



FAMILY THERAPY BASICS

This week, I read an article summarizing a Norwegian study on how practicing therapy impacts therapists' lives. I found the article *extremely* valuable. Many points in the article validated my therapist experience, and I'm sharing them with you today in the hopes that they will validate your experience, too.

Developmental Stage

"Research has also shown that the impact of being a therapist differs depending on career stage. Trainees often report positive personal effects due to gaining more self-awareness, whereas mid-career clinicians tend to focus on the stress created from their jobs. Senior therapists are more likely to focus on the ways their role as a therapist has facilitated personal growth."

This point emphasizes the changing impact and meaning of our work based on our professional developmental stage. It's important for trainees to understand that they may not always have the same feeling about their work that they now have, and for mid-career professionals to know that they may, in the future, feel grateful for how their work has influenced their personal development.

Perhaps we can use this information to help train and encourage future therapists (and ourselves!) on the lifespan of our profession and its common experiences along the timeline, in order to normalize and contain their challenges and emotions. Perhaps knowing this information as we enter and remain in the therapy field can lead to increased awareness about, and therefore longevity in, our field.

Finding Balance

"According to the researchers, the 'concept of work–life 'balance' did not offer a satisfactory way of understanding the way that therapists learn to manage their lives.' Instead, the researchers describe how clinicians 'acquired a capacity to exist in parallel realities, and that one of the ways in which they accomplished this was to co-construct, with others in their lives, a set of practices that enabled them comfortably to move across contexts, such as the shift between work and home.'"

This was one of the most striking themes in the research, and I believe it merits its own study. I'd love to know:

- What are specific strategies that therapists (as compared to other professionals) use to "co-construct" their lives with their significant others?
- What does it mean to exist in parallel realities?
 - Do all professionals exist in parallel realities? If so, how are therapists' parallel realities unique?
 - What are the benefits or consequences of living this way?
- What type of practices help therapists shift contexts?

I ponder these points recognizing that most of us shift in and out of co-construction and awareness. Perhaps we go silent and inward for periods of time. Regardless, many of us can answer some of my questions above based on our therapist experience. We also may struggle in our work and life at times, partly, because we have lost sight of how to shift within and between contexts. This research points to a fact that many of us therapists already know, because it is our daily truth: Our work and our lives cannot be separated.

The importance of this type of research is that it presents us with information that can guide us in searching for ways to talk about our distinct profession and the way it blends with our lives and identities. It also emphasizes the importance of searching for and figuring out our specific responsibilities to our "parallel" contexts, so that we can be transparent about our experience with ourselves, our loved ones, our colleagues, and the public.

This is the original article based on the research: [The Effects of Practicing Psychotherapy on Therapists' Personal Lives](#)

If you read it, I'm interested in knowing which research theme resonated with your experience the most. Hit reply and let me know.