

Vicarious Resilience: Learning from and Growing with our Clients

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**UTAH CENTER
FOR EVIDENCE BASED
TREATMENT**

Origins

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- Interviewed 12 psychotherapists who worked with victims of political violence and kidnapping at a torture treatment center
- Survivors of Torture, International in Bogota', Colombia
- Published results in 2007

Vicarious Resilience: A New Concept in Work With Those Who Survive Trauma

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This study explores the formulation of a new concept: vicarious resilience. It addresses the question of how psychotherapists who work with survivors of political violence or kidnapping are affected by their clients' stories of resilience. It focuses on the psychotherapists' interpretations of their clients' stories, and how they make sense of the impact that these stories have had on their lives. In semistructured interviews, 12 psychotherapists who work with victims of political violence and kidnapping were interviewed about their perceptions of their clients' overcoming of adversity. A phenomenological analysis of the transcripts was used to describe the themes that speak about the effects of witnessing how clients cope constructively with adversity. These themes are discussed to advance the concept of vicarious resilience and how it can contribute to sustaining and empowering trauma therapists.

Keywords: Vicarious Resilience: Resilience



Elements identified

- ▶ witnessing and reflecting on human beings' immense capacity to heal
- ▶ reassessing the significance of the therapists' own problems
- ▶ incorporating spirituality as a valuable dimension in treatment
- ▶ developing hope and commitment
- ▶ articulating personal and professional positions regarding political violence
- ▶ articulating frameworks for healing
- ▶ developing tolerance to frustration
- ▶ developing time, setting, and intervention boundaries that fit therapeutic interventions in context
- ▶ using community interventions
- ▶ developing the use of self in therapy

Vicarious Resilience is born!

“Based on this data, we advance the idea that a specific resilience process occurs as a result of psychotherapists’ work with trauma survivors: Vicarious Resilience. This process is characterized by **a unique and positive effect** that **transforms therapists** in response to client trauma survivors’ own resiliency.”



Follow-up study



Main themes

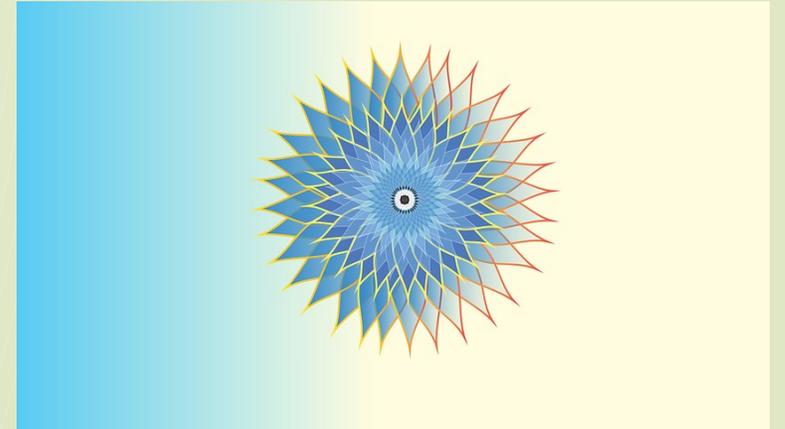
- being positively affected by the resilience of clients
- alteration of perspectives on the therapist's own life
- valuing the therapy work performed

Integrative

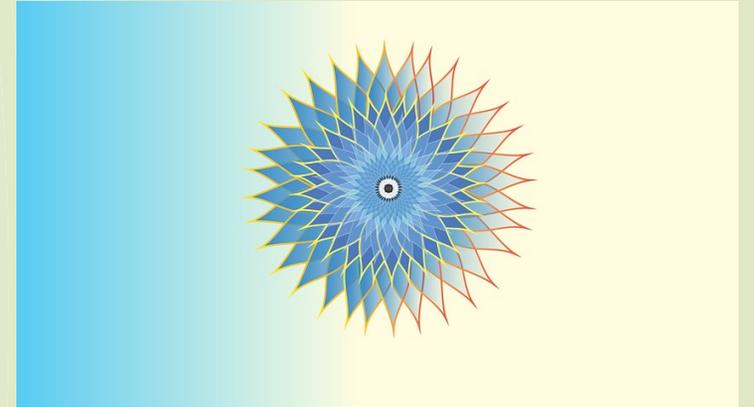
Includes four areas of clinical research, theory and practice

1) The vicarious impact of trauma survivors' stories and experiences on therapists

- Vicarious traumatization
- Secondary traumatic stress
- Compassion fatigue



Integrative



2) Resilience

3) Politically motivated violence, including kidnapping disappearance, assassination, torture and other forms of persecution

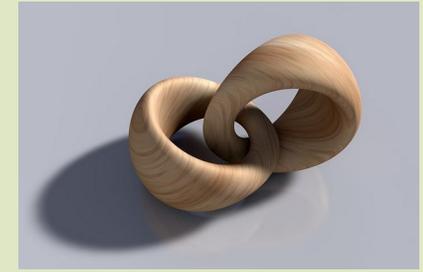
4) Issues of equity, culture and international trauma work



Why is VR important to you?

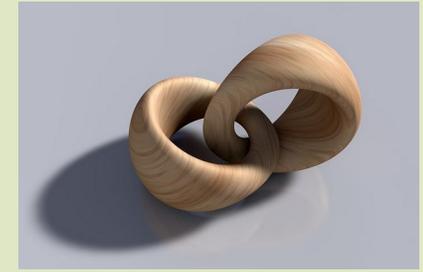
- It is a useful tool to counteract extremely difficult work
- Greater awareness of VR processes can provide avenues that strengthen therapists' motivation and persistence
- Training and supervision of developing trauma therapists
- Trauma therapists may use what they learn from their clients for their own times of crisis
- Clients may benefit from knowing this concept, alleviating some of their concern about the effects on the therapist
- Awareness of VR can enrich and motivate therapists' professional development through working with multiple systems and expanding their work into teaching, writing, research and advocacy

4 Major Themes



- 1) A change in the therapists' self-perception and their general outlook on the world
 - reframing of the therapists' personal issues
 - a new sense of patience
 - less need to be in control
 - more relaxed
 - a more informed worldview
 - redefined what is important to them

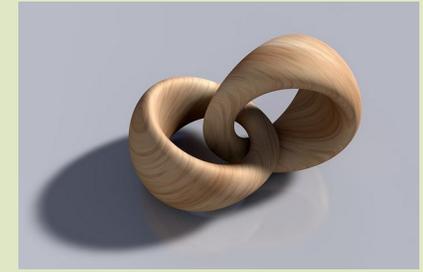
4 Major Themes



2) An altered spirituality

- not well defined by participants
- usually movement away from organized religion and toward meditative practices
- sometimes in response to the evil in the world
- some feel the work itself is spiritual practice

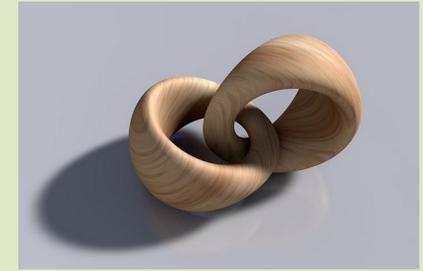
4 Major Themes



3) Modified thoughts about self-care

- improved work boundaries
- intentionally learning from clients in this area
- many already highly valued self-care aside from client influence

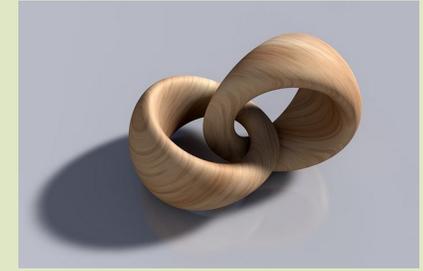
4 Major Themes



4) A new view on trauma work and on connecting with clients

- ▶ A shift in the therapists' understanding of their own role
 - meeting clients where they are/less control
 - mirroring client resilience
- ▶ Changes in their general belief in practice models
 - broadening their involvement
 - moving away from traditional models and toward narrative approaches

4 Major Themes



- 4) A new view on trauma work and on connecting with clients
- A strengthened trust in clients' spirituality as a resilience factor
 - A new or renewed confidence in a strengths-based approach
 - Acknowledge clients' resilience
 - Build the relationship



Reflection: Reciprocity

Consider a trauma client with whom you have had a significant therapeutic relationship.

1. How would they describe your relationship? Did the client see you as an advice giver, confidante, expert, supportive presence, etc?
2. Do you think they perceived you as someone who has also struggled at times?
3. Did they see you as someone who cared about them personally?
4. Did they worry about the effect of their story on you?
5. What do you think they considered the most important element of your relationship?



Reflection: Reciprocity

Consider a trauma client with whom you have had a significant therapeutic relationship.

1. How would you describe the relationship? Do you see yourself as an advice giver, confidante, expert, supportive presence, etc?
2. How did you decide which parts of your life to disclose to this client?
3. Did you care personally about this client?
4. Did you feel that the client cared about you as a person?
5. How did it feel to receive this client's story?
6. What did you think was most important about your role in this relationship?



Reflection: Multiple Identities

What are the identities of your client?

Ethnicity

Class

Sexual orientation

Religion

Gender

Nationality

Ability

How have these identities shaped their experiences generally?

Shaped their experiences of therapy?

Of you?



Reflection: Vicarious Trauma

Have you experienced any symptoms of VT or compassion fatigue in relation to your work with trauma survivors?

How?





Reflection: Vicarious Resilience

- What challenges have you witnessed your client overcoming in the therapeutic process?
 - What did your client stimulate in you that you want to nurture and expand?
- 



Reflection: Vicarious Resilience

In examining how you may have been positively impacted by your clients' ways of coping with adversity, do you:

- Have any thoughts about how your perception of yourself may have been changed by your clients' resilience?
- Feel that your general outlook on the world has changed in some way?
- Identify any impact in your own views about spirituality?
- Have any thoughts about how your views on trauma work may have been positively impacted by your clients' resilience?
- Have any thoughts about how the ways you take care of yourself have been impacted by your clients' resilience?



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