OVERVIEW

• Attachment enjoyed & disrupted
• Shame and the object body
• Play and Embodiment
• Questions

“Of all of the primary tasks of the infant, there is none more crucial than the pursuit, acquisition and establishment of joyful, securely attached relationships.”

– Curt Thompson referencing Allan Schore in The Soul of Shame
• At our core is a need for joyful relationships.

• Joyful relationship is the experience of another person knowing us in all of our vulnerability and truly meaning, “I am so glad to be with you!”

Shame disrupts the longed for and anticipated joyful connection with someone we believe we can or should be able to trust.

• Instead of “I’m so glad to see you” we perceive others as responding with, “you disgust me.”

• One of our responses to shame is to become overly self-referential

• We often blame ourselves or a personal trait for the experience of shame

• We react to what we think others think of us

• We try to solve our shame in isolation
Shame and Self-Reference

Example:
- Individual is teased and told, “You are fat and ugly.”
- Turns away from others in shame.
- Misses out on other external feedback to counter fear of being abandoned.
- Fixates on perceived flaw, “I’m fat and ugly” and experiences fear of abandonment.
- Attempt to fix the flaw in isolation. “I must lose weight.”

Coping with Shame: Body as Object

If the body is perceived to be the source of shame it is highly likely the body will become intensely objectified.

Shame & the object body
**Object/Corporeal Body**

The Object/Corporeal body is often most apparent to us when we perceive there to be something wrong with it. When we feel tired, injured, sick we begin to say things about the body “I have”. “My legs are sore” as opposed to I’m sore. My head hurts as opposed to “I hurt”.

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**Subject/Lived Body**

The lived or subject body means not only the felt body and bodily sensations... In other words - everyday life when I'm not thinking about or reflecting on my body as a body but simply experiencing life the only way I can - AS a body.

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**Shame and the Body**

We become intensely aware of the corporeal body when we feel exposed and naked [shame] and our body becomes “an object for them, a ‘body-for-others’ and the focus often shifts to our appearance and our perception of how others see us.

—Thomas Fuchs
Anorexia and the Object Body

In anorexia nervosa, the dialectic between being a body-subject and having one's body as an object becomes the core of the disorder.

This...body now becomes an alienated, repulsive object that may even arouse disgust...

Gaining independence from it, and turning it into an object of control and mastery, becomes a source of grandiose triumph (Walter et al. 2007).

— Thomas Fuchs, Phenomenology and Psychopathology

Questions

• How do we heal shame and decrease corporealization/objectification of the body?

• In other words, how do we make the body an avenue of life rather than an obstacle of shame?

Play & Embodiment
Healing Body Shame through Play

1. Play creates space to make mistakes, struggle, and experience both success and disappointment in the context of relationships.
2. Play is often grounded in the experience of the subject body.
3. Play opens up possibilities and increases flexibility, which may shift perspective from self-reference to connection.

Body Play and Movement

“We know ourselves not in a linguistic sense ("I am human"), but in an “existentially kinetic sense, in the sense of being animate”
—Maxine Sheets-Johnson

• Experience the subject body
• Develop mind-body connection
• Trust implicit knowing
• Tolerate discomfort
Social Play

- “Play through” distress in relationship
- Regulate emotions
- Navigate self-other boundaries
- Increase creative problem solving, especially of divergent problems
- Practice risk-taking and resilience

References and Resources

- Thompson, Curt, MD (2015), The Soul of Shame: Retelling the Stories We Believe About Ourselves
- Stuart Brown, TED talk: Play is more than just fun. https://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital?language=en

Questions?