



Shame and childhood sexual abuse

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Starting point

- Personal identity as survivor
- Service user group
- Trainee clinical psychologist

What is shame?

- “an inner experience of self as an unattractive social agent, under pressure to limit possible damage to self via escape or appeasement” (*Gilbert, 1998, p22*)
- Associated with desire to hide: to “sink into the floor and disappear” (*Tangney, 1996, p743*)

Moving forward

- Shame and the psychological literature
- The subjective experience of shame
- How to work with feelings of shame in therapy?

Previous psychological research

- Feelings of shame a significant mediating factor in recovery from experiences of CSA (eg *Feiring and Taska, 2005; Whiffen and MacIntosh, 2005*)
- Survivor literature (eg *Ainscough and Toon, 2000; Fraser, 1999*)
- “Shame-proness” (eg *Lutwak, Ferrari and Cheek, 1998; Talbot, Talbot and Tu, 2004*)

Consequences

- A context-free, unitary, stable and measurable intra-psychic construct
- Mirroring the individualisation of blame and responsibility for criminal acts of abuse??

Other understandings

- Relational cultural model (*Jordan, Hartling and Walker, 2004*)
- Unwanted identities (*Ferguson, Eyre and Ashbaker, 2000*)
- Feminist approaches to subjective experience (*Cosgrove, 2000; Crossley, 2000*)

Shamed to the core of my being: The story of a survivor's understanding and experience of shame

- Used a feminist narrative approach
- To contextualise understandings of shame within the meaning-making of four women with experiences of childhood sexual abuse
- A detailed analysis of Naomi's story

An understanding of shame as embodied distress

- Experience of shame linked to somatic sense of self: taken *inside* the body as part of the contamination of abuse

So it's a lot of sorting out what is and what isn't me and what's stuff that other people have shoved in but the felt sense of it being very much inside

- Continuing distress
- Safe dialogue

Impact on sense of self

- Feeling of first sensing being a person within an abusive relationship

Because what I'm aware of is that erm in terms of my grandfather abusing me I sought him out erm because it was like he did he noticed and saw me

- Fear of being seen/ connection to others

Recovery

- Safe connection: being seen and valued
- Sense of self as separate from abusive experience

That it mattered to someone even if it was only God that I was actually alive... because I just felt I didn't exist. I didn't know I existed.

The silencing of shame

- To be unseeing
- Separate selves
- Tension between wanting to be seen and fearing being shamed

even at work now someone can still make a comment or whatever and I'm in a position of still swallowing that because it's better to to swallow that than make some reaction or some stand or whatever and I end up then back in coming home then feeling wrecked

Implications for working with feelings of shame in therapy

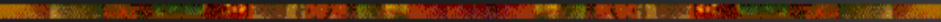
- Shame as property of the situation not the person – contextualised understandings
- Integrate issues of embodiment with cognitive process
- Prioritise power processes
- Potential for groupwork and narrative approaches

And finally.....

An awareness of shame as

- a subject position rather than a symptom of pathology
- part of the process of recovery rather than “shamed identities”

in order to re-emphasise shameful acts and the context within which the abuse of children is perpetrated



People carry feelings of shame because they've been shamed by someone not because it was inherently in them in the first place. I don't think I was maybe yeah I don't think I was born with it