

Interview of Jessica Booth, LMFT, LCAS-A from Cognitive Psychiatry of Chapel Hill by Dogwood Studio

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Jennifer: I have Jessica Booth from Cognitive Psychiatry of Chapel Hill with me today. Thank you, Jessica for joining us.

Jessica: Thank you for having me.

Jennifer: What makes CPCH different from other practices?

Jessica: There are a couple of things that make Cognitive Psychiatry different. Of course, I am biased because I care so much about the practice. There are a lot of things that we feel are different from practices in the area. One thing is, I can't say enough about my team of folks that I have working in the practice. We have all different types of licenses in our practices. We have doctors, nurse practitioners and we have therapists. Even our therapists are different licensures. We have clinical social workers. I am a LMFT, a marriage and family therapist, and we have mental health counselors. So there are different licenses that we have. That is really important to me because we want to try to collaborate with one another other and try to help one another in treating our clients in the best way that we possibly can. One of my favorite parts about working with CPCH is my team of people who have different backgrounds, different interests and specialties and we can all come together, learn from each other and collaborate with each other and try to get the best outcome we possibly can for our clients. Which I think is a step ahead from what other places will do for you, at least in this area.

One other thing I really like about it is, we definitely operate from an integrated care perspective. We don't just focus on the mental health of our clients. We focus on the mental health, the spiritual health, emotional health, relationship health and physical health. We try to treat people in a

way that they are not just in a mental health bubble. They live in an environment full other people who contribute to their situation, to their stress and their mental health in general. We operate from that full integrated lens.

The last thing that I think makes us really different and peaceful is that whenever you walk into our office, which people are doing now more than have been in the past. Whenever you step into our office, we have a very peaceful environment that you walk into. And we have worked really hard to make our office feel like a spa. You kind of walk in as though you are walking into a day spa. We want it to feel that way because we want you to want to be there. A lot of mental health practices in the area will have an office that maybe throw in a desk and a chair or two and you have to sit there uncomfortably and try to work through things that are very difficult for you usually. In our office, we make sure that you are comfortable. We make sure that you have a bottle water if you would like it. We take that the extra step to make sure you are comfortable and that you feel safe and comforted in the location that we are at before we get started which I think can make a big difference in the outcome of the treatment. Those three things really differentiate us from the other practices in the area.

Jennifer: That is really wonderful. I am picturing the space that you have being so peaceful, calm and welcoming. So that someone can come in and feel relaxed and really connect to their therapist.

Jessica: It makes a difference when you can walk in and feel comfortable and relaxed and not having to worry about where you are sitting or what you are doing or whatever. You can solely focus; I am comfortable, I can pay attention and be present with my therapist or provider and can get through whatever I need to get to that day.

Jennifer: That is a nice image. You mentioned you have more people walking in than ever. I have a feeling it has a lot to do with the pandemic we

just had in the last year and a half. Do you have some more you like to speak to about that?

Jessica: The pandemic has been unprecedented to say the least. It has had some benefits. One being that we have learned how to do telehealth much better than in the past. It was by necessity but something good for us. We learned as therapists and providers how to be more effective on a computer than we have ever before. It is a benefit that will never go away now that we have the skill set that we have. That has been great.

But one of the downsides of the pandemic is that it has created a lot of issues for our clients. We thankfully have been able to open our office back up to the public and we are seeing quite a few people in person right now. We have an opportunity still to do telehealth or in person work. The vast majority of our clients are choosing in person work right just to be able to get out again and practice being out and open in public. That is one of the reasons why our spa like environment is so important right now.

The pandemic has caused a lot of anxiety on a grand scale. Even people who didn't suffer from anxiety before now absolutely suffer from anxiety now. The social anxiety aspect of things has grown exponentially. I heard on the radio yesterday, it was one of those trivia questions that they talk about on the radio. He asked, "2/3 of people now can not tolerate what since the pandemic started"? And the answer was crowds. People don't like to be in crowds anymore. They don't like being in a crowd anymore; people don't like being around people. They don't know how to handle those situations emotionally because we have been out of practice for so long.

There has been some increased paranoia with some people. A lot of people struggle with obsessive compulsive tendencies especially in terms of maintaining cleanliness from germs and fearfulness of getting sick or catching COVID or other illness, flu and things like that. A lot of concerns of hypochondriasis and feeling like you are sick all the time, fearing that you are sick all the time. Having some really catastrophic thoughts whenever

you wake up and you have the sniffles. You might have allergies but you might feel that you have COVID and it could lead you down a dark path. We have experienced a lot of concerns with that and a lot of decreased patience with people because all of this, because the heightened anxiety and the worry and things like that. We are trying to work on the aftermath of the pandemic right now with our clients to find a new normal, to be able to make peace with what has happened, and to be able to move forward in a way that feels positive for them. That might look different for different people. Everyone has experienced some kind of loss in this situation. Some people have lost family members, some people lost friends to COVID. Some people have lost their jobs. Some people have dropped out of school because they might have ADHD or other symptoms and could not keep up with online learning. I have a lot of parents of young children who really struggled through the last year to make sure that their children were getting the proper education. It has been a struggle for everyone. We are trying to work through, how do we come back from this and feel somewhat normal? How do we get some sense of normalcy and be able to move forward? That is one thing that is a main focus for us. I do want to say also, that our clinicians are right there with everyone else. We are human, too. We have been through the pandemic too just like you have. It has been a struggle. We have people in our office that have lost loved ones, lost friends and we might be struggling with our own anxiety or our own stressors from the pandemic. It is important to realize we are all human. That we are doing the best we can. It is important that we do that together and not feel like you are on your own trying to forage this new path.

Jennifer: I love that vision of it is more of a partnership. That we are going to guide you through this, that you are not alone at all. We have been isolated for so long with the pandemic or stuck at home with loved ones for longer periods of time than normal.

I see that CPCH offers collaborative medical management psychotherapy and wellness coaching all together. How is this different from the traditional approach?

Jessica: It's different because the traditional approach, at least in North Carolina, we are trying to catch with all the other states. Many states up North and in the Midwest have been able to pioneer some new approaches to mental health and in North Carolina has been behind quite a bit in that. We are trying to catch up with them. The traditional approach here in North Carolina, is often a very specialized type of treatment. If you have mental health issues you go to a therapist. If you have physical health issues you go to an MD. If you have muscle related issues you might go to physical therapy. It is very specialized and you go to different specialists in different locations for the treatment of your special issues. What we are trying to do is create a more integrated approach to where if you need medication for mental health, then you can be able to receive that in the same place that you can receive therapy and in the same place you can receive some wellness coaching and in the same place you can receive some physical health coaching. It doesn't mean that we are nutrition specialists or that we are going to try to encroach on other people's professions. We know a lot about the effects that mind has on the body and that the body on the mind. We can provide some general suggestions on some health benefits that we can start implementing: some habits, sleep hygiene, having healthy nutrition and adding some healthy movement in your day. Those types of things are not generally discussed in a typical mental health setting. It is more like here is your medication, do this worksheet over the weekend and that's kind of all there is. It is more of a robust approach to treating all aspects of a person's health and trying to do it in the same location so people don't have to go to this specialist and that specialist dragging it out. We want to talk to each other and collaborate with each other as professionals and be able to create more positive outcomes for the client.

Jennifer: That is really wonderful. I think hopefully people will see that it is not just mental health. It is not just physical health. That is all one big picture of their overall health.

Jessica: Absolutely, our treatment model for North Carolina in general has always been a treatment-based, disease-focused model. You go to the doctor only when you are sick. You go to the ER when you are dying. You go to a mental health professional when your mental health is so bottom you can't go any lower. That's not how we need to be anymore. We need to focus on being a preventive-based, wellness-focused model. That is what Cognitive Psychiatry of Chapel Hill is really focusing on. Yes, we can help you whenever you are at the lowest of the low and we will make sure you get taken care of you in the way you need. But why do we need to wait until you get to the lowest of the low before you get some help? We want to try to prevent you from having to feel as low as you can be. We want you to see, "hey I am really struggling right now. I don't really know what it is. I can't really put my finger on it but I know I am not myself." We can work with that the same way as someone who is at the lowest of the low and can't go any lower. And the outcome is so much more positive and so much less work for the client whenever we can treat them on a preventative-based and wellness-focused model. That is another way that we are trying to break the mold of medicine here in North Carolina. We want to promote wellness and not just fix you to the point of non-sickness. There is a difference, and we want to emphasize that difference.

Jennifer: I think people realize they need to go in for annual physicals and body health checks. But because there is a stigma of mental health, people wait until it is impacting their lives to a great degree before checking in with themselves. I was hoping during the pandemic people had some time, some retrospective time to realize that they have been going along day to day, the same thing. Have you seen an increase in people's ability to diagnose that they need to check in with their mental health, or that their loved ones being around each other can help each other to know the need to come into CPCH and get preventative care or maintenance care?

Jessica: Absolutely. We have seen people who maybe typically wouldn't have the time because of their job or because of other responsibilities who have really checked in with themselves over this pandemic and have said,

“I need some help. I need someone to help guide me through this.” Maybe, they have baggage that they have been holding onto for some time and they haven’t noticed it on a day-to-day basis. And now they have time to notice that they don’t want to carry it anymore. It’s too heavy. “I don’t want to carry this around the rest of my life.” So they have been able to reach out and get help. It has been very very noticeable. Prior to the pandemic happening, we might have gotten 1 or 2 new intakes requests in a day; maybe 10 a week, max. Since the pandemic has happened, especially since they decreased the mask mandate in the state and we have been able to open back up, we are receiving over 100 intakes a week right now. If that tells you anything about how much people are noticing what’s going on with their mental health. I think it is the best indicator we have. People are really trying to promote their wellness now. And a lot of people are struggling, as well. It has created a lot of change in that area right now.

Jennifer: I would say, in our yoga therapy world, that people frequently think about yoga to improve their physical status such as arthritis or pain in the neck. But really yoga brings you to the present moment and focusing your mind on what you are doing now, forgetting about the meeting you had, the bills you haven’t paid yet and you are thinking right now this pose and my breath and check in with myself and there so many improvements to the mental health while practicing yoga. And I really see that yoga therapy can fit in with what you are discussing right now. It is a wonderful other piece. How do you see yoga therapy fitting in with your approach for improving mental health?

Jessica: There are a lot of reasons why I think that yoga could really help with mental health. One being the simple fact that a lot of times yoga is done in a studio with other people around. There is a sort of community of individuals that come together to partake in the classes and maybe become friends or at least acquaintances where we talk to each other before and after and really get to know each other. That aspect alone I think would be one of the main reasons why I would recommend that someone go to yoga; just to be able to get out again and start socializing and build some kind of

sense of community in their lives, to be able to meet people that are like them, that want to be able to promote their health and promote their wellness and to be able to talk to those people regularly and to have something to look forward to. Even if they don't have something to look forward to, they can look forward to their yoga class and their yoga instructor or the friend that they met in the class. That alone would be amazing.

I think aside from that, being able to learn how to be present is something that I think a lot of people who know how to do it take for granted. We in our offices try to teach how to be present, how to be mindful, how to take those deep breaths to be able to calm themselves down and really ground themselves into their body and be able to bring themselves down when they are out of touch or spinning out of control. It takes practice. That is something that I really value in yoga. Every time a person steps on the mat, they are practicing those breaths; they are practicing that mindfulness. Your yoga instructor talks about grounding yourself into your body and feeling your energy down all the way into your toes, feeling the breath all the way through your heart; being able to feel that connection between your mind and your body. A lot of times people struggle with the feeling of disconnect between that mind and body; that they might be conflicting with one another or that they have different priorities from one another. It is hard to get them in sync. Yoga is one of those aspects that promotes you being in sync with your body and mind together fulfilling one purpose.

That is what we are trying to get in therapy. That feeling that you can get whenever you feel that in sync mind-body experience in yoga. That is what we want to try to harness and that is what we need to practice. Therapy is a helpful tool. I think it benefits everyone. I think everyone on the planet should have a therapist. I have a therapist. I think all my therapists should have therapists. It is a very important and helpful tool. A lot of people have the misconception that change happens in the therapy office. That's not true. The discussions and the learning are what happens in the therapy office. Change happens outside the therapy office. Change happens whenever

you start to implement the things that you learned and discussed in the therapy office. As much as we would love to be able to walk around with all of our clients to be able to see the change happen day to day, we just can't do that. So being able to refer them to a yoga practice like yours that really appreciates bringing in the mindfulness and being able to ground people into that mind-body experience can create another atmosphere for them to practice what they are learning in therapy already and promote that implementation. So that they can come back into therapy next week and show what they have done and what they have learned and to make it a habit in their life rather than something that they do temporarily and then let go of later on.

Jennifer: That is wonderful. I can see how they can really intertwine and reinforce what you are teaching them about pulling themselves into their mindfulness and reconnecting their mind and body because that is what we hope to accomplish in yoga therapy as well.

Jessica: And yoga can also be a spiritual experience. It doesn't always have to be. But I think people sometimes need that spirituality in their lives and they feel different when they do have that spirituality. It can be a just a connection with nature and not a higher power. It can be a connection with themselves or their family or nature. And bringing the spirituality into the yoga practice as well can promote that mindfulness and experience as well. And promote those positive outcomes outside the therapy room.

Jennifer: Do you have any other thoughts for how someone would know if CPCH is a good fit for them?

Jessica: I think I would just reiterate that CPCH is a good fit for anyone who is on the spectrum of needing a tune up with their mental health, if they are struggling physically and their doctor is doing as much as they can and they can't do anything else and it leads to the mental health side of acceptance is needed, or whether they are at the lowest of their low and feeling depressed, lonely or outcast. CPCH can help. I want to encourage



people to do what they can to take 30 seconds and check in with themselves and ask themselves, “What do I need right now?”. That can really help us to understand more about what we are experiencing and how we can get help with it. The next thing is to reach out. If you feel like there is something that could help in this situation, if there is a little tuning up or if there is a little bit of something to be gained by working on yourself. I think it is a good opportunity for you to reach out to us. Give us a call. Shoot us an email. We would be happy to help you change your life in the way you want it to be changed and to promote wellness in a way that we haven’t been able to for quite some time now. I think that is something we don’t need to take for granted.

Jennifer: That is a great message to end with. Thank you so much. Thanks for joining us.