakening to the Tao by Lui I-Ming from Shambala. There are many others to explore if you enjoy these two.

→ The majority of these principles I learned over the last 20 years from my teachers. The most important to me is Bill Ryan. He was the founder and director of Brookline Tai Chi in Boston for many years and has recently established Towards Harmony in Northampton, MA.

Towards Harmony offers a wide array of Chi Gung, Tai Chi, and meditation classes and retreats, as well as very useful practice tips via email that are available at www.TowardsHarmony.com

Appendix E

Handout—Research on the Benefits of Qigong & Meditation

- Qigong (and Tai Chi) are associated with improvements in stress, anxiety, depression, mood, increased self-esteem, and many other benefits.
- It is possible to produce substantial changes in brain function through short-term practice of meditation. (Qigong can be done as a meditative practice.)
- Meditative practices have recently been shown to boost the activity of many beneficial genes while reducing the activity of more harmful ones.
- Meditation has shown to produce anti-inflammatory effects in the human body within minutes of starting a practice much the same way stress creates negative physiological impact.
- Functional MRI studies are now showing that meditative practices can change our temperament and physical health in dramatic ways.
- Studies are showing improved cognitive processing in meditators that include focus, reduced cognitive delay, and increased perception abilities.
- Research is also showing that meditation leads to a decreased sensitivity to pain that appears to work through moderating emotional reactions and stress responses.
- Along with Qigong and Tai Chi, meditative practices are also correlated to reduced anxiety through improved social and emotional functioning, increased awareness, and enhanced emotion management.
- Improving emotional balance is associated with increasing compassion and empathy. Research here could be very useful in therapeutic settings.
- The benefits of Qigong and Tai Chi for the elderly are extensively documented and include increased balance, reduced frailty, and much more.
- Qigong and Tai Chi have been shown very effective in substance abuse settings, suggesting the possibility of showing benefits in helping with behavioral addictions too.
- These are now Evidence-Based Practices!

Online References for Research on Meditation and Qigong:

Comprehensive Library of Medical Benefits of Chi Gung and Tai Chi.

<http://worldtaichiday.org/WTCQDHlthBenft.html>

Meditation Boosts Genes That Promote Good Health.

<http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn23480-meditation-boosts-genes-that-promote-good-health.html> - .Un0NMo3yktw

Mind Gym: Putting Meditation to the Test.

<http://kexuesongshuhui.blog.163.com/blog/static/935965672011014114938296/>

Meditation Will Make You Smarter (And Happier).

Studies continually demonstrate why meditation is good for us:

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/meditation-modern-life/201309/meditation-will-make-you-smarter-and-happier>

The Science of Meditation.

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/200105/the-science-meditation>

Tai chi for older people reduces falls, may help maintain strength.

<http://www.nia.nih.gov/newsroom/1996/05/tai-chi-older-people-reduces-falls-may-help-maintain-strength> - .Un0WIo3yktw

Can Qigong reduce cocaine cravings in early addiction recovery?

http://www.sciencecodex.com/can_Qigong_reduce_cocaine_cravings_in_early_addiction_recovery-107449

Meditation found to increase brain size.

<http://www.news.harvard.edu/gazette/2006/02.02/11-meditate.html>

Tai chi and reduction of depressive symptoms for older adults: A meta-analysis of randomized trials.

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1447-0594.2012.00882.x/full>

Appendix F

Handout—Loving-Kindness Meditation

The practice of Loving-Kindness, or Metta Meditation is a simple and effective foundational support for other awareness and self-care practices as well as a powerful tool in its own right. The goal, which it often achieves, is to evoke a “boundless warm-hearted feeling” through reciting specific words and phrases. The practice is made even easier by starting our focus on ourselves and gradually extending it out beyond the limits of self, family, religion, or social class.

For helping professionals and caregivers, I have found the practice especially useful in at least two ways. First, Loving-Kindness Meditation is an effective way to enhance our relationships with others. Secondly, when done in an affirmation style, you can quickly add a shot of resilience, balance, and hope to your day. This, in turn, helps us be more open and available to others without taking as much of their troubles on board.

The Practice:

Where to Begin: To get the flow going, start by repeating the following, or similar, phrases to yourself. While saying these phrases, allow yourself to feel the intentions they express:

May I be happy. May I be peaceful. May I be safe. May I live with ease.

The Next Step: When ready, you can begin to move these feelings of loving-kindness beyond yourself, to loved ones, acquaintances, animals, and finally to those with whom you may be having difficulties. Try a friend to start:

May you be happy. May you be peaceful. May you be safe. May you live with ease.

Relational Metta: Our home life can have a significant impact on the rest of our life. Try directing this loving-kindness towards a parent, partner, or child. As you recite each phrase, allow yourself to feel any emotions and warmth that may be arising. Connecting this warmth to the phrases can strengthen your practice:

May you be happy. May you be peaceful. May you be safe. May you live with ease.

It can be hard to be there for others if you lack energy, hope, or admiration for yourself. (Remember what the flight attendants say about the oxygen masks?)

Practicing Loving-Kindness while visualizing yourself experiencing the mental and emotional states described in the phrases can help you through challenging moments and foster more positive states of mind. Feel free to play with changing or adjusting the phrases to better suit your needs at any time.

Online Resources for Loving-Kindness Meditation:

Metta Meditation

<http://info.med.yale.edu/psych/3s/metta.html>

Metta: The Philosophy and Practice of Universal Love

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/buddharakkhita/wheel365.html>

The Metta Institute

<http://www.mettainstitute.org/mettameditation.html>

Facets of Metta. (And a study on just how powerful it is!)

http://www.vipassana.com/meditation/facets_of_metta.php

Metta on Wikipedia

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mett%C4%81>

Appendix G

Handout—The Jin Shin Jyutsu Finger Holds

This practice can be very useful for creating a more overall balanced and harmonized feeling in a very short time. It works well as a complement to some of the other more mental and emotionally focused exercises because the finger holds act more directly on the body in ways similar to acupuncture or massage.

Although traditionally practiced for at least three minutes per finger (it can be a great practice for falling asleep with), it can still be a significant help when done for one minute per finger, or less. You can also focus on a few different fingers, or hold just one for the whole time. It is probably best when doing a shortened version of this to cover all fingers, especially if you are seeking balance and centering.

If you have enough time, for a more contemplative approach you can hold each finger until you feel a rhythmic and/or increased pulse before moving on.

Another benefit to this flexible practice is that using it can provide the space to incorporate other self-care practices simultaneously. For example, you could practice gratitude, loving-kindness, and/or breathing awareness during the finger holds to build a more personalized approach to self-care. This has been reported to be a helpful practice for people with difficulty falling asleep.



- Thumb. (Can also help with worry)

Stomach and Spleen: The Stomach Function Energy is associated with intelligence and reasoning whereas the Spleen is the entry point for light energy.



- Index Finger. (Can also help alleviate fears)

Kidney and Bladder: The Kidney Function Energy relates to our development on all levels (mind, body, spirit). The Bladder Function Energy brings mental clarity and emotional stability.



- Middle Finger. (Can help reduce or soften anger)

Gallbladder and Liver: The Gallbladder Function Energy helps replace reactivity with objectivity. The Liver Function Energy aids in the movement of all substances within the body.



- Ring Finger. (Can help with sadness or guilt)

Lung and Large Intestine: The Lung Function Energy is important for the immune system, for regulating the entire physical body, and for feelings and emotions. The Large Intestine Function Energy aids both the mind and digestion.



- Pinky Finger. (Can help with balancing inner and outer selves)

Heart and Small Intestine: The Heart is considered to affect the entire body. Small Intestine is associated with discernment and connection to others.

Hand images and text from the website: <http://www.intuitiveheal.com/jsj-hand.html>

Based on the practice as taught to me by Betty Jean Wall, PhD.

You can find her online at www.BettyJeanWall.com.

Appendix H

Handout—Gratitude Practices

Research is showing that gratitude is an important emotion and that practicing it is a simple yet powerful tool. Although disarmingly simple, immersing yourself in gratitude practice is something that most people have to experience to fully appreciate. Social constructionists believe we create our worlds of meaning through our interactions and relationships. It is often in these relational spaces between us that the power of gratitude plays its biggest role. It is here where gratitude seems to work its healing on things like our stories, our worldview, and our conceptualization of others and ourselves.

When practiced individually, gratitude has the potential to enhance well-being, resilience, and appreciation which can help us be more present and available in our work and home lives. Gratitude can help us turn towards each other, improve our resilience, overcome negative sentiments, and reduce the effects of burnout.

The Practice:

Gratitude Practice: To foster a more positive mind state, relieve stress, and enhance your appreciation and perception of the people and things around you, take a few moments to think of things to be thankful for. The more you practice gratitude, often the more things appear in your field of view to be thankful for. You can focus on specific areas of your life where you want to feel more grateful and connected or just let go and wander off into wherever your practice takes you.

Relational Gratitude Practice: To enhance positive sentiment in your relationships with others, you can join someone in taking turns sharing something about each other for which you are grateful. (Exchanging the words “thankful” and “grateful” can make the language feel less repetitive and helps keep each statement feel fresh.)

Letters of Gratitude and Gratitude Journals: To ease your way into the direct sharing of gratitude with others, you might find that letters or journals of gratitude are a good door opener to get the flow going. You do not need to share these with anyone. Just the act of expressing gratitude and organizing your thoughts on paper can be helpful.

Gratitude Walks: Going for a walk can be a good time to explore the potential of gratitude practice. You can choose a focus, such as your immediate environment, or leave it open to whatever comes to mind. None of these practices require sitting quietly in a particular place, or a particular position. You can make these practices yours by adapting, changing, and playing with them.

Specificity: To go deeper into the state of gratitude, you can try adding a reason why you are grateful after each statement.

Online Resources for Gratitude:**An Overview of Gratitude Research from The Positivity Company**

<http://www.thepositivitycompany.com/research/gratitude-research/>

A Serving of Gratitude May Save the Day

http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/22/science/a-serving-of-gratitude-brings-healthy-dividends.html?_r=3&ref=science&pagewanted=print

The Positive Psychology Center at University of Pennsylvania

<http://www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu/>

Five Ways to Practice Gratitude

<http://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2009/07/21/5-ways-to-practice-gratitude-an-interview-with-sonja-lyubomirsky/>

How to Start a Gratitude Practice to Change Your Life

(A very touching story about a couple's experience with gratitude)

<http://tinybuddha.com/blog/how-to-start-a-gratitude-practice-to-change-your-life/>

The Gratitude Lab at UC Davis

<http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/Labs/emmons/PWT/index.cfm?Section=4>

Appendix I

Handout—The Inner Smile

Smiling has the social power to remove barriers to communication and acceptance, to increase trust, ease anxiety, deescalate tension, warm each others' hearts, and more. (*Think about a time that you noticed yourself or someone around you smiling. Or about a time where a smile broke the ice or helped two people connect.*) Although we normally experience smiling as a relational act, as a nonverbal communication, we can turn that power inwards to smile at ourselves as well. The act of smiling can be an effective vehicle for bringing some lightness, energy, and healing into our bodies and minds.

1. Begin by finding a place to sit as comfortably as you can where you can close your eyes and let your body relax. Take a few slow, deep breaths and focus on letting go a bit more on each outbreath.
2. Let yourself notice how your abdomen rises with each in breath, and relaxes back toward your spine with each out breath. As best you can, let any thoughts come and go without judgment or analysis.
3. Rest the tip of your tongue gently on the roof of your mouth, somewhere behind, and close to, your upper front teeth.
4. Smile gently, as if you have just gotten a joke that someone told you several days ago. Let your jaw, face, and neck relax as you start to feel uplifted.
5. Bring your attention gently to the space between your eyebrows. Imagine that place to be like a pool of warm water, and as your smiling energy builds there, let your attention drift deeper into that pool - back and toward the center of your head.
6. Let your attention rest now right in the center of your brain - the space equidistant between the tips of your ears. Feel the energy gathering there.
7. Allow this energy to flow forward to your eyes. Feel your eyes becoming "smiling eyes." To enhance this, you can imagine that you are gazing into the eyes of a person or animal you love, and they are gazing back at you.
8. Let the smiling energy move downwards through your body like a waterfall of warm light. You can direct the smile energy into a place in your body that would like some healing. The heart is a good place to start if you are on limited time. Or it might be a place where you have recently had an injury or illness. Or you could explore a place that just feels a little numb, distant, or "sleepy."
9. Continue to smile into that place in your body, for as long as you like letting it soak up smile-energy like a sponge and radiate warmth while releasing any negativity there. You can also thank this area of your body for the work it does to keep you alive and well.
10. When this feels complete, or if you need to stop, direct your inner gaze, with its smile-energy, into your navel center, feeling warmth and brightness gathering in your lower belly. This is where you can store some of this energy to enhance the rest of your day.

Feel free to modify, and make this exercise your own. There is no set way to do this practice (it will probably be even more effective if you add your own style). Spend a little time in each area letting the smile energy, warmth, and healing invigorate that area.

You can extend the Inner Smile into a progression relaxation by following a more orderly path down the body visiting, in order of either up or down, as many places, organ, bones, etc. If you are on a tight schedule, you might want to use a gentle timer while exploring progressive relaxation approaches as time can pass very quickly in the deeper levels of meditative and relaxation practices.

(Adapted from versions of Mantak Chia's original.)

Appendix J

Handout—Breathing Practices for Self-Care

Breathing Awareness and Mindful Breathing

Breathing is a core part of our daily lives. It regulates our oxygen and carbon dioxide levels; it influences our mood and thoughts, and acts as an indicator of our moods and thoughts. When practiced mindfully, breathing can do much more like massaging our organs, increasing our energy levels, and even enhancing posture. Breathing practices can be done anywhere, not just while sitting down. Try it while you are walking around too.

Aware Breathing can be incorporated into most any other self-care practice without disrupting or complicating it. For example, you can breathe while doing the Finger Holds or while practicing Qigong. You can even combine gratitude or loving-kindness with the breath for a more integrated body/mind experience.

Taoist and Other Breathing Practices:

- **Belly breathing** – Babies breathe with the belly. For many reasons our culture encourages chest breathing. Gut in, chest out is one explanation, as is the cultural valuing of thinness as an indicator of health and attractiveness. Belly breathing takes far less physical energy, it massages the organs, brings more chi and oxygen into the body and the Taoists believe it is how we actually evolved to breathe.
- **Seamless breath** – Do you pause between the breaths? Do you stop and then start again? Playing with the timing of the breaths and the moment of transition between the breath can bring mindfulness into our breathing and help create a more seamless transition between breaths, which translates to more time spent breathing. Holding the breath is connected to a lot of other holding and tension supporting behaviors.
- **Heart-Focused Breathing** – Imagine you are breathing through your heart or chest area – putting your attention here facilitates shifting into a coherent state. Take slow, casual, deep breaths. Think about a positive experience or image and just gently hold onto it and play with it as you continue to take casual, slow, deep breaths while focusing on your heart or chest area.
- **Wiring breathing awareness** into other practices – for synergy and increased effectiveness, not for multi-tasking or spreading yourself too thin. Remember the 70% principle.

Breathing with Movement: Qigong

We will do a Qigong movement before class focusing on the in breath and another session at the closing where we focus on aspects of the out breath. Focusing on: posture, belly breathing, seamless breathing, slowing down the breath.

Appendix K

Handout—Mindful Breathing

Let yourself get comfortable and allow a few moments to settle into a more relaxed state. Congratulate yourself for taking some time for this self-care practice.

Bring your awareness to your breath wherever you feel it most prominently in your body. It may be at the nose, neck, chest, belly, or somewhere else. As you breathe in normally and naturally, be aware of breathing in, and as you breathe out, be aware of breathing out.

Simply maintain this awareness of the breath, breathing in and breathing out.

There is no need to visualize, count, or figure out the breath; just be mindful of breathing in and out.

Without judgment, just watch the breath ebb and flow like the waves at the beach.

There is no place to go and nothing else to do, just be in the here and now, noticing the breath – just living life one inhalation and one exhalation at a time.

As you breathe in and out, be mindful of your body expanding on the inhalation and contracting on the exhalation. Just riding the waves of the breath, moment by moment, breathing in, and breathing out.

From time to time, attention may wander from the breath. When you notice this, simply acknowledge where you went and then gently bring your attention back to the breath.

Breathing normally and naturally, without manipulating the breath in any way, just be aware of the breath as it comes and goes.

(Adapted from the work of Bob Stahl, Ph.D. and Elisha Goldstein, Ph.D.)

Appendix L

Handout—*Stealing Minutes* (Original Handout) Building an Effective Daily Practice Out of Spare Moments

Qigong Movements

You can practice the basic move anywhere you have the room and time. Each time you do it you can choose a new area to focus on in order to deepen your practice, attend to your needs in the moment, and keep it interesting.

Breathing Awareness throughout the Day

Breathing is a core part of our daily lives. It regulates our oxygen and carbon dioxide levels; it influences our mood and thoughts, and acts as an indicator of our moods and thoughts. When practiced mindfully, breathing can do much more: massaging our organs, increasing our energy levels, enhancing posture, and soothing our nervous systems. Breathing practices can be done anywhere, not just while sitting down. Try it while you are walking around too.

Walking as Self-Care Practice

From Buddhist walking meditation (i.e., awareness of the left foot, right foot, then rinse, lather, repeat☺) to Taoist approaches of making the body conscious, bringing more awareness to this part of our life recaptures quite a bit of time each day. From walking around at work, to and from your car, to a restaurant at lunch, or even if you are walking for exercise, you can enhance the benefits of walking by choosing different areas of awareness to practice each time. Stairs can provide even more fun as an awareness playground and make a more natural environmental ally for incorporating visualizing. Try feeling or seeing yourself more and more relaxed or centered as you move down to each step or more invigorated and energized as you move up each step. The choice is yours how you engage with these exercises.

What Do You Do in the Loo?

Seriously, how about a little contemplative time in the only room in the house, and maybe at work, where you know you have a minute to yourself? Maybe you can create a particular mantra or affirmation you say to yourself in those private moments? This could be a good place to do a few Qigong movements without having your coworkers asking you what year it is or who is the current president.

Feel Where You Are Planted

Feel your butt on the chair, your feet in your shoes, feel your shirt on your shoulders, smell the air, hear the creaking of the floorboards. From a self-care perspective, this is especially useful when we focus downwards to the ground and our lower body's interactions with it.

Practices to do while In Line

Are you standing on one leg or both? Is one foot getting sore or does one hip feel more pressure? How does your spine feel? Do you still have those kidneys, lungs, and stomach you had yesterday?

Sleep Qigong

Finding ways to enhance your sleep has many benefits across your daily life. Using methods like gratitude and Loving-Kindness Meditation to center and calm yourself before bed can help you have a more restful sleep throughout the night. Spending at least some of the time you are falling asleep with both hands on your body can help the body's healing processes that go on at night.

Smiling yourself to sleep and smiling when you wake up can ripple across your night and day. The same applies to Gratitude Practice. Waking up and going to sleep are great opportunities to commit to a certain

practice. These times can be good reminders as well as quiet moments. Adding the Finger Holds to any of the above practices can make for a very powerful sleep aid. And we all know how important a good night sleep is for self-care.

Adding a Dash of Gratitude

Why? Because it works! Oodles of research from the positive psychology field and beyond are showing the far-reaching power of this disarmingly simple practice. There is no end to how you can adapt and modify this practice to fit your life. Gratitude is one of the most adaptable practices for incorporating into our daily routines during activities like driving, walking, getting dressed, or eating.

Loving-Kindness Meditation on the Fly

Like Gratitude Practices, sometimes we can more easily slip in and out of Metta practice versus other more meditative or physical practices like the Inner Smile or Qigong, which may take you deeper than you have time to go. Metta practice can help you let go of one session and move forward to another without running late or feeling fuzzy.

Clearing Your Head and Grounding Yourself

You can go a long way to feeling grounded with the following combination of Qigong tips: Place your tongue on the roof of your mouth, start to pay attention to feeling your feet, and then take a few deep breaths. You can visualize any stress or tension draining down your body and out the soles of your feet as you breathe out. And you can visualize fresh, revitalizing energy coming back up into your body as you breathe in. You can feel it, or imagine it, or do whatever you are drawn to in the moment to help you get centered. Playing and experimenting really help make these practices your own.

Unlock Those Joints and Free Your Chi

A key theme among most Chinese energy and movement arts is circularity of the body and openness in the joints to keep energy flowing. Locking the joints blocks energy and interferes with smooth, rhythmic movement. Like walking with your knees locked can make you feel like Frankenstein, a similar process may be occurring inside your body when you habitually lock your joints. This is a good one to play with while standing in line, driving, or sitting in chair.

Smile for Increased Energy and Brain Balancing

Like other activities on this list, smiling can be combined with others for increased effect. It is not necessary to engage in a premeditated or structured process to get the benefits of the Inner Smile practice. Just smile. Even if done for no apparent reason, you can still stimulate positive changes in your neurochemistry and mood. Smiling can also stimulate your energy to awaken while directing it upward and outward. This upward focus can make the Inner Smile one of the more energizing of these practices. It can be a great pick-me-up if you had a particularly deep or meditative session and need to pop back. Try it for yourself. Smiling can be a very quick treatment when you are feeling out of sorts and need a lift.

Pay Attention to the Sources of Your Energy

Diet alone is said to account for up to 80% of your body composition. What are you eating? How does it make you feel?

In almost any situation, you can build awareness by gently and politely asking yourself: “Is this a weakening or strengthening activity?” This does not constitute an invitation to be dogmatic or hard on your self. This is just an awareness practice. Remember the 70% principle.

Appendix M**Flyer—For Promoting the Pilot Workshop****The Self-Care Lab for Helping Professionals**
An Experience-Based 8-Week Lunchtime Retreat

Photo courtesy of ipadwallpaper.com

Come join fellow helping professionals for a lighthearted, hands-on look at tools for *Stealing Minutes* throughout the day to care for yourself.

- **Learn brief methods that fit into your free moments.**
- **Increase your resilience & decrease burnout risk at work.**
- **Care for yourself while enhancing creativity and workflow.**
- **Sample a variety of self-care & wellness practices.**
- **All practices are adapted to fit between meetings or clients.**
- **Expand your tools for healing, grounding, & strengthening.**
- **Email support will be available throughout the course.**
- **Handouts with instructions for all practices will be included.**

Thursdays 12-1pm November & December 2013

at 35 Warren ST, Concord, NH

Presented by Lafe Coppola as part of the Self-Pay Clinic at Warren Street Family Counseling Associates. Lafe has been practicing Qigong and meditation for over 20 years and is a certified Energy Arts instructor. \$75 per person.

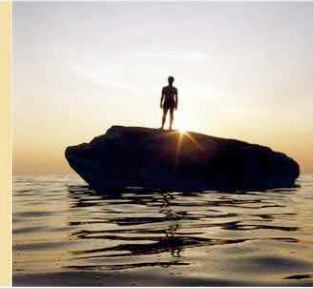
Please email jcoppola@wsfca.net or call 508-274-7881 for more information.

Appendix N

Flyer—For Continuing Education Unit Approved Workshops

Stealing Minutes: Ethics and Practices of Self-Care for Mental Health and Helping Professionals

An Experiential Eight-Week Lunchtime Retreat



Tuesdays Noon to 1pm March 25 – May 13 OR

Wednesdays Noon to 1pm March 26 – May 14

Located in the group room at Warren Street Family Counseling Associates.

33 Warren Street, Concord, NH 03301 603-226-1999 x130

8 ETHICS CEU's AVAILABLE AT NO EXTRA CHARGE! TUITION \$95

Exploring the Ethics of Self-Care

- We'll look at cultural narratives of self-neglect and build a new story of self-care.
- Recognize the potential consequences of not practicing self-care.
- Explore the potential barriers to self-care, and strategies to get beyond these barriers.
- A review of what the various mental health professional codes of ethics say on self-care, and what they don't that could also be important.
- Unpack the excuses that we use daily to avoid integrating self-care into our work life.
- Participants will have time to explore the impact of these issues in their lives and have an opportunity to share them each week.
- We'll have time to discuss our experiences to reinforce the connections between self-care and ethical therapeutic practice.

Experiencing the Practices of Self-Care

- We'll learn how to create personally sustainable and unique approaches to self-care.
- Sample a variety of evidence-based self-care, centering, and wellness practices.
- Learn brief, adaptable and effective self-care tools and explore ways to integrate them into your daily activities.
- Care for yourself while enhancing your creativity and workflow.
- Increase your resilience and decrease burnout risks at work and in your personal life.
- Email support for practice questions or concerns will be available to all participants between meetings for the eight weeks.
- Handouts with instructions, references and research for all practices will be included.
- We will discuss a selection of self-care practices adapted for busy lifestyles.

Presented by Lafe Coppola, M.A., MFT

Lafe Coppola is a co-founder of the Self-Pay Clinic at Warren Street Family Counseling Associates providing individual, couple and family therapy to uninsured and underinsured members of the Concord community. A certified Energy Arts Instructor, Lafe has been practicing Chi Gung, mindfulness and meditation for twenty-five years and teaching them for fifteen. Lafe is currently pursuing his Ph.D. in narrative and collaborative approaches to self-care.

To register for either workshop: Call 603-226-1999 x130 or email jcoppola@wsfca.net

EACH WORKSHOP is limited to 8 participants so please register early!

(Photo by Lafe Coppola)

Appendix O

Application to Issue Ethics Continuing Education Units

CEU Application for:

Stealing Minutes: Ethics and Practices of Self-Care for Mental Health and Helping Professionals

1. **Sponsoring Organization:** Warren Street Family Counseling Associates
2. **Date of Application:** March 6, 2014
3. **Date that you need response back from this application:** March 12, 2014
4. **Overall Program Name:** Stealing Minutes: Ethics and Practices of Self-Care for Mental Health and Helping Professionals
5. **Person Responsible for the Program:** Lafe Coppola, M.A. MFT
6. **CEU Contact Person and Information:**
 - a. Lafe Coppola, 33 Warren ST, Concord, NH 03301
 - b. 603-226-1999 x130
 - c. jcoppola@wsfca.net
7. **Items A-K** (flyers, bio, references and evaluation forms are attached)
 - a. **Workshop Title:** Stealing Minutes: Ethics and Practices of Self-Care for Mental Health and Helping Professionals.
 - b. **Date of Workshop:** Three workshops of identical content will be offered on Tuesdays March 25-May 13, Wednesdays March 26-May 14, and Thursdays March 27-May 15.
 - c. **Length of Workshop:** Each of the three workshops is 8 hours over eight weeks for a total of 24 hours.
 - d. **Location:** The group room at Warren Street Family Counseling Associates located at 33 Warren ST, Concord, NH 03301.
 - e. **Target Audience:** Mental health and helping professionals.
 - f. **Workshop Content Description:** Workshop will be a hybrid of discussion of all topics covered on flyer and evaluation form accompanied with handouts on ethics, handouts on self-care practices and experiential, hands-on learning.
 - g. **Learning Objectives for the Course:** Please see items 1-6 on the attached Evaluation Form.
 - h. **Instructional Methodology:** Facilitated discussion with handouts and facilitated experiential learning of self-care practices.
 - i. **Biography of Presenter:** Please see attached.
 - j. **Workshop References:** Please see attached. (More are available.)
 - k. **Evaluation Form** for workshop is attached.

Appendix P

Workshop Evaluation Form

Workshop Evaluation Form

Title: Stealing Minutes: Ethics and Practices of Self-Care for Mental Health and Helping Professionals

**Presenter: Lafe Coppola, M.A., MFT
Warren Street Family Counseling Associates**

Workshop Objectives: Upon completion of this workshop participants will:

1. Better understand the connection between professional ethics and self-care practices.
2. Recognize potential professional and personal consequences of not practicing self-care, including personal sustainability issues and potential unintended ethical ramifications on client care.
3. Understand barriers to self-care from wider psychosocial and systems perspectives including cultural demands emanating from narratives that run counter to self-care.
4. Understand the synergistic connection between ethical therapeutic practice and self-care.
5. Identify, learn and practice evidence-based self-care methods that increase resilience while also decreasing the risk of therapeutic burnout.
6. Receive handouts describing the self-care practices that will be experienced during the workshop along with up to date references and relevant supporting research.

A. The objectives of the workshop were met:

Objective 1	not at all	somewhat	a great deal
Objective 2	not at all	somewhat	a great deal
Objective 3	not at all	somewhat	a great deal
Objective 4	not at all	somewhat	a great deal
Objective 5	not at all	somewhat	a great deal
Objective 6	not at all	somewhat	a great deal

B. The presenter was knowledgeable in the areas:

Lafe Coppola, M.A., MFT: not at all somewhat a great deal

Please turn over to continue the evaluation.

C. The workshop: Stealing Minutes: Ethics and Practices of Self-Care for Mental Health and Helping Professionals by Lafe Coppola, M.A., MFT, was (please circle all that apply):

clear	confusing	the right amount	too much	too little
interesting	boring	the right level	too advanced	too basic
relevant	irrelevant	helpful/useful	not helpful or useful	

D: The extent to which this workshop will be used in my clinical work:

not at all	somewhat	a great deal
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We welcome additional comments about this workshop, presenters, location, etc.: _____

Thank you for your time!

Appendix Q

Testimonials for Continuing Education Unit Application

I have had the opportunity to experience the benefits of this practical and supportive workshop. As we go about our work in the service to others, therapists have a responsibility to regroup and refresh in order to be fully present to the next person, couple, or family that expects our attention and support.

This workshop offers the best group of skills and practices that I am aware of to restore and refresh in order to respectfully engage with others in ethical and mindful ways.

These are practical ways not only to avoid burnout, but also to reinvigorate our work throughout the day.

I have found this workshop to be very supportive of therapists “being at their best”, which goes a long way toward our goals of an effective and ethical practice.

I recommend this workshop to all mental health and helping professionals who seek restorative, and self-regulatory practices that can be used within their busy schedules.

Sincerely, *(name removed for privacy reasons)*, LICSW

I am about to complete an *8-week course (one hour per week) on the ethics and practices of self-care for helping professionals, taught by Lafe Coppola*. I am writing this letter to describe the value this course has added to my professional practice as a marriage and family therapist.

This course has contributed to my professional integrity. It is our ethical duty as therapists to seek care for ourselves in order to mitigate personal stressors that might impair our clinical judgment or competence with clients. This course offered numerous concrete and highly effective tools for addressing the stress, distraction and fatigue that can decrease the quality of our therapeutic work with clients every day. I began practicing the relaxation, centering, and energy-increasing exercises immediately and have found them more effective than any stress-reduction techniques I've practiced before. I have felt more present, grounded and receptive in my work with clients and in my personal life as a result.

Clearly, I feel this course has enhanced my professional competence by helping me bring all I have to offer to my work with clients, but it has also provided me with new knowledge and tools to offer my clients. The techniques taught in the course are extremely effective at decreasing anxiety and aiding with emotional regulation. I've found them very helpful already for my clients experiencing anxiety or depression, as well as anyone working to better handle the stress of daily life.

Sincerely, *(name removed for privacy reasons)*, M.A. Ed., M.A. MFT

Appendix R

Sample of Ethics Continuing Education Unit Certificate

has attended the 8.0 hour series

Stealing Minutes:
Ethics and Practices of Self-Care for Mental Health and Helping Professionals

Presented by Lafe Coppola, MA, LMFT

Concord, NH
March 26th-May 24th 2014

This workshop is approved for 8.0 hours of ethics continuing education by the
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy,
New Hampshire Division. NHAMFT CEU #2014-4



Lafe Coppola, MA, MFT

Appendix S**List of Interview Questions**

Interview Questions Form for *Stealing Minutes* Workshop Participants:

- What would you like to share with me about your experience of this self-care workshop?
- What shifts (of any kind) have you noticed, thought about, or perhaps had others comment on that could relate to this workshop?
- What aspect of the workshop stood out the most for you? What aspect stood out the second most for you?
- In what ways have you used, or thought about using, any of these self-care practices?
- What practices have you shared with others or thought about possibly sharing with others?
- If any, what previous practices, ideas, or knowledge has this workshop linked up with?
- What societal discourses or professional expectations might we be responding to, bumping up against, noticing, or reinforcing in this work we are doing?
- Is there anything you have been thinking about, or that has aroused your curiosity, that you would like to ask me about?

Possible follow-up questions for richer descriptions:

- Could you tell me more about that?
- Could you share a story about that with me?
- Could you describe more about what that looks like for you?

Appendix T**Sample Interview Transcript—The First Interview**

- Lafe Coppola: What would you like to share with me about your experience of this self-care workshop?
- INTERVIEWEE: All of it?
- Lafe Coppola: Yup. So what sparks? What resonates for you? What do you want to share first?
- INTERVIEWEE: And we're talking round 1 and 2, everything to date?
- Lafe Coppola: Everything and anything. In the workshop, after the workshop, outside of the workshop.
- INTERVIEWEE: I think for me the, the most revolutionary, or the biggest piece, is just introducing the concrete practices. I would have said tools before, but that sounds too sterile now, but introducing real concrete practices that I can make a regular part of my life that I just really didn't have before.
- Even though you had certainly introduced me to several things before, having the regularity of the weekly structure, and maybe also doing it with other people, and a more formal introduction, a more thorough I think introduction has made a huge difference that all the vague intent in my past to learn some relaxation strategies never accomplished.
- So I think the biggest effect that it's had for me is actually making it something I think to use on a regular basis, especially when I'm needing something.
- I think also slowing me down in general a little bit. It's not magic. It doesn't hold all the time, but I think there's been a global effect of helping me be more mindful of slowing down, calming down. You didn't ask what's the biggest impact, but I think the biggest effect is what I think first to share.
- Lafe Coppola: Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah. Do you have any stories about that that you can share with me about, about the impact?
- INTERVIEWEE: One image that came to mind just as I was saying that, I was thinking so how does it actually play out in my day to day life in the global way that I was describing, and I pictured a moment of running out the door with the kids to get to school in the morning or running out the door with the kids to go to clarinet or whatever it is, all the moments of running out the door with the kids, which tend to be pretty rushed, pretty stressful.
- I'm usually experiencing myself as kind of rushed and a little stressed. I can usually feel how I'm conveying that to the kids, how I'm pushing them and totally transmitting stress-ness and rush-ness to them, and I think the global

effect that this set of workshops has had is I just have a consciousness in the back of my mind in that moment as I'm about to walk down the steps in the garage to the car. That's where I tend to feel it the most, of "slow down. Just breathe."

I think having these weekly reminders, that hour a week of being reminded, and being walked through, and helped to slow down and breathe, it gives me that awareness but it's also that I'm using some of the techniques on a semi-regular basis. That helps me be at a lower baseline, so I'm more able to catch myself in that moment. Once you get too far, awareness doesn't really cut it.

Lafe Coppola: Hmm, yeah.

INTERVIEWEE: So I think it's both. What's another story?

Lafe Coppola: You told me a story about how you used the, the Loving-Kindness Meditation when you couldn't be with the kids, and I've been using that story to help a lot of other people be more open to the practice.

INTERVIEWEE: Right. I didn't know if we were going to get to specific ...

Lafe Coppola: Could you tell me more about that story in your own words? I'd love to hear it fresh again.

INTERVIEWEE: I have several stories about specific practices. The real beginning of that one is that you had introduced me to Loving-Kindness Meditation three years ago, and I had tried it repeatedly back then, and I didn't quite feel it as powerfully. So two things happened ... I'll tell you the exact nugget you're asking about, but hold on.

I think that it was probably before these workshops actually that rephrasing it made it more useful to me and calming, but it was when I heard my client talk about Loving-Kindness, using it when she couldn't be with her daughter, when she was having a lot of pain from her daughter having chosen to go live with her father for awhile, and it was her telling me how she had crafted her own phrases to help her feel connected to her daughter and feel like she was providing nurturing and caring for her daughter when her daughter wasn't there present and able to let her do that in person.

I was so moved by that. I think that's what led me to try that myself, and then when we covered it, when we talked about Loving-Kindness in the lab, by then I had already experimented with it and found that I did find it really helpful, and I think by then I had also shared it with another client to help her. I don't remember when I did that, if that was before or after.

I thought that was that way of using Loving-Kindness to feel connected to people that were not, that were not in as much contact as we want, and the idea of using it. I think previous to that I had really only thought of using it to calm myself, nurture myself, soothe myself, to help get myself into a, a better place.

That was the mind shift of using it to deal with grief, not just by soothing myself when I felt grief, but also by actually feeling like I was doing something to address the grief, to use it to connect to people. Simply engaging my energy towards the person that I was missing or feeling at a loss with actually filled the need to be actually connecting to that person, and that's been a really big revelation to me.

And it made me understand more about Loving-Kindness, probably the intention of Loving-Kindness, some of the intention behind doing it for people you're having trouble with, it gave me a new understanding for energy, that generating our own energy towards someone, even if it's only in our head has an actual effect that is a kind of connecting to that person whether they know we're doing it or not.

In terms of the self-care group, having a place to talk about that and experience that, share that with other people, and see other people respond to that is really powerful for them too has made it an even stronger experience, and belief, and practice. I think it really reinforced for me how powerful that is. It wasn't just my kooky little reaction to what my client said or my kooky experience. It feels like having this environment to share that and see that it really resonated for other people too was pretty powerful.

Lafe Coppola: Thank you. What shifts of any kind have you noticed, thought about, or perhaps had others comment on, that you could relate to this workshop?

INTERVIEWEE: Like shifts in me you mean?

Lafe Coppola: Shifts of any kind.

INTERVIEWEE: Mm-hmm (affirmative) (chuckles). Well, I think the shifts that I was talking about that I've noticed in myself are the biggest, but I don't think I said exactly before.

I think maybe one of the biggest shifts for me is being more open to attempting self-care when I need it.

And then of course having some tools to actually use that I find really effective reinforces that. So I now feel like I find the Loving-Kindness much more effective than I did before. I'm more willing to use it. I'm more willing to go there, and partly it's that for me, finding that it relieved some of my pain around the kids made it so much more useful to me to do, but finger holds, I think the finger holds for me are the biggest. Isn't that funny? (laughs). It was so frickin' simple, holding your fingers.

That's the most calming and useful. I think it's because I do really focus on the breathing at the same time as I'm doing it, but also it takes that much to get me to just stop, and slow down, and do something for at least 10 minutes. And 10 minutes, unless I fall asleep, 10 minutes is the longest I probably do it. But even that for me, I really have always resisted, for confusing reasons, actually helping

myself when I really need it. So, both for myself and trying to use it with the kids to greater and lesser success.

I think it's a pretty equal call, the effect it's had on me personally and the effect I feel in what I'm able to do with clients. I feel so much more effective being able to share concrete strategies with clients. It's exactly what I have always felt I was lacking is something beyond talking about it, something to give them. It was a real gap for me, any knowledge of any of this. The fact that I feel like I am exponentially more useful now when all I'm really bringing to people is like 3 ideas (laughs). It's evidence that I really didn't have much in the way of these resources to offer people before.

I'm also pretty sold on the fact that, as with a lot of emotional things, there are a few really simple basics that probably are the most of what people need.

Lafe Coppola: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

INTERVIEWEE: And just having a few ways to help them access these basics is huge. So I think it's huge for myself and I think it can be huge for other people too. I think the Qigong move, I don't think I've gotten quite as comfortable with. I have at times. In the beginning I went to it more, but I don't think I ever reached kind of the total level of comfort with it, so I haven't gone to it repeatedly the way I have with the finger holds.

Lafe Coppola: Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah.

INTERVIEWEE: Or Loving-Kindness, or breathing, or what else? I'm forgetting something. Gratitude. I really do... The story about the gratitude, that's a pretty powerful one too, and that was directly from the self-care group.

Lafe Coppola: You can talk about stuff from the current group too.

INTERVIEWEE: But the story goes back to, um, December.

Lafe Coppola: Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah.

INTERVIEWEE: So it was the first round, and it was going into, to sign the divorce papers, and I really didn't think I was going to make it.

Lafe Coppola: What do you mean?

INTERVIEWEE: Driving there, I really did not think I was going to be able to not be crying through the whole process. I just was not able to stop crying the whole way in and just didn't think I was going to be able to calm down at all and I was really just like grasping for, "okay, what can I do because I can't go in like this" because it wasn't just like, "oh a little teary." I was completely out of control (chuckles). So the gratitude, and focusing on the kids really helped calm me down in a way I don't think I've ever had to reach for exactly before.

I think that'll stay with me because I think that was the most powerful experience of really refocusing my feelings as much as I could at that moment to what I could feel the most completely, purely positive about, and of course, it was related to what was so upsetting, so that's what made it so powerful.

It's so weird. That's like the one session I can't remember as much about what we did to learn it. I know that's why you've been tweaking it.

Lafe Coppola: Yeah. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

INTERVIEWEE: And again, that was a practice that really did not work for me previously, emotionally. I thought it was a great idea, but when I was having a hard time that did not work for me at all really.

I have a very easy time feeling filled with gratitude about any spectrum of things when I'm in a good place.

Lafe Coppola: (chuckles)

INTERVIEWEE: But I had not before that, I think, had a really strong experience of how it can get you out of a really, really hard place or at least pull you together a little (chuckles).

Lafe Coppola: Mm.

INTERVIEWEE: What I started to say a minute ago is, just like with the Loving-Kindness, having had that experience, I then felt so much more empowered and helpful to be able to offer that to clients because I've had a personal experience. It also got me so much more in touch.

Learning all these approaches and feeling the shift from not feeling like I could get myself to use them to feeling like I can has made me feel a lot more empowered and a lot more able to talk to people about how I understand that it's very hard to reach out for these strategies when you really need them the most and to help them to anticipate that and talk about it to help get past it.

I'm trying to think of which client I talked to about that... I think it's the same one who was the most affected by the idea of being able to do Loving-Kindness for a daughter that she was estranged from.

Lafe Coppola: Mm-hmm (affirmative) So what aspect of the workshop stood out the most for you?

INTERVIEWEE: I think the experiential part of being... I think of it as being brought down in the beginning. So I think having your calm presence, your calm leadership helping to guide us through an exercise or two at the beginning, whether it's just a movement or the movement and the feeling energy or whichever.

I think having the calming or centering or grounding exercise at the beginning and the end, getting into that head space, getting into that energy, and I think having it as a collective experience is much stronger than it would be if it was just one on one.

Lafe Coppola: Hmm, yeah. I agree.

INTERVIEWEE: That creates a whole feeling that supports whatever it is, whatever resistance it is that I have, and probably a lot of people - I don't think I'm alone in this - have against, even though we want to calm, against slowing down, calming, grounding, having a group all doing it together helps break through that resistance much more than just one on one I think would.

I think being brought into that space before learning something new creates an openness to whatever that new idea or thing to try out is, which is pretty important I think just teaching people without helping to do that centering or grounding first I don't think would be nearly as effective.

Lafe Coppola: Hmm, yeah.

INTERVIEWEE: When you asked what stands out for me the most, what, what feels the most powerful about the sessions for me is getting into that place once a week.

Lafe Coppola: Cool. Thank you.

INTERVIEWEE: So I look forward to that.

Lafe Coppola: So what aspect stood out the second most?

INTERVIEWEE: The practices themselves I guess. Yeah. Learning them.

Lafe Coppola: So this next one we've sort of covered but let's see if it stirs anything up. In what ways have you used or thought about using any of these self-care practices (laughs)?

INTERVIEWEE: Okay, so I talked about gratitude and about Loving-Kindness. The finger holds, I said it was the one I use the most, which it is. The way that I've used that, I think that I started using it immediately because of how much trouble I have sometimes in the early morning getting back to sleep, so I started using it trying to get back to sleep and I love that because even if I didn't get back to sleep necessarily, it helped me drift in that way you're always saying you can drift that I cannot do calmly.

It helped me just calm down, so even if I was going to be awake from 5:30 to 6:30 until the alarm went off, at least I was calm and feeling meditative instead of getting increasingly anxious thinking about how I wasn't sleeping or my mind starting to spiral over anything and everything that upsets me and is difficult, which is what usually happens. So that was really powerful.

I started using it pretty much very regularly if I felt anxiety getting really high for one reason or another, even during the day, stress, whether it was feeling painful difficult feelings that I was wanting to sort of bring down, calm down from, or whether it was feeling that rushed stress that I felt more like with the kids. So I found I was using it for sadness and for anxiety and tension, and I taught both kids because they have trouble going to sleep.

Well M more, obviously, than A. That was more effective with A than with M, but I taught it to clients right away. I think the finger holds and the Loving-Kindness I introduced the most with clients and then also breathing, not only merging the breathing with the Loving-Kindness ... I'm sorry merging the breathing with the finger holds with clients, adults and kids alike, but just feeling like I was more equipped to talk to clients about breathing in general.

I think I've also at least with one client now just focused on how they're breathing to calm down when anxious, based on the work we did on breathing. What else? I've tried to teach my mom a little bit. I offered. I didn't actually try to teach her. What else? What practices am I forgetting? Finger holds, breathing, Loving-Kindness, Qigong.

Lafe Coppola: That's everything, from the first lab.

INTERVIEWEE: From the first one. I'm really liking Gratitude Maps. I think I'm most likely to also pass on and use that structure for helping people to do a gratitude practice with a little more structure than just sort of, "think of three things you're grateful for."

Five things you're grateful for. So I like having that as an option that I think will be really useful for some people for whom, "oh, writing three things every night in your journal" isn't going to be enough. Well, it's a different kind of exercise anyway to do it in the three layers of deepness kind of format. I think it's a more pointed exercise for when someone's sort of having trouble really identifying or connecting with something they're feeling, or feeling at a little bit of a loss. It's a way to walk people through it in a way that I think will go deeper than just thinking of three things.

I think that whole first lab I really was taken actually with the Qigong movement too. I think I didn't put enough time into practicing it to get more comfortable with it, but initially I found doing it really powerful when I focused on the grounding aspect of it because for me that's really helpful.

Lafe Coppola: Could you describe more about what that looks like for you?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah, so focusing almost entirely for me on the section of the arm movement that is from the top on down, and visualizing collecting energy and bringing it into my heart, and bringing it down from head to heart, down from head to heart. I think that actually the head to heart piece came in a later conversation in a group recently in the last couple of weeks.

Lafe Coppola: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

INTERVIEWEE: But the earliest visualization was just maybe more bringing it into the heart and, pelvis, and hips, just bringing the energy down, and for me that was really calming and grounding. I really liked the distinction. I really connected to the distinction between raising energy up and bringing it down, and I quickly connected, “Yeah, I don’t need to bring any more energy up into my head.”

I quickly felt like this even raising up, was just increasing my physical sensation of anxiety in my stomach and chest, and that bringing my arms down towards my belly was calming, was physically actually calming those physical sensations of, of nerves and anxiety and stress. I have to think more about why I haven’t used that one as much.

I don’t yet feel as comfortable what to do with the rest of my body. I’m worried too much about what’s happening with my balance, what’s happening with my feet. Am I on the balls of my feet or the heels of my feet? My knees, how are my knees? Are my knees locked? No, don’t lock your knees. Is my balance back? Is it forward?

There was too much. If I ignore all that and I just do what feels comfortable to me, I think I get a lot out of it. If I focus on trying to do the technique properly just as I would when I try to focus on how to swing a golf club, it’s no good. I really just don’t do well with that.

Lafe Coppola: Do you think there was something in the way it was presented or taught that made you feel like there’s a proper way to do it or that it should be done properly?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, I think that there are certain pieces. I think you were definitely communicating that there you want to sort of stand like this, don’t lock your knees, or you want your breaths to go in your belly, not just up in your chest. I mean, those kinds of things.

Lafe Coppola: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

INTERVIEWEE: There are things that make all these things more effective than others, and for me, trying to focus on them all at the same time raises my anxiety instead and distracts me from just standing however the heck I’m comfortable in doing it.

Lafe Coppola: So it sounds like there could be a shift in how it’s taught that might be helpful, or at least not as overwhelming to people?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, I guess, but I think that’d be a tradeoff. My sense is there are certain things that it is helpful to communicate about how to make it as effective as possible.

Lafe Coppola: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Do you think there’s a way that both could be addressed?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, I don’t know. I just flashed on the technique used in lots of yoga classes or whatever, lots of probably Qigong classes when that’s what you’re doing with a

group exclusively, of walking around and using physical touch to communicate these things instead of verbal instructions maybe.

Lafe Coppola: Hmm, yeah.

INTERVIEWEE: For me that's probably more effective maybe. I don't know. It wasn't more effective with golf (laughs). I need someone standing behind me and trying to help me feel how it was supposed to be. That's not an easy thing for me. It's just like with skiing. I just want to move organically how it's comfortable to me. That's, that's relaxing. As soon as I start to focus on any one part, I don't do as well.

Lafe Coppola: Thank you. This next question seems also to have been covered but let's see where it takes us. What practices have you shared with others or thought about possibly sharing with others?

INTERVIEWEE: Right, the finger holds, Loving-Kindness, gratitude, breathing. I shared the Qigong movement too with someone. Yeah, I shared that one with the client who already knows all these things because I thought that was the one thing she might not know.

Lafe Coppola: Ah!

INTERVIEWEE: I mean she's the one who has told me about the Loving-Kindness practice around her daughter and how she had rewritten it for herself. It was the, the Qigong movement I started to try and teach my mom, but I kind of held back because I didn't want her to feel like I was pushing something on her. I wasn't sure she was welcoming it, so I think I really just told her about it. Oh, I tried to share the Inner Smile with the children. That didn't go over very well.

Lafe Coppola: (laughs)

INTERVIEWEE: Actually, I did share the Inner Smile with the children (laughing). That did not go over very well, but I'm not sure I did it justice. So then the last time I was trying to get M to do finger holds, I started to go there and she said, "You're not going to tell me to do that Inner Smile thing again, are you?"

Oh, but an interesting thing... Last night I was leaving the room and she was saying, "Well ..." She had wanted me to, to leave because she admitted that she didn't think she was going to get comfortable until she had the whole bed to herself, and that's a phenomenon for her, but she's always torn because she wants the company. She doesn't want me to leave, but she wants the bed to herself and so as I was leaving the room she was still saying, "But I don't want to be alone."

And I said, "You know what? Why don't you try, if you feel antsy or you get bored, you might try the finger hold thing again," and I thought, oh, this will be interesting. I'm going to suggest she do it with me not there and see if that works better and I said, "Just ..." What did I say? So I tried two new things. One,

suggesting she try it with me gone, and I thought that was potentially going to be more successful.

And then I also said, “Just focus on like breathing three or five times with each finger. Don’t worry about anything else, and lie however you want to lie” because I think I had told her before it would work better if she’d lay on her back, so I tried to remove myself and one of the previous kind of rules about it, much as I sort of know that I need to remove some of the rules for myself for these things to work.

And also when I first introduced it to her I had focused too much on the ... I had talked about feeling the pulse and it was too much. It was like, she was distracted ‘cause she didn’t feel the pulse.

Lafe Coppola: Mm-hmm (affirmative). It’s an experience that has happened to at least one or two people in every group until I stopped doing it (chuckles).

INTERVIEWEE: Right, and I love the pulse. The pulse is like my favorite part of it.

Lafe Coppola: Really?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah.

Lafe Coppola: Oh cool.

INTERVIEWEE: When I first started doing it when it was just about ... that’s interesting... I haven’t done it in the simplified way in awhile, but I really loved it for that, of just focusing on the pulse and as soon as I felt the pulse moving on. I loved the feeling that I was balancing myself somehow. That calmed me very much to think, “oh, when I’m done with this I’m going to be much more balanced,” and so I think it works on a few different levels.

Lafe Coppola: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

INTERVIEWEE: But one of the levels is I feel like I am going to be more balanced and therefore I am more balanced (chuckles). Anyway, so the finger holds with M, I meant to tell you that. When I went back in the second time, she was asleep and I was worried it was going to be like a four timer last night because she was way chatty at 9:10.

I was like, “oh, she’s never going to go to sleep,” and the first time I went back she was still awake, and the second time - I go in at 10 minute intervals - and the second time she was snoring, so I thought maybe, maybe the finger thing worked. I didn’t remember to ask her this morning.

Lafe Coppola: Good. Yeah.

INTERVIEWEE: I don’t know if she’ll admit it.

Lafe Coppola: So, if any what previous practices, ideas, or knowledge has this workshop linked up with for you?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, I guess we'd have to say it links up with some previous knowledge of Loving-Kindness. I haven't really thought about that. I think I could say it pretty quickly. It's tapped, it's linked up with prior experience with groups that felt nurturing.

Lafe Coppola: Ah!

INTERVIEWEE: I think two different kinds of groups in the past that I have found really nurturing. I really do think part of the value is creating the group, the creation of the group identity ... No, identity's the wrong feature. That's not really what I think is important. It's the group membership, the camaraderie, and the social and supportive aspect.

I've certainly had that experience in a couple of different groups before, and this reminds me of how powerful that is. I think that's a big thing with these groups.

What else does it link up to? Previous attempts to engage in relaxation and self-care practices. Oh, most closely the prenatal yoga class I did when I was pregnant with M. I loved that, and it was so good and I so need it and I just don't do it on my own regularly enough.

Lafe Coppola: What did you love about it?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, as with this, just having a place that once a week, having it be a regular part of your weekly schedule means it's happening at least once a week (laughing), and that makes it much more likely to spark similar little bits of it throughout the week, to do on your own.

Lafe Coppola: So is there anything else you want to share about all this or any sparks, or arresting moments, or stories?

INTERVIEWEE: Hmm.

Lafe Coppola: You can also email me.

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah.

Lafe Coppola: If you think of something, you know?

INTERVIEWEE: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Lafe Coppola: We can always add vignettes ...

INTERVIEWEE: As I think about some?

Lafe Coppola: To this interview.

- INTERVIEWEE: Oh, that's good.
- Lafe Coppola: Yeah.
- INTERVIEWEE: That's good to suggest to people 'cause thoughts will come later.
- Lafe Coppola: Yeah, because who knows what this interview will then stir up ...
- INTERVIEWEE: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Lafe Coppola: Later on.
- INTERVIEWEE: I think it's hard to know. I think it's hard to pull, to tease out. I bet it'll be easier for the people who have only been in the first one so far. This has been going on for enough months now that it's no longer so easy to identify what came from this and what just is.
- Lafe Coppola: What do you mean?
- INTERVIEWEE: I mean we've been meeting long enough that I'm wondering if some things that are specifically coming out of the self-care workshops I'm forgetting to even connect to the workshops anymore because they've become integrated enough that I'm forgetting after this many months, what started with the lab and what's just been true for me. There are things that have become part of the woodwork already. I'll have to think about it, but I bet after the first few weeks I was more aware of what was newly sparking and newly happening specifically because of each group session.
- Lafe Coppola: Hmm.
- INTERVIEWEE: So I'll have to think about that more.
- Lafe Coppola: Okay.
- INTERVIEWEE: But I bet, I bet it's easier for people who have just are only a few weeks into it to still identify what's new in their lives.
- Lafe Coppola: So it sounds like there might be an optimal window to do interviews that are not too soon but not let it go too long before it fades into the woodwork it seems.
- INTERVIEWEE: Yeah, I don't know. I would guess it's okay even at the end of the first run. I mean that's eight weeks. That's a long time but it's still short enough that I bet people would remember. We had the eight weeks and then we had a gap, and then we are like four weeks into the second, right?
- Lafe Coppola: Yeah. Okay. Thank you.
- INTERVIEWEE: You're welcome.

Appendix U

Interview Consent Form

Research Interview Consent and Confidentiality Form

Stealing Minutes: Ethics and Self-Care Practices for Mental Health and Helping Professionals

Description of the Research and your Participation

You are invited to participate in a research interview regarding your experiences during and after the self-care workshop facilitated by John Coppola, MA, MFT. Your participation will involve a recorded interview of about one hour duration. If anything comes up that you would like to share after the interview please contact me and I would be happy to meet with you again.

The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of your experience of the workshop as well as any life changes you may have had in the weeks following the workshop.

Risks and Discomforts

While there are no known risks associated with this research, some topics may be difficult to speak about. If you accept the invitation for an interview please remember that you may choose not to speak on any topic that you find uncomfortable. You will not be asked to explain why.

Questions will be framed in a general and open-ended format to allow you the most room to share what is most relevant to your experience and values. For example, no specific questions about sexuality, trauma, emotional experiences, or personal history will be asked during our conversation.

Potential Benefits

Participating in a narrative interview following the workshop can help organize thoughts, solidify understanding of the practices and possibly help you develop richer and more personal descriptions of your experiences of the self-care practices. This research may help us understand the usefulness and impacts of our approach to self-care and assist us in improving the delivery of this material.

Protection of Confidentiality

We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. Your information will be protected under the confidentiality codes (HIPAA) of the mental health profession.

Your interviews will be marked only with initials and all recordings will be deleted once transcriptions are completed. All audio files and documents will be kept on a passcode locked computer in a passcode locked folder. Additionally, your identity will not be revealed in any publication, now or in the future, resulting from this study.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate and you may withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You will not be penalized in any way should you decide not to participate or to withdraw from this study.

If you need to discontinue your participation in the workshop for any reason your information will continue to be protected under this confidentiality agreement.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact me, or my advisor, at any time during this process.

- John Coppola at 603-226-1999 x130 or email jcoppola@wsfca.net
- Dr. Sally St. George at +1 (403) 220-3884 or email sstgeorge@ucalgary.ca

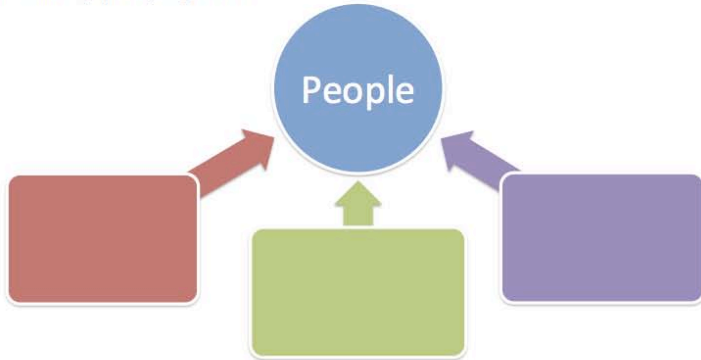
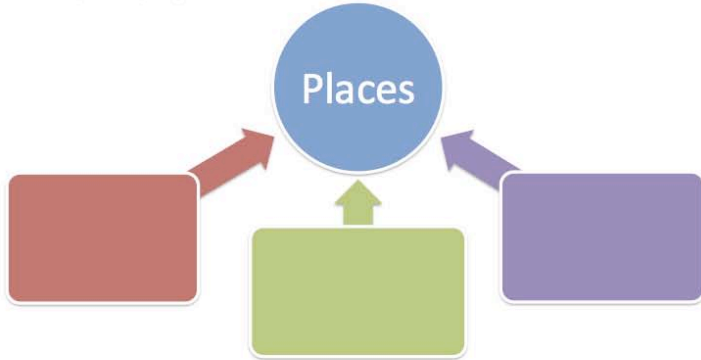
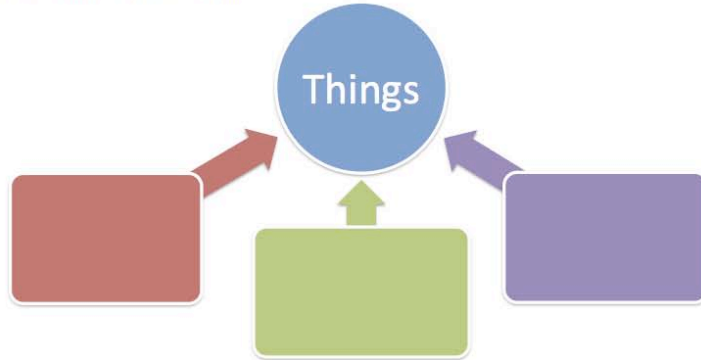
Consent

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give my consent to participate in this study.


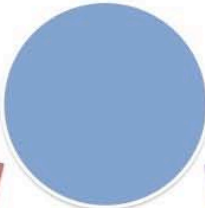







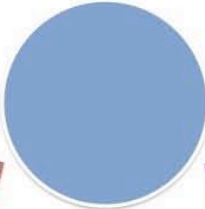


Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____

[A copy of this consent form should be given to you.]

Appendix V
Handout—Gratitude Maps

Gratitude Map Self-Interview (Lafe Coppola / jcoppola@wsfca.net / 603-226-1999 x130)	
Write down three people that you're grateful for:	
Write down three places that you're grateful for:	
Write down three things that you're grateful for:	

Turn the page over when you're ready to continue...

Gratitude Map Self-Interview (Lafe Coppola / jcoppola@wsfca.net / 603-226-1999 x130)	
<small>(In this exercise, try to come up with longer phrases or sentences for each of the boxes.)</small>	
<p>Write one thing from page 1 that you are grateful for in the blue Gratitude Circle to the right --></p>	<p>Then think of three reasons why you are grateful for what you've written in the <i>Gratitude Circle</i> to the left and write one in each of the <i>Why Boxes</i> below:</p>
	
	
	
<p>Draw a line from one of the above <i>Why Boxes</i> to the <i>Gratitude Circle</i> below and write the contents from the box in it:</p>	
	
	
	
<p>Draw a line from one of the above <i>Why Boxes</i> to the <i>Gratitude Circle</i> below and write the contents from the box in it:</p>	
	
	
	

Appendix W

Handout—Taoist Dissolving Meditation

Introduction:

The Dissolving meditation is a Qigong practice from the Taoist tradition known as the Water School. This practice is part of a Qigong system known as Energy Gates Qigong. I originally learned it from my teacher Bill Ryan (TowardHarmony.com) and then trained with his teacher B.K. Frantzis (EnergyArts.com). More detailed approaches to Taoist dissolving practices can be found in Frantzis' book *Relaxing into Your Being*.

The Basic Practice:

The basic dissolving practice is done while standing. Take a moment to get into a comfortable standing position. Check the alignment of your feet. Are they facing forward? Are they shoulder width apart? Most importantly, are you in any kind of pain or discomfort that you could alleviate by changing your posture?

Check in with your knees, hips, spine, and shoulders. Are you standing comfortably? Do you feel you are in a more open and softer position to stand for 15 minutes or more? Once you are settled in, begin to let your awareness gather at the top of your head.

Like you would with a progressive relaxation, begin to move your awareness slowly downwards from the top of your head while scanning each area that you pass through. You can approach this exercise by working in sections like the floors of a building or by going from one area to the next in a roughly downward manner. Use your imagination to play around with ways that feel the most natural to you.

As you work your way down your body, remember to use your breath to help you relax and let go. See if you can breathe gently into each area where your awareness travels on your way from the top of your head to the bottom of your feet.

You can carry an intention of dissolving or letting go with you but there is no need to use force or strong imagery in this process. A common image the Taoists use for this practice is “ice to water, water to gas.”

As you visit each area, let any stress or tension melt like ice to water. If you find it helpful, you can imagine the water either flowing down your body into the earth, or evaporating into the air. Play around and see what feels best for you.

You can do this exercise in as little as five minutes or take as long as an hour or more. It is up to you how long you do it. Each time might be a different experience.

Appendix X

Handout—Handing It Over

Handing it Over is another useful self-care practice that can help reduce stress, alleviate the weight of obligations or burdens, and lighten our day. This is basically a visualization-based method of letting go of people and situations that have become overwhelming. Here is an adapted version to get you started. Feel free to play with it and change it to better meet your needs, tastes, and beliefs.

- Visualize a problem, person, or difficult situation. You can imagine it in front of you in your hands if you like. Take a few deep breaths and let a picture build of the person or situation you are wanting to turn over to a higher power (this can be a deity, saint, nature, the ocean, the universe, etc.) Let yourself be aware of it in whatever ways emerge. For example, you can imagine it, feel it, see it, hear it.
- You do not have to actively visualize or strain to produce an image, just use your imagination to begin sensing this situation in your hands in front of you and let the details build. You can also skip the hands part if you like and just let the image build in your mind.
- Then say a phrase of letting go that you are comfortable with such as “I am turning this over to God” or “I am turning this over to the Universe.” *(Some people like to add “for the highest and best” and even “for all involved” to make sure they do not feel guilty or worried they are doing it out of resentment or anger.)* Take a moment and think about what you would like your phrase to be.
- While repeating that saying as many times as you choose, visualize the image of the person or situation drifting upwards and away from you. Let yourself sense it getting smaller and smaller as it leaves your hands and floats up into the light. Or maybe it is drifting out to sea and getting smaller and smaller as it approaches the horizon and dissolves into the vastness of the ocean. As it moves further and further away from you, notice how it begins to fade.
- See yourself handing off this problem and any burdens, fate, or responsibilities that accompany it to a higher power who is well equipped to handle it.
(In lieu of a higher power you can visualize the universe absorbing it the same way the ocean would effortlessly absorb a glass of water or handful of sand.)
- Take a few deep breaths and remind yourself of what you are accomplishing here. Feel the lightness in your hands, in your heart, in your mind.
- Let yourself stay open to noticing any increase in inner peace and calmness as you visualize yourself having more room for positive thoughts and feelings than you did just a few minutes ago.

Feel free to repeat this exercise as often as you feel is necessary or useful. It usually gets more effective with practice as you learn to build clearer mental imagery and feel the negativity lifting away from you. Feel free to change around the imagery, the sayings, the situation, or the person.

Many people have found that the more they play with this and make it their own, the more useful it becomes.

Appendix Y

Handout—Re-Membering Client Legacies

Introduction:

Settle into your chair and get comfortable. Take a few deep breaths and, in your own time, let your eyes close and feel yourself relaxing.

Take another moment to continue to relax.

As you begin to think about the clients you have worked with, watch for any images or thoughts that relate to a particular client. Does one person, or couple, or family stand out to you?

When you have settled on a client or a case that stands out for you, give yourself a few moments to think about it. Let yourself relax into the imagery and feelings of that situation. Think about the person or people involved and let any images, sounds, or words that are connected with that situation come to your awareness. Take a few more deep breaths and relax a bit more as you let the memories flow.

Think about what you learned from your experiences in this situation...

Begin to explore how your time with this person or people has shaped you and your identity as a therapist. Has it shaped you in others ways?

How do you see your time together as helping to shape them?

What lessons or legacies has he/she left you that you are grateful for? Keep relaxing into your experience and understanding of the situation as you begin to think of three things about the client or clients that have helped to change you in some way.

Writing the Legacies:

As you begin to bring your awareness back into the room and become more aware of the space around you, try to keep holding onto the images and thoughts you have just uncovered.

When ready, pick up your paper and pen and begin putting those thoughts, feelings, and pictures into words by writing three legacies that this client or clients left with you. These legacies can be lessons, insights, inspirations, or memories from the situation that you want to carry forward with you in your life.

Take your time and let the words come to you. You can scribble notes, draw images, or create the phrases in your head before writing them down. Follow whatever format resonates the best with you and your memories in this moment.

Appendix Z

Handout—Haiku Clinical Notes

Cultivating Unique Awareness in Clinical Settings [Draft]
Poetry as Counter-Practice to Medical/Psychological Models.

Haiku Approaches

It is not the structure or the 5-7-5 that is key here but the philosophical underpinnings, the stance of inquiry and mindfulness of a lived experience, of a moment that gives haiku a self-care potential to capture, reflect, and transmit experience as well as double as a form of inquiry, mostly through juxtaposition of ideas.

Haiku of Mindfulness and Lived Experience

What are you surrounded by right now? Are there any interesting textures within reach? What kind of light is around you and is it telling you anything? What might be the origins of some of the things around you like furniture, art, appliances, etc.? Is your awareness of any of these things affecting you internally? Has your mood changed? Have any memories or feelings arisen or been linked to?

Gratitude Haiku

In this exercise, the kigo/seasonality can be replaced with something that you are grateful for. Here the kireji/transition will be from what you are grateful for to why you are grateful for it. This can help us to find new ways for the mind to connect gratitude with specificity and also broaden our ability to articulate our gratitude in new ways. (As we discovered in the Gratitude exercise, we can sometimes broaden our awareness when we focus it.)

Clinical and Session Note Haiku

For a more contemplative approach to therapeutic process, treatment plan insights, and to create a space where you might develop unique observational skills in your work, try writing haiku about your clients/sessions. You can choose sessions or clients that stand out for you, or cases where you're experiencing difficulty, or just go with your most recent experience.

Haiku of Interconnectedness

Pick two things and challenge your imagination to explore ways to connect them within the medium of haiku. Play with using kireji, kigo, and with leaving them out. You may also want to explore free-form modern haiku (gendai-haiku) which places less emphasis on the 17-syllable structure and on taking nature as their subject, but they do continue to make use of kireji/juxtaposition.

Inspired by the books *Haiku Mind: 108 Poems to Cultivate Awareness and Open Your Heart* and *Bashō: Narrow Road to the Interior*.

Appendix AA

Handout—The 5-Breath Finger Hold

Introduction

The 5-Breath Finger Hold exercise is a hybrid practice that combines Loving-Kindness Meditation and Breathing Awareness with the Jin Shin Jyutsu Finger Holds. This combination makes use of the different benefits and approaches of each practice to create a single exercise that can be more mentally engaging than just doing the finger holds, and yet more relaxing and calming than just doing Loving-Kindness Meditation or Breathing Awareness practices.

This is especially useful when experiencing anxiety, stress, or trauma as we often respond better in those moments to a practice that engages the mind in a positive way. Another advantage to this practice is that it provides a way to time the Finger Hold practice without counting to a number or setting a timer or alarm to structure the practice. This way the mind is engaged in a particularly positive way with less chance of overstimulation that could come from counting. It also frees up awareness for incorporating the breath while allowing room for falling asleep or drifting off into a deeper state of relaxation.

The Practice

- Start the Finger Holds by taking one hand and gently wrapping it around the thumb on the opposite hand. Let the hand that is doing the holding embrace the thumb without any tension or pressure.
- While holding your thumb, say one of each of the five phrases within one breath. This way, it will take five breaths to complete the practice.
- After your fifth breath, and the last of the five phrases, move your hand from your thumb to your index finger next to it.
- Without straining, or overthinking, check in with your body to feel your belly expanding and contracting with each breath. Feel the air flowing in your nostrils and filling your lungs. It is okay if your awareness of the breath comes and goes. You may also become involved enough with the phrases that it will fill up your focus.
- Continue this process until you reach your pinky finger on that hand and then switch to the thumb on the hand that started out doing the finger holding.

Practice Notes

Try to let each session evolve in its own way and see where the journey takes you.

Appendix BB

Sample Page from the Codes to Themes Process

① coding for robust experience first led to many unexpected categories/themes and let more of participants voice/language through. Instead of applying my ideas onto their work, I found myself being in conversation with them as a group of voices.

Analysis Mixed methods Visual tools MAXDictio Help Sun 10:16 AM Lefe Coppola

/Users/lefe coppola/Documents/Stealing Minutes.mx11 - MAXQDA 11 (Release 11.1.3)

Rigidity necessary in science to prove anything

Code System

Wider Culture: Response too

offering a different context as counter practice to outsider forces

simple + profound practices spread easily

connectivity + community

comes over into personal life

simple + profound and Adaptive once you create an adaptive, don't rely or overanalyze or overthink!

meeting people where they are

unexpected - generative nature of practice group setting - sharing

connectivity + community

stealing minutes concept

simple + profound

Reasoning with concepts + taking them up

simple concepts that are simple to communicate yet show profound impacts

Wider culture

Transformative moments + Experiences

Resonance with

Wider culture + self-care in that context

Group/Insight/BISS

Linking up with our social and cultural history!

asking questions into new territory

generative nature of groups/connectivity + community

They build on each other

mindfulness happens w/o EBP of mindfulness

changing how we work (practice) - shifting culture in org

Transformative moments

Stealing Minutes

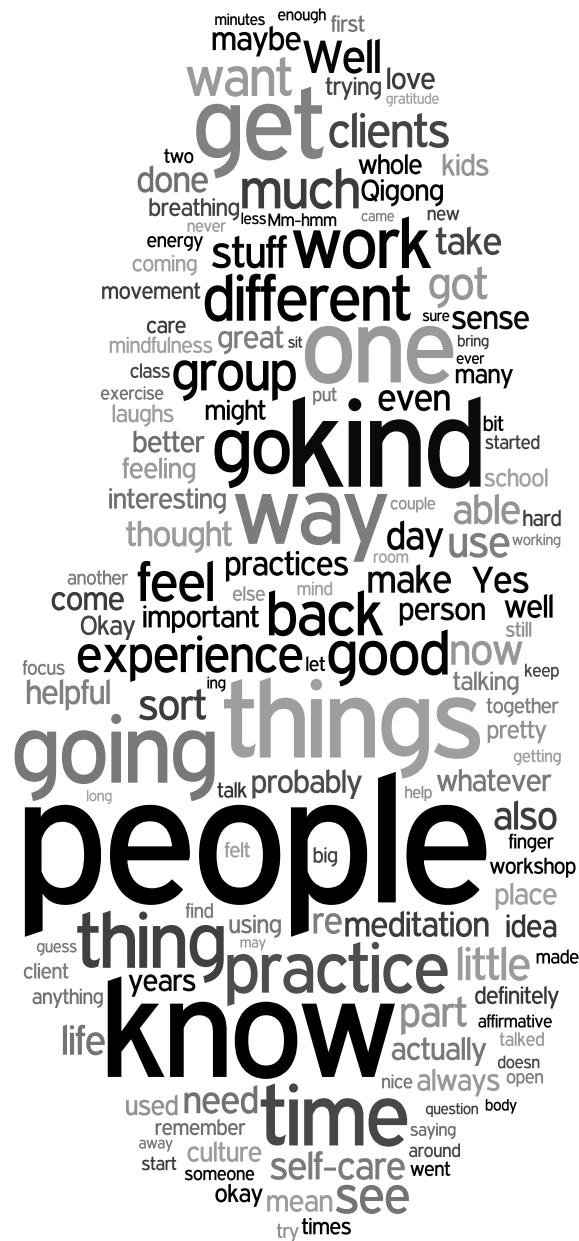
Consistent self-care for inconsistent work

Simple query (OR combination)

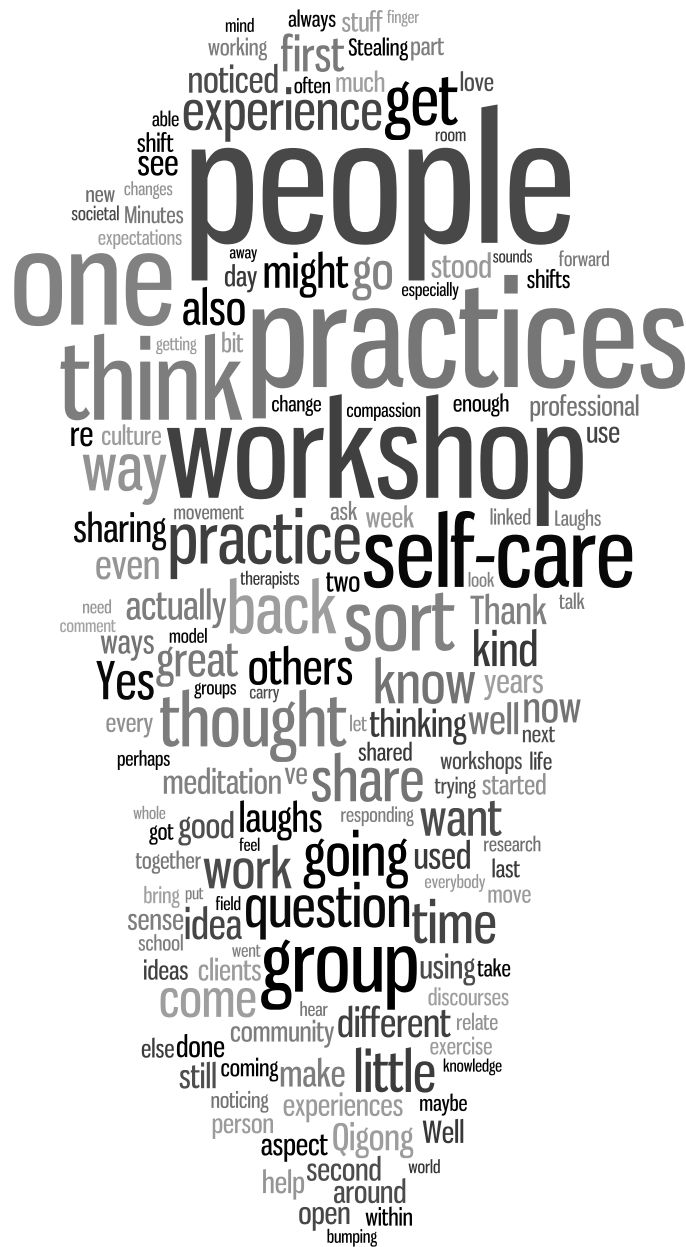
✓

Appendix CC

World Cloud of Interviews—All Dialogue by Interviewees



Word Cloud of Interviews—All Dialogue by Interviewer



Appendix EE

Code System of Open and Focused Coding

Code System for Stealing Minutes Participants Interviews
Linking Up Into Our Lives
Feeling it helped me help clients
Clients more open to these practices
Practices invite innovation & personalization
Enhancing creativity and inspiration
Anchoring anxiety
Using the finger holds to sleep
Helping me be more present
Linking up with past & other practices
The Landscape of Imagination
Being the best I can be for my clients
I did the movement with him to help him calm down
I just asked what he noticed
Using the 70% principle in many areas of life
Doing the Qigong movement in my mind
I'm visual and he's 'felt sense'
Struggling to keep myself together lately
I find it centering for me – instead of feeling 'semi-scattered'
Nurturing mindfulness between clients
Helping my clients in unexpected ways
Helping clients change and innovate within the practices
I want to keep going with this
I want to be the person who has the energy and fun
The beginning of initiative to reclaim self-care
Re-discovering my love of places – of nature thru gratitude SCP
Healing value of natural world – social creatures & natural
Seeing self-care shifts in other areas of life
Remembering and tapping into my abilities!
More likely to use what resonates with what already doing
I'm intrigued by how I might use these for my own benefit
I don't think I knew how draining the experience was
The revolutionary days of family therapy – being outlaws
I noticed less tension in my body and with clients
It helped me shift from low energy to get thru day
Starting with self-care at the beginning of my sessions
Helps me stay grounded around distressing material
Goal is to develop a mini-protocol of techniques for clients

It always brings me back. I like that aspect of it.
Helping clients have an understanding of innovation
Choosing a practice based on where I'm at in the moment
Using SCP to stay focused during sessions too
Finding common denominators and patterns with practices/clients
Mindful of putting my own needs b4 productivity
How it plays out in my day to day life
They spread easily – link up – taken up
Linking up with my poetic practices
Pondering the role of what is ineffable
The practices link up with elements of each of us
Linking up is what makes things sustainable
The idea that nothing stands on it's own. Narrative/Relational.
The purpose can connect to our values and history
Noticing carrying the last session in my body
Noticing and changing my in-between-clients habits
Reinvigorating our lives and previous practices
Here's another message from the universe
Incorporating the SCP into my life
I was open to it and ready for it
Taking up mindfulness in everyday life
Applying the practices in my private life
I do LKM when I can't drive with my knee
Doing self-care proactively
I'm more mindful minute by minute now
We're tweaking it for ourselves, not diluting it!
Transformative Experiences
Unexpected benefits
Spiritual practice that's unspoken
Growing through loss
Richness in difficult experiences
It feeds and enriches our lives
It felt very powerful
I remember it was Transformative
An alternative resource to caffeine
How would you deepen the practices we're already doing?
It helps me during rough times
Learning to be sustainable with 'feeling good'
Seeing the needs below my interests
Seeing the larger world of self-care.. Resonance

Invited to ask difficult questions
Feeling safe and enclosed with LKM
Grounding myself to not get caught up in others' stories
I think my unconscious is being stirred by all this somehow
Realizing I've been holding back, not taking risks
I'm more aware of my need to get in a spiritual community
My heart could give out any minute
Heart attack reminds me we're all living on a razor's edge
I kept wanting more... so that was good.
"Oh, that's what that feels like."
Learning how to love ourselves. That's beautiful.
I had no idea what I was walking into
It's helping me slow down in general
I didn't think I was going to make it...
Experiencing how it can get you out of a really hard place
Activities associated with a purpose – Transformative
Values within intentionalizing self-care
Changing my relationship with anxiety
This is very anti-anxiety for me
The affect was calm honesty
It takes you out of your head and into your heart
Honoring the gift of becoming more fully alive
Having the freedom to let go
I put it all together and the love came back
Courage to go deeper with our clients
Each one of my fingers feels different when I do that
Grounding, staying present through grief
We all have moments in life that transform us
Turning suffering into something meaningful
Going to death as a self-care practice
LKM made me feel like I was praying for somebody
It was out of my comfort zone, which is always cool
LKM helping me be more patient, kind, gentle with my sister
Simple and Profound
Experiential is how I learn best
Effectiveness of 'concrete' practices
Self-care on the fly
Freedom to create – opening space
This Flowing Through Place
I like the Stealing Minutes concept for using with clients

It gives you feedback – You notice the energy right away
We taught your practices in a workshop
It looked like it might be doable!
Early success helped me try harder and stick with it
Understanding the feeling and experience vs the concept
That sense of something bigger than our current knowledge
Intellectual knowing doesn't stick w/u as easily
Finding language for metaphysical stuff
I have found the handouts to be helpful for sharing practices
If I understood it better I'd be able to explain it better :)
The teaching – 'how to' – is important sometimes!
Some people struggle with examples and words but I need them
Very helpful when you say "make this your own..."
"Oh, why didn't you change it?" Thankful to be taught that way.
It takes away the pressure piece of it
Having a map – not wondering 'when is this gonna end?'
Holding you long enough to have an impact...
Aware something is missing but don't know where to go for it!
Sense of well-being as more attainable than happiness!
Introducing it to clients as something we do ourselves
Having a set of practices to share with clients
Different practices resonate with different clients
The power of guided imagery
Finding tools to give clients – and use for myself.
Bringing these practices into PTSD and Anxiety
I liked going back to the beginning with the LKM
Slowing down to just notice instead of reacting right away
10% Happier
So flexible and adaptable that I can do it anywhere...
Glad you took the time to do the practices
Permission to not adhere to any specific structure
The simplicity of the Qigong exercise was really nice
Having a simple practice that can be layered on
Applying the concepts AS self-care
Come on. Like, it takes a minute. What's your excuse?
Little things you can do that create lasting change
It's right at my fingertips
Remembering the phrase SM helps me do it throughout the day
Having a barometer to check where I'm at across the day
Remembering that 5 minutes is better than nothing at all!

How could this not spawn curiosity?
Something I use when I need it
Shift: more open to attempting self-care when I need it!
Having effective tools that I'm willing to use
It was so frickin' simple, holding your fingers!
A few simple basics are what most people need
Gratitude
Powerful because related to what was upsetting
FH help me drift, calm down, get back to sleep
Finger Holds
Helpful for anxiety, sadness, tension, sleeplessness...
Gratitude Maps are good structure. Encourage further use...
Gently encouraging others to do what works for us
I'm not a very good breather
Practices that can punctuate your day
You have something you can do about it!
I can always do breathing
Layers of self-care practices
Feels like a smorgasbord of self-care practices
When it's not being spoken about but it's speaking to you
The Subtle carries me stronger than "Ta-da" ones
Simple enough they can be handed to anyone!
Inventing new client-focused versions of each practice
Holding them gently to protect against Certainty
Scaffolding into the precious and valuable
Surprised by how quickly it brings discovery
I think people respond more to spirit/presence than actual
Sensing the deep roots and foundations of these SCP
Surprised by the continual supply of new practices
These are activities of life
Stealing Minutes
Each experience allowed me to grow into further experiences
I found adding the movement really helpful
70% Principle
This doesn't have to be long!
Linking up meditation with movement
I can use this anytime, anywhere
I used to visualize golf in the dentist chair
All you have to do is take one deep breath!
How readily available these practices are

There's no right way.
Exponential growth – SCP going viral
He does not live with ease – using SCP language in conversation
Having someone who understands the territory
I'd like to know more about the Qigong
The handouts have shifted my therapy practice
The subversiveness of Stealing Minutes approach
Suprised by the popularity of alternative practices
That something so simple can be so profound!
All day mindfulness versus single long session
Little pieces during the day works better for people
Leaving room to keep unfolding
Connection and Community
Valuing a sense of connection & community
Giving back and to myself
Seeing the connections
Wanting to help others who are isolated
Strangers because we didn't know the lingo
Attunement – Helpful action without thinking
It feels magical to be tuned in
Attunement as self-care practice
We've all got our strengths
I love Hearing everybody else's experience
Witnessing deepens experience of ourselves and others
Talking out loud about self-care
Others noticing the difference
Surprised/encouraged at range of people finding this helpful
Witnessing others in group helps me with my clients
Watching others change from doing self-care practices
Not just for us but for the community
From unspoken to shared values!
Taking up other participants innovations for my own practice
Discovering an unexpected common ground through witnessing
Connections leading to synergy
It was important for me that you seemed calm and centered
If you know something good, why wouldnt you want to share it?
Of course therapists are going to share this with their clients
I convey my stressness and rushness to the kids
LKM for when we can't be with the ones we love
A new understanding of energy and connecting with others

It helped us talk in a way we have not talked before
The sense of being in an energetic space together
Practices of connection
Using language we produce together
Coming up with ideas through conversation
Letting us know you get it – being vulnerable
Playing with my tribe – and avoiding clients in self-care group
Using meditation for others
I don't know your story but I find you interesting
Letting us spin off from each other
It can help the most unlikely people
Culture Shifts in Organizations
Potential for wider audience
Maybe you could start a Qigong group?
He's taking self-care into his work culture
Maybe expanding on the 70% principle?
The influence of timing of workshop – weekly vs one day
Weekly course helped with things that didn't come easily
Culture shifting through relaxation together
Shifting from the bottom up instead of top down
First job in mental health was new and exciting
Setting time aside each week was really helpful
I wish we could have done more on Gratitude
Maybe we could start a meditation group here?
The need to have a time&space just to be with themselves
Starting to get people into the habit of being more mindful
How do we trust each other with our vulnerabilities?
I like how often you talked about making it our own
Bridging the divides between people and groups
Paying attention to closing and opening space
Helps you realize there are other ways of being in the world.
Ideas really need a person who's grounded in the world
Figuring out how to do the work and take care of ourselves
Stay in front of the pain!
I'm always paying attention to culture in organization
Our culture should be healing for us
Set up something so it works and is beneficial to us
Not easy to pay attention to culture of an organization
One energy to start it, and another to keep it going
This can help bridge the generational gap

Bringing self-care into all organizational decision making
Client-centered focus brings self-care benefits to therapists
Creating a more functional baseline for us and our clients
Comfortable with both empirical and subjective knowing
Helping culture focus on how it's taking care of you
Mindfulness as add-on not yet a fundamental shift
Influence of the Wider Culture
It never gets talked about
Even imagination based workshops can be boring
Language piece created wicked anxiety for me
Bumping up against managed care and limited sessions
Managed care contributing to loss of connection – attunement
EVP as doing something "to" this family instead of listening
Talking w/people who are more disbelieving of 'not concrete'
Counter-practice to 'typical Yankee culture'
It counters annoyance and rush
Failing at self-care.. I felt like I failed yoga.
Clients told me about previous negative experiences with SCP
Meditation had never worked for me... knowledge-based approach.
The culture of do more, earn more, gain material things.
I like that you're appealing to people focused on money/success
Church was our only door to well-being... non-tangible focus
Countering the tough guy discourse against self-care
Non-profit world: Overworking in the name of helping others
Inoculating ourselves against unhealthy dominant discourses
It's great to be your own boss but then you're the problem...
There's no escaping the need to do some things in order to work
"All my supervision has been about paperwork"
State hospital – all about maintaining control
Therapeutic things could stir up trouble
Seasoned therapists know one way – new therapists know many
Holy Crap! Do I get three credits for that?
Busyness means success to a lot of people
Harder in some ways to do a group in training than with clients
I don't agree with one group defining another group
Therapists keeping their protective edges with each other
It's none of my business. I'm not God.
Your work challenges self-protective veneers
Self-consciousness can hold people back from the physical
Never had my eyes closed so much at an Ethics workshop

Finding out how hard it is to love ourselves
Closing eyes & being still is out of their comfort zone
Hard to encourage clients back into previous self-care practice
It was kind of a tough crowd
It takes that much to get me to stop and slow down.
Bumping up against our resistance to being calm/inward
Entering calmness before learning something new
Initial Qigong teaching method made it harder to pick up
"You're not gonna do that Inner Smile thing again are you?"
What is this a response or correction to?
The culture of stay busy and look busy
Culture of business influencing culture of therapy
It's okay to have low tide
Sharing self-care practices versus skills teaching
Culturally corrective work
Bringing visibility to what they're counter practices to
Modern power is thinly held
Poetics to counter formulated understandings of life
The only choices available are the ones available
Alternatives to dominant cultural choices(narrative resources)
Consistent self-care for inconsistent work
Only in the minutes in between can we take care of ourselves?
There aren't as many meditation groups as in the past
We listen to so much trauma every day
Giving therapists other ways to care for themselves than therap
What do you mean by "take care of yourself?"
I think u should take this to every MH Center in the state
Ethics CEU that contribute to my ethics base not fear base
Will these SCP allow us to continue on in an unhealthy way?
Nice to have a different context than outside forces
Disappointed by spiritual hierarchy
More research on these practices could help them spread
Rigidity necessary in science to prove anything
Scientific rigidity is entering mindfulness/self-care field
Self-care was harder in a hierarchical organization
Making transparent the struggles vs wider culture
Go to church on Sunday and be an asshole for six days

The majority of approaches to self-care in the mental health field revolve around activities that take place outside of the work environment or on supervision and policy level approaches.

Using social constructionist and narrative principles, we created, implemented, and studied a series of workshops focused on intra-day approaches to self-care. Using Research As Daily Practice, Case Study, and Grounded Theory, we were able to gain insights at each phase of the project and provide richer resources for moving forward with the goal of constructing a new approach to self-care.

This dissertation may benefit therapists, educators, and other helping professionals in reducing stress in the workplace through providing simple and effective tools to use with clients, students and others.

