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Amelia Knott is an art psychotherapist who specializes in the mental health impacts of hustle culture and the attention economy. She runs a private practice offering clinical art therapy, groups, and open studios. Amelia describes herself as 'chronically online', using social media to challenge the status quo of the wellness industry and advocate for digital ethics and creativity as a force for healing. She is currently writing a book about wellbeing in the digital age which will be published Fall 2024. Amelia is a member of the Canadian Art Therapy Association and the College of Registered Art Therapists of Ontario. Welcome, Amelia.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Welcome back to Not Boring CEs. I'm here with Amelia Knott from arttherapyinreallife.com.

And we're talking about art therapy. We're talking about creativity, and I'm really excited. Thank you for being here.

Amelia Knott she/her: Me, too. This is my favorite thing ever to talk about yay, so

Allison Puryear (she/her): can we just like start with why, creativity is therapeutic?

Amelia Knott she/her: Sure, I mean, for so many reasons. I think inherently, most of us have a sense that creativity is good for mental health. It's a good way of taking care of ourselves, but in the context of therapy practice and mental health.

Amelia Knott she/her: I think that, like creativity gives us this opportunity to expand our tool belt for understanding and processing our emotions right like. For some of us, language can feel

Amelia Knott she/her: kind of limiting. Some of our experiences don't fit perfectly into language, and, like the analytical and cognitive sides of our brains, are really powerful and really useful, and sometimes it's helpful to have something like color or shape, or texture or metaphor to get into what we're experiencing when trying to nail it down in language feels kind of challenging

Allison Puryear (she/her): it's interesting too, because, I think about how quickly creativity goes by the wayside for many of us, when we're stressed out and when it can be like

Allison Puryear (she/her): our safety net but we don't always. We just don't always treat it that way. Do you think some people like what?

Allison Puryear (she/her): you know? The answer to the question I was with asked. So let me ask a

better question. Why do you think some people are so much more attuned to creativity being helpful

Allison Puryear (she/her): than others?

Amelia Knott she/her: I mean, there's so many reasons for that. And I think what you said about creativity going by the wayside, for a lot of us has to do with just how

we were encouraged to be creative as really young people. I think it's a really common experience that maybe we had art classes through elementary school. But at a certain point we internalize this messaging either from teachers or caregivers, or just the culture at large, that

Amelia Knott she/her: creativity is for people who possess a certain kind of skill or talent, or that it's not really worth our time unless it's going to become

Amelia Knott she/her: our career, or unless we're making in a way that it's that really narrow definition of like accurate

Amelia Knott she/her: eurocentric, western marketable art right like,

if we can't sell it or turn into our jobs, then we shouldn't bother spending our time on it, because there's other things that might be more important. And I think in reality

it's such a human experience to want to take the things that are occurring inside of us and put them outside right to express what is happening in our bodies, in our brains

Amelia Knott she/her: and bring them out into the world. And again, that's why creativity, I think, is so therapeutic because it gives us this opportunity

Amelia Knott she/her: to take something that is living inside of our bodies and actually

get to handle it in a tactile way actually get to manipulate it, maybe even change the story right?

Something you said just sparked something that actually ties into your other conversation in

here about social media ethics. And I'm thinking about how those of us who did not feel good enough

Allison Puryear (she/her): at art,

or whatever kind of creativity we were doing when we were younger.

Allison Puryear (she/her): about how that might be, where a lot of people are creating on social media and getting the message of like, why are you putting your personal stuff out here. Why are you

crying on the Internet like that kind of thing? But it is their way of trying to be creative

and put something out there. That is an external, manifest manifestation of what they feel inside.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So something that you just said sparked that in me. And I was like, oh, this makes a lot more sense a lot of ways like in the absence of other kinds of art or in just like an appreciation of what social media provides us.

Allison Puryear (she/her): But there's not something tangible we can hold, but we do have to get it out somehow, right like we all have things we need to express in some way, and we don't always have easy avenues for that.

Amelia Knott she/her: Well, and that brings up a really good point that, like creativity doesn't just need to be like the traditional media we think of right. It's not just painting or drawing or writing perfectly polished poetry. It might be the way you assemble a playlist. It might be the way you create content or share vulnerably of yourself. You can hold a really wide definition of creativity. And I'm glad you mentioned social media because I think it taps into this again really human instinct

Amelia Knott she/her: to be seen and connect with other people in a vulnerable way. Right art can do that. And also the ways we show up online or the ways we show up in relationship are all just avenues

Allison Puryear (she/her): for being seen and finding community and universality with other people. Absolutely. Yeah, yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): I'm thinking about like

Allison Puryear (she/her): my own experience. I can't remember if I've shared this was something

we recorded, or if we just talked about it, but, like my own experience being raised by 2 artists like my mom's, a sculptor and a painter. My father's a musician, but also could like draw anything in the world. And I literally like.

Allison Puryear (she/her): can barely make a stick figure look like a human. So I do not have the same kind of creativity and artistic talents that my parents have.

And when I was younger that felt like a failure. And they're also. I thought that there was this expectation of me as the daughter of my parents to be

Allison Puryear (she/her): naturally good at something. And II there was a time when I was like, maybe that's in my head. And then I had an art teacher. Basically tell me,

like. Well, you didn't get your mom's genes, did you? So? I know,

I know. So I know it was Miss Campbell, my middle school art teacher, shout out to Miss Campbell.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Hope you changed your ways, but just thinking about how like for me,

that shut down visual art like I was done with visual arts. Luckily I did a lot of performing arts, so I still had a different way to be creative.

Allison Puryear (she/her): But we get these messages when we're young. We internalize them, or we don't. And

Allison Puryear (she/her): if you're 30 or you're 48, or you're, you know, 25. And you're thinking about

Amelia Knott she/her: creativity as not for you, you've been missing out for a really long time on an outlet that could be really, potentially life-saving for you in a lot of ways. And you know what Alison is so interesting is, I'm not like a talented drawer either. Right? Like drawing classes

Amelia Knott she/her: like that, was my Adhd, and just like not having an interest in kind of belaboring something or finding accuracy. I think, had I had a different kind of set of circumstances in my upbringing, I would have also kind of met the end of of my art, I mean one of the privileges of my childhood, I think, was painting in a class that was mostly focused on abstract and looking at kind of color and composition, and using that as kind of my own

Amelia Knott she/her: therapeutic process, even though it wasn't technically heart therapy. But.

Amelia Knott she/her: like you say, so many of us miss out on this chance to tap into something creative, because we're only ever shown the value of a finished product, not what the process can feel like.

Allison Puryear (she/her): right? Good old capitalism.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah. Yeah. Well, let's so the process. Can we talk a little bit more about process, and why? It's important therapeutically, far more important than the product

Amelia Knott she/her: and this is the basis

Amelia Knott she/her: one of the big differences between like an art class, and an art therapy session is the focus really shifts between making something that is finished, that you're happy with. That is good. I'm using heavy air quotes. If this is, if anyone's just listening to that, and instead, we get to focus on well, how does the process feel like what's happening internally before begin? What is it like to actually

Amelia Knott she/her: feel and touch the materials? What am I expressing?

What decisions am I making? And like those the kinds of parts of the process that an art therapist would help their client explore and unpack.

Amelia Knott she/her: and we might not actually end up with with anything at the end. Right? Something that feels like you could put it up on the wall or frame it. But there might be something in the process, usually something in the process that is interesting, and that can be a really useful tool in exploring whatever emotional concerns or mental health issues that that person is bringing into session.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah. I think about the slowing down it requires, too. like it gets us out of our heads.

Allison Puryear (she/her): To some extent. It can be very meditative

Allison Puryear (she/her): as well to be working on something. I'm thinking about these little like side side benefits. Having been an art therapy, a group art therapy client before. And how powerful it was for me to be like. I had to be

restricted for a little while to my non dominant hand, because my perfectionism, like I couldn't.

Allison Puryear (she/her): I couldn't do it. I couldn't be vulnerable because

it was so bad. And how, using my non dominant hand and not being

allowed to use my dominant hand. And it basically being required

Allison Puryear (she/her): to look bad. really saved me in a lot of ways.

Amelia Knott she/her: And that's, I think, again, where art can be so powerful is, we have very few

opportunities in our daily lives, in our jobs and our relationships, where we have an arena

Amelia Knott she/her: to do something imperfect with low consequences, right? So

to get to practice doing something imperfectly within, like a safe therapeutic relationship.

Amelia Knott she/her: Where, like, it's okay that it doesn't look the way I anticipated,

or it's not something that I would post online,

or that I would sell like having that experience for yourself

Amelia Knott she/her: is kind of a little stepping stone into. Well,

maybe there are other places in my life where it would be okay to be imperfect. And not only that,

then you have this artifact, this evidence that you can carry with you of like, yeah,

that little moment of imperfection was safe. Maybe it was fun. Maybe it revealed something

about me or expressed something that I have trouble expressing in other places in my life.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah. I am thinking about

just like creative blocks in general, because

there are those of us who tell ourselves we're not creative,

and that's a big block. But then there are a lot of people who

Allison Puryear (she/her): identify as creative,

who find their own blocks along the way. What are some of those that people come across?

Amelia Knott she/her: Well, I think this comes up especially.

It's really interesting working with clients who maybe do have art training

or do something in a creative field. Maybe they're writers or performers.

Amelia Knott she/her: And that's actually a really interesting experience. When someone is in tune with one type of creativity to get to kind of step back and make in a way that doesn't have those same demands. So I think perfectionism impacts us all, whether it's because we felt like,

Oh, I can't make art. I'm not a creative person, or I make art in this one very specific way. And

Amelia Knott she/her: the stakes are really really high. So getting to create in a totally different way, maybe with like your non-dominant

hand or materials that you wouldn't normally use kind of opens back up

Amelia Knott she/her: the possibility of the creativity existing in some different way.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah. we're going to do an experiential activity. Right?

Amelia Knott she/her: We are. Yeah, I thought this would be kind of a cool way for for listeners and

watchers to just kind of see what an art therapist might do in session. But also, yeah, as an example

Amelia Knott she/her: of how like using kind of visual tools can be

really revealing of kind of what's going on for us outside of conversation or language.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, so should they grab.

Amelia Knott she/her: should they grab anything if they're if they're not driving or not, follow along? And and to be clear as well. This isn't us doing art therapy and not gonna analyze or kind of. We're not gonna go deep on this one, but it will be an example of what can happen without fancy materials without a lot of time. If you have 3 pieces of just plain paper, you can go ahead and grab those right now. I know you've got some right in front of you. I do

Amelia Knott she/her: so. What I'll have you do is kind of grab

your first piece of paper. We're gonna make 3 sculptures and pretty quickly.

And so there's lots of ways that paper can be manipulated. So maybe that is

Amelia Knott she/her: crunching it up.

Amelia Knott she/her: We're not trying to make anything specifically. Just

Amelia Knott she/her: that's 3 different experiences of how paper can look or feel. So maybe there's crumpling. Maybe rip

the next one or roll it. So let's just

spend yeah about a minute playing with paper and seeing what 3 ways that you can manipulate it.

Amelia Knott she/her: I'll do the same over here, alright.

Amelia Knott she/her: And for anyone following along as you're going like this is an opportunity to kind of slow down and experience something

Amelia Knott she/her: paying extra attention to just what the paper feels like in your hands.

Amelia Knott she/her: Maybe the sounds it's making. I'm not sure that's being picked up by my microphone

Amelia Knott she/her: could be the smell of it.

Amelia Knott she/her: and something I'll also say while we're creating is, it's okay to make something you don't like. Like. If you have an experience of oh, I don't like the way that turned out, that's just information.

Amelia Knott she/her: So whenever you're ready, I'm ready. Now. How was that?

Allison Puryear (she/her): It was fun? It was yeah, it was.

Allison Puryear (she/her): It's I'm still playing with this one.

Allison Puryear (she/her): I think there comes that point where you don't know when you're done

or not. I usually jump early. I've noticed as I'm like, Okay, that's good. I don't wanna mess it up

Allison Puryear (she/her): And also noticing how each form or each action

Allison Puryear (she/her): felt like me or not like me.

Amelia Knott she/her: Hmm, that makes sense

Amelia Knott she/her: it totally makes sense and actually, one of my favorite art therapy directives is to take

Amelia Knott she/her: 2, identical sets of materials and make one that you don't like, and when you do like or when it feels like you,

and when it doesn't feel like you, and in art therapy session a therapist would help

Amelia Knott she/her: kind of process like what parts of that felt like you.

How did you know? Like there's lots in in the processing of the artwork that can be revealing or really useful in a session.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Amelia Knott she/her: So in terms of what you've made, which one

Amelia Knott she/her: feels most like you, whether that's your mood right now, or you in general, and you don't necessarily need to know why.

But is there one that you gravitate towards this one feels more like me.

Allison Puryear (she/her): It's just very symmetrical and orderly, and like

Allison Puryear (she/her): you know, like I'm a tissue folder like

Allison Puryear (she/her): it's very it stands up on its own. There's probably a metaphor there.

Allison Puryear (she/her): yeah. So it's just for people who are

Allison Puryear (she/her): listening. I just folded the paper a bunch of times, and it is like a 3D triangle kind of or half pyramid, maybe.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Amelia Knott she/her: So that one feels most like me.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So if this was an art therapy session. There'd be some things to kind of pull on there. Stands up on its own

Amelia Knott she/her: folded, I think, did you use the word orderly? Those could be things that we we draw on. Then the other thing that could happen in a session is,

we could ask, Okay, well, what what does that need? This sculpture,

and there could be a whole other creative process around? Does it need to change?

Does it need color? Does it need to be protected like maybe a whole session involves

Allison Puryear (she/her): building a box or an environment that it would want to

live in. And another thing that could happen in an art therapy session is,

we could repeat that at the very end that could be a check in to kind of gauge how we're entering.

Amelia Knott she/her: and then we could do it again and take a look at okay,

what's different between the beginning and end of session as a way of giving some some language

or some visual metaphors to the internal shift that's happened in our time together.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Amazing. Should I show the other ones, too?

Amelia Knott she/her: Yeah. Yeah. So that so this one

Allison Puryear (she/her): feels the least like me. It's just like a crumpled.

It's an unintentionally crumpled paper like I realized I was like,

and I was also really mashing it, trying to get it like a flat, crumpled

Allison Puryear (she/her): which just feels messy. But that's okay. A little mess is all right. And then I have this one that is just a bunch of semi symmetrical tears.

Allison Puryear (she/her): that are almost

Allison Puryear (she/her): wave-like.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So those are mine.

Hmm! I actually use some similar ones. I have a crumple that didn't feel like me.

Amelia Knott she/her: I had a crumple that was turning into kind of rounded edge, and then

Amelia Knott she/her: some tears as well, and in an art therapy session, the ways that we might

process. One would be talking about how the process felt like, what did you start with?

What actually happens while you were making, we could go into. Okay. Well, what do you see?

Amelia Knott she/her: Right? The crumple. You could describe it in a phenomenological way,

and that would give us lots to jump off from. And then there's the metaphorical level like,

does this remind you of something? Does it look like something? Or is there a kind of a

personal symbol that's coming from any of these pieces like there's lots of avenues that an art therapist might go in helping the client look for the metaphors or the meaning in their process.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Awesome? Yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So

Allison Puryear (she/her): we've had an example of what an art therapist might

Allison Puryear (she/her): explore. Can we talk some about like

Allison Puryear (she/her): like, what is art therapy?

Amelia Knott she/her: And yes, that example, that we just did perhaps isn't something that another clinician would do if art therapy isn't their specialty. But art therapy specifically is a modality of psychotherapy that combines expressive art making and counseling skills to help clients process emotions, regulate, kind of meet their treatment goals.

Amelia Knott she/her: And it's more than just kind of using art as a way of like regulating. Or it's more than just

Amelia Knott she/her: what's that word I'm looking for, recreation. I think a big misconception of art therapy is. Oh, it's like the groups that happen in retirement homes, or it's for fun. It's relaxation. And it absolutely can be that can be a piece of it. But what art therapists specifically do is have training around the actual processing and expressing of emotions within the visual materials.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So

Allison Puryear (she/her): can we talk some about an art therapist versus art therapy protected terms, those kinds of things.

Amelia Knott she/her: Yeah. And this is something really important. I don't know, if you've seen on

like psychology today, you can just click the art therapy box without verifying any kind of specific

training, and just like psychotherapist or psychiatrist or counselor depending on the State and the regulations. Art therapy in Canada and United States is a protected term.

Amelia Knott she/her: So art therapists need to have a master's level training specifically in art therapy, and just like other therapeutic modalities that involves a certain number of practicum hours supervision specifically within this one modality. So this is all to say that unless you've got the specific training as an art therapist and belong to an art therapy, regulatory body, you can't use the term art therapy.

Amelia Knott she/her: Now, that's not to gate keep creativity. There's lots of ways that art and expressing ourselves can be therapeutic personally, and that other kinds

of practitioners can bring creativity in. But I think the line exists when we're moving from.

Amelia Knott she/her: say, art as a calming or regulating technique or a mindfulness exercise into the act of actually using an art process to explore an emotion or to be treatment.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So I think about like people like me who are not trained art therapists. What would be a safe way to bring creativity or art into session, and how would we know which clients that would be most beneficial for

Amelia Knott she/her: it's big. And I think it comes back to this, like we don't know what we don't know, we can feel, like, oh, yeah, it would be okay for me to like, say.

Amelia Knott she/her: bring in some materials and have a client like represent a memory from childhood. And like, there's some some big risks involved. And we. And that's because, especially that, like memory and trauma lives in the visual side of the brain. So it's really possible to be activated suddenly in a creative process, in a way that we might not be in in conversation. So I yeah, that caution is.

Amelia Knott she/her: it's just again we don't know what we don't know, but going back to what could be safe, I think when it comes to like teaching coping skills, something that is mindful, something that is regulating.

Amelia Knott she/her: So maybe you have coloring books in your office, or maybe like drawing a breath spiral. That's one activity I really like where a client would focus on their breath while drawing right. It gives them something to focus on, something tactile in here and now, because sometimes just breathing or focusing on the body is too overwhelming or

Amelia Knott she/her: or hard to really visualize. So I think, yeah, mindful techniques as coping skills can be appropriate.

Amelia Knott she/her: I mean the other thing. And again, this will go down to individual discretion. But I know, for lots of clients like making eye contact during session while they're having a conversation can be pretty overwhelming. So, having like

Amelia Knott she/her: something as a fidget or play dough, something to kind of do with your hands

while you're talking, can kind of be a third place to put the focus. And I found sometimes that really helps with vulnerability or helps the client feel comfortable in discussions where maybe

just the sitting in the eye contact feels really, really direct, but again, like the place to be cautious is when it comes to the processing. So what like a talk therapist wouldn't do

Amelia Knott she/her: is ask, you know,

what do you see in that? Or what's the metaphor, or start to kind of pull out

Amelia Knott she/her: meaning in in the piece. But again, when it comes to something that is

Amelia Knott she/her: helping the client to kind of relax, regulate,

I think that can be can be safe, depending on the specific context you're working in.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, I'm thinking about working with kids, too,

and how often art supplies are used in working with kids, and how they

don't always have the language and so like, does the line shift for them like, is there

Allison Puryear (she/her): more kind of delving into the work itself. That's safe with kids.

Allison Puryear (she/her): If you're not a trained art therapist, or is it still?

Amelia Knott she/her: Hold the line back where you would with an adult?

Amelia Knott she/her: That's a good question, and you know,

I don't work with kids. My practice is all working with adults. My practicum did

include working with kids. But like a play therapist isn't technically an art therapist

if they have that different training, but would likely use things like a sand tray or art materials.

Amelia Knott she/her: so I think it depends on your modality and and your

scope of practice. If it's something that you haven't been trained in,

or haven't kind of experienced or have supervision around

Amelia Knott she/her: using caution. But with kids like play can look like so many things right?

You might know better than I. Like, have you ever used art

materials or had things like that out in kid sessions. I mean, back in the day when I worked with kids,

we always had art supplies in the rooms. This was back in agency work. But I would just be like,

Hey, you wanna draw and color with me kind of like while we talked about things,
and sometimes at the end I'd be like what you got, maybe like, oh, I drew my family, and I'd be like

Allison Puryear (she/her): I don't know all the rules for interpreting this. So I'm not going to. I'm just gonna be like, oh, I drew my dog so I think there's a I was always afraid of stepping in it, because that's the way I am like I'm always gonna be. I'm gonna veer towards overly cautious

and respecting a limit more than I'm gonna be like oops. So I probably was a lot more safe.

Allison Puryear (she/her): But I know that, you know,

I know a lot of kid therapists who use a lot of art and maybe diving into it more so. I'm kind of asking on their benefit for their on their behalf, because I'm not entirely sure. So

Amelia Knott she/her: I think you have it exactly right, Allison. The not interpreting piece is so important, and we might assume that an art therapist interprets or sees a certain color or a certain symbol, and thinks, Oh, okay, that's what's going on there. And in a person centered art therapy approach, we actually don't make interpretations. Any meaning

Amelia Knott she/her: comes from the artists themselves,

so I wouldn't even ask a client like, oh, what's going on with the the crying woman in the piece, because I'm assuming it's a woman they're crying.

Amelia Knott she/her: But the question you asked like, What do you got? What's going on here? Being

curious about what's happening? I think means that the client gets to tell you about what they've experienced, and that curiosity can look like, how does that process for you like what changed for you before and after, or moving into the relational. How is it to share that with me?

Allison Puryear (she/her): I love that. Okay, cool. And I'm I'm thinking about like a CE I took

Allison Puryear (she/her): years and years ago that first really introduced me to art therapy therapy as therapist. I'd already, when I was younger I'd been a client. But

Allison Puryear (she/her): it felt so like, this means this,

and this means this. So I'm I'm really interested in hearing you be like

like, let's let them interpret like, if the if somebody's feet aren't touching the ground in the picture, it doesn't necessarily mean XY or Z, or like. There were all these rules that I was like. Oh, this is intense. I had no idea. And that's like a psychodynamic therapeutic approach. Art therapy's roots are in that approach of Amelia Knott she/her: the therapists getting to interpret, or having some kind of knowledge or insight. But it it comes back to like, how do we want to hold hierarchies of power in session. Right? If I'm the expert of a client's art that's really disempowering, like Amelia Knott she/her: I think it's so much more powerful when someone gets to tell you about what something means for them. Then if they look to you, okay, I've made something. What does it mean? They'll be much more able to kind of step into their own creative practice and decide, okay, this is what feels good for me. This is how I express myself. This is.

Amelia Knott she/her: yeah. My own dictionary of meaning as opposed to needing to turn to a quote expert about what is true for them, which I mean is the same in talk therapy, right? We want to equip people to go out into the world to use the tools for themselves, not rely on another person to tell them what their life, what their emotions mean.

Allison Puryear (she/her): I'm thinking about how

Allison Puryear (she/her): like, how you would handle it if people are like. I don't know, like I don't know what it means. I just like the color like, how do you? As an art therapist? How do you

Allison Puryear (she/her): respond to that?

Amelia Knott she/her: Yeah, I kind of love when people say, I don't know. like there's a lot to open

up in in that. I mean, one place is, what's it like not to know

Amelia Knott she/her: right? What's it like to be with this thing that doesn't immediately tell you what it's about, or to kind of be uncertain

Amelia Knott she/her: right? And from there there could be another process of like,

how might we get to know? Maybe there's writing dialogue between yourself and the piece? Or maybe it's coming back to. Well, what do you know about this piece.

Amelia Knott she/her: and like oftentimes what I'll do in sessions is

Amelia Knott she/her: kind of slow way down. So we're not jumping into the metaphor or what it

means. But really, literally, what do you see like the question I'd love to ask is, okay. Pretend I can't see the work, or that I don't have the use of my eyes? How would you describe what's in front of me in like the most basic terms? So with something like this, it could be, it's

Amelia Knott she/her: a white rectangle that has been crumpled

Amelia Knott she/her: dozens or hundreds of times like. There's so many ways that you can describe something visually and in that description the way the client chooses their words and chooses what they're gonna focus on like from there. There's always something that can lead into a therapeutic process.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Are there like. is there anything with the materials that people need to be aware of and thoughtful about?

Amelia Knott she/her: Oh, totally. Yeah. I mean again, this is something around like, if you don't know, you don't know like

Amelia Knott she/her: the way art therapists might choose materials or collaborate with their client on choosing materials, has so much to do with their history or their comfort level or their sensory needs. I think a good example is like, say, I am

Amelia Knott she/her: working with a new client. I know they have a trauma history. I probably wouldn't choose a really uncontained material like I wouldn't

Amelia Knott she/her: bring out watercolors. I wouldn't. Say, okay, let's do finger painting on a giant piece what I might do instead. And as I get to know them, this could be more and more refined.

But it might be something like, I'm actually gonna take down the borders of a piece on the table.

Amelia Knott she/her: So it's really sturdy. And so there's a visual border like a metaphor for containment for the work to happen within, and I might offer kind of predictable materials

that don't smudge so that could be one way of working with material.

Amelia Knott she/her: So we're always thinking about, not just like what is the comfort, level, and preference. But what kind of are the metaphors within the material and appropriate to what the client is experiencing. And for some people like actually using visual media approaching a blank canvas is way too overwhelming right? Like the blank canvas anxiety is really real. So maybe digital tools

Amelia Knott she/her: are a safer stepping stone. Maybe we'll use something like a drawing app

where they can press undo. Maybe we'll even use like an AI art tool like Midjourney, so they can type in a prompt and see what comes up. And you know, eventually working towards

Amelia Knott she/her: tolerating, like the imperfection and the anxiety of

Amelia Knott she/her: the blank, open canvas. But there's a lot of ways that we can choose a different kind of material with a different kind of metaphor

Allison Puryear (she/her): to help them process. Whatever it is they're working on. It hadn't even occurred to me the use of like digital like digital media and art therapy like I hadn't gotten near my head yet. That's really fascinating.

Allison Puryear (she/her): alright is. Does that ever get like stratified by generation or by age. Have you noticed like.

Allison Puryear (she/her): or is it typically more clinical presentation?

Amelia Knott she/her: That's a good question.

Amelia Knott she/her: I mean, I think with all materials, there's a process of helping the client feel comfortable. Different things are uncomfortable to different people. And again, what an art therapist would do is like really, deliberately help somebody feel comfortable. So maybe if we're working with digital tools.

Amelia Knott she/her: part of that is kind of slowing down like, okay, this is how you would open this app. This is how you would save

Amelia Knott she/her: your artwork in a way that's secure. So kind of doing some

hand holding to make it comfortable to use those materials. But in a sense of

Amelia Knott she/her: like mastery that comes

Amelia Knott she/her: from approaching something that maybe you weren't comfortable with before,

can then also bleed out into their lives. So I'm not sure if there's a generational

divide between digital and non digital tools, I think younger generations that

kind of use technology more often might kind of immediately understand how to

use like an app or something like that, whereas someone who has less experience

Amelia Knott she/her: using computers or

phones might need a little bit more support getting there, but I think

Amelia Knott she/her: it can be valuable for people in both ways. I mean,

there's lots of debate in the art therapy community about the usefulness of digital

versus traditional media. I think what we can't do on a computer screen is

actually have the tactile experience of making something. Like the sensory feedback

Amelia Knott she/her: is is a really important part of art therapy. So that's what we miss when

Amelia Knott she/her: we're using canva or a drawing tool,

or something like that. But different situations, different materials.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, yeah,

I was just thinking I was thinking about it more from like the younger generation

who naturally spends more time on screens than an older generation may, and how it might feel

Allison Puryear (she/her): easier for them.

Amelia Knott she/her: but it might be more beneficial to be more tactile,

and in their real world. Yeah, no, I agree with you. I know an art therapist who, you know,

was feeling challenged, working with youth to get them to use materials. But they were amazed at at

like an AI image generator. And what could happen there? And that sparked something that could then

Amelia Knott she/her: be translated to something visual. And I mean,

that's just another opportunity for exploration with our clients like, maybe you make something digitally and make something in a tactile way like, How is that different like, did you notice something change for you, working digitally versus working in a tactile way? Like an example for myself is, I feel really different when I'm like typing a journal entry or a poem versus when I'm actually writing it with my hand. So

Allison Puryear (she/her): yeah, I get that as well. I'm the same like, I'm old school with so many things. That's why I have paper so easily accessible, because writing things helps get things in my brain a little bit differently than typing it.

Allison Puryear (she/her): yeah. So so.

Allison Puryear (she/her): being mindful about the art materials you're using is a big part of it art therapy. I'm thinking, so you know, I talk to therapists constantly. It's like what I do and how they're

Allison Puryear (she/her): I feel like the burnout level amongst therapists has

Allison Puryear (she/her): like it. It increased so sharply in 2020, and I don't feel like it's gone down. I feel like it's either plateaued or gone up.

Allison Puryear (she/her): I'm curious how therapists could be using

Allison Puryear (she/her): creativity or art, or anything to help with burnout. because I know like that's something that got me out of burnout in 2021, I was able to pop out of it by like

Allison Puryear (she/her): going into my creative self

Amelia Knott she/her: and maintaining that since then, so I know that there's great utility and creativity to get us out of our clinical brains constantly.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So how do you recommend therapists do that?

Amelia Knott she/her: Well, I mean, maybe we can use you as an example, if you're comfortable talking totally doing creatively. And what shifted for you. Yeah. Well, I got into a place where I was like all I've done for years now, it feels like, is obligations.

Allison Puryear (she/her): It is like work obligations, family obligations, bill obligations, like all the things that just needed to get done,

and I wasn't having fun. I was getting together with friends before Covid. And then Covid struck,

and I didn't have that anymore. And as a hardcore extrovert that did not suit me. So

Allison Puryear (she/her): in 2021 I went through this exploration of what used to be fun for me back in the day. Like back in high school. What was fun? Because I couldn't.

Allison Puryear (she/her): You know what was fun in college was going out, my friends, which was not really suiting my lifestyle now. And I went to performing Arts High School. I did, you know, improv a lot. I sang I did a lot of things that were performing arts related. So I

Allison Puryear (she/her): started like a beginner's improv class.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And we were all masked,

I mean, for like a year of working together in these classes like we were all just masked.

Allison Puryear (she/her): and which you would think would be a real detriment to acting. But

Allison Puryear (she/her): we made it work. and it was fun. I was playing like I hadn't played in so long, and it just felt silly and like this thing I did just for myself, and it didn't matter how tired I was at the end of a workday.

Allison Puryear (she/her): By the time I get to improv that night I was like bouncy. I was ready and so just being able to do that. And it wasn't.

Allison Puryear (she/her): It wasn't, you know, memorizing lines, or you know it. There was nothing obligatory about it, and I didn't have to prepare for it, which is like the opposite of most of my life.

I could just show up and do, and if I bombed. It didn't matter at all.

It did not matter, and that was really freeing.

So yeah, and I've been doing improv since.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And it's

Allison Puryear (she/her): a really big part of my joy every week.

Amelia Knott she/her: But what changed like in in your work or like, have the obligation side of your life when you had that outlet. Yeah, I mean,

I there was reprieve really like, I just had something that was just for me. I tend to

Allison Puryear (she/her): be somebody who will

Allison Puryear (she/her): hyperfixate on things that really don't need that much attention.

And so I found that

Allison Puryear (she/her): when I had some

Allison Puryear (she/her): playtime in my life that was just for me,

and was just for joy. I realized how much stuff I was worried about

or taking care of didn't really matter, and I could. I could prioritize better.

And I was a much more happy fun, mom, a much happier, more fun, partner.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Once we were seeing friends again regularly like I

was a like more joyful version of myself than had gone into the

pandemic. And so I feel like it. It just like brought me back to myself

Allison Puryear (she/her): ultimately.

Amelia Knott she/her: Oh! Brought me back to myself. Yeah, yeah.

Amelia Knott she/her: Like the phrase that you you've used. I think probably everybody listening

Amelia Knott she/her: can relate to is the having something just for me. Yes, and how crucial that

is, especially when we care for a living right? Like, if our job is emotional labor, yeah. And if

Amelia Knott she/her: we're also perhaps socialized female,

and in lots of other caretaking roles to protect some time to do something that

Amelia Knott she/her: is selfish in the best possible use of that word is really

really important and special, and especially given also the fact that we experienced a

collective trauma moving through the pandemic, we experience collective and vicarious trauma.

Amelia Knott she/her: Watching the news cycle we experience as well,

you know, hearing and supporting people in in challenging situations. So play,

I think, isn't something to be taken lightly. I've heard play

described as the opposite of trauma. So, giving ourselves again opportunities

Amelia Knott she/her: to do something where you know,
the final memorized performance isn't the goal or the perfect painting isn't the goal.

Amelia Knott she/her: It's not frivolous. It's not a cute little hobby. It's it's
life saving. It really is so I think the first like answer to your question is
finding ways to protect time, to give some of that back to yourself.

Amelia Knott she/her: and if

Amelia Knott she/her: if carving that out feels hard like, I think,
outsourcing some of the accountability is a really useful way. Maybe that is okay.

I'm finally gonna sign myself up for the pottery class, and

Amelia Knott she/her: my partner is taking care of the kids that night like putting something on
the

schedule and having community around it is one way to protect that. I know for myself art often
falls to

the bottom of my to do list. But when there's something, maybe I've paid for it or bought
materials in the calendar. I have to go somewhere like then it's it's protected from all the other

Amelia Knott she/her: responsibilities and things that that life is asking. Yeah of
us. So that's I think one is finding those creative outlets for ourselves.

Amelia Knott she/her: And that might even be an art space supervision group like
those exist. Art therapist supervisors are are really incredible people who
use different creative techniques in the process of supervision or
group supervision. Or maybe it's even a peer support group of therapists who get
together on zoom and crochet while they're having conversation, or while connecting.

Amelia Knott she/her: you know, once a month,
or something like that. So those are a couple of ideas.

Amelia Knott she/her: and then I think the other things that
are really useful for preventing burnout.

Amelia Knott she/her: Is how we think about what we take home with us

Amelia Knott she/her: like that. I think for me when I've been on the brink of burnout.

It's because the conversations that are happening in sessions are are heavy, and I'm thinking about

it. When I get home from work. I'm thinking about it when I wake up in the morning.

Amelia Knott she/her: So post session art is a really important part of my practice, and I know it is for lots of therapists and creative people, where, if we've heard something or something's kind of sticking with us from the work we've done with our clients that day, maybe taking even 5 or 10 min to represent it visually, or to write about it, and then to actually dispose of it, or close it up to give ourselves the metaphor of closure.

Amelia Knott she/her: So sometimes for me, that is kind of drawing out something abstract or something that holds the the essence of what I've done in my work day, folding it, recycling it, crumpling it, maybe burning it in the fireplace afterwards, just so that I have like the physical experience of. Okay, it's coming out of my body.

Amelia Knott she/her: It's being represented. I have some control.

And now I'm gonna put it away really, mindfully, I think that's a useful tool just for kind of moving through the stress cycle. Yeah, that mindfully putting it away piece is really important. I'm realizing, like, as you say that, thinking about

Allison Puryear (she/her): like when I've left kind of creative things open like. Just shoved them in a desk drawer or something like that, instead of

Allison Puryear (she/her): kind of reverently and intentionally closing it up.

Amelia Knott she/her: Yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): it helps keep it in its container

Amelia Knott she/her: and in its container is is like the perfect way of phrasing that and something that might also not be obvious to folks who aren't art therapists is like what happens to the artwork after it's quote finished is a part of the process right? Does this need the reverence of a frame, or going up on the fridge? Does this need to be ripped up or

disposed of? Does it need to be tucked somewhere where nobody else can find it like what happens

Amelia Knott she/her: after the process is paused or closed, whether it's to keep it safe so we can come back to it when we're ready or when we have time, or whether it's giving ourselves some

kind of metaphorical closure like that's a really important part of the creative process, too.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): I'm thinking about like the the compassion fatigue we feel. And I guess I'm thinking more of writing than like visual art. And how

Allison Puryear (she/her): how that works with HIPAA. Yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Like.

Allison Puryear (she/her): are there ways that you would guide therapists who maybe feel more connected to writing than a visual art.

Allison Puryear (she/her): to be able to process those emotions in a way that doesn't have any PHI in it, I guess. To make it super clinical.

Amelia Knott she/her: No, but I'm glad you mentioned that, because, like client art is personal health information, therapists can't store their clients artwork anywhere that isn't secure online, or, you know, in a physical office, it needs to be locked away. And the same goes for post session art, right? We can't have identifying details.

Amelia Knott she/her: So I mean one practice that that I really love is say, I'm doing some post session writing. I'm writing about what I experienced.

How it impacted me. Maybe there's

Amelia Knott she/her: exploration of transference, or or whatever it is. What I might do is something

called a distillation poem, where I kind of okay, go through my writing. I'm gonna circle the words or the phrases that that stand out to me and actually cut them out and then rearrange just those words into a poem for myself to find new meaning.

Amelia Knott she/her: and then maybe shred and like properly and safely dispose of anything that could be identifying. But that's one way of kind of taking

Amelia Knott she/her: like the client material,

processing it for ourselves in a way that we might need to without

Amelia Knott she/her: yeah, kind of stepping over those lines. And another important consideration is, we probably don't post our post session art, or anything that relates to

Amelia Knott she/her: you know our experiences of

Amelia Knott she/her: of what a client has been through as well like that extends in the same way that we don't talk about what happens in our client sessions with others or on social media.

We probably don't kind of share our personal process around it, like, of course, there's there's gray areas. But I think, holding our clients with that reverence and really honoring their experience, means holding kind of our own processing of that in a similar way as well.

Allison Puryear (she/her): How do you handle the artwork.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Do you have clients take it home with them? Do you take photographs

so you can upload it to your EHR and then delete the photo like, how does that all work?

Amelia Knott she/her: Yeah, so it's different, depending on what context you're working in. I only work online. So what would happen during a session is, I'm using a video platform. First of all, that is HIPAA or P-HIPAA compliant, right? When a client texts a photo so would be working in session, and they'll make something. They'll take a photo on their phone.

They'll send it to me through an encrypted messaging service. Because something like

Amelia Knott she/her: let's say, like imessage isn't encrypted,

and if the image is gonna be stored on another server, that's no longer private. So then what I will do is upload it to my note system. And so my notes are again in an encrypted software. And that's where they stay. And so making sure that there's no photos of client art in email. There's no photos on my desktop that my desktop isn't automatically uploading things to cloud like that's the online way of protecting client health information.

Amelia Knott she/her: But if it's in person, then we would store things the way we would store our

clinical notes. So a locked file cabinet, or maybe there's a closet or a room where client work gets

locked and stored away, and if it's get sent being sent home, then again, there's that conversation

about what's gonna happen with the art. Of course the client gets to choose, you know, whether

they're keeping it, whether they're virtually destroying it or letting it be transformed.

Amelia Knott she/her: But one really important consideration with working with kids is having conversations with the parents about what happens to the artwork post session. Right? It needs to

be treated in a different way than stuff that's coming home from kindergarten art class. Yes, yes, which finds its way sneakily into the recycle in my household, anyway, but not not the work that's done in therapy.

Allison Puryear (she/her): yeah. So

Allison Puryear (she/her): you'd mentioned mindfulness earlier?

Allison Puryear (she/her): We've talked about art materials. And I'm I'm just thinking about that experience the tactile experience of different art materials I'm thinking about like how different

Allison Puryear (she/her): a what do they call it? Like? Just like a fine point Sharpie feels versus a crayon versus markers versus

Allison Puryear (she/her): charcoals.

Allison Puryear (she/her): How do you help people stay slow and present with each of those materials? Do you ever encourage them to try something they don't automatically feel drawn to like.

Allison Puryear (she/her): how do you do that?

Amelia Knott she/her: Oh, yeah. I mean, if it's in person, then I would set up a studio with a variety of things. Right? I mean, I only work online these days. But if I ever get back to a studio, then it would be a room with tons of options available. So the first thing might be inviting, like, what are you gravitating towards? Or maybe I have some materials set out in the space that we're working in.

Amelia Knott she/her: So if the client wouldn't grab, naturally gravitate towards something,

there might be an invitation to try something else and

Amelia Knott she/her: to help somebody stay slow. Maybe there is like, oh,

like maybe noticing how it sounds or how it feels, just like we did in in this activity, to not go

immediately into "This is what I'm producing on the page visually in front of me." But all

the senses that are getting activated when we're working with a material, the touch, the smell.

Amelia Knott she/her: the sight of something. So yeah inviting

inviting in that sensory input is one way.

Allison Puryear (she/her): thinking about how grounding that could be just on their

own as well. If they're having a rough day. It doesn't take much to grab a piece of paper,

you know. Like, if you, if you have some space to just feel and just be

with that piece of paper, and whatever materials you have in your desk drawer.

Allison Puryear (she/her): like it could be therapeutic for a client or for a therapist

to just just be with that for a little while before going back to business as usual work.

Allison Puryear (she/her): yeah, what else about art therapy do

you feel is really important for us to understand as beginners to

Allison Puryear (she/her): like even just knowing about it?

Amelia Knott she/her: Hmm.

Amelia Knott she/her: I mean, I think some of the misconceptions that

Amelia Knott she/her: art therapists come up against like we mentioned before is that it's

just recreation, or it's, you know, just about the play, or that it's that it's kind of a light

discipline. I think art therapists are pretty sensitive to not being taken seriously compared to

Amelia Knott she/her: perhaps other modalities when we are also psychotherapists. So yeah,

I think it's important for folks to know that there's a huge body of research around

Amelia Knott she/her: this kind of modality, and

Amelia Knott she/her: that it's really valuable for folks to have a non verbal

way of expressing themselves, whether that is in the context of art psychotherapy, or like you said

Amelia Knott she/her: the way it feels to go home and pull, to paint by numbers, or pull

out something where you have that that tactile experience. As a way of caring for yourselves.
So

Amelia Knott she/her: yeah, essentially, yes. The point I want to make is that.

Amelia Knott she/her: yeah, there's so much focus in like the self help and mental health world on doing analytical work of healing when it's also really really valuable to do, like the embodied creative, tactile, expressive

Amelia Knott she/her: work of playing, of of expressing ourselves in that other way.

And I mean, I'm just really excited about the work that's being done by the Art Therapy Associations in Canada and the States, the growing research that's coming out.

And I think, yeah, the growing popularity of of people

Amelia Knott she/her: starting to express themselves as adults in ways that don't need to be perfect and polished. I think that's evident in like the rising popularity of like coloring books.

Or, you know, the people we see online, showing different kinds of creative techniques, and

Amelia Knott she/her: like the energy that started in the early

pandemic of people taking up Sourdough baking, or whatever new hobby like,

I think there was something something powerful in that, and that that points to exactly why creativity is a really important tool for all of us to to make space for.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, absolutely.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And just thinking about how?

Allison Puryear (she/her): Because we have access to so many people doing creative things online,

right? Like, we've got pinterest. We've got wonderful accounts on Tiktok and

Instagram and Facebook. We can follow all these people being creative. And

it can be really inspirational. And it's good to actually do the things,

too, not just watch. It's nice to watch. I enjoy a good like cookie decorating video,

Allison Puryear (she/her): and I signed up for a class to learn how to do cookie decorating, you know, just to like play with it, I know so satisfying. Gosh, but just

Allison Puryear (she/her): I know for me I'm really careful of what I consume versus what

I do. That's something I've just learned over the years with social media is like, if I'm really drawn to watching something. Maybe I'd be drawn to doing it, too. And let's bring more things into my real life and not just what I'm watching other people do with their lives online.

Amelia Knott she/her: yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): I'm

Allison Puryear (she/her): I'm excited about

Allison Puryear (she/her): what feels like an

overlap with the rise of somatic therapies and arts and expressive therapies.

Allison Puryear (she/her): I feel like they really do have a lot of

really wonderful overlap that's not rooted in "What do you think?"

Allison Puryear (she/her): And I mean, I'm a I'm more of an ACT therapist than anything.

So I'm definitely in the talk therapy cognitive world, the top down world. But

I really get excited about this. The bottom up and the creative expression that isn't

Allison Puryear (she/her): so readily like tip of tongue.

like describing what's going on with you, you know. And

that's I mean, maybe something people also don't know about art therapy is,

it involves both right? Sometimes we'll have sessions where we're mostly talking.

Amelia Knott she/her: you know, language is also a creative tool.

Amelia Knott she/her: So sometimes framing like a session where we're mostly in conversation.

as like a creative act

can help us play with language in a more expansive way. But there's,

I think again this interplay between top down like what do I see? What do I think?

Amelia Knott she/her: What meaning am I making of this?

Amelia Knott she/her: Along with the bottom up approach of what happens if

I spend an hour with a crayon in both hands on a massive piece of paper,

right like we get to use both sides of our brain, and touch in with a bunch of different modalities,

to to figure out what circumstance would be most appropriate for what approach. And that's what

I love about art therapy is like the tool belt we have access to as art therapists is

Amelia Knott she/her: every material and and more right

like it gets so tailored to client experience.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, that's really exciting, because it does allow you to

Allison Puryear (she/her): to play with what's what's really helping your client best. To really pay attention to

Allison Puryear (she/her): what's landing for them. And what's not which even the stuff that's not it's great juicy information, right, like, there's always good stuff in there too.

Amelia Knott she/her: and something else that that art therapists do that I think

Amelia Knott she/her: is unique from talk therapy is will often hold art reviews, so maybe after 10 sessions or a number of months, when there's a natural pause point.

Amelia Knott she/her: and art therapists might make a slideshow of all the pieces that their client has made up until that point and use that as like a visual way of okay,

here's where we started. Here's where we are now like, what do you notice changing in pieces. What do you remember about these pieces like something I really love about

Amelia Knott she/her: about this discipline is that we have the visual aids to remember what's happened in each session, and the client has this artifact of what they've

done and experienced to look back on so like the potential for reflection is really, really neat

Amelia Knott she/her: in art therapy..

Allison Puryear (she/her): That would be. And it's

Allison Puryear (she/her): it's compelling, you know, like it's

Allison Puryear (she/her): it's compelling for the client in a way that me being like. Well,

I was looking at my notes, and you know where you've come since July like this is impressive, you know, like it's very different for. And it's their interpretation as opposed to like my interpretation through my notes, presenting it to them. I love that.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, I want an art review.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Awesome. Well, Amelia, thank you so much. I appreciate you talking with

us. I hope that this sparks a lot of people who are wanting to look more into the discipline and consider it. And whether it's as a client or as a clinician, because, having

Allison Puryear (she/her): having been on the client side of it,

I can say art therapy is very powerful stuff, and it definitely was

Allison Puryear (she/her): a very integral part to my own healing years ago. So

Amelia Knott she/her: yay, yeah, that makes me so happy to hear and for folks

who are interested in the field, I'll say that there are some programs where you won't

need to do a whole other Master's degree. There's a couple of schools

Amelia Knott she/her: in the United States that do. Yeah. Programs made for people who have existing training. So know that that's an option. If you feel really drawn towards art therapy.

There's also different kinds of programs for folks who want to bring in more creative tools in that

kind of mindful coping skills, kind of way, but not actually stepping fully into art therapy.

Yes, amazing. Thank you so much. Yeah, yeah, of course. And it. The

last thing I'll say as well is, if folks are interested in becoming an art therapist I've got

a webinar available about the entire education and credentials process that was made with Alyse

Ruriani, who is an amazing art therapist based in Chicago. So if you'd like kind of the step by step plan to to learn about what it takes to to get into the field and become accredited

Amelia Knott she/her: there's a discount for everyone who is a part of Not Boring CEs, so

Amelia Knott she/her: we'll send some links to that as well. Wonderful.

We'll make sure that those are easily accessible and available.

Amelia Knott she/her: Yeah, I appreciate it so much,

Amelia. Thank you. Yeah. I always love our conversations. This has been great.

I hope that broadened your clinical horizons! Head over to notboringces.com to get your CE credit. Wanna have a Not Boring conversation with me about your clinical area of expertise? You can apply there, too. If you like this conversation, leave us a five star review, tell a friend, and be sure to subscribe for future conversations.