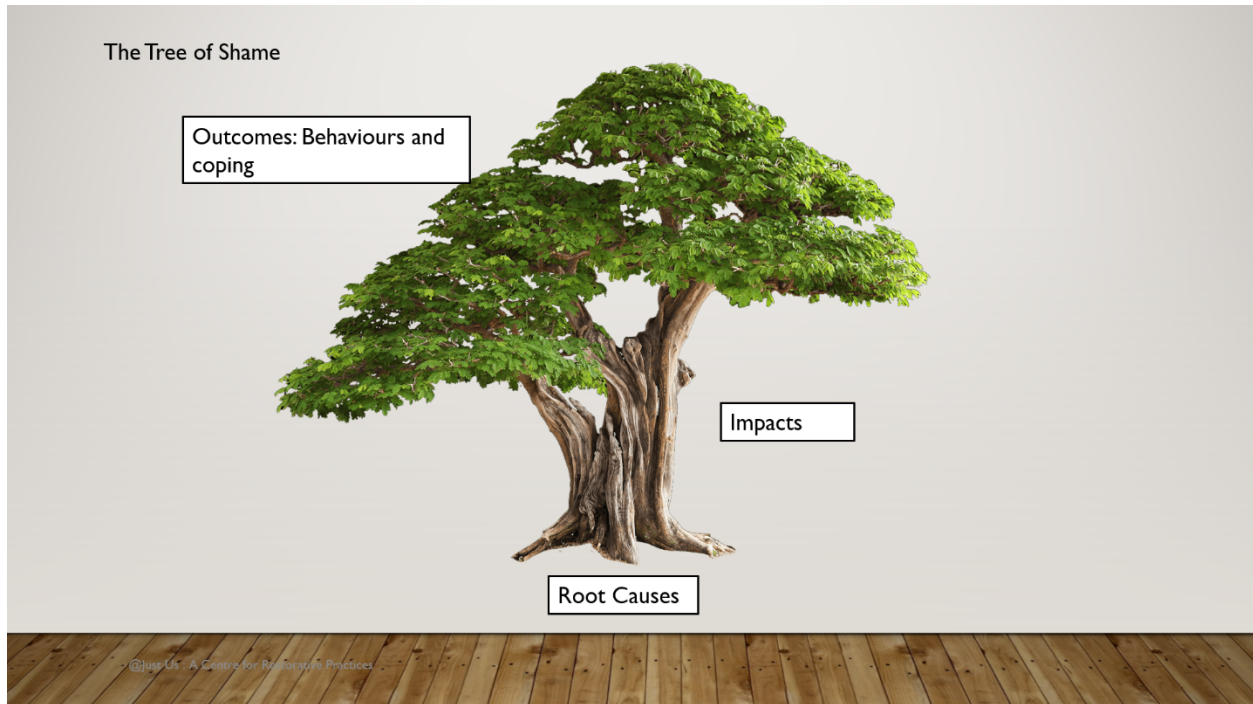


IT'S MORE THAN A SHAME:

THE TREE OF SHAME

RICK KELLY @JUST US: A CENTRE FOR RESTORATIVE PRACTICES



OBJECTIVES

- ❖ To develop the ability to identify the systemic and structural dynamics underlying shame and its behavioural presentation.
- ❖ To expand the ability to respond to the behavioural presentation of shame by acknowledging and addressing the contextual elements.

MATERIALS

These include enough for working groups of 3-4.

- ❖ Large flip chart paper
- ❖ Markers (non-toxic)
- ❖ Masking tape
- ❖ Sample tree that outlines
 - **Roots** (sources)
 - **The trunk** (impacts)
 - **The branches and leaves** (outcomes)

INSTRUCTIONS

Describe to the group that they are about to engage in a small group activity, a gallery walk and then a larger debrief, reflection and discussion.

The activity asks the small groups to address three areas of focus in relation to shame. The three areas of focus are represented by a tree which highlights the roots of shame, the trunk which is the impacts of shame and the branches and leaves which reflect the outcomes as behavioral manifestations of shame.

Ask the group to draw their own tree similar to the one offered as a sample with labels for each area.

Suggest to the group the following as they reflect on each of the three areas:

- ❖ **Roots** can be thought of to include issues that go beyond individual encounters and involve specific elements related to systems and structural (institutional, policy) constructs and practices.
- ❖ The **trunk**, which reflects the impacts, can be thought of in relation to the impacts on a person's sense of self, relationships with others and the ability to change, grow and development.
- ❖ The **branches and leaves** are the behavioural manifestations of the impacts. As an example, ask them to reflect on how does a person who has been shamed show this in their behavioural reactions. Each person is unique so there can be many ways in which shame shows itself.

Have them get into groups. Give them about 20 minutes depending on the level of activity and conversation in each group.

Ask them when they are done to post them on the wall. Have them put them around the room or side by side.

When everyone has completed this part of activity ask them to walk around the room and view each other's work.

Optional: Have each group present a brief description what they would want others to take away from their work and one "aha" moment.

DEBRIEF (Reflect and discuss)

Conduct a discussion using a series of open-ended questions that draw out and build knowledge with the group. Focus on each area separately starting with roots.

Begin with the restorative questions:

What did you think about shame when you first began the exercise?

What are you thinking now?

Roots: Lead the conversation to explore the various roots which range from event-based experiences (child abuse) to ones that are more systemic and pervasive such as poverty or racism.

Intersectional and intergenerational dynamics

- ❖ To what degree do these elements intersect and what kind of multiplying effect does their presence have on individuals and also groups?

- ❖ To what degree do these roots have an intergenerational dimension?
- ❖ What impact does that have?

Impacts:

- ❖ Ask in what ways they found that the roots of shame impacted on individuals regarding:
 - Their sense of self, self worth, lovability, sense of competency, developing internal narratives
 - Their ability to relate to others, engage, be in intimate relationships
 - Their ability to cope, grow, change, deal with frustration

Outcomes

- ❖ What are the different behaviours identified that arise from the impacts and as ways of coping?
- ❖ How do you make sense and interpret the connection between the behavioural responses and the impacts?

Lesson:

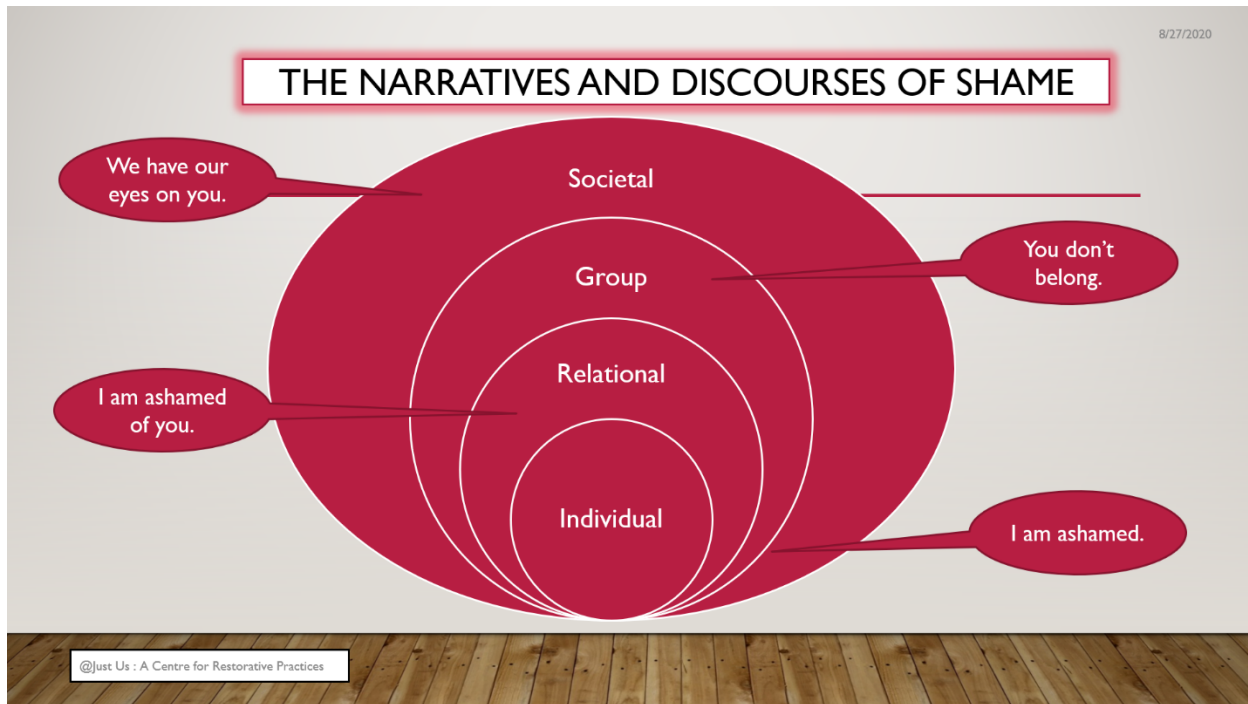
Shame is the outcome of being judged as person in relation to what one has done or who one is or appears to be. This is a judgement that asserts verbally and sometimes non-verbally, that one is less than, unworthy, not meeting expectations either for one's self or others or in the eyes of society. Sometimes these judgements can intersect and have an amplifying effect. The judgement is problematic for a number of reasons. One is that it conflates and confuses what a person has done with their sense of personhood or worthiness. When it arises in the context of close relationships or from those in authority it can be doubly powerful.

As an emotion, shame is very difficult to live for most people, because of the debilitating messages to oneself. Therefore, people may resort to different ways of coping that manifests as both behaviours and negative self talk. The coping is not an effective long-term response but helps to deal with the immediate messages and emotion. One can map responses and see the different reactions in what is called "the compass of shame".

The compass, as a compass, has four direction to it. Actions can be directed outward, inward, away from or by burying and denying the impacts. The different ways of coping can have their own consequences and impacts which compounds addressing the initial issue.

To add to this there are dynamics of shaming that move beyond the individual and immediate relationships to include group experiences of exclusion as form of shaming, and societal and structural dynamics that label and stereotype individuals and groups and effectively construct barriers that limit their potential participation in the goods of society.

Responses to the presentation of shame by individuals need to include an understanding and acknowledgement of the larger and systemic dynamics that can often be the source of the reason why individuals behave the way they do. Such things as substance abuse, high risk sexual behaviour, running away, suicidal thinking and actions can often to be traced to the impacts of shame and larger issues.



Optional:

There can be an introductory discussion of responses to shame which has systemic roots. This can involve responses such as: compassionate witnessing and listening, the opportunity and ability for those harmed to tell one's story, the opportunity to name it, the absence of judgement.

The focus can be changed and directed to analysing violence, racism and/or trauma.

Teachable Aspects: (see resources and links)

The classroom discussion can use all or any of the following content to consolidate the learning:

- ❖ The compass of shame ([Compass of Shame](#))
- ❖ Relevant quotes from Brene Brown ([Quotes](#))
- ❖ The "Pair of Aces" ([Pair of Aces](#)). It is presented as a tree and addresses both Adverse Childhood Events and the systemic roots.
- ❖ The triangle of violence ([Galtung](#)).
 - Enhanced diagram of dimensions of violence. It has been reproduced and enhanced as a tree by the Green String Network ([Graphic](#))
- ❖ The work of Resmaa Menakem on Black, White and Police bodies and the history of intergenerational embodied trauma that each person and group carry with them.

Sources for the exercise:

Boyes-Watson, C. (2008). *Peacemaking Circles and Urban Youth: Bringing Justice Home*. St. Paul, Minnesota: Living Justice Press. (This is a demonstration of the implementation of peacemaking circles to address trauma and shame based on the work of Roca Inc. which has now extended to over 30 years of evidence-based work.)

Chanicka, J., *Marginalized People Face A Unique Mental Health Struggle*, http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/jeewan-chanicka-/marginalized-people-face-a-unique-mental-health-struggle_a_23345523/

Dolezal, L. & Lyons, B. Health Related Shame: an affective determinant of health? *Med Humanit.* 2017-01-7. doi: 10.1136/medhum-2017-01186. The

Habermas, J. (1989). *The Theory of Communicative Action: V.2*. Boston: Beacon Press. (This work highlights the interplay between the “life-world” and “systems-world” and the interplay between individual narratives and societal structures and discourse.)

Menakem, R., *My Grandmother’s Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*. Las Vegas. Central Recovery Press.

Morris, M. (2016). *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools*. New York: The New Press. (The title says it all!)

Nathanson, D. (1994). *Shame and Pride: Affect, Sex, and the Birth of the Self*. New York: W,W Norton. (This author is the central figure in the popularization of Affect Script Psychology and especially his presentation of the “compass of shame”).

Pickett, K. & Wilkinson, R (2009). *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone*. London, U.K: Penguin Books. (This book offers a meta-analysis of the impacts of structural inequity and the significant societal impacts. Shame is identified as an outcome of inequity.)

Travis, R. & Leetch. (2013,). Empowerment-Based Positive Youth Development: A New Understanding. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 24(1), 93–116. (This article takes an AOP/AR approach to understanding racialized youth, their coping through adopting poses and positions that are often misread as simply defiance and disengagement.)