HOLDING SHAME WITHOUT SHAMING :
FINDING AFFECTIVE AGENCY IN A MENS GROUP

WHAT CAN A MENS GROUP DO?

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Social ordering in a world of winners and losers



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AFFECTIVE POLITICS

Violence and Coercion

as deviant or over-conforming?

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MORAL IMPERATIVES

Stop violence

You are a perpetrator

Man up and take responsibility

Real men don't use violence

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MORAL IMPERATIVES → ORDERING JUDGEMENTS

Stop violence

You are a perpetrator

Man up and take responsibility

Real men don't use violence

(felt as) social threat / judgement

You are weak / pathetic
You're not a real man

I'm not a violent man

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' DON'T BE THAT FATHER'

What animates a moral to ethical shift?

A MORAL IMPERATIVE

↓

AN ETHICAL STRIVING

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REGISTERS OF SOCIAL THREAT – LATE LIBERALISM

SITES OF SOCIAL ORDERING –> POINTS OF INFLECTION

1. SOCIAL FIT → BELONGING – ABANDONMENT

   Loss, neglect, isolation, rejection

   Do I fit in?
   Do I belong?
   Am I losing connection? → PANIC-LOSS

2. SOCIAL VALUE/WORTH → SOMEBODY – NOBODY
   WINNER – LOSER

   Ongoing judgement & relegation

   Do I matter?
   Am I good enough? → SHAME (HUMILIATION)

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EXPLORING AFFECTIVE AGENCY

Reflection 1

Challenges in this work

What are we up against?
What sustains us?

Reflection 2

A flow of productive energy that moved you and appeared to move other men

How does this flow emerge?
What does it do?

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EXPLORING AFFECTIVE AGENCY

Reflection 1

What are we up against?

What sustains us?

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WHAT SUSTAINS US

COLLECTIVE ACTION	Mutual support - resistance Part of bigger project
ETHICAL INTEGRITY	
FAIRNESS	Resisting injustice
COMPASSION	Refusal to judge - exclude
ENDURANCE	In face of adversity
PATIENCE	Small steps towards big goals
REGULATED AFFECT	Responding vs. reacting

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Politics of othering

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Motif

A passionate interest in otherness

as the antithesis of violence.

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ETHICS – INTEREST IN OTHERNESS

FAIRNESS / PROTEST	resists social ordering / othering
REMORSE	other-centred / respects boundaries
LOVE	interested in difference
COLLABORATION	we are in this together

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AFFECTIVE AGENCY

A flow of productive energy that moved you and appeared to move other men

- How does this flow emerge?
- What does it do?
- What might enable it?

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AFFECTIVE AGENCY

Strong men's group

PROTEST
↓
REMORSE
↓
LOVE
↕
COLLABORATION

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AFFECTS THAT ANIMATE VIOLENCE

PANIC-LOSS ⟷ Threats to belonging
connection
social fit / status
(*I don't fit in ; I'm losing it)*

↓

SHAME ⟷ Social ordering – threat of judgment
Insufficiency
Worthlessness
(I'm not good enough)

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EXPLANATORY MOTIF

Abusive, coercive and controlling behaviours as a consequence of *our* problematic relationships with Shame

POLITICS OF SHAMING
POLITICS OF SHAME ERASURE

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A POLITICS FOR AFFECTIVE ACTIVISM

ATTUNEMENT ⟷ EMPATHIC UNSETTLEMENT

Co-regulation => (resonance – rupture – repair)

Affective Curiosity

- *What is driving this reactive behaviour?*
- *What else might there be?*

Fostering Ethical Protest & Resistance

A Proper Relationship with SHAME

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GEORGE'S STORY

Transforming shame through protest

'I exploded again'

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GEORGE'S PRESENTATION - Overwhelming hopelessness

Sense of humiliated defeat – resignation

I can't bear it

I know what I'm doing is wrong

It's killing (my wife & children) *It's killing me*

What I'm doing is destroying everything that matters but I just can't stop it

I seem to stuff up everything I do

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GEORGE'S PRESENTATION

I can't bear it

What I'm doing is destroying everything that matters but I just can't stop it

I seem to stuff up everything I do

↕

She never gave me a chance

She just ups and leaves like that

Humiliated defeat

↕

Contemptuous blame

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GEORGE'S PRESENTATION – SOCIAL THREAT

AFFECTIVE POLITICS OF SHAME

I can't bear it
It's killing Stevie & Ricky
I'm doing destroying everything that matters but I just can't stop it

↕

I seem to stuff up everything I do

↕

She never gave me a chance
She just ups and leaves like that

[You guys always take the woman's view]
[No-one believes the man these days]

Desperate panic
PANIC – LOSS

↕

Humiliated despair
REACTIVE SHAME

↕

Contemptuous blame
CONTEMPT

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NEUROPOLITICS OF SHAME

AFFECT SYSTEMS ATTUNED TO SOCIAL THREAT

PANIC – LOSS (jolt) ← THREAT OF LOSS
- CONNECTION / BELONGING
- STATUS

↓

SHAME (wince) ← THREAT OF JUDGEMENT
(reactive) SOCIAL ORDERING
HUMILIATION

DISGRACE (cringe) ← RECOGNITION OF VIOLATION
(responsive)

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NEUROPOLITICS OF SHAME

AFFECTIVE REACTIONS IN SOCIAL THREAT – SHAME AVOIDANCE / ERASURE

PANIC – LOSS (jolt) → DEFENSE
DESPERATE / INTRUSIVE ACTIONS

↓

SHAME (wince) → CONCEALED HUMILIATION
(Shutdown / detach)

DISGRACE (cringe) → ↕

CONTEMPT (Sneering judgement
/ blame)

↓

RESIGNATION

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AFFECT REGULATION AS CO-REGULATION

STAYING WITH THE TROUBLE

Stepping into PANIC-LOSS

Holding SHAME

How might we find ways to assist George to identify and build a proper relationship with these affect systems?

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GEORGE'S STORY

Attunement → Becoming Responsive to SHAME

MISTAKEN SHAME – HUMILIATION
(reactive shame) (not good enough)

↓

DISGRACE – REMORSE
(responsive shame) (*seeing* the other)

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REMORSE (Gaita, 2004)

'a pained, bewildered realisation of what it means to wrong someone'

'an awakened sense of the reality of another……through the shock of wrongdoing the other'

'When it is lucid, remorse ……. is an astonished encounter with the reality of the ethical.'

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HOLDING DISGRACE

Can you see Ricky? Can you see his face?
What are you seeing?
What is he feeling?
Who is he terrified of?

If you were to translate your actions as a message to Ricky,
about who he was to you,
about what he meant to you, right at that time,

What would that message be?

If he held that message, what effect would it have?

Would you ever be OK with that?

What do you want to do about that?

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GROUP PROCESSES

Ex. 4] Ethical Commitment in Developing a Duty of Care

How might we set the scene for agency in commencing a men's group by :

- anticipating likely reactions to social threat?

- enabling ethical expression – speaking out?

- privileging the development of duty of care?

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PROCEDURAL PHASES

ETHICAL COMITTMENT

↕

CHALLENGING ABUSIVE PRACTICES

↕

REPARATION & RECLAMATION

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ETHICAL COMMITMENT

1. **Respecting Intent**
2. **Anticipating Social Threat**
3. **Eliciting Ethical Strivings**
4. **Duty of Care rather than Judgement**

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ETHICAL STRIVINGS

What has brought you here today?

What did it take to walk in here today?

What have you felt up against?

What have you had to find in yourself?

How does it affect you to be here with this group of men?

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ETHICAL STRIVINGS

What is important for you? What do you want to achieve?

What are your hopes & visions as a father / as a partner?

What is important for the people you care about?

What worries you about how they feel around you?

How are you wanting them to feel?

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ETHICAL STRIVINGS

What kind of father am I wanting to be?

How am I wanting my kids to see me?

How am I wanting them to feel in my presence?

How am I wanting them to look back on me when they grow up?

How do I want to do it differently?

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ETHICAL STRIVINGS

Where does this striving come from?

How did I learn about this possibility?

Was that the kind of family I grew up in?

How safe did my mum and I feel?

Who had my back when I was a child?

How do I want to do it differently?

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ETHICAL STRIVINGS

How did I manage as a child?

How did I want it to be different?

How do I want to do it differently?

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ETHICAL COMMITMENT

1. **Respecting Intent**
2. **Anticipating Social Threat**
3. **Eliciting Ethical Strivings – Capacity for protest**
4. **Duty of Care rather than Judgement**

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RESPONSIVE ETHICAL INQUIRY

How is that affecting you?
Where is it taking you?
How does it fit with your goal to …?

What is it taking to hold your course?
How did you manage to pull it off?
What were you up against?

What does that say about you?

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RESPONSIVE ETHICAL INQUIRY

Where did Jack's story take me?

I can really tune into what you are saying
When you said …. it made me think ….

You story reminded me of ….
Your story has helped me to see ….

I wonder who else has been there?

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DUTY OF CARE

A Context for :

- **Ethical Expression**
- **Responsive Protest**
- **Remorse**
- **Collaboration**

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RESPONSIVE ETHICAL INQUIRY

What opened your eyes to this realization?
Have you spoken out about this before?
What is it taking to speak out like this?
How are you standing your ground?

Where might this take you?
What do you plan to do about it?

How does this resonate with other men?

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NAMING ABUSIVE PRACTICES

When did you come to see it that way?
How did you realise that?
How did you used to see it?
What opened your eyes?

What difference does it make to see it more like it is?
How does that fit with how your partner might see it?
What tells you that this is a helpful path to take?
How does it fit with the man you are becoming?

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NAMING ABUSIVE PRACTICES

When you did that / saw it that way in the past;
what might this have said to your partner about what she meant to you?
How does that affect you now?

How does this resonate for other men in the group?

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Ex 5. Emergence of PANIC-LOSS in the group

What might these refrains reveal?

How might we respond affectively rather than challenge rationally?

How might we invite a responsive attunement within the group?

How might this become an opportunity for affect co-regulation, rather than avoidance?

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MANAGING PANIC-LOSS REACTIONS

When family is everything and you feel like you're losing it all;

How big can this feeling get? **PANIC**
What does it try to get you to do? **DESPERATION**
How does it try to overwhelm common sense?

How have you been able to manage it?
What has it taken?
What has helped you to stand your ground?

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MANAGING PANIC-LOSS REACTIONS

When family is everything and you feel like you're losing it all;

RESISTANCE

What have you stood to lose?
What is at stake here?
How have you resisted temptation to take desperate measures?
How has it helped to sit with PANIC-LOSS and stand your ground?

ETHICS

What have you proved to yourself?
Where has it taken you?
What has it said to your partner?

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MANAGING PANIC-LOSS REACTIONS

UNDERSTANDING PANIC-LOSS
accept - helpful warning system – social threat

OBSERVING PANIC-LOSS
pause - pay attention to body and automatic thinking

OPPORTUNITY FOR REGULATION
live with it - breathe
- slow down
- take time to think

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TRANSFORMING SHAME

Attunement → Becoming Responsive to SHAME

MISTAKEN SHAME – HUMILIATION
(reactive shame) (not good enough)

↓

DISGRACE – REMORSE
(responsive shame) (*seeing* the other)

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WINDOWS TO SHAME

I don't want to talk about it.
I don't have any feelings about it.
I don't need this. I can handle it myself.

I didn't hurt her.
I lost it.
I can't remember.
It was an accident.

What is revealed?

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LEN'S PRESENTATION

I don't want to talk about it.
I'll never do it again.

I don't want to talk about (impact on partner).
Look it's my shit. My shit is my shit.

I just don't want to talk about it.
I'm ashamed about what I did.
I don't have any feelings about it.

It's shit being here.

What might be obscured here?

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WINDOWS TO SHAME

I don't want to talk about it.
I don't have any feelings about it.
I don't need this. I can handle it myself.

I didn't hurt her.
I lost it.
I can't remember.
It was an accident.

How might we respond?

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WINDOWS TO SHAME

I didn't hurt her - I can't remember.

What might it mean if you did remember?

How might it affect you?

What do you think your partner remembers?

What did your actions mean to her?

How might it affect you if you took a closer look?

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I don't want to talk about it.
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Look it's my shit. My shit is my shit.
I don't want to talk about (impact on partner).

I just don't want to talk about it.
I'm ashamed about what I did.
I don't have any feelings about it.

It's shit being here.

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Ex 7a. A PROPER RELATIONSHIP WITH SHAME

Rob, Mike, Tom and Trevor see the effects of their actions in their children's faces & voices

How might we invite the development of a proper relationship with SHAME?

How might we assist the group to hold SHAME as a marker of integrity and guiding ethical force?

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A PROPER RELATIONSHIP WITH SHAME

INTEGRITY

What does it mean to really see him / her?

What does it take?

What does it say about you?

How might it change you?

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A PROPER RELATIONSHIP WITH SHAME

INTEGRITY

What does this event reveal to you about Rob?

What does it reveal to you about yourself?

How important is it to see it like it is?

What does it take to stand your ground and refuse to run and hide from it?

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A PROPER RELATIONSHIP WITH SHAME

INTEGRITY

What does it tell you about courage and love?

How might Rob's realisation fit with the father you want to be?

How might the depth of this realisation affect your determination to be that father?

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A PROPER RELATIONSHIP WITH SHAME

INTEGRITY – COLLABORATION

How might we make sure this kind of SHAME is a guiding force in the group? Not something to run and hide from?

How might we ensure it makes us stronger rather than weaker?

How might we make sure that we recognise the courage, love and integrity that SHAME reveals?

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Ex 7b. JACK'S PRESENTATION – SEEKING EXCESS

I never really stopped to think how I let Sue down again & again.
I used to apologise to get her to forgive me.
If I was Sue, I wouldn't trust one bit.

I feel really depressed.
I watched (TV doc about rape in marriage) - all these women going on and on about what it did to them.

I've been coming here for 7 weeks and I'm getting nowhere.
I think it's a waste of time.
I don't think Sue will ever want me back.

It's always me who has to change.

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ETHICAL THEMES – GEORGE

ETHICAL CLARIFICATION – Generative strivings

'An awesome dad' – 'promise to always have his back'

What were you determined to provide for Ricky?
What message are you wanting to send to Ricky?
How were you wanting Ricky to feel?
How are you wanting him to feel about his dad?
How are you hoping he will see you when he looks back as an adult?
What are you hoping to pass onto him as your legacy?
What example are you wanting to set for Ricky?

FEELING HE BELONGS	FEELING ON HIS OWN
SUPPORTED	ALONE
SAFE / SECURE	FRIGHTENED / LOST
RESPECTING HIS DAD	SCARED OF HIS DAD
LOOKING TO / ADMIRING	AVOIDING
UNDERSTOOD / LISTENED TO	TALKED AT / CORRECTED
INTERESTED IN HIM	CRITICAL OF HIM
FREE SPIRITED	CONTROLLED / HELD BACK
CHERISHED	TOLERATED
DAD MANAGING PRESSURE	DAD LOSING CONTROL

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BECOMING *AN AWESOME DAD* – AFFECT REGULATION

Every feeling / thought / action has both reactive and responsive elements

BECOMING RESPONSIVE ← **BECOMING REACTIVE**

REGULATION PRACTICES
- creating a gap
- monitoring
- breathing
- anticipating

DYS-REGULATION HABITS
- rushing in
- avoiding
- distracting
- justifying

OTHERNESS PRACTICES
- listening
- stepping in their shoes?
- tolerance – taking time
- considering – what are they feeling?

SELF-CENTRED HABITS
- correcting
- pushing my point
- judgement - jumping in fast
- demanding – what do I want?

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