

Shame & sexuality

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Abstract

From a bioenergetic viewpoint, the concepts of shame and sexuality are put in mutual context taking as the point of departure that they mutually influence the organismic energy system and its economy, asking: How can sexuality influence shame? How can shame influence sexual function? How can we deal with shame and sexuality in psychotherapy? Developmental issues, energetic and characterological dynamics with therapeutic implications are included.

Keywords: Shame, sexuality, psychotherapy, bioenergetic viewpoint.

Human shame is a wide and deep topic, having a role in religion and philosophy, cultural history, biology, psychology and sociology. When we add sexuality as a related theme, the object of our attention get immensely complex since sexuality plays such a central role in human nature and culture. In this article, I will look at shame and sexuality from a bioenergetic viewpoint, taking as the point of departure that they somehow mutually influence the organismic energy system and its economy.

In order to bring the issue into a manageable discussion, I will look for answers to three questions:

How can sexuality influence shame?

How can shame influence sexual function?

How can we deal with shame and sexuality in psychotherapy?

A quick thought may appear in you as it did in me: “Shame has a negative effect on sexual life”. I warn myself though, that rushed ideas not always can be trusted. Instead, I will try to unveil the topic in a careful way.

Before the discussion, I find it most straightforward to say where I come from. I grew up with sexuality in the shadow of shame. After decades of struggle to come to terms with it, I have no illusions that reconciling shame and sexuality is a fast track. The burdened experiences may of course blur my look on the matter, but also be a resource in seeing its complexity and impact through the human life span.

I am deeply indebted to Dr. Phil Helfaer who has elucidated the theme with his book *Sex and Self-Respect* (1998) and the article *Shame in the light of Sex and Self-Respect* (2011). John Conger (2001) is a main reference in the aspect of shame and narcissism.

With Helfaer (2011), I prefer to look at shame as entangled in four developmental themes: *Selfhood, Sexuality, Grounding and Energetic organization*. *Sexuality and selfhood* develops hand in hand, are both the same and different. A common energetic process underlies them, both as they flourish and gets disturbed.

Sexuality has a *grounding* and since grounding in the bioenergetic sense must imply feeling and contact, grounded sexuality appears as a felt connection to the body. The feeling we have for ourselves as men and women and the affectionate tone of close relationships is a body feeling. Since the erect posture is fundamental to being human, we need to feel that connection standing on our two bare feet (Hafstad 2013). What are the connections between standing grounded and sexuality? I came to think there are many. I like to choose one that strikes me: Grounding is about *how we stand in ourselves*. Stanley Keleman (1971) said that *unsureness in standing* is a common human factor. When we stand, we feel our unsureness in standing. If I do not feel it, if I do not have contact with it, then I am not grounded. The felt contact with the ground is only comforting and vitalizing because I also feel the unsureness.

Standing in myself is part of a wider context: *How do I stand in my life?* This brings in all the existential questions. Family relations, health, work, stresses and conflicts. Again, there is no safety without feeling the vulnerabilities. They are aspects of existential grounding.

Closely following these questions comes a third that builds on the two formers: *How do we stand as men and women?* How I feel about myself as man is about both sexuality and selfhood, always these two together. Sexual identity and selfhood seen this way, is also *organizing principles* brought into life from birth and continuing through the life span. Feeling our vulnerabilities, our liveliness and shame - as men or women and

accepting them as they are, is the sound Self-respecting way to sound sexuality. Both the way *I live my shame* and *my sexuality* is immediately also here in my standing. This is an aspect of basic body grounding. In therapy, it is immediately present in the standing client and a direct road to work with these themes. Below, I will choose the standing position as an avenue to work with shame and sexuality in therapy.

Since sexuality and selfhood are closely intertwined developmental lines, while shame is a developmental influence, I chose to look at development of sexuality and selfhood first.

I will frame sexuality as “the personal experience of being sexual”, both gender and sexuality, experience of sexual feeling, aliveness, interest, arousal/orgasm orientation and goal seeking that starts as a developmental line from birth. The first fact of the infant is that of being a girl or a boy. Boys and girls express gender in many ways. Others responds to these expressions, influencing children’s energy, feeling tone and expressiveness. This in turn organizes selfhood and sexual identity on organismic and psychological levels. The fate of children’s needs in the world structures into their whole being (Stern 1995).

Sexual feeling is a soulful experience felt in the body as sweet and good. Also, it awakens a desire and a seeking process for an object. Libidinous attachment intensifies the feeling and adds a lust for rough and wild expressive movement (Gullestad 2018). The feeling is in the body, as well as in the mood. I fallowed to stay and grow; a vitality develops that nourishes the whole human being. It stimulates cells and tissue proliferation and increases organismic pulsation. Sexuality is essential for reproduction *and* filling life of the whole person with substance and meaning. Through sexuality, life sings its song and makes it swing.

Sexuality undergoes maturation and developmental steps as well as developmental risks. We may look at some main stages for its development (Helfaer 2011). In the infant stage the baby while alive and motile establishes a sense of “being of the species”, being one like the mothering one. In the separation-individuation phase, the child feels support and respect from the parents as “I am accepted as lively individual”. The Oedipus period establishes “identification with the genital”. Energetically, the child has developed to a new point around the age of three. With that follows a heightened charge and a need for discharge. The child needs to regulate sexual tension. The sexual object has changed from the infant’s breast and pleasure-sensations in the oral area and pleasure in elimination and

streaming in the anal cavity by the toddler. Now, excitement in the whole body with especially increased streaming in the genitals relates to involvement with the preferred love object in the family. The need is to “be loved *with* my pulsating aliveness”. In adolescence, the need is “to choose and to be chosen” grounded in integration of selfhood and sexual desire of the adult body. Full integration of all these developmental steps demands parents supporting energetic aliveness of the growing self. Integration is work and all work require energy. Surplus of energy is what drives integration (Hafstad, 2018).

The developmental line described is subject to vulnerabilities. It is more likely than not, that some of them appears and interferes with integration. Rejection of aliveness incorporate shame into personality. It has different effects on each of the four stages.

After the infant stage, it may leave a feeling that “I am not of this species. I am different and one to be attacked by my own species. I carry the shame of not being like the others”. Shame in the infant makes the self and the world feel cold and foreign.

After the separation-individuation (mirroring) phase, “I am extraordinary, but is thrown down, left in humiliation and shame of myself”. Shame in the mirroring phase creates a constant vulnerability to devaluation and as protection from that, a constant struggle to be seen.

After the oedipal stage: “I am wrong and terrible because of my dirty excitement. I am ashamed of it and disclaims it’s me”. The sexual intensification of the child’s oedipal phase challenges the family field. The triadic constellation between mother, father and child intensifies. If the parents get disturbed, it hits into the child’s vital core of being and the whole organism contracts (castration).

After adolescence: “I am not worthy of anyone and cannot expect to be chosen. I am too defective and dirty” (sexual ruination). The summed-up constellation of shame and contraction at that time, sets the scenario for the future.

Children are by nature alive, spontaneously motile and express pleasure in everyday life. Sexual feelings are at first not different from other states of pleasure and aliveness. When children are shamed when in sexual excitement, sexuality easily connects to shame. Children do not distinguish love from sexuality, but if parents do in a confusing way and thereby disturb the vital connection to the child, the following contraction

builds some split that the child is not ready for, between affection and excitement. Clinical experience show it is hard to mend that split.

In all the stages shame tags negative affect to the Self, sexual identity and sexual drive. When identification with good sexual feeling comes to arrest, as we can sense – life turns into a struggle of confusion and pain. It is quite a loss, since sexual feeling is one of the very gifts of life. The feeling of life lose harmony, sweetness turns sour. Vitality suffers.

The child has to find its best adaptive response after the moments of arrest. Such a response is hard to put in reverse and has a good chance to persist and consolidate. Decades later the adaptive pattern forms into character traits – traits that keeps vitality disrupted. They only have meaning in the context of the childhood scenario. Character defense strongly conserves a field that is mutually composed of sexuality and shame. Despite the defenses and shame, there may also appear memories from childhood that holds sweetness of sexuality, liveliness and tenderness. I remember such feelings from before going to school, from a time when I directed those sweet good feelings towards my mother. I remember telling her that when I got old enough, I wanted to marry her. Remembrance of the love we once felt for those who also did hurt us, is an important gate to the childhood vitality we once had. Whatever we had of that early sweet feeling is a source for a connection to our vitality now. If it ever was, it can and needs to be restored. I see this as *a major goal in the healing of sexuality and shame*.

Shame

Shame is not a singular phenomenon but an array of different experiences. It is possible to differentiating some main forms.

I will start with the state of *shamelessness*, which I define *as an inability to consciously feel and process the affect of shame, and a tendency to act out in ways that would be shameful or humiliating for others*.

In some persons, it is the dominant way of living shame, as in sociopathic and severely narcissistic personalities. It may occur because the normal capacity for shame has not developed in the ordinary way. Besides, it is common in psychotic states, were the ability to feel shame disintegrates in the person as part of the psychotic regression. Also, it increases in altered states of consciousness and under substance influence.

There is also a *second form of shamelessness*, where early experiences of shame have been so severe that we have developed a deadening

defense against the feeling of shame. I say “we” since some shamelessness can be present in any person. We have disowned-disconnected-unfelt parts of our selves. It can be a state *or* a context dependent response. Sometimes it dawns upon us when we recover ordinary sensitivity and contact with ourselves: “My God, what did I do!”

Shame states have generally a regulatory effect on behavior; they intervene by self-critical evaluation before we release behavior scripts into action. Shame have a tendency to inhibit spontaneous behavior and restrict our freedom of action. Nevertheless, shamelessness is a condition where we have lost social sensitivity, self-judgement, borders and felt responsibility. It can be considered the most primitive and disintegrated aspect of shame.

A second form of shame is *severe shame*. It is an extremely painful experience where we feel loss of personal value, below other persons and undeserving of recognition and love. At its most, it is a process of inner ruination or even dying. Everything feels lost and there is no mercy, no hope for recovery of social dignity. It is a most dangerous condition if it turns into a chronic state. It makes sense that shamelessness or - killing the awareness of shame - sometimes is the only found defense against self-destruction. If we feel lowered to an intolerable degree, we may feel that we are not any longer tolerable to others, we are outcasts, the scum of the earth, we are useless and deserves no pity or recognition, even to exist. It can turn into a very damaging state. It has far-reaching bodily and energetic implications and it reduces our capacity for social and cognitive functioning. The effect is traumatizing.

Humiliation is a harsh form of interpersonal shame that require a humiliating agent to imposing it and is particularly devastating. When repeated, severe shame leads to shaping of an *ideal-self* while humiliation leads to shaping of a *persecutory internal object* and a mental state of hypervigilance to protect oneself from persecutory attacks. Humiliation vulnerability is more violent, more violating and involves the use of power, force or rage by a significant other. The risk of fragmenting self is greater. The person feels less able to face the world and may turn to protective maneuvers like contempt, manipulation, projection, projective identification, derision or out and out hate.

Narcissistic shame

Since the work of Kohut, (1977) the field generally agrees that severe shame in the narcissistic form stems from disturbances in the

separation-individuation (mirroring) phase. We often see this pattern in persons aspiring for place, status, and affiliation with the clan. At the same time, they might display a slouching posture, inaudible speech and averted gaze, hallmarks of narcissistic shame (Morrison 1989). If not expressed, the therapist might sense an apology of the self's very existence. When in shame we are unable to look others in the face, or we wear a mask – as ocular and facial hiding. Bodily shame is the concealed side – that I am ashamed of who I am, my body and body parts and bodily expression. I am ashamed to be the organism I am, the erotic self, the person seeking fulfillment through an alive good body feeling. This kind of shame splits us from our body and erotically grounded self. Social shame can be a defense against or displacement of bodily shame. The averted gaze and the mask can also cover pelvic movement, penis or vagina, the look of lust or desire and guard our hidden erotic fantasies or sexual secrets. The naked body itself (Helfaer 2011).

In this condition, there is a tendency to be fixated on unattainable ideas. When the person realize that he never can reach his goals, a crisis appears. This leaves an emptiness that can lead to the opening of Self-respect and from there a connection with the body.

Arrest of vital movement

Every sound childhood expresses the somatic pulsation of life through excitement, love, emotion, feeling, and play (Conger 2001). Appreciation and respectful awareness support the child's energetic flow and allows its energetic expansion. Its expression is upright, bright and prideful. The paradox is that the livelier expanded and therefore sensitized a child is, the more he or she is susceptible to shame. *It is as sexual vitality invites shame to enter into the life scene.*

Events or patterns of arresting vital movement can occur in any or all of the stages mentioned above. The parental forms of stopping have a broad range from respectful firmness to disrespectful rage and violence. Stopping responses also includes absence of contact, neglect and lack of attention. A most severe energetic arrest appears in mortification. Children been exposed to parental hate, hateful behaviors and hateful family environment may in effect be grossly stopped in all levels of their movement. They have to develop all kinds of compensatory attitudes and a characterological pattern called the *self-hate system*. They learn to hate themselves. It is even worse than that since it is so chaotic, complex and torturous. The child introjects hate and even hate oneself for not being able to win the

parents approval and love. What dominates life is a fundamental internalized “reality” of having earned hate. With any such experience in early vital relations comes a chronic organismic contraction. To the extent movement is stopped –life is painfully stopped. The shamed humiliated child shrinks in, collapses down (Helfaer 2011). *The organism cannot any longer sustain the same level of energy.* Were happy liveliness circulated, shame now infuses as a mix of cognitive and affective components that can constitute a more or less energy reducing closed loop.

Later, in adult life, the affective and energetic side of shame, rooted in bodily and affective reactions from childhood continues to circulate along with a set of idealizations developed in childhood as response to the contraction.

Milder forms of destructive shame are probably more common. They include a phobic response to flushing, to public attention, a sensitivity to being embarrassed and a preoccupation with appearance, with success and fulfilling ideals. The general quality is not so much a devaluation of the Self and inner pain, it is more a fear of what can happen to one’s social Self that is caught in anticipated humiliation and shame.

Then we arrive at a final form of shame. It is the ordinary occasional experience of the shame-emotion. A sound response to having acted in a way to others that violates one’s own values. It is a social sentiment of feeling a lowering of self-value in relation to another or others and a need to do some correction of the wrong or saying that I am sorry. Shame in this form can blend with guilt. It is a socially adaptive and self-regulating capacity in social life. It is not attacking self-respect or a capacity for compassion. On the contrary, it guides and motivates us to treat our self and others in a good way. “I cannot accept what I did and needs to undo the fault as best I can”. It is a sound part of social and moral sensitivity. It is tolerable and do not harm vitality and mature functioning. There are children who grows up with this fine capacity, and many parents who support it. They support children’s good body feeling and fertilize the ground for sound aspirations and strivings. The child may still feel shame but not the repetitive misery-making sort. Shame then, can aid strivings in a way that take care of both the child’s autonomous needs and the need for a vital connection.

Polar energetic dynamics of sexuality and shame

Sexual aliveness generally increases organismic pulsation and flow, deep soft breathing, bodily charge and expansive flow from core to

periphery. Also, increased sensitivity at the peripheral contact points, increases the inflow to the core and feeling of a unified organismic self. Sexual aliveness flows readily through all segments, improves grounding and organismic balance. Sexual aliveness supports motility of the pelvis. It is as the whole organism is fertilized and enriched. This organismic proliferation builds a reservoir of surplus energy ready for creative involvements, full sexual involvement with orgasmic discharge and growing personal integrity.

Energetically, destructive shame has a profile that is the opposite of sexual aliveness. Organismic pulsation and flow stagnate towards a standstill. Generally, it restrains breath and reduces pulsation between core and periphery. It creates contractions and tensions in the core and reduces flow towards the contact points. “Feeling my organismic self” may be lost. It represents a withdrawal from the world and anesthetizes the erogenous zones. Shame runs counter to sexual aliveness and grounding. It has more or less contracting effects on all the body segments. The down braking collapsing effect blends more or less with a compensatory “pulled up” and upward displaced energetic dynamic. The body is more or less deserted and the head takes a role of “a refugee camp”, filled with dysphoric affects, noisy and disturbing thoughts. Remark that this dynamic is *not* valid for shamelessness and the sound shame emotion.

Let us remember the qualities of shame I have mentioned:

Shamelessness, severe shame, the milder form of destructive shame and finally the ordinary and sound experience of the shame emotion.

As we can see, the five forms of shame differ significantly in its operation and consequence: *Shamelessness* does not inhibit sexual expression but twist it to a forced, destructive and insensitive way. *Destructive shame*, especially when it is severe, runs counter to sexual feeling, expression and function. *The mature form* of shame enhances sexual sensitivity and develop its respectful expression. Also, concerning underlying energetic dynamics, there is differences. Shameless sexual expression does not come from the sensitive core but from an intermediate forced layer of activation, violating bioenergetic integrity. The mature form of shame is careful, soft and sensitive but governed by self-respect and respect for the other. Its energetic pulse and flow are full, concerned, and in tune with the heart. And so, it promotes bioenergetic integrity.

Character formation

Now, a word about the nature of contact. I understand contact as appearing at an interface, where life on the one side feels life on the other, or in short – contact is “life feeling life”. It happens within a person and between persons. The vital connection between the child and the beloved object – feeling alive in togetherness is of central importance to the child in becoming a person. My first memory is a clear one; I must have been a little more than a year.

I woke up in bed, the sun was shining and no one else was there. Where were the others? With much insecurity, I climbed over the high fence of the bed, stumbled over the floor and went fearful down the steps as if it was my first descent alone. The door to the right led to where the others were. Proudly I opened it and looked for cheering response: Here I am - I did it on my own! Then I saw my mother there, her look was angry or hostile. I remember the shrinking feeling.

I was not welcomed in my autonomy achievement. My movement arrested. It gives some insight into the sensitivity of the individuation – separation phase. This experience shows that at every age, the fate of the child’s need is at stake.

Disruptions in the vital connection can make a strong organismic effect: The indwelling tendency in every child is pulsation, expansion and inflow. With pulsation comes *contact sensitivity* – discrimination of the life enhancing from the life disruptive. When the alive, contact-full and sensitive child is exposed to shame in the oedipal period, or at any other charged developmental moment, the child is so sensitized to disturbance that it hits straight into the core of being. It hits the “life nerve”. Shaming sexuality or its expressions as liveliness, has an immediate disturbing consequence. It functions as what we call “one trial learning”. One such experience can be a change maker that is very resistant to be undone. It is character forming. Which of the shame qualities (see above) that follows the experience will determine the energetic modification that follows and in turn, what defensive and adaptive operations gets mobilized?

Shame motivates to conceal, in contrast with guilt that motivates to confess. In its concealed form and ever present, shame is hidden under a protective attitude against shame. Attitudes like arrogance, irony, superiority and grandiosity serves this need to hide. Underneath this cover, there are defenses as rage, contempt; envy; depression; hypochondria; mania and narcissism. Sometimes shame and contempt serve as a defense that

cover intense drive conflicts arising around the Oedipus complex (Helfaer 2011, Morrison 1989).

Systems

The layer of character attitude and the defenses joins with adaptive structures, mainly the *Shame System, Ideal-Self and Self-Hate System* (Helfaer 2011):

Shame-system

When the universal experience shame amounts to feeling worthless, failing, lacking and defective -combines with feeling not to belong and loss of vital connections, it can become a “system”. It may include humiliation, shame of the body or body parts, genital desire and expression. Filled with shame, we want to sink into the ground and disappear. The child internalizes a shame of “what I am”. Shame in this sense – can have a disintegrative impact. Mortification is an unbearably painful form of humiliation. It makes being in the world very difficult. Shame as a system can also develop from chronic painful shaming or neglect of the child: “they show me how worthless I am”. When it becomes a subjective reality to the child, explaining the bodily pain, it takes hold of the child’s being. Mind follows body. Integrated into the character – it forms a closed loop that perpetuates the initial contraction. The effort to reconnect or reconstruct the early vital relationship is fueling the character system. The tragedy continues since it is an attempt to establish love and being loveable. It becomes a futile attempt to construct a cohesive Self. The “plan” is dependent on a contraction repetition.

Ideal-self

This system builds when the real bodily self becomes incongruent with the parental response. The child then attempts to respond, think and feel based on his or her limited experience of what can make me lovable. The result is a person with unrealistic and unrealizable strivings that produces vulnerability. *Narcissistic vulnerability* appears in persons who has a view of themselves as fundamentally flawed and defective in relation to the parents. They have fallen short of their internalized parents ideals and goals. They tragically repeat the belief that they only can become someone of worth through becoming the parent’s ideal daughter or son. This builds a narcissistic tension between grandiosity and desire for perfection on the one side and a basic sense of self as flawed. There is an incompatible need for absolute autonomy and uniqueness on one side and a wish for perfect

merger and reunion through projected fantasy of the ideal way of being. So shunning shame drives narcissism always higher and higher, reflected in a pulled-up body attitude. This often happens when there is a history where parents shamed the child's need for both merger and childish longings to be special and unique. The situation is one of inner chaos, confusion and turmoil.

Self-hate system

A child exposed to profound and consistent disrespect of their being, self and personhood, can develop identification with the aggressor-parent and create a negative identity to justify the hate. The child turns against the self in a powerful, intense way.

The core hurt

Underneath these attitudes, defenses and (mal) adaptive structure lies the shame of not feeling lovable and lost sexual aliveness, implying a chronic contraction at the core of being.

Therapy

Therapeutic work with shame and sexuality is inherent in Bioenergetic therapy.

Goals

- Becoming a person in the bioenergetic sense, implies some main goals in restoring sound sexuality and shame:
- Restoring organismic pulsation, flow and core sexual feeling.
- Restoring general body feeling and contact sensitivity - life feeling life.
- Developing self-respect and respectful sensitivity for others
- Restoring a shame response that is in tune with respect for self and others
- Ability to develop sexual fulfillment through a mature vital connection

Self-respect is an organismic concept, not a psychological one. It is about our capacity to regulate ourselves in tune with our true organismic state, desire and feeling. With this orientation, we foster aliveness, motility and flow of energy (Helfaer 1998).

General therapeutic orientation (Helfaer 2011):

The shame of the patient is “contagious”; often touching the therapist own shame issue. Feeling of failure is actually the feeling of shame or the failure to live up to once goals, ambitions and ideals. Sound Selfhood holds the quality of Self-respect and the fostering of sexuality. We need to consider our countertransference feelings along with the theme in the client. The therapist needs contact with his own failures to achieve goals, to see ambitions, grandiosity and ideals in himself. The therapist needs to metabolize own experience with the client and be aware of and welcome his own shame. Processing of empathic failures, mistakes, misunderstandings and poor judgement promotes progress. Through discovery, examination and working with shame, the experience that the therapist and client alike can accept shame and its origins – is a major curative factor.

Sexuality is one of the major organizing principles of personality – with selfhood being another. If sex is the biological expression of sexuality and gender, then self-respect is the biological expression of selfhood. For shame, the healing antidote is acceptance of the self. Acceptance is in the larger context of respect, leading to the attainment of self-respect. The respect for the feelings, states and reality of the body. These twin themes is a continuous part of the process.

Do energetic work in the same contact-full attunement, sensitive and respectful attitude as any other part of therapy.

In the bioenergetic approach of *seeing the person*, we are dealing with shame issue from the first moment! Staying in contact full seeing – the shame issue becomes even more central, since we bring the client into shame vulnerability when feeling looked at. The eye of the therapist stimulates the shame issue. He/she must go on with the business of looking still. Therapist’s self-warmth and self-acceptance at the body level can support him/her in this shaky situation. The client may sense this as supporting and grounding respect that can allow the way for genuine movement.

From the moment when body experience becomes the focus, it is advisable to give room for verbal processing along with energetic work. Analytic-reflective dialogue helps reality testing the belief system and to separate it from the affect: In shame, we live the delusion of having a horrible feeling *because* we are not up to justified goals. In truth, the feeling was here way before the goals. We constructed the ideals afterwards as a need to keep hope of the vital connection. If not seen through, the illusion can go on in a lifetime, keeping the energetic process in its contracted grip.

Energetic work, stimulating pulsation, deep breathing, crying and release of anger – undermines the illusion and we can reach the origin of the painful shame experience. Capacity for self-respect grows through feeling the newly enlivened body.

We must be prepared for projective identifications that claims: You are the one to be ashamed - You are the inadequate one! Narcissistic rage attempts to get outside what is inside. Self-respect allows us to feel and suffer our shame and pain, its sources and its end. To integrate estranged parts, therapist needs to aid it back so the client can feel and own it.

There is a confusing swing between self-degradation and grandiosity. It has a counterpart in two polar identities: I am worthless/ I am special. The swing makes contacting bodily feeling difficult, since any feeling can be attacked and therefore invalid. Desire, needs and genital feeling suffers the same fate. It is the therapist's job to hold self-respect continuously in the relationship and bring it back to the realities of the body. We cannot escape that "the body is me", but the conflict between self-denigration and self-respect can be held and felt in the here and now. Gradually, the person can develop a sense of "respecting me as a living body". I am simply as human as others.

With that comes a capacity for pleasure and sexual fulfillment. It has to include the feeling that I am one of my kin; I can feel my genitality as my good essence. I am one that can choose and be chosen as man or woman. In reality - choosing comes from an inner movement. It comes from a bodily feeling of excitement of connecting with a desired person. As I come to feel my body and have good feelings in my body, it is possible to feel like a good person.

Specific bioenergetic work

Although there is no simple technique necessarily involved, I find one kind of approach often suitable:

The standing position has several advantages in working with shame and sexuality. I have already mentioned that to stand is to stand in oneself, to stand as man or woman, to feel how I stand in my life and to mobilize the theme of being seen as a person. In standing the body gets as aligned as it can and the energetic system is mobilized by gravity (Hafstad 2013). The gravitational pull stimulates a down-up charging wave that invites pulsation and flow. We can often feel this *pulsatory grounding wave* as a first

sign that my Self is not in the head but resides in body aliveness. As such, it appears as a resource for further work with shame and sexuality.

I start with the standing position, inviting to just stand with bare feet, stand as good as you can and feel into yourself. I both look and feel how your uncertainty, tensions and spontaneous motility affect my body. What is your unsureness, how do you tense up? I ask what you feel and may give feedback on any spontaneous movement. Both the way we live our shame and sexuality is immediately here in the standing. It hits the therapist strongly. At the same time, I can see the organization of posture. I see what is most striking about the awkward grounding. I may comment or not. So here we are, with a direct road to work with those themes.

Then I suggest a few modifications. First is positioning the feet aligned and feel the difference. People usually say it is strange or unnatural. I consent, but suggest they try it anyway. Then I suggest they experience their breathing. They may tell what they sense or not. I suggest they allow it to go as deep as it can and see/feel what is going on. They may share an experience or not. I keep my impression/feeling. Then I ask if they would try something new and tells what I have in mind, if I have consent, I just say:

Just continue your breathing and let down in your knees while you breath in, push into the floor while breathing out.

For some it is impossible, since breathing in is ego control, while letting down is ego surrender – incompatible to the ego. The movement require letting go of ego superiority and surrender to “body, breadth and Self moving from the ground”. Asoutbreath and felt contact with the ground supports one another by pushing into the feet, a pulsatory wave goes upward through the body segments. It is *the pulsatory grounding wave*. In the standing position, the segments show the state of energetic modification. When the pulsation is activated, we have a situation to work dynamically with them from the feet up. When working with the pelvic blocks, I found particularly useful two interventions introduced by Helfaer (1998): “*Stopping the movement*” Which investigates the pelvic contraction pattern of the person and “*Identification with the genital*” Which invites and supports genital movement to develop again.

Summing up and Conclusions

How can sexuality influence shame?

Sexual aliveness generally increases organismic pulsation and flow, deep soft breathing, bodily charge and expansive flow from core to periphery. Also, increased sensitivity at the peripheral contact points, increases the inflow to the core and feeling of a unified organismic self. Sexual aliveness flows readily through all segments, improves grounding and organismic balance. Sexual aliveness supports motility of the pelvis. It is as the whole organism is fertilized and enriched. This organismic proliferation builds a reservoir of surplus energy that needs to be down regulated through creative investments of any sort and frequent enough full orgasmic discharge.

Feeling body aliveness and Sexual streaming can neutralize the effect of shame. Reconnecting to the love we once felt in childhood, is an important gate to vitality now. Feeling again that early sweet feeling is to connect to core aliveness now. It is a major goal in the healing of sexuality and shame. Any person's appreciation and respectful awareness of their energetic flow, allows it to expand and to regain upright, bright and prideful posture.

How can shame influence sexual function?

I have differentiated between shamelessness, severe shame, the milder form of destructive shame and finally the ordinary and sound experience of the shame emotion.

Destructive shame runs counter to sexual feeling, expression and function. Energetically, it is the opposite of sexual aliveness. Organismic pulsation and flow stagnate towards a standstill. Generally, it restrains breath and reduces pulsation between core and periphery. It creates contractions and tensions at the core of being and reduces flow towards the contact points. "Feeling my organismic self" may be lost. It represents a withdrawal from the world and anesthetizes the erogenous zones. Shame runs counter to sexual aliveness and grounding. It has more or less contracting effects on all the body segments. The down braking collapsing effect blends more or less with a compensatory "pulled up" and upward displaced energetic dynamic. The body is more or less deserted and the head takes a role of "a refugee camp".

Shamelessness does not inhibit sexual expression but twist it to a forced, destructive and insensitive way. This sexual expression does not come from the sensitive core but from an intermediate forced layer of activation, violating bioenergetic integrity.

The mature form of shame enhances sexual sensitivity and develops its respectful expression. This shame is careful, soft and sensitive but governed by self-respect and respect for the other. Its energetic pulse and flow are concerned, and in tune with the heart. It promotes bioenergetics integrity.

It is more likely than not, that shame appears in the developmental line of sexuality and interferes with integration. Some disturbances incorporate shame into personality. It has different effects on each of the four stages mentioned. After the infant stage, it may leave a feeling that “I am not of this species” (reification). After the mirroring phase, “I am extraordinary, but is thrown down” (narcissistic vulnerability). After the oedipal stage: “I am wrong and terrible because of my dirty excitement. I am ashamed of it and disclaims it’s me” (castration). After adolescence: “I am not worthy of anyone and cannot expect to be chosen. I am too defective and dirty” (sexual ruination).

In all the stages shame tags negative affect to the Self, sexual identity and sexual drive. It hits into the child’s vital core of being and the whole organism contracts. The summed-up constellation of shame and contraction at that time, sets the scenario for the future.

Shaming sexuality or its expressions as liveliness, has an immediate disturbing consequence. It functions as what we call “one trial learning”. The child shrinks in, collapses down and loses integrative capacity. One such experience can be a change maker that is very resistant to be undone. It is character forming. In addition, which of the shame qualities that enter the experience will have influence on the energetic modification and after that, mobilization of corresponding defensive and adaptive operations. Character defense strongly conserves a field that is mutually composed of sexuality and shame.

How can we deal with shame and sexuality in psychotherapy?

Be respectful. Identify the core hurt. Find out what unattainable ideas are active. Take advantage of the emptiness crisis that appears when the belief system collapses. Support Self-respect and a new connection with the body.

Support organismic pulsation, flow, general body- and sexual feeling. Activate the pulsatory grounding wave early in the process. Find ways to stimulate energetic pulsation. Identification with the genital is a direct way to give sexuality a new drive in countering the domination of shame.

Stimulate contact sensitivity. Support a sound shame response. Promote sexual fulfillment through a mature vital connection in the client's life.

Be friendly to your own shame issue. Accept your failures and see through your own goals, ambitions and ideals. Foster your own self-respect and sexuality. Consider countertransference feelings along with the theme in the client. Remember that for shame the healing antidote is acceptance of both selves in the room. Both needs to have good body feeling to feel like good persons. Self-respect reduces the toxic effects of the shame systems. Grounding is a way to reduce the effect of the ideal self.

Developing self-respect and a sound shame response dampen the dysregulating effects of shame. Restoring a feeling of being lovable and experiencing sexual aliveness dissolves character patterns and bodily contraction.

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