FEELING HEAVY TOO

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE CONCEPT OF VICARIOUS TRAUMA

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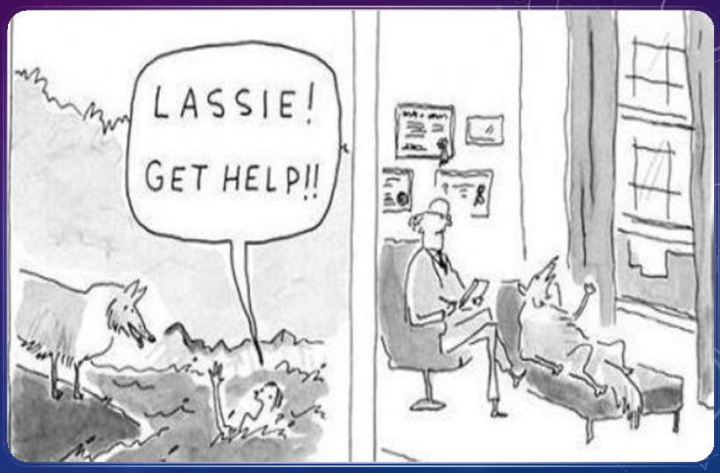
1

UNDERSTANDING DIAGNOSES AS CONTEXTUAL

Critical social theory research looks specifically at the operation of your discipline in a social context – in this case, how psychology has used psychologisation, or the use of psychological concepts, to explain phenomena that are largely structurally and socially determined



2

VICARIOUS TRAUMA – A WORKER'S DISEASE

Descriptions of vicarious trauma share a core thesis named by Pearlman (who originally coined the term) and Caringi (2009), who describe the phenomena as "the negative transformation in the helper that results (across time) from empathic engagement with trauma survivors and their traumatic material, combined with a commitment or responsibility to help them" (pp. 202-203)

3

EXISTENTIAL SYMPTOMATOLOGY

- There is a diagnostic checklist and scales for measuring vicarious trauma (Huggard & Unit, 2013), a constellation of symptoms whose contents appear to be largely existential. *A sense that the world is no longer safe, a flooding of helplessness, alienation, and a trapped feeling that brings with it threatening changes in identity*.

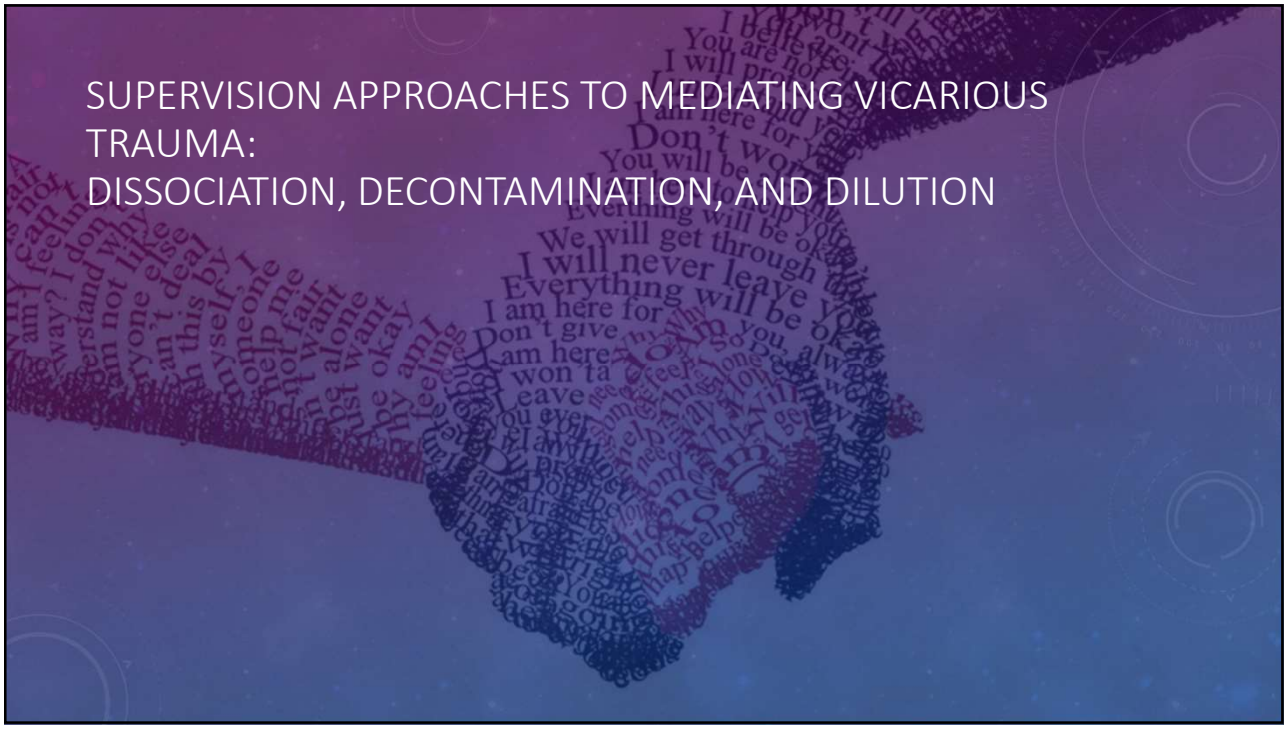
4

BIG WORDS BUT HOPEFULLY NOT ABOUT NOTHING

The concept of vicarious trauma sediments some pain as surrogate or derivate and contains within it the necessity of spectatorship. I could go so far as to say that the signs of vicarious trauma, as it is currently diagnosed, are evidence that direct communication of traumatic affect has occurred. These experiences of affective transmission have then become socially instrumentalised through their framing as vicarious, to both reproduce and to reprint trauma. This reproduction occurs by naming not its shared impact, but instead the idea of its deadly contagiousness to those who are positioned as helpers to the traumatised.

5

SUPERVISION APPROACHES TO MEDIATING VICARIOUS TRAUMA:
DISSOCIATION, DECONTAMINATION, AND DILUTION



6

SHARED ECOLOGY

For every trauma you bring to me is a part of our shared ecology. I may not have been present as fire raged though your neighbourhood. I may not have been a member of the church where you were assaulted or owned a property you were evicted from when you could no longer afford the rent. But I am a part of the world where these things have happened. I may be an unwitting victim, perpetrator or accomplice in either the small or larger picture of your suffering, as you may be to mine.

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