



Shame/Violence Intervention

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I'm sitting in a circle in London's biggest prison, HMP Wandsworth, in a Shame/Violence Intervention (SVI) voluntary discussion group in 2006 comprising the jail's most violent prisoners. Position as a "face" within the violence hierarchy does not depend on any violence associated with your outside offence; your reputation for violence inside and how you are prepared to back this up while still incarcerated are what count. Two are main players who compete for territory to control the jail, Roland and Wayne, and two are their respective hitters, Trevor and Myron,¹ along with one other main player present, plus more hitters and soldiers, as well as those looking to earn their stripes. To be anything in the violence hierarchy, you have to be affiliated; otherwise, you're vulnerable.

I've collected them from across the prison and brought them together in an off-wing area that, like everywhere else, is heavily gated, but where no other prisoners or staff are on the rest of our floor.

¹ All participants' names have been changed.

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Everyone is at different stages of their SVI involvement in this remand jail serving courts and other prisons and therefore experiencing a high turnover of inmates in an ever-changing and unstable environment, where the violence hierarchy is always shifting and frontlines are continually being contested.

Having met one-on-one last week with two inches of locked steel between us for the first part of the interview, it's Myron's first group and, though no one else is smoking, he lights a rollup.

I ask Myron please to put the rollup out and to wait for the break.

By asking Myron to do something in front of the others, it singles him out. But I need to go there. I can feel my shame level creeping up in response to how Myron is carrying himself—a little too complacent around Roland, so therefore not showing him recognition commensurate with his place in the violence hierarchy.

The rollup is a gift to enable me implicitly to bring Myron's passive aggression towards Roland into sharper focus against me, preventing Roland, or those with whom he's affiliated, feeling provoked into violence either during the session or later back on the wing.

Facing Myron in my chair, but with my upper body slightly concave to balance the impact, I ask Myron for a second time please to put the rollup out.

Myron inhales smoke. He looks around, but no one's expression signals anything to him about how to play this. Even Wayne, with whom Myron is affiliated, is deadpan.

Myron looks at me.

I look at him and maintain my gaze.

Myron continues to stare back.

ME

Myron, I do need you please to...

Myron dashes his rollup and springs out of his chair, knocking it over backwards.

MYRON

(yelling at me but not approaching)

Fuck you fucking clown motherfucker and fuck this fucking shit!

Myron's outburst scares me. But I allow my fear to be there, because what I'm focussed on right now isn't my fear of Myron's potential for violence, but the shame coursing through my body from Myron's disrespect.

Shame awareness—staying with shame, feeling it and listening to it with my whole body, monitoring it and tracking it very closely—helps me to cope with fear, because I know that shame is a primary cause of violence and that fear, while it may be present when violence happens, is secondary.

As long as I can stay connected with my shame, this will intuitively connect me with the shame of others in the room and, no matter how frightening it gets, guide me in real time in what to do to prevent anyone having to experience a shame overload and be triggered into violence.

And in helping me cope with fear, shame awareness enables access to something else: a feeling of healthy pride that isn't dependent on the creation of victims. And everything hangs on this, because, driven by a desire to access that same feeling of healthy pride I get as a reward, it motivates others to co-facilitate, which gives me confidence in how we'll achieve an authentic de-escalation that has the backing of everyone involved. There's no way I could handle this with Myron one-on-one; working with the jail's most violent prisoners with me in the room, paradoxically, makes it safe.

Shame is the feeling of vulnerable exposure that detonates inside us when our sense of belonging feels threatened and we become aware of a potential for being seen by another in a way we do not wish. Pride exists at the other end of the continuum from shame and is what we experience when our sense of belonging feels strengthened and instead of wanting to avoid being seen, we relish visibility.

Shame and pride are dynamically linked and they're contagious, giving an instantaneous readout on the state of the social bond (Scheff & Retzinger, 1991). In particular, to ward off group rejection, shame has evolved to trigger a compulsive urge to cover up—indeed, the word “shame” is thought to come from the Proto Indo European “skem”, meaning “to cover”, and this is famously explored in the shame allegory that the early pages of the Bible waste no time getting into ahead of any another human emotion: fig leaves aren't enough; Adam and Eve run for the trees from God for additional cover to hide their shame when he comes looking.

The ejection from Eden can be seen as an allusion to a transition from a hunter-gatherer life to agriculture; instead of living off the natural

environment, we're forced to cultivate land to harvest our own produce. The point in relation to shame is instead of reliance on people we tend to get to know, the population growth arising from the new form of food production means we become increasingly reliant on people we tend not to get to know, to which shame isn't evolutionarily adapted: we may see threats where they don't exist and not see them where they do. This adds to the inherent scope for shame in itself to feel shameful, and the smaller the shame trigger, the more shameful it may feel to be ashamed of it—we may cover up even to ourselves our covering up. We're told explicitly that Adam and Eve felt no shame at being naked, but, at least in the several English versions I've read, once they've eaten the forbidden fruit and the transition happens to agriculture, despite shame being the driving force of the action, it's never directly referenced again—even though less central emotions like anger and fear do get a look in, shame becomes hidden.

But whether we're ashamed of shame or not, and whether we cover up even to ourselves our covering up and shame becomes hidden, where others inflict it, especially from more powerful positions, congruent with our hunter-gatherer heritage where group acceptance was paramount, the possibility of rejection may feel life-threatening, and this may be enough to make us violent. God slights Adam and Eve's eldest son Cain over a grain offering, shaming him, and we move from concealing parts of the body to concealing thoughts, feelings and intentions: targeting an innocent victim lower down the dominance ladder, Cain plots and later commits the world's imagined first premeditated homicide, against his younger brother Abel, showing not only how people below pay the price for shame inflicted above, but also how risk avoidance by those in power to preserve the status quo may heighten risk further down the line—banishment from Eden to protect the tree of life leads to 25% of the allegory's global human population getting whacked.

Whether enacted immediately, moments, years or even decades later in an apparently random fashion, violence defends against and transforms the panicked sense of inadequacy and frighteningly vulnerable feeling of exposure to threat generated by shame. It's about exerting power and control on the outside to counter feeling powerless and out of control on the inside. In denial of both our shame and the fear arising from it, therefore, violence gives access to a toxic form of pride. Staying with shame instead of denying it, on the other hand, allows fear to be there without it taking over, enabling protection and repair of the social bond in real

time, building trust and giving access to a healthy form of pride instead of a toxic version.

To our hunter-gatherer forebears, a sense of belonging was a matter of life and death: pride is not something we're evolved to function without. But while pride in itself isn't negotiable, a question has always been do we lean towards a toxic version, a shameless and shame-avoidant shortcut to a sense of belonging, where fear eats away at the social bond, driving one group against another, even to the point of violence? Or, do we push back against victimisation by leaning towards a healthy version of pride, putting in the extra work to deploy shame awareness to manage fear to protect and repair the social bond in real time to create a sense of belonging that's bigger?

Returning to the SVI group room, in response to Myron's aggressive outburst, Roland doesn't move. His alert stillness is a stabilising influence right now, and I need the backing of this main player at this moment. The sense of belonging I'm experiencing with him is a source of healthy pride, and that feeling is the reason why I'm here.

And my shame in relation to the violated bond with Myron flattens off, telling me Myron is holding it down—he needed to blow as cover for complying with my rollup request and he's done it without hurting anyone, which is great.

But Roland's hitter, Trevor, has his eyes narrowed and his jaw clenched as he stares at Myron.

Trevor has a problem with Myron's disrespect against me, because it's an attack on the sense of belonging Trevor, despite being in a room with prisoners from rival affiliations, has built up in the group. But by me taking Myron on, it prevents Trevor or others doing this a different way, either here, or later back on the wing.

WAYNE
(referring to me)
Rush him!

As if in sympathy with his hitter Myron, main player Wayne lunges at me out of his chair...

Listening with my whole body to shame to manage fear, it means I don't flinch and damage healthy pride to trigger a shame overload in the room leading to violence.

Wayne then laughs... confirming it's a wind-up.

The easier thing for Myron would have been for me in response to his aggression to have pressed the alarm button on my radio, causing staff to come running from different areas of the jail. But by me using shame awareness with Myron to allow my fear to be there, relying on my bond of healthy pride with other group members to give me the confidence and motivation to handle him, it places Myron in a radically unfamiliar situation that's even more stressful than the familiar one, from young offender jail till this moment, of getting jumped on by a deluge of officers and being bent up by three of them in a restraint hold and taken down to the solitary confinement unit.

Having yelled at me threateningly and not followed through, the question for Myron is how can he sit back down in his chair in front of everyone, without experiencing a humiliating overload of shame. For this would compel Myron to become violent either now or later in order not to mug himself off, which would make him vulnerable to reprisal from others in SVI who have as much if not more status and reach in the violence hierarchy as him.

As participants put it, "you can't be wrong and strong". Myron right now has nowhere to go.

To not get taken out by those in their own individual criminal networks, underworld leaders maintain a group sense of belonging through hurting others, diverting the violence of their own people away from themselves as leader and onto those who do not form part of their network. Otherwise, the leader, as the person in the most enviable position that holds the most power over their own people, might be next. And if an external victim isn't readily available, a member from within may be scapegoated. Or both these external and internal projective mechanisms may operate simultaneously. But by staying with my shame and therefore managing my fear, and despite being the butt of Wayne's joke, I'm role-modelling a high-status alternative to violence—protecting the group sense of belonging and holding my ground, yet without creating any victims.

And that was new.

Ascent in the violence hierarchy comprised hurting people on the way up and hurting people to stay up; losing your place involved laying yourself open to getting hurt on the way down. But the healthy version of pride I got from putting my body on the line for violent prisoners in SVI was a gamechanger, because unlike a toxic version, healthy pride didn't motivate a reprisal, yet, like a toxic version, it was still contagious. So,

for people positioned in the violence hierarchy and locked in a cycle of retaliation, healthy pride lit the way to create a bigger sense of belonging in SVI that crossed rival affiliations, shifting the culture and countering its revenge imperative.

In particular, SVI promoted an outwardly potent move in open confrontation that didn't involve violence, but which, even in prison, could be as effective as violence in protecting status, even though you weren't hurting anyone. Matching someone's power in real time enabled your SVI opponent's choice either to leave it there or to take it to the next level, which, if they left it there, amounted to an acceptance of an invitation to share in healthy pride. Or, if they took it to the next level, you could match their power again in an incremental fashion to offer the choice at each stage of the escalation, slowing things down and rendering shame less threatening, boosting confidence there was a different way to deal with it and motivating others to co-facilitate.

Removing choice creates shame overloads that lead to violence. Facilitating choice is at the heart of shame-aware work.

And matching power was most effective if you were able to do it not solely on behalf of yourself, but also on behalf of others without signposting it and therefore without shaming the person you were protecting; you could build trust in that unspoken way even with someone you might normally have feared.

Nor as part of any of this did anyone ever have to refer to territory within the jail. They could operate in a parallel way in relation to discussion topics that might even on the surface have appeared banal, but where position in the violence hierarchy was nevertheless always in play in front of other faces who were, like themselves, habituated to the shame/violence dynamic from childhood.

Main players, their hitters, their soldiers and other violent prisoners looking to earn their stripes felt and picked up on shame and used shame as a violence trigger to counter threats in order both to ascend the violence hierarchy and to maintain their position, intuitively gauging their shame-based violence to garner respect and fear in the right combination, exerting an influence over not only other prisoners and their visitors, but also in some cases, as the most prized territory of all, over staff. With financial transactions verified by contact using illicit mobile phones, through a corrupted employee as the easiest route, you could make big money inside by supplying a whole wing or more of a jail at vastly inflated rates, or, through enforcement, by taking a cut from someone else. For

the instrumentally most violent, therefore, being put in London's biggest jail was a publicly funded business opportunity, and the door was left open: amazingly, staff didn't undergo from one year to the next any routine or random airline-style body scan or pat-down search.

Inside their first session, because of the contagious aspect already touched on, all it took for these prisoners positioned in the violence hierarchy to access healthy pride via matching power was seeing other prisoners more experienced in SVI and positioned in the same hierarchy stay with their shame in real time in the session without switching into a violent mode of thinking or behaviour. And that was it. Otherwise, SVI would have been too dangerous to operate.

And despite the name of the programme featuring the word "shame", it didn't involve participants ever having consciously to recognise their own personal shame as a causal factor leading to their violence. SVI was not a cognitive programme, so no insight into shame and no awareness of shame awareness was necessary, and shame never needed to be discussed as a topic, which was important to safety, because shame can be shameful, so bringing violent people together and putting them under pressure to talk about it in front of each other would not have been a good idea.

In fact, I relied on participants for the entire group discussion agenda, with no pre-set material coming from me at all. Nor were there any ground rules coming from me either, apart from my one condition that we come together as a whole group to ensure any tensions could surface in the room for us to address head on and deescalate safely there and then, so nothing spilled over to the wing. But even here, because, through their motivation to access healthy pride, I relied on participants to co-facilitate, everything may still validly have been experienced as arising out of their own initiative.

So, this didn't overturn the violent-prisoner hierarchy and destabilise it, which would have been dangerous and would have created power vacuums that would have led to increased violence, not less. It was about working with the hierarchy as it was, so threats of violence and acts of violence no longer had to be deployed as the only ways to administer it.

Indeed, the most vulnerable people taking the biggest risks in SVI were, counterintuitively, those at the very top. For the higher up you were in the hierarchy, the more pressure you experienced from shame, because it took less to make you look a lesser person in front of your peers. In facilitating access to healthy pride, therefore, it was main players' social

bonds that needed most implicit protection and repair in real time in SVI to keep things safe, not only for them, but also for everyone else.

Out of reactive necessity, in order to minimise the risk of violence between them as they competed for ascendancy, violent prisoners pre SVI entry ended up being separated by management on different landings within wings, or ended up being separated on different wings altogether, or, removing them from the population entirely, managers sometimes placed them in solitary confinement.

But managers were not incentivised to consider *subsequent* violence, either enacted through intermediaries or in person, whether in other prisons or in the community outside, occurring as direct fallout from their own policy of keeping, after the event, their own violent prisoners apart.

And that was crazy.

Violent prisoners described SVI as “seeing-is-believing”, because prisoners who had been violent towards each other could be not only brought back safely together in SVI, but also located safely on the same landing of the same wing between SVI sessions for all to see the beef had been squashed.

This didn't mean participants were no longer dangerous. Far from it. SVI was a prison safety programme that did not provide answers for participants, or protection for victims, after participants were no longer actively engaged. Longer-term protective factors to deal with shame, such as good education, training and employment would need to occur, otherwise, serious outcomes with this level of offender could be entirely expected, including murder—and even with positive developments leading to a stake in legitimate society, bad things could still happen.

But what SVI did do, where a taxpayer-financed and toxic version of pride was on offer in London's biggest jail, instead of passing violence down the line in a crazy manner, was address it at source.

Lying on a couch in psychoanalytic psychotherapy beginning in the late 1980s, long before I ever got to work inside a prison, was where I began gradually to become aware of shame as a primary motivator of violence. After several years, a shame overload that had saturated my childhood started to surface and I came to acknowledge a violent potential in myself. But as a defence against ever becoming violent towards my therapist, I never allowed myself to experience any anger towards her in a session. When my therapist asked what would happen if I ever did become angry with her in the therapy room, I replied that I'd kill her.

I had never had a physical fight in my life, had no credibility as a violent person and was from a materially privileged background. Nevertheless, SVI created a space for me to get into stuff and work with it in a way that I couldn't elsewhere. And this subverted the potentially shaming power imbalance between the apparent helper and helped, because I was open with violent prisoners about needing SVI—indeed, I was open about almost anything.

I came to realise how my willingness to be transparent engaged prisoners in the violence hierarchy, who would not otherwise have come anywhere near me, let alone trusted me enough to be a catalyst for them to interact with other violent prisoners posing a threat. My transparency meant participants could choose at key moments of tension to put the spotlight on me instead of on them, relying on my openness in the group to mitigate for them any shameful sense of being vulnerably exposed. My transparency could work in the other direction too: if I chose to withhold my openness by placing my focus on someone else, the potential for vulnerable exposure exerted a force, which I learnt to calibrate with shame awareness, otherwise, instead of being protective, my focus could have been taken as a cue to others to attack the individual later on the wing, shifting the balance away from healthy pride to a toxic version.

Had I been able to get into everything outside, without me posing a risk to my psychoanalytic psychotherapist inside the therapy room, SVI would never have happened. But SVI made me feel less of a danger to others, which made me feel less alone, which is why I took on and managed the potential for violence. In fact, because managing the potential for violence built healthy pride, I enjoyed it.

SVI was like an extreme sport that attracted shutdown, traumatised individuals—me and others; the buzz of belonging and the rush of the risk of violent reprisal made us come alive, but the buzz and the rush were mobilised to make things safer instead of the other way around. Yet, at first, I didn't even realise I was engaging prisoners who were any more violent in prison than the rest of the population. Indeed, I did not set out to target main players, their hitters, their soldiers and other violent prisoners looking to earn their stripes at all.

The strange thing was, from the start, violent prisoners sought me out and not the other way around.

In 1998, aged 34, impacted by developmental childhood trauma and having failed at several careers, after a period of work at Feltham Young Offenders Institution, I got a job in the HMP Wandsworth education

department at a time when the security clearance required for prisoners to gain access was waived in favour of having officers and a radio present; as long as prisoners in the violence hierarchy not currently in solitary confinement put themselves on the list for “Jo’s class”, they could gain admission. Furthermore, the education department was somewhat chaotic, so if space was lacking, participants could put themselves down for other things and then attend my sessions regardless, and despite some staff appearing dismissive of the work, they never raised any objection, even if the noise from some of the aggressive escalation coming from my bulging classroom could sometimes be alarming, before observers realised that no violence was actually kicking off.

From there, with a couple of years’ violence-free operation under my belt, in addition to my continued work within the education department, with no officers or radio assigned and no security screening of prisoners, I was asked to run sessions on the wings themselves, including on the biggest wing with an extremely fluid population going through the court process, and I took up these opportunities.

But some staff who came into contact still appeared to discount the work, or it wasn’t easy for them to acknowledge it existed at all, which, curiously, even extended to those managers helping SVI grow. So, despite its expansion, because of the type of prisoner it engaged, SVI always felt like something of a shameful and dirty secret for the prison, and it therefore always felt as if it could be stopped any moment for any reason.

But as far as other educational or therapeutic interventions to tackle prison violence went... there weren’t any.

Yes, excluding remand prisoners, if you happened to be convicted of a violent crime and were sentenced, there were nationally accredited offending behaviour programmes that you had to complete to progress on your sentence, and they used a cognitive approach delivered by the psychology department to reduce your violence *after* release.

But prisoners currently being violent were not allowed on them.

And if you did manage to get on a course and broke one of a number of ground rules to combat escalation, for example by getting up out of your chair, you were taken off for being aggressive and not permitted to return for that rotation.

Though they had to conceal it from those in authority to advance towards freedom, violent prisoners saw the risk avoidance on these programmes as artificial and inapplicable to their real world.

SVI, on the other hand, worked with prisoners, sentenced or not, who were currently being violent, with no coercive link to earlier possible release, bringing these prisoners into direct contact with the shame trigger underlying their violence, taking them authentically into the heat of the moment in front of others who were, like them, attuned to and expert in shame-based violence.

There was nowhere to hide.

Yet, as participants pointed out, “real recognise real”, which meant the voluntary take-up in SVI was very high and the dropout rate was very low among prisoners in the violence hierarchy, which was astonishing, for their noncompliance should have meant they were hardest to reach.

And not only did participants’ adjudicated prison violence generally come down while actively engaged in SVI, but also, despite bringing these faces together in a way no one else would do, operating at levels of aggression seen on no other programme, with no ground rules to combat escalation, even though violence had occurred between group members pre SVI entry, there was *never* any incident of physical contact violence inside *any* SVI session.

And there was *never* any incident of physical contact violence *outside* any SVI session between any active SVI participants.

Ever.

For the entire 12 years SVI ran.

Had there been, because it brought violent prisoners together instead of screening them out, SVI would straightaway have been shut down. Instead, SVI survived. And in 2004, HMP Wandsworth was subjected to a performance test by the government and given six months to improve across the board or undergo compulsory privatisation, carrying with it the perceived threat of less favourable working conditions for staff. In a rapid reversal of the prior lack of open acknowledgement, SVI was suddenly subject to praise by management before being incorporated in the prison’s successful contract bid to stay in the public sector. It was around this time that I encountered two of Gilligan’s books on shame and violence (1996, 2001). I had felt ashamed of contravening an organisational norm by putting the word “shame” out there, but Gilligan helped me get beyond this, which was when I came up with and began using “Shame/Violence Intervention” to describe my approach.

As a result of the successful contract bid, SVI was transferred from education to a newly created department for prison safety, which was headed by a new line manager, who instituted a new protocol. All I

needed to work with a violent prisoner, bringing them together with others in a dedicated SVI group room on its own floor away from people so the work didn't alarm anyone outside, was my assessment it was safe. With SVI operating above the radar, there was pushback from staff, but my line manager negotiated this, including dealing with demands to screen out prisoners positioned in the violence hierarchy, which would of course have defeated the whole point. Where these prisoners wanted to participate, which was practically all of them, I continued never to have to turn anyone down.

The difference was I now went out and chose them, instead of them choosing me, and even if they were in solitary confinement at the time, this was no longer a bar to entry. After the appropriate training by the security department, I was issued with a cell key in addition to the landing key I already held, and I was assigned a radio to transport violent prisoners both from the wings and from the solitary confinement unit to the SVI group room and back again. With a member of the SVI group there to co-facilitate, and with a solitary confinement officer coming in towards the end of the session to bear witness to what had taken place, I also ran sessions in the solitary confinement unit itself, using it to bring prisoner and staff victims safely together with their perpetrators, reaching a resolution so that victims no longer had to live in fear.

Nothing like this had ever happened before.

SVI won the national award for innovation from the largest therapy organisation in the UK, the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. A member of HMP Wandsworth's independent monitoring board wrote that SVI was a "potential revolution in prison practice", and the head of violence reduction for all prisons across England and Wales wrote, "SVI not only has potential to influence the development of work with prisoners nationally, it gives hope to the national and international non-violence movement that the tide of entrenched violence can be turned". But five years on from the threat of privatisation being averted, in 2009, despite the HM Inspectorate of Prisons report of that same year referencing SVI as excellent, the money to pay for my hours was stopped. I chose to continue delivering SVI for no pay and was given permission to look for alternative funding. I got a response from the police at national level, and in 2010, SVI participants agreed to meet them.

For members of the SVI group to be open to engaging in dialogue with top police at all, let alone while still in prison and surrounded by

other prisoners in London's biggest jail, was a remarkable thing. For these same police officers to be willing to break a taboo by entering into the main population area of a prison to sit down with any prisoner, let alone with those positioned in its violence hierarchy, was also genuinely significant.

The prison could have welcomed this inspirational development. However, under a new governor, instead of healthy pride, the proposed visit triggered a toxic version. SVI was suspended the morning after I notified the prison of the proposed visit from the police. A new prison safety manager, who had replaced my former boss after her promotion elsewhere, then stopped my access to the jail altogether. And in my absence without me being consulted or even knowing about it, a new deputy governor called in an area manager from outside the prison to shut SVI down completely for generic administrative reasons entirely unrelated to the police visit and which didn't add up. After I was allowed back in to the prison only to be told my work had been stopped, the chief of the National Offender Management Service twice refused to investigate my complaint, and my third letter to him went unanswered. The 2011 HM Inspectorate of Prisons report said in its opening that "the prison's progress had halted" and "the safety of prisoners held in Wandsworth is now a matter of serious concern". And even though it was found to be "no longer running", the report said the jail's published violence reduction strategy included—so as if it was still operational—"the 'shame violence' initiative [sic]".

Before its publication in 2022, I sent this piece to the person who had been my main police contact for that visit over a decade ago. Coincidentally, he had retired in recent months from the force to set up privately, opening up a fresh possibility for us to collaborate, and, building on the success of a 2013 prison movie I wrote called *Starred Up*, we're now looking at a documentary idea.

But let's end here by returning to where we began, with Myron standing in the SVI group room after his aggressive outburst, with me facing him in my chair and giving him my full attention...

Myron clocks Trevor, Roland's hitter, who's been staring at Myron through narrowed eyes.

Myron and Trevor's gazes meet.

Myron and Trevor continue their stare.

Wayne, as Myron's affiliated boss, no longer thinks this is funny.

MYRON
 (to Trevor)
 And what?

Focusing on my inner awareness of shame, listening to it with my whole body to manage fear, I get up, keep my eyes on the floor, and, without crossing over between Myron and Trevor to mug Myron off by breaking his line of sight, I walk over and stand in front of Myron, while he continues to look at Trevor over my shoulder.

I'm within Myron's striking range, but not too close in a way that would convey disrespect.

I'm implicitly directing the attention of the group onto Myron to present him with a potential for vulnerable exposure, taking him to his point of shame without overloading him, offering him the choice either to leave it there or to take it to the next level, while I'm implicitly directing the attention of the group away from Trevor, offloading critical pressure from Trevor in response to Myron's contemptuous challenge.

And by working with me and the group to hold it down, helping me deal with my fear of Myron, I feel healthy pride in my bond with Trevor, enabling me to send a potent message of trust by having Trevor behind me out of my field of vision despite his level of provocation.

Attuned calibration in real time is key to matching power: I'm standing in front of Myron, but I'm slightly side-on in deference to where his focus is directed beyond me towards Trevor; I'm looking to Myron's left side, which is across his body and through his personal space, but I maintain my downward gaze to mitigate the impact; I'm focussed on a spot on the buffed vinyl floor close to Myron's Nike, but I don't break a body boundary by staring at the trainer itself.

By tracking shame's instantaneous readout on the state of the social bond, nuanced adjustments to my gaze and body language arise without me having to think and thus without me even for a split second having to detach myself emotionally, which would be shaming and therefore dangerous.

Myron starts to tremble with rage as the staring with Trevor continues...

I look up from the floor for the first time.

ME
 Myron.

Myron breaks eye contact with Trevor and steps forward to drill me with dotted pupils from a distance of four inches.

Slowly, I tilt my head away in an act of submission, but I don't take a backward step and I don't reach for the alarm button on my radio.

Myron closes the gap even more until his bared front teeth are practically glued to my temple.

A bead of sweat travels down his forehead to plop onto my neck.

Holding my ground with Myron, relying on my bond of healthy pride with Trevor and others, knowing co-facilitation is out there, I continue to listen with my whole body to shame to manage fear...

Wayne rises.

He walks to Myron's knocked over chair, rights it and puts it back in the circle.

Wayne steps up to Myron.

Myron looks at him.

Wayne places his arm across Myron's shoulders.

Wayne turns Myron gently in the direction of his chair.

Myron stops.

Myron looks at Wayne.

MYRON
(under his breath)
Blood.

Wayne looks at Myron.

Wayne takes his arm off.

Myron looks at his chair.

He breathes.

He walks forward.

He sits.

Trevor's jaw relaxes.

Wayne sits too.

ROLAND
I got a topic

Wayne looks at Roland, who still hasn't moved throughout the entire incident.

Roland looks back.

WAYNE

Go through, bruvva.

I resume my seat.

While Roland talks, I can feel Myron's gaze, but I don't return it.

I want Myron to be the one in control.

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