Questions Asked During Live Webinar Broadcast on 1/26/2022

Shame: A Long Ignored Key in SUDs
Presenter: Cary Hopkins Eyles, MA, CAP

Do you recommend any specific workbook to do your own shame work?
A: Get Untamed: The Journal (How to Quit Pleasing and Start Living)

I have read that collectivist cultures use shame as a tool to motivate people to bring them back into community. Individualist culture such as ours use guilt for personal motivation. If this is so, don’t we have to be careful when counseling people from a collectivist culture?
A: We always want to be mindful of any and all cultures we work with and be responsible to them. Cultural competency is critical and we need to be comfortable asking questions. But cultural issues that create shame still should be addressed.

Anxiety vs. Shame? How to decipher with clients?
A: Anxiety (as an experience or a diagnosis) is different from shame although it may feel similar. A key difference in shame is how we speak to ourselves. But they also may be highly related and both can be addressed simultaneously.

How do you break free when your childhood was built on shame?
A: Small steps and persistence. First recognize your shame triggers, which are likely highly integrated into your own voice if they come from childhood. Second, practice critical awareness – are the messages I am sending myself true? Valuable? Beneficial? Shame won’t be. Third, share shame experiences with people who have earned the right to your story and will not make it worse. Fourth, make shame a part of your discussions on a normal basis to get rid of the silence and secrecy of shame.

Do we "want" to make the client feel that the shame is normal? Or, do we want to help them reframe their self-talk from who they are to what they are doing?
A: We want the client to understand that shame is normal and will come up. But we also want them to work on their self talk. Shame can come up for anyone, especially those with trauma histories, but we can help people to overcome the depths of shame, and now how to handle it when it comes up.

What precisely do you mean by 'disconnection'?
A: Disconnection in the context of shame means that we think people will not accept us, will reject us, and we will be isolated and alone. When we tell people our shame, they often can relate and a connection is built. Shame tells us we are unworthy and separates us from others.

How can we gender an overall more empathetic culture company-wide or even field-wide, in a field still very connected to punitive strategies/entities?
A: This is a huge question and one I struggle with on a regular basis. As for as the field, that is a big task. But I will address our companies, our families, areas where we have immediately reach. We can always use empathy with our employees, co-workers, friends, family. Empathy doesn’t give someone a pass for poor behavior or choices. We can always relate to emotions and use compassion, even while – especially while – having strong boundaries. So for example, I may be unhappy with an employee’s work. I can talk to that person about struggles they are having, provide support such as EAP programs, but still hold them accountable for the work expectations.

Thoughts on shame as it relates to ADHD (especially the perfection “gene”)?
A: I am not a medical expert but I will say that I believe some people have greater potentiality for shame or a strong rejection response and actually this has been found to be related to ADHD.
Is there something good to use with Shame for Men in Addiction? I work with the Male population. A workbook?
A: Brene Brown does talk about the differences in men and women and shame but I am not familiar with a specific workbook for this population. Shame is the same in terms of how it is experienced physiologically etc, the trigger is usually the difference.

Could you talk about the relationship between provider stigma, shame, and abandonment of buprenorphine treatment?
A: I am going to make an assumption that this question relates to the stigma and shame that sometimes surrounds harm reduction. As a field, we need to examine our shame around harm reduction and anything that isn’t fully an abstinence model. If we have stigmatizing views around these programs and believe they are less than, that will come across to the clients, staff, and community.

Regarding cognitive errors: is it a cognitive error to decide our inside by others outside when others react in a way that makes our inside feel bad … relating to low self-esteem or shame?
A: I am not sure if I fully understand the question but I will always recommend against comparing ourselves especially the mistake of comparing our insides to other’s outside appearance or our perception of them. As far as how others react to us, the cognitive error we make there is to assume it is about us. How people act is about their experience, feelings, background, beliefs etc.

Do you have any recommendations for a book to work with incarcerated youth and shame?
A: Not specifically. Anything Brene Brown has published about shame will help in clinical work with this topic though.

I work in middle schools and high school as an intervention specialist. How would you address the idea of shame with parents specifically? It is such a huge issue in my job that parents would rather punish instead of trying to understand.
A: I would suggest we step back and realize that their desire to shame likely comes out of their own shame. Instead of allowing themselves to admit that their children’s behavior makes them feel scared and hurt and doubt their parenting, they go into defense mode and want to punish. If you can start with the parents’ shame, make sure they understand there is no blaming with you, that you are there to help, maybe talk about generational patterns that can be broken, you may have some luck. Not easy work. Thank you for what you do.

How would you address internal body shaming?
A: I would use the same steps in Shame Resiliency Theory. Identify it, notice the voice that is speaking to you internally, share with people you trust like a therapist or best friend, question the validity of the shame – even question the validity of the social goals (e.g. being a size “zero”).

Can you discuss the 2nd of Ruiz four agreements of not taking anything/everything personally? Hence internalizing blame to shame.
A: I absolutely LOVE Ruiz’s four agreements and have worked for decades on not taking anything personally – what a lifelong journey! Doing the work of not taking anything personally helps us remember everyone is looking through their own lenses, as are we. That always can help us question our shame which is so sure we are wrong.

Is shyness really a fear of being vulnerable?
A: I can’t say definitively but certainly whenever we put ourselves into the company of others and express who we are, there is a possibility of rejection and therefore it is vulnerable.

How much work do you do with (or encourage on their own) your students?
A: I am not sure what kind of work this is referring to but I love mentoring and working closely with students.