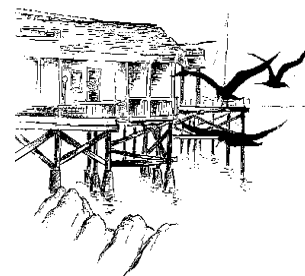


The Monterey County Chapter California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists

July / August 2022 Newsletter



Benefits to MC-CAMFT Membership:

- Reduced fees at our events
- Invitation to our Members only annual gatherings
- Access to Members only Salons, which are intimate workshop offerings taught by fellow Members
- Periodic Newsletter with relevant CAMFT information and Member created writing
- Opportunity to contribute your writing to our Newsletter, including things such as a column, book review, workshop or conference review, poem, opinion piece or article
- Free advertising in our Newsletter and "Classifieds" section of our website
- Inclusion in our "Find a Therapist" website directory
- Access to Member and Announcements Forum on our website where you can seek feedback from other members and post things to the community
- Opportunity to submit a proposal to host a Salon for our Members
- Option to join us on the Board as a volunteer committee chair or ad hoc committee member
- Opportunity for MC-CAMFT to co-sponsor your workshop, so you can offer CEUs to your attendees
- Free Mentoring by experienced clinicians
- Invitation to suggest any member activity you find interesting, and we'll consider it!

Benefits to MC-CAMFT Website:

- ◇ Current Member Directory
- ◇ Classifieds Page for Members
- ◇ Chapter Board Contact
- ◇ Specialized Forums
- ◇ Online Newsletter
- ◇ Networking Opportunities
- ◇ Chapter Documents Access
- ◇ Sponsorship Opportunities
- ◇ Membership Information

MC-CAMFT CALENDAR

July - State of the Monterey County Chapter

Event Type: In-Person Outdoor Gathering

Host: Jennifer Farley and other board members

Location: Veteran's Park Area #3, 1200 Veterans Dr., Monterey, CA 93940

Date/Time: Saturday, July 30, 9:30-11:30 AM

Schedule: 9:30-10:00 Eating and socializing/networking, 10:00-11:00/11:30 discussion of State of the Chapter, the remaining time can be spend socializing/networking

of CEs: 0

Pricing Categories/Respective Prices:
MC-CAMFT Member \$10

September - Save the Date!

Event Type: CE Event

Date/Time: Sept. 30, 2022

Host: The Art of Integration Work Presented by Jennifer Allen, LMFT, ATR-BC & Cristin DeVine, LMFT

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2022 MC-CAMFT Board Roster

2022 Board of Directors - Officers -

President:

Jennifer Farley
jennifer@shamanhealingmonterey.com

Treasurer:

Susan West
831-206-7639

Secretary:

Rochelle Hall
rochellehall.consult@gmail.com



2022 - Committee Chairs -

Membership Chair: OPEN
Public Relations: OPEN
Programs Chair: OPEN
Continuing Education Chair: OPEN

Legislative & Ethics Chair:
Michael Newman

Mentorship Chair:
Pat McDermott, LMFT
patmcdermft@comcast.net

Newsletter Editor:
Ross E. Farley III
rossfarleyiii@gmail.com

Hospitality Chair:
Olivia Fae Stadler
olivia.stadler@yahoo.com

Pre-Licensed 3,000 Hr. Club Chair
Catherine Rodriguez

Member-At-Large:
Carmen Martin, LMFT
lovehealing@me.com



There is hope,
even when your brain
tells you there isn't.

— John Green

@therandomvibez



Like Us on Facebook!

Connect with your colleagues
through the Monterey Chapter
CAMFT Facebook page.

Jennifer Farley



2022 Board President

Hello MC-CAMFT Chapter Members!

I am excited that we will be offering our next in person gathering in late July! We will be gathering together for a casual breakfast outside to connect, and to discuss the future of our chapter. We have reached a point where many of our board members have been dedicating their time to the chapter for years and are ready to move on. I know we have all been through a lot both personally and professionally over the past 3 years in particular with the impacts of the pandemic, upheaval in our country, and whatever else life has brought to our lives. My hope is that there are people in our community who are also feeling energized and inspired to focus their energy on continuing to provide support to our community of mental health clinicians by being on the board. Please begin to consider this in the time leading up to our gathering in July!

Also, I do hope that you all try to use our new chapter listserv that is meant to replace the forum on our website. As a perk of being a member of the chapter, you are automatically enrolled in the listserv. When you post to it, all of the other members are notified of your message via email, and can respond accordingly. There are also ways to manage how you receive notifications from the listserv, so that you don't feel bombarded. There is a summary of all of this in the newsletter. I really encourage you to explore posting and engaging with the posts that are submitted. It is a great way to have ongoing connection with your colleagues.

I hope I see you all in July!

May you be well,

Jennifer Farley

P.S. I want to highlight that the Member Spotlight is back! Our Member Spotlight includes a photo and write up by a chapter member highlighting his/her/their work in the community. The Member Spotlight appears in the newsletter and on the website. If you are interested in being in the spotlight, all you need to do is send a headshot and a writeup to Ross Farley III, and he will add you into the rotation. You can contact Ross at: rossfarleyiii@gmail.com

Events & News

Saturday July 30th, 2022

Event Type: In Person Outdoor Gathering

Title: State of the Monterey County Chapter

Presenter: Jennifer Farley and other board members

Location: Veteran's Park Area #3, 1200 Veterans Dr., Monterey, CA 93940

Date/Time: Saturday, July 30, 9:30-11:30 AM

Schedule: 9:30-10:00 Eating and socializing/networking, 10:00-11:00/11:30 discussion of State of the Chapter, the remaining time can be spend socializing/networking

Number of CEs: 0

Pricing Categories/Respective Prices:
MC-CAMFT Member \$10

Description:

Join us outside in beautiful Veteran's Park for a lovely continental breakfast, some time to connect with colleagues and engage in a frank discussion about the future of our Monterey County Chapter. There are ways in which our Chapter has continued to thrive during this pandemic era, and there are ways in which our Chapter is facing some tough realities as we look ahead. Let's gather together, connect and create an approach for MC-CAMFT moving forward.

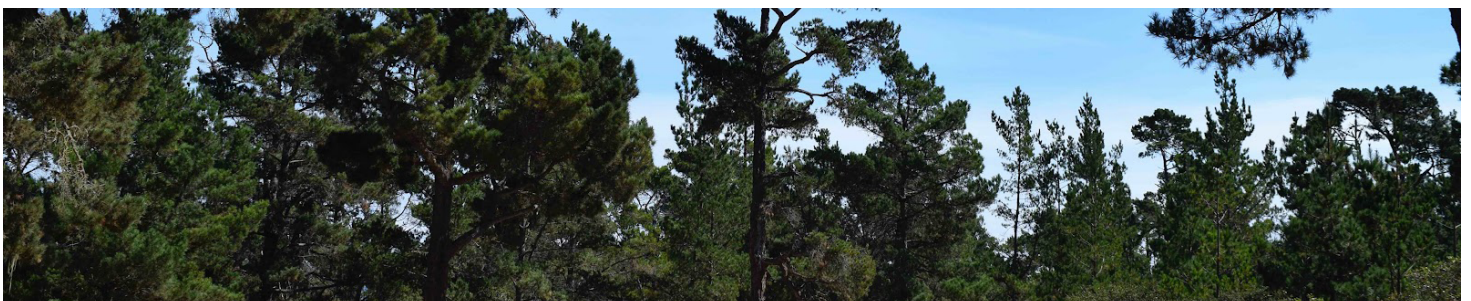
Please note: Since this event is being held outdoors, we are not requiring proof of vaccination or negative COVID test. We will also not be requiring people to wear masks, but of course we support your choice to do so if that is your safety practice.

September 30th, 2022 - Save the Date

Event Type: CE Event

Title: The Art of Integration Work

Presenter: Jennifer Allen, LMFT, ATR-BC & Cristin DeVine, LMFT



MC-CAMFT ANNOUNCEMENTS LISTSERV VIA TOPICBOX

Welcome to our new announcements forum!

This replaces the old forum on our website.

Enjoy a wider outreach, as every active member can now access this listserv.

As a chapter member, you are automatically enrolled in this listserv so that you can easily communicate professional announcements with fellow members.

How it works:

To send a message to everyone in the group, use the email: mccamft-announcements@mccamft.topicbox.com

You'll receive a copy in your email, or you can view it online at <https://mccamft.topicbox.com/groups/mccamft-announcements>. You can write new messages or responses there too.

- An acceptable announcement is any referral, event, group, office space available/wanted, supervision wanted/offered, trainings, etc. This can include both offering or looking for a service, a resource, or information.
- Examples of announcement topics are: looking for referrals, office space, internships, supervisors, etc.; starting a peer consult group; forming special interest group; practice announcement or openings; donating books; referral questions for clients; questions on resources, or services, etc.

HOW TO MANAGE YOUR NOTIFICATIONS FROM TOPICBOX

When someone makes a post, you will get an email notification. If you'd like to adjust things so that you get a daily summary (rather than potentially multiple emails a day), or to remove yourself from all notifications, here is how to do it:

Click this link: [delivery options](#)

It will ask you to put in your email address. Enter your email.

It will then send you a code to type in. Type in that code.

Now you are in Topicbox.

On the right hand side, you'll see a section called "Delivery options" and then a link that says "edit delivery options". Click on the link that says "edit delivery options"

From there, there are 3 options and you can pick which is best for you, including an option to no longer receive emails. If you'd like to not be active in this forum, you'd pick that option.

Please note that there is also an option to receive a "daily summary". This would allow you to get ONE email per day with a summary of all messages sent, so if you are overwhelmed by messages coming in as they are posted, this can be a great way to still stay engaged, but not get too many emails.

Couple's Corner

Couples Corner

-offered by EFT trained therapist Amy Somers

We are so funny, as humans in relationship. We all want the same thing: connection, love. So why do we struggle so hard against just this?

My husband and I work with a couple that is more typical than not: in survival mode with multiple kids, careers and endless modern life events moment by moment, spinning indefinitely. They walk through life in parallel, rarely touching. They both want to. We see genuine love between them during intense moments of connection in session as they describe their favorite qualities of each other, eyes brimming with tears. The reasons why they chose each other, why they choose each other still. It's quite gorgeous. We pause in silence to let the room swell every time.

Inevitably, it feels too awkward, unfamiliar, or just too vulnerable so one immediately pulls the other back into their normal dance. The energy spins once again and they lean away on the same couch to assume their position. High emotions (especially when raw spots are rubbed up against) turn up the speed and return partners to their attachment of origin wiring, which feels like coming home. Coming home to a place you can't stand but know the way by heart with your eyes closed.

Last time this happened I was able to notice the pattern immediately and slow it down EFT style. I pressed the pause button, then the slow-mo review. I noticed that before the pause, both partners wanted the same thing. She wanted him to want her, the warts-and-all her. He wanted to know her authentic self (he even promised angry and sad were great, any ounce of "real"). I repeated their words back to them slowly and quietly. "Do you realize you both want the same thing?" I asked, wide-eyed. They seem confused. I repeated their words again and emphasized the same message from both.

The session ended and they thanked us both, walked out to into the beautiful Spring day. We don't know where they went from there, besides home. We hoped they recognized the irony/beauty in their similar pleas but honestly have no idea.

There is a question in EFT that poses: Do you want to be right or in relationship? I love this and use it quite a bit in my own partnership. I notice the charge in my own body wanting to be right, so right I can taste it. Of course, this goes back to my attachment of origin, always being wrong, always doing something wrong.

I'm convinced I must present the facts in the right way for my husband to touch the heel of hand against his forehead and exclaim "I get it now; you are SO right!" Just for the record, this has never happened. Never will.

So, I embrace the charge in my body that may have a slightly metallic taste (or maybe that's just me biting my tongue). I ask myself which I prefer in that moment. Right? Relationship? And then something interesting happens. I choose the relationship because I always want to connect to my partner. I choose it and the charge starts draining out of my body. My course of action become crystal clear. Connection requires ego dissolution, heart space instead of head. I choose my heart and I reach out. I know he wants the same, so I repeat the same question back to him. It may take a couple times, but he always chooses the relationship too. So, when I reach out, he reaches back. He responds. It's so hard for me to reach out as a Withdrawer, but this is one of the strongest EFT indicators of change. The Pursuer needs to respond with connection. So, he does, and we do. We connect and find our Third safe and warm again beneath our feet.

I follow an Insta posting by Julie Menanno, LMFT & LPC, [thesecurerelationship](#). If you are on, follow her. She has a way of explaining attachment styles in relationship that hit home. This one:

"relationship problems didn't start overnight. If you want to see change, you have to put in the work consistently. emotional trust takes time to build. and it takes time to heal. It can't be any other way."

Here's what I see: the consistent work goes on autopilot with most partnerships towards attachment of origin. Most likely if you come from an insecure attachment style, this does not work in favor of the relationship, just in favor of the cycle learned originally. Like an homage to disaster, relived on repeat. What if it was possible to change course from autopilot to manual? To choose a new path that turns you toward, not away, from your partner. Would you take it? Would you try it? Did our couple attempt an awkward and vulnerable path back towards each other and their Third after getting back in their car and pointing home?

Don't know, we will see next week. I hope so. The thing is, if the effort goes in either way (right or relationship) why not try something with a potentially successful outcome? Why not at least attempt a different path forward when you know where usual one ends? Good luck in partnership and good luck with your couples! One little question may change your day.

The Road to Licensure

Phase 1: Graduate School and Traineeships

Welcome to the MC-CAMFT Road to Licensure article series! I'm Catherine Rodriguez, your 2022 Pre-Licensed Board Chair.

This series is adapted from the latest version (2022) of CAMFT's Master Checklist for MFT Licensure. Be sure to check with CAMFT and the BBS often to ensure you have the most current information, as it is an ever-evolving process. We'll do our best here to provide you with the most up-to-date information on the Road to Licensure. On the BBS website, you will notice the phrase "Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the applicant to comply with all requirements for licensure." While this is true, there is plenty of support available for you. My goal in this series is to empower you to know where to go for resources and support on your road to licensure.

Over the course of this series, these articles will address these 6 topics in the Phases of Licensure: 1) Grad School & Traineeships, 2) Upon Graduation, 3) Gaining Hours of Experience, 4) Application for Licensure and Exams, 5) Licensure and Beyond and 6) Therapist Self-Care. These articles will have links to websites that you can access for the specific support that you need. Please feel free to contact me for guidance or to give feedback on how we can best serve you.

In Phase 1 of your journey, Graduate School and Traineeships, you might begin by exploring the BBS website <https://www.bbs.ca.gov/applicants/> under your license type where you will find several publications that provide the detailed steps to ensure you meet the BBS requirements. This includes the Handbook for Future LMFTs and Answers to Most Frequently Asked Questions for Associate Marriage and Family Therapists and MFT Trainees. I recommend that you create an organizational system that works for you to keep track of all the forms and documents you'll need over the course of your journey.

On the state CAMFT website <https://www.camft.org> under the Pre-Licensed Corner, you'll find The Master Checklist for MFT Licensure (updated for 2022). You must be a member to access this, but it's an invaluable resource along with many other resources available from CAMFT for Pre-Licensed members.

One of the first steps you'll take is to select an approved and accredited graduate program in counseling, psychology or social work. You can check the BBS website under your applicant license type to find the list of California graduate programs to ascertain accreditation. There are many grad schools listed, and it might feel overwhelming. To narrow down your search, consider whether you want an in-person or online program. You might also consider the type of program you want, whether the school has a particular specialty that interests you. Most schools offer informational sessions or have a contact person you can speak with about their program.

Another helpful resource is from Cris Walker Roskelley, MFT <https://growingtherapists.com> who practices in California and supports therapists on their journey to licensure and beyond. She wrote an article for CAMFT in 2009, which is still relevant for today and offers lots of great tips for navigating graduate school. A few examples of this include keeping a journal called My MFT Practice to capture ideas along the way for what you want in your future private practice. She also advocates getting your own personal psychotherapy to "be on top of your own stuff" as a therapist and understand what it's like to be a client in therapy.

<https://www.camft.org/Resources/Pre-licensed-Corner/Articles-of-Interest/How-to-Make-the-Most-of-Graduate-School>

As part of your graduate program, you will have a practicum traineeship where you will gain a minimum of 225 face-to-face counseling hours toward both graduation and licensure. Your graduate school practicum coordinator should be able to assist you with navigating the process of acquiring appropriate placement opportunities, as well as meeting your grad school (and BBS) requirements toward graduation.

cont'd on pg. 8

When seeking out practicum site placements, keep in mind the populations and issues you might prefer to work with. Typically, you'll have the opportunity to gain a range of mental health experience working with children and teens, families, couples, groups and individual adults. You can also seek placements on the state CAMFT Pre-Licensed Corner Job Board (a member benefit), MC-CAMFT website, and job search websites such as <https://prelicensed.com/jobs/> and Indeed at <https://www.indeed.com>.

Be sure that your work setting meets the BBS requirements. It must "lawfully and regularly provide mental health counseling or psychotherapy," generally in a mental health non-profit community agency. As a Trainee, you are not yet permitted to work in a private practice or professional corporation. Your work setting must provide you with appropriate supervision as well as the required documents (found on the BBS website). As a trainee, you are required to have one unit of supervision each week (1 hour of individual supervision or 2 hours of group supervision) for every 10 hours of direct counseling experience.

Supervision is a key component in the quality of your pre-licensed work experience. In addition to meeting the necessary BBS supervision requirements, WHO your supervisor is matters. You may not have a choice in who your supervisor will be, so how do you ensure that you get the best supervision possible? How can you be an empowered trainee? Trainees don't always know differently, so they may accept whatever type of supervision is offered. However, if there is something that isn't working for you, speaking up about what you need is critical to your professional development. Here's some things to consider about your supervisory relationship.

- What is your supervisor's primary theoretical orientation? How well does this match yours?
- What is the supervisor's approach to supervision? Do they have a coaching / mentoring approach or a teaching / telling approach (or both)?
- What important qualities does a potential supervisor bring to supervision?
- What is their communication style?

·What do you want from supervision? Ideas include getting feedback, learning theory, exploring countertransference, gaining tools or techniques, engaging in roleplays, defining your professional identity, etc.

·What are your professional goals? How might this position contribute to those goals and how can the supervisor support you?

As a pre-licensed therapist, another responsibility you have is to track and document the hours you gain in your practicum position. You can do this directly using BBS forms or you can use a web-based program, such as Track Your Hours. It is a paid service, but can be an invaluable support in tracking, documenting and validating your hours gained. It will help you to ensure that you are counting your hours properly and getting the proper ratios of clinical hours to supervision, as well as making sure you meet the requirements for the different types of experience you need. It can bridge across your traineeship to your associate MFT hours, as you can add multiple positions over the course of your journey. You can find the Track Your Hours website here: <https://www.trackyourhours.com/features/>

Last but not least, be sure to sign up for membership in state and local CAMFT, for resources, information, community, mentoring and support on your Road to Licensure. Check here <https://mccamft.org> for member benefits on the MC-CAMFT website. See you in the next article, and good luck on this phase of your journey!



During Turbulent Times, Resilience Is Your Superpower

Learning how to rebound is more important than ever before.

Robert Kovach Ph.D.

KEY POINTS

- Resilience is important now more than ever, especially as we try to manage our work lives during uncertain times.
- Building resilience can improve mental health, by reducing anxiety and depression that is related to setbacks.
- You can and should take active steps to increase your resilience: build connections, leverage your experience, and stay hopeful.

These days, the only certainty is uncertainty. We have no idea how this year is going to end, let alone what the next several years are going to bring. In the first six months of 2022, we have seen a major war erupt, inflation soar, markets sink, and supply-chain disruptions. Business leaders admit they have no idea how to plan for the next few years; it's impossible to know what will be expected of employees on the individual level. What will be key is resilience, which is the critical skill set for today's environment.

Understanding what resilience is. Put simply, resilience is not about being "happy." Resilience is the to adapt and recover after a difficult experience. Whether it's losing a job or ending a relationship, we are unable to avoid times of adversity. But improving our resilience is key to remaining emotionally healthy so that we can continue to function. In times of great uncertainty, the instability itself can become a challenge. For example, even if you don't lose your job, the day-to-day concern that you might become unemployed can be equally stressful. The markets are another example, it is impossible for anyone to know how much their investments will be worth from week to week, and the constant fluctuations can become trying.

Why being resilient is important. We all face setbacks from time to time, and it is natural to feel the impact of being knocked down. But becoming resilient is vital to how we get back up in a healthy way, this allows us to take risks again. If you want to achieve professionally, you will have to continue to take chances, whether that's going on a job interview, requesting a raise, pursuing a promotion, or changing employers. With resilience, you will be less prone to depression and self-doubt when inevitably some of that risk-taking does not pay off.

Connections are comforting. Get connected with your co-workers. Understandably, this is tough when you're remote or hybrid working or just starting somewhere new. These days you may have to make a more concerted effort to build those relationships. If you can, meet in person or via one-on-one zoom calls until you have a rapport. Ideally, get to know people before you need them, one way to build resilience is to have a network in place that you can rely on during crises. Being connected will also make you more productive, which further helps build the confidence and stability that fuels resilience.

Experience can improve expectations. Leverage what you know now, which will help build some quick confidence. Uncertainty is as much of the problem as any specific bad outcome. But you can use your past experiences to decrease feelings of helplessness. In addition, use those relationships, as mentioned previously—you can rely on the experiences of others to help you have meaningful goals. Connect with those who may have been through turbulent or difficult times in the past for advice on how to manage emotions and goals now.

Make every day meaningful and stay hopeful. None of us know what will be happening by the end of the year. What you can do now is focus on what you do today, tomorrow, and next week—for the 40 hours (or more) you are at work. Turn your professional life into an opportunity to do something that matters to you. Make the necessary changes at work to help you feel that your contributions are meaningful. Or find something new, if that is what it takes to make you feel worthwhile. Finding satisfaction in the workplace will help you rebound more easily. Neuropsychologists have shown us that the thoughts you hold have an impact on your brain and body. When you think of work, make sure you can see something positive in it, something that will inspire you. This impacts your well-being, which makes it easier to be resilient. You can't ensure what tomorrow will bring, but you can make sure that today you accomplished something that matters to you.



What Moving to a Different Country Taught Me About Belonging: Changing perspectives and the idea of home.

Aditi Subramaniam, Ph.D.

KEY POINTS

-Moving out of our comfort zones has the potential to make us see things more clearly about the places we called home.

-Moving to a different country gave me valuable perspective on the fact that people are more similar than they are different.

-Immersing ourselves in a different culture can help us learn and grow beyond our narrow confines.

The lovely thing about Disney's animated movies is that there's something in them for everyone—if my toddler erupts in giggles each time she sees Olaf the snowman doing something silly in the movie “Frozen,” I end up finding so much meaning hidden beneath the layers of snow. Everything turns into a metaphor, and a drastically different one depending on whom you speak to. When one of the sisters in “Frozen,” Elsa, flees to the North Mountain after unleashing the powers that are beyond her control, she finally realizes that she can let her powers go, and that gives her an immense sense of freedom. She sings in the song “Let It Go” :

It's funny how some distance makes everything seem small
And the fears that once controlled me can't get to me at all.

It has been nearly five years since I moved to the United States, and I think of these lines each time I board a flight to or from India, during take-off. As I see the houses getting tinier and tinier as I go higher and higher up, it never fails to make me philosophical. How small are we in the larger scheme of things, it makes me wonder.

If going farther away from the ground makes me ponder the inconsequential nature of being, living miles away from the country I grew up in gives me immense clarity. Our comfort zones are like wearing foggy eyeglasses. Move away from them, and the fog clears up to reveal the truth—the good, the bad, and the ugly.

View From the Outside

Conversely, observing a foreign nation from the outside can be a form of fogged-up eyeglasses in itself. What we see about a country from the outside is usually the stuff that qualifies as news.

These extremely rare events can be mistaken to be the entire truth of a country. To the outsider, America is a country of gun violence and of deep divisions that are masked by a veneer of sophistication. While it is definitely all these things, it is also so much more, and you see that only when you live in the country for a while. You also realize something clichéd but incredibly profound—that human beings all over the world are more similar than they are different, and that the battles we all have to fight are strangely similar to each other.

Moving to a different country, for my husband and me, was more of an adventure than anything else. We're young, we thought, so why not travel the world and see what life is like beyond these familiar shores? We'd visit family often—traveling between countries (at least in pre-pandemic times) for those who had the wherewithal to do so was as simple as boarding a flight at night and waking up on the other end of the world. There has also never been a better time to move to a new country—technology has made it incredibly easy to keep in touch with family and friends back home. With a smartphone and an Internet connection, there is practically no difference between two friends who live in two different cities in the same country and those who live several thousand miles apart. It has been a fascinating adventure, to say the least, filled with surprises and meaning at every turn.

I still recall the first time I set foot in the United States of America. My husband, who had just started his master's degree, picked me up from the airport, and we took an Uber to our apartment. I remember being somewhat awed by the size of the highways, the speed of the cars, and, of course, the size of the skyscrapers downtown. Never mind that I didn't know the word “downtown” then, or that some highways here were called “freeways,” and a number of other pop culture references that would dawn on me only with time, despite me having watched every episode of “Friends” back in India, and more than a few of “Grey's Anatomy.”

In her bestselling novel *Americanah*, author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie describes beautifully this feeling of not grasping references completely in a new country:

Ifemelu laughed, too, although she did not fully understand the joke. And she had the sudden sensation of fogginess, of a milky web through which she tried to claw. Her autumn of half blindness had begun, the autumn of puzzlements, of experiences she had knowing there were slippery layers of meaning that eluded her.

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Manufactured Differences Between People

Moving to a different country has also made me an astute observer of the ways in which humans divide themselves up into neat groups. If in India caste and class are the primary drivers of such divisions, in the United States it seems to be race. Moving to a different country has given me a perspective on these manufactured differences between people, the dehumanization that people who are lower in the hierarchy are routinely subjected to still, and the way people from different groups interact with each other.

Moving to a different country has also made me reflect on the idea of home. What does it mean to belong to a place? Do I belong only if the majority in a country says I belong? I feel like I belong here; is that not enough? Do I have to change aspects of my identity? I do not have answers to any of these questions, but for now, I'm just glad to be here, immersing myself in a different culture while having an opportunity to stay in touch with family back in the country where I grew up.

Guest Article

Dieting Put Me on the Fast Track to an Eating Disorder
A Personal Perspective: *Key to recovery was understanding binging was a symptom.*

Victoria Maxwell

I remember watching her in the bathroom as she weighed herself. There she was, standing on our beat-up white metal scale with her head bent, squinting her eyes to see the exact number. A number my mom was apparently unhappy with.

"Should I lose some weight?" I asked her.

My mom stepped off the scale and said, "You could lose a little, I guess."

That comment was like a gun at the starting line. It put me on the fast track to an eating disorder.

Food can be a source of pleasure and comfort. It can be a source of struggle. For others, like me, it was both.

My relationship with food changed that day in the bathroom when my mom and I went on a diet together. I was 17. It would be another 14 years before I would have a healthy relationship with eating, exercise, and my body.

I didn't need to go on a diet. I was at a healthy weight. I didn't see it this way, though, and my mom's comment just further confirmed that.

It was the Woman's Day magazine's "Eat-All-Day Diet." What's not to love? Eat all day and lose weight? How good is that? Well, it wasn't good. At all. That's where it all began with a puny article from a US monthly.

Well, to be fair, it didn't really kick it off. My eating disorder was a symptom of myriad underlying issues: early trauma, undiagnosed anxiety, witnessing daily rage and emotional abuse at home, and living with parents who had a mental illness (one diagnosed, the other not).

I was sort of a textbook case. I was controlling food as a way to cope with the uncontrollable situation at home. I didn't know those were the reasons. I didn't even know I was experiencing an official disorder. I just called it my "food problem." I have pages after pages in journals where I write about my "pig-outs," binges, and inability to be "normal" with food; my desperation to find a solution.

Binge. Restrict. Over-exercise. Repeat.

The diet started a pattern of restricting calories and an obsessive focus on food and body size. One day after too little food for too long, I inhaled what seemed like the contents of our fridge and kitchen cupboards. Nothing was off-limits. To be so out of control was frightening. The scale of shame and guilt I felt was matched only by the militant restriction of food and grueling compulsive over-exercising that followed.

Binge. Restrict. Over-exercise. Repeat. It escalated when I transitioned to university and continued after I graduated and into my early 30s.

Those of you reading who relate to this know the thinking patterns and behaviours are almost identical to someone with a substance use issue. The substance just happens to be food. Unlike an issue with alcohol or drugs, however, you can't just give up food. I italicize the just because abstaining from alcohol and drugs isn't simple either.

Over time, I started experiencing severe depression and more severe generalized anxiety: this compounded food, body image, exercise, and rumination challenges. Eventually, I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder 1 with psychotic features (the diagnosis and psychotic part is a whole other story). I didn't accept the diagnosis for four years. I was in and out of the psychiatric ward and continued to struggle both with my mental health and my eating disorder.

cont'd on pg.12

After too many hospital stays, too many failed attempts at finding solutions on my own, the fear my life would be a revolving door of being in and out of the psych ward and eventually meeting an excellent psychiatrist who I trusted, I accepted the conditions and began to understand my eating disorder behaviours.

New Strategies That Don't Include Food

My binge eating and overexercising began to subside. As my bipolar disorder and the roots of the anxiety and depression started to heal, I relied less and less on food as a coping means. It took a long time, but gradually I transitioned to using self-soothing and wellness strategies that didn't include the use of food or that focused on exercise, weight, or body shape.

Going for a walk instead of a run; writing poetry; writing in my journal; meditating; taking a hot bath; hanging out with friends; choosing to feel instead of choosing to eat (that was a hard one, still is sometimes).

My eating disorder is now part of my history but not my present. No one's more surprised than I am that I have a healthy, enjoyable relationship even with food, eating, exercise, and my body. I consider cooking to be one of my favourite hobbies. I would never have imagined that to be possible. As cliché as it sounds: If I can do it, I know others can too.

If You're Struggling

If you're struggling with an eating disorder, don't give up. Don't give in. Reach out for help. The journey is hard. But recovery is possible. Life can feel like a gift again. I promise.



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MC-CAMFT **Mission Statement**

MC-CAMFT is dedicated to the advancement of marriage and family therapists, to the promotion of high standards of professional ethics and qualifications of its members, and to expanding the recognition and utilization of the profession in Monterey County.

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