Working with Shame and Internalised Oppression

Tim Foskett
Shame

“To experience Shame is to feel seen in a painfully diminished sense.”

“Exposure, the central characteristic of shame, can be of two distinct forms: exposure to others or exposure only to ourselves.”

G. Kaufman & L. Rafael, Coming Out of Shame

“In the experience of shame, the core of the self is regarded badly.”

Charles Neal
Shame

“Shame is perhaps the most powerful feeling state associated with the experience of a conflicted and socially devalued identity such as being gay or lesbian”

Cohler & Galatzer-Levy 2000
The course of gay and lesbian lives,
University of Chicago Press.
Internalised Oppression

“Internalised oppression refers to ways in which we, mostly unconsciously, take into our psyches and ways of thinking and being, oppressive ideas, attitudes and beliefs.”
“Internalized oppression is the manner in which an oppressed group comes to use against itself the methods of the oppressor. For example, sometimes members of marginalized groups hold an oppressive view toward their own group, or start to believe in negative stereotypes of themselves.

For example, internalized racism is when members of Group A believe that the stereotypes of Group A are true and may believe that they are less intelligent or academically inferior to other groups of people. Any social group can internalize prejudice.”

Wikipedia
Some examples of IO

- Having negative thoughts or feelings about being ‘not normal’
- Having feelings of shame when seeing GSMs in public
- Believing GSM relationships are temporary or fragile
- Having feelings of shame about gender identity - “I should butch- or femme-up”
- Thinking I will pay for my ‘sins’ or sexual happiness, or feeling criminal
- Thinking it is abnormal to be attracted to both men and women
- Being hyper-vigilant around children
Internalised Oppression

- Anthony Hillin’s Model of Internalised Oppression
Impact of Internalised Oppression – Research Evidence

Higher IO is correlated with:

- Lower levels of well-being and greater stress in bisexuals
- Higher levels of sexual anxiety and guilt in lesbians & gay men
- Concern about sexual image
- Greater HIV-related sexual risk taking
- Lower self-esteem and greater depressive symptoms

More Research Evidence

- Wells & Hansen (2003) found high levels of internalised shame in a sample of 317 lesbians despite having reached the highest levels of lesbian identity integration - ‘Synthesis’ (Cass 1979, 1984)

- In a second study of lesbians in psychotherapy Wells (2004) concluded “interpersonal psychotherapy may contribute to a reduction in stigma-induced shame.”

Trans Shame

“The closer people get, the easier they find out, and so several trans men (I know) avoid close contact and meeting new people and so on. I find that pretty depressing and I wonder what can be done about it.”

Trans Shame

“The idea that transness was ugly or less "real" was highly damaging to the psyche of trans people, manifesting itself as internalized transphobia. This idea even existed in trans communities and led to practices such as ranking trans people with regards to their ability to pass as cis.”

Clinical Ideas about Shame and Internalised Oppression

- TA Life Positions
TA Life Positions

I’m OK

You’re not OK

I’m not OK

You’re OK

Tuesday, 22 November 11
Clinical Ideas about Shame and Internalised Oppression

- Top Dogs and Super-egos
- The Velvet Rage
  - Stage 1 - Being Overwhelmed by Shame
  - Stage 2 - Compensating for Shame
  - Stage 3 - Cultivating Authenticity

The Velvet Rage, Alan Downs
Working Effectively with Shame and Internalised
The journey towards wholeness must first take us deeper into shame before bringing us out of shame with pride reaffirmed, power restored, and hope for the future renewed.

We begin by making shame itself more conscious.
We must first allow ourselves to bring both shame and the shamed need or drive into sharper focus by experiencing both of them for a longer period of time. That will enable us to tolerate shame itself.

Though it can be very painful, we must learn how to stay with the feeling of shame longer without quickly escaping it.
Working Effectively with Shame

- Changing TA life positions
- Being witnessed in our shame
  - and not re-shamed
- Developing Intra-Psychic Awareness
  - Chewing over and spitting out unhelpful or oppressive introjects
  - Top Dog exercise

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Stop listening to and accepting what the Top Dog says:

- Shut it up
- Laugh at it
- Acknowledge the grain of truth, and deflate the exaggeration.
Working Effectively with Shame and Internalised Oppression

• Developing Compassion

• Groups & Retreats - ‘Consciousness Raising’

• Trusting the Body (Neal)
Working Effectively with Shame and Internalised Oppression

- **Minority Stress**
  - Inc symptoms of depression, anxiety, panic and substance misuse.

- **Insidious Trauma**
  - Being continually exposed to sub-threshold traumatic stressors - eg (news of) hate crimes, negative media portrayal

- **Micro-Aggressions**

Lynn Carroll (2010), *Counselling Sexual & Gender Minorities*
Microaggressions

- From anti-racism, but present in other oppressions
- Automatic and sometimes unconscious verbal and nonverbal insults, snubs and dismissive behaviours/tone of voice (Sue et al 2007).
- “I should have some round here somewhere” (from film)
- “It’s shame you’re not straight, you’d have made someone a lovely husband/wife.”
Everyone's heard this self-help platitude: We need to love ourselves before we can love anyone else. This may sound wise, but it misses a great truth; if we want to experience true intimacy, we need to be taught to love aspects of ourselves - again and again - by the people around us...
As much as we want to control our own destiny, the humbling truth is that sometimes the only way to learn self-love is by being loved - precisely in the places where we feel most unsure and most tender.

When that happens, we feel freedom and relief - and permission to love in a deeper way. No amount of positive self-talk can replicate this experience. It is a gift of intimacy, not of will-power.

Ken Page  http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/finding-love/201105/how-love-yourself-first
The Turning of Backs

• Passage from *Story Like the Wind*, Laurens Van der Post.