Emotional harm and its transformation to healing

A workshop with Margaret Thorsborne
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Workshop outcomes

Participants will:

• Understand the nature of emotional harm and the behaviours that result from that harm

• Understand how it is that restorative/CR approaches are more likely to help both those responsible and those harmed

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Relational harm

At your tables and in 2 or 3’s, discuss a case of conflict/crime you know and draw a sociogram of the web of relationships within the case

Who is in the story?

Indicate where the greatest damage has been done to these people and their relationships

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What do those harmed need?

- To tell their story and explain what it has been like
- To be understood
- To understand why it happened
- To be validated and have harm acknowledged
- To know the person responsible is genuine around apology
- To be relieved of the burden of their shame
- To be reconnected with their community of care
- To be able to heal and let go (forgiveness?)
What do those responsible need?

- A chance to be able to explain themselves
- To be understood
- To be treated with respect
- To be reconnected with their community of care
- To be relieved of their burden of shame
- To be able to participate in deciding what to do
- To have their harms addressed
- To be able to heal and let go (redemption)
Satisfaction

procedural

emotional

substantive

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Transformation of emotion

Time and process

-ve

+ve

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Fraught/toxic relationships

Chronic distress
Chronic shame
Chronic fear
Chronic anger
Chronic disgust
When harm causes shame (as it almost always does), it usually creates further harm. Shame is triggered by any impediment to positive affect BUT once triggered it also acts as a further impediment.

The extreme end product of this process is TOXIC SHAME that completely isolates people from self, friends, family, and community.

Traditional methods of punishment for misdeeds and crimes (especially prisons) increase shame in both perpetrator and victim alike making toxic shame outcomes more likely.
Partial list of shame-based emotions

- Ashamed of the self
- Hurt feelings
- Feeling Abandoned or Rejected
- Feeling Distant from others
- Feelings of Loneliness
- Shyness
- Feeling Exposed
- Frustration
- Feeling Disappointed.
- Having a sense of Helplessness or Despair.
- Feeling Discriminated against and Disrespected.
- Feeling Weak, Incompetent and like a Loser.
- Feeling Guilty about something I did that made me look lesser in the eyes of others and myself.

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Kelly, 2014
Defensive Responses to Shame

How do people respond when shame is triggered and the information shame provides cannot be used to constructively remove the impediment?
Defending against shame

ATTACK OTHER

WITHDRAWAL

ATTACK SELF

AVOIDANCE

Nathanson, 1992
Defending against backed-up distress

Augment → Prevent

Escape → Immerse

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Nathanson, 2000
Distress

- The affect triggered when something goes wrong and stays wrong
- If disavowed, distress will back up, eventually impacting on long term health outcomes
How can restorative/CR processes help?

Central blueprint rules:

1. Coming together to tell the stories about the incident(s) (mutualising the expression of affect)

2. Listening carefully (with increasing understanding and acknowledgment) to the harm (ie metabolising −ve affect)

3. Making plans for the future and reconnecting of relationships (maximising +ve affect)