

### **Why did you choose the career of a psychologist/therapist?**

I was fascinated by learning and memory research when I was in high school and I wanted to study it in college. I was also at that time interested in being a first grade teacher but my advisor and a mentor steered me more in the direction of psychology because they thought it would be more intellectually stimulating for me. After working as a “youth worker” with “at risk” adolescents in the inner city I could see that I needed more education to be able to use my privilege to advocate for these kids and families. When thinking about having the most impact I decided that a PsyD in psychology would be the right degree to do that. I knew that I wanted to be a therapist with kids who were abused/traumatized because I had worked with all of these youth and I had also volunteered at Washburn Child Guidance Center with first graders in day treatment.

I am both a therapist and a professor in a doctoral program of Psychology so my work is really varied. I had always wanted to teach, and have been involved with teaching preschool through graduate school. When the opportunity came up to start teaching in a Master’s of Education program at St. Mary’s I was excited to start that part of my career as a psychologist.

### **What do you find are your biggest challenges on the job?**

As a therapist one of the biggest challenges is all of the ridiculous hoops I have to jump through in order to get kids and families the authorizations that they need so that their insurance will pay for their treatment. That type of paperwork can be so annoying and frustrating, especially when it gets turned down for dumb reasons.

Another challenge is the times I have had to report a parent to Child Protection. Mostly they already know when they tell me something that I will have to do that but it can be really painful to have the conversation and make the report, especially if the parent is doing all of the right things at that point and I know the

county will become involved and perhaps it will not go so well.

I work with people who have been horribly traumatized and some of them are still being abused or are living with domestic violence. It can feel really sad and heavy sometimes. I can also get really really angry that the 'abusers' mostly do not get punished. I want something to happen so badly sometimes because it feels so unfair. Mostly I am not in that place but when I am tired and I am there it is a very difficult place to be.

The hardest part about being a professor is when you have to tell someone that they are not meeting the expectations of the program or the profession and that they have to do something to change that. I have done it many different times but it never gets easier to introduce that conversation. A couple times it has ended with a student being referred for dismissal from the program but mostly it has served to strengthen the student in their self knowledge and commitment to the program and the field.

### **What do you find most rewarding about your job?**

I find so much of what I do to be phenomenally rewarding. I feel grateful on a daily that I get to do things for my work that I am very good at and that I love so much. It is very rewarding to see people feel better about themselves or their lives. I love it when someone can do something, like go on a date or tell someone to stop bothering them, that 6 months or a year prior they could not have done in a million years! I love being able to put all the things I know and have been through myself at the disposal of my clients for their healing. I love it that I get to have relationships with people who are in the process of healing and growing and I get to be on that journey with them

It is actually similar being a professor. My students really matter. I love helping them to discover who they are and what they believe and how to practice in ways that are in lign with

their values. I really appreciate being able to teach at St. Mary's where I feel so supported by my colleagues and the values of the University. I really enjoy teaching and I absolutely love it when I see people "get it".

### **How do you balance your career with your family life?**

This is a pretty hard one for me. I can get into times where I work way too much. I have a daughter who I would like to spend a lot more time with but sometimes I have a hard time saying no to a new client or a new project or teaching opportunity. Some of the things I do is we always go out to breakfast and have a day together on Sat or Sun and we try to eat dinner together as much as possible. I also go to church every Sunday which helps me to stay connected to what is important to me and how I cope when things are really hard with my work or in the world. During the summer I spend a lot more time in my garden because I teach less in the summer. I also get to spend more time with my daughter and my dogs 😊

### **What career area do you specialize in? What kind of patients do you work with?**

I have a few specialties that sometimes overlap or intersect. I work a great deal with people who have been horribly traumatized, some of whom have been trafficked. I work with children and adolescents and families and some with adults who were traumatized as children.

Another area of expertise is cross cultural/multicultural work. I frequently consult at mental health organizations and schools about this and have created curriculum for it too. I also work quite a bit with trans-racial adoption. Many of these kids have been adopted either internationally or domestically at an older age and have lots and lots of pre-adoption trauma, one of the overlapping areas.

The third area that I specialize in is work with individuals with

Autism Spectrum Disorders. In fact, I was just presenting for three hours at a conference this morning on that very topic. I also went to Sri Lanka a few years ago for a month to teach about ASDs to professionals there. There has been a very large increase in diagnoses of ASDs in the last 10 years, particularly in some of the refugee communities so I can use my knowledge and expertise in multiculturalism along with that of Autism to help families understand and cope with what is going on with their child. I am also one of the few people that I know of in the state who does work with youth on the spectrum who have been abused or trafficked. Again, lots of overlapping areas of work for me.

I also teach graduate courses on all of the above areas and regularly present at conferences or consult to agencies or individuals.

**What kind of education and training were required to become a psychologist?**

I have a BA in psychology and Art. The Art part was not necessary but it informs the work that I do in therapy because I do quite a bit of art therapy with youth and adults. My Master's degree is really an 'on-the-way' degree because of the kind of program I got accepted into for my doctorate. I spent 5 and a half years working on my doctorate which included 2 years of half time training at different mental health sites while I was taking classes and one year of full time training, called Internship, at yet another place. The thing that was the hardest about my training was actually finishing my dissertation!!

We are also required to do 40 hours of continuing education every two years in order to keep up Minnesota State licensure.

**How many hours do you work in a typical week?**

WAY TOO MANY!!!

Probably about 25 hours a week as a professor with my

teaching load and all of the work I do reading assignments, creating curriculum and being on research committees for student dissertations.

I see clients on average about 20 hours a week and then have 5-10 hours of paperwork and billing to do. In the summer I tend to work more like 10-15 hours a week at school.

### **Where do you work?**

I have a private practice in South Minneapolis and I teach at St. Mary's University of MN in the School of Graduate and Professional Programs in South Minneapolis.

### **What are some opportunities for advancement in this field?**

There is so much that you can do as a psychologist: work in medical settings, work in schools, doing therapy or assessments, consultation and supervision, teaching, running programs or writing curriculum, work in Industrial/Organizational settings, Sports psychology, there is really so much to do that it is really pretty wide open. That is one of the interesting things about getting a graduate degree in psychology and one of the exciting things about being a professor because I get to help people figure out what is right for them

### **What advice do you have for someone interested in this career?**

Be open to all kinds of different experiences with people. Everything you do or learn or experience goes into being a good psychologist. Learn about humility and kindness and compassion because those are really good qualities to bring in to work with people who are hurting

Learn about yourself and how to take good care of yourself when you are stressed. It takes a lot of school to become a doctor of psychology and graduate school is stressful. Depending on what you end up specializing in, that might be

pretty intense too.