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Recovering Identity: The Development and Pilot Testing of the Shame Identity Resilience and Vulnerability (SIRV) Curriculum

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Recovering Identity: The Development and Pilot Testing of the Shame Identity
Resilience and Vulnerability (SIRV) Curriculum

An Honors College Project Thesis

Presented to

The Department of Psychology

Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for

Honors Scholar

By

Erin Zachary

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Abstract

This study involved the development and implementation of the Shame Identity Resilience and Vulnerability (SIRV) Curriculum among a group of recovering alcoholic and drug addicts. Most, but not all, of the participants were transitioning out of incarceration and were a part of The Nehemiah Project at Grace Place Properties. This curriculum was derived from the ideas of two Abilene Christian University students in combination with research and ideas from Brené Brown in her book, *Daring Greatly*. SIRV consists of eleven lessons laid out in eleven session leader guides and eleven worksheets by participants. The ultimate goal of this curriculum is to encourage participants struggling with shame to build community and to give participants tools to cultivate shame resilience. The pilot testing of SIRV was carried out in conjunction with ACU's Justice and Urban Studies Team (JUST) through the Honors' College, during the Spring semester of 2015. The sessions were carried out during the usual Tuesday night classes of The Nehemiah Project, held at the Duncanville Church of Christ, and they lasted about thirteen weeks, including holidays. Sessions were led by curriculum authors, Erin Zachary and Raychel Duncan and attended by Nehemiah Project participants, including founders, Chuck Adair and Stek Steck. The sessions lasted from January 13, 2015 until April 14, 2015. While the primary goal of this research was the construction and field-testing of SIRV, researchers attempted to evaluate effectiveness by asking participants to reflect back over their experiences. The personal reflections of one of the authors are also shared. Overall, it is argued that the SIRV curriculum instilled valuable tools in the participants that attended thirteen weeks and was successful in creating a more positive self-concept. Implications and improvements are discussed pertaining to the focus on the mantras and the flow of the curriculum in general.

This Project Thesis, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Honors College of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the distinction

HONORS SCHOLAR


Dr. Jason Morris, Dean of the Honors College

Date

Advisory Committee



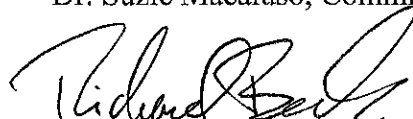
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Recovering Identity: The Development and Pilot Testing of the Shame Identity Resilience and Vulnerability (SIRV) Curriculum

There are certain, seemingly harmless actions that are not viewed as shameful until certain consequences arise. Examples of these include court-ordered rehabilitation from a partying lifestyle, Sexually Transmitted Diseases from promiscuity, and addictions arising from alcohol and drug use. Once these consequential conditions are manifested, individuals are often labeled (i.e. sleazy, drunks, or dope fiends). Once a part of the addiction lifestyle, it is natural and easy for individuals to start to identify with the labels that are given to them on a daily basis from outside sources. Examples of some of the less-extreme labels used in society include things such as ditzy, lazy, stoner, type A, fat, or sleazy. These labels can have detrimental effects on an individual's self-esteem and identity as they start to internalize and agree with them. In the same way, participants in recovery programs are often labeled as addicts, drunks, and junkies throughout their counter-addiction programming. The identities, spiritual lives, physical and mental health, and possibly even the recovery processes of these individuals can be affected negatively by these labels.

In Christian circles, there is a section of literature that focuses on molding the identity of an individual into a mirror image of the ways that God identifies His children. Scripture is often used to provide and validate these principles in a positive self-talk sort of fashion. In faith-based recovery programs, however, the shameful labels used among the drug and alcohol culture are still a part of everyday language. This often results in a need for “recovery from recovery,” (Howard, 2008, p. 191). The question being presented in this study is whether or not the use of scriptural identification principles has

any effect on the identity, spirituality, and recovery process of the population in question. The researcher found multitudes of literature on the factors involved in the recovery process: shame, identity, spirituality, and the addiction/recovery process itself. However, there has not been much, if any, research on how the biblical principles previously mentioned affect these factors.

The goal of this research was to develop a curriculum that cultivates shame-resilience and promotes a more positive self-concept among individuals struggling with shame. What makes this curriculum unique is that the authors sought to include scripture as a means of giving a foundation of credibility to the therapeutic insights presented in the lessons. The pilot test was carried out among a faith-based transitional program, due to the assumptions that participants would be struggling with stigma and shame induced by their criminal records, labels as addicts, and past abuse or trauma they may have experienced. The preceding structure of the Tuesday night classes and the faith-based status of the program were conducive to the discussion-group design of and biblical principles presented in SIRV.

Shame, Identity and Spirituality Among Populations

Struggling with Addiction

Shame

Shame is a negative emotion that combines feelings of dishonor, unworthiness, and embarrassment (Brown, 2012, p. 68-71). Many times in recovery programs, the motivation to adopt a new lifestyle and mindset is to escape the shame associated with the participants' previous actions. The shaming that participants can endure can be effective in changing lifestyle choices, as shown in the study by Flores and Hondagneu-

Sotelo (2013), which illustrates the ways that shaming the pasts of gang members in recovery encourages their recovery process. Although the program in this study seems to be successful, it is my theory that a more effective method for encouraging recovery is one that embraces the shamefully connoted acts while encouraging a positive and unashamed identity. The method that I propose aims to use the individual's past mistakes in order to inspire productivity, shame resilience tactics, and biblical principles to improve the participant's self-image.

Often, the stigma associated with past incarceration and addiction can have extreme adverse effects on individuals and encourages their adoption of shameful identities. This is validated and paralleled by Markowitz (1998) on his study of the mentally ill. Within this study, Markowitz explored the effects of the negative stigma placed on those who were not "normal" due to their mental illnesses. Along with the labels and stigma that participants endure, there are also many diagnoses of various mental health issues that are associated and consequential of the past lifestyles. In Anderson's (1994) study on codependency, the clients are approached from a perspective that puts their "addiction" or "disease" in the background. Anderson (1994) proposes that this method is effective for countering the diagnosis of codependency. In the same way, the counter to the shame that accompanies the labels given to recovery patients will involve looking at factors of identification other than the past mistakes. Dore (1994) and Brown (2012) both look into the socialization of shame and the effects of promoting vulnerability. These ideas seek to reframe the "self" of individuals by encouraging them to use vulnerability – a concept normally promoted by society – in order to become a more wholesome self. The decision to take steps toward this type of well-being is often a

result of individual's realizing the extent to which the labels and, consequently, the shame have limited others' opinions of them and their opinions of themselves.

Identity

The concept of identity is a complicated one that has been explored by multiple researchers. Many things play a part in constructing one's identity: beliefs, morals, desires, experiences, memories, and abilities, just to name a few. These factors are vital to what makes us who we are even though they are rarely static qualities. Both social contexts and individual factors have influence on identity and what changes it (T. Anderson, 1994), making it difficult to pin down which factor to address when attempting to help one reframe their sense of self. The discriminative experiences that are inevitably a part of someone living in addiction can often have negative effects on their sense of self (Markowitz, 1998). These experiences, plus the shaming endured in recovery programs, (Flores & Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2013), can very easily leave individuals feeling as if the person they were while in the midst of their addiction is someone they should be ashamed of and completely abandon. This is the opposite of what I hope to encourage throughout this study. When recovering addicts embrace the mistakes of their past in order to better serve those around them, it can promote them being a successful member of society (Brown, 1991). While this method does not completely abandon the factors of their pasts that participants are able to identify with, it does reframe them as something to use in order to be productive and help others. In turn, this promotes positive identification within the individual.

The change in identity of career-addicts is also a multi-layered concept. There are various types of identity change, two of which are "alternations" and "conversions"

(Anderson, 1993). While alternations are slight, somewhat subtle changes in identity, conversions “include new meaning and discourses, a change in allegiance to authorities and a negation of former identities...” (Anderson, 1993, p. 135). The type of change that is promoted in this study is much more toward the side of conversion. It will help participants move past the contradictory nature of making statements such as “My name is and I am an _____,” and try to move away from this label at the same time. As asserted in the study by Howard (2006), making sure these labels are temporal is highly important in changing the recovery participants’ identities. Discarding these labels, however, can be extremely difficult. There are existential, interactional, and cultural obstacles that hinder the decision of participants to cast off these identification labels. Jenna Howard (2008) elaborates on these three categories in her research. The existential obstacles revolve around a liminal space that results from discarding a comfortable and long-lasting label, the interactional obstacles around the fear of being ostracized or abandoning the individual’s former community, and the cultural obstacles around the views of society that various, normal emotional functions are pathological and a therapeutic culture. The curriculum used in this study seeks to provide an identity for individuals to transition into while still involved in a recovery, group setting with other participants attempting to do the same thing, and an emphasis away from the language of pathology and towards a relatively high spiritual culture.

Spirituality

In a faith-based recovery program, spirituality is a major factor in the programming. This, in turn, makes the spirituality of the participants a major concern. The language of the program is laced with allusions and references to the Bible, as well

as an emphasis on the importance of a relationship with God. The population used in this study was open to this type of programming, due to its inclusion in a faith-based program. This classification was determined by factors as mentioned in the study by Ebaugh, Pipes, Saltzman Chafetz, and Daniels (2003).

The curriculum that is implemented in this study was predicted to raise the spirituality levels of the participants. Aside from the curriculum, participants were involved in a program called Celebrate Recovery, which is a Christ-centered twelve step program. This program in itself has shown to raise the levels of spirituality of participants (Brown, Tonigan, Pavlik, Kosten, and Volk, 2011). One roadblock to this achievement was the fact that some of the participants may have had a harder time believing in the scriptural principles than others. The trauma endured by the participants, who often have come from abusive or rough backgrounds, can make the principle of God's grace, which will be prominent in the curriculum, difficult to accept (Beste, 2003). The program of the population in this study used the Bible and testimonies to create an awareness of God in control of participants' lives. The study done by S.M. Timmons (2012) validates both the need for relatively high spirituality in participants, as well as the credibility of the program itself.

Addiction

Often, addicts feel helpless and out of control when it comes to fighting their addiction. Recovery is the counterargument for that feeling. Addiction can be viewed as a physical, mental, and emotional problem all in one, therefore, multiple methods, medications, and therapies have been used to attempt and try to "fix" this "disease." However, it has been suggested that the solution to addiction is not merely an outside

force, but rather an internal motivation of the individual themselves (May, 2001).

Addiction is an extremely complex issue, therefore so is recovery. However, the success of a participant is often measured by the steps they take to keep their struggle in check, positive life choices they make, and how they interact in society. The study done by Flores and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2013) validates the idea that a change in mindset, or, positive self-talk, have positive effects on the recovery process. The biblical principles used can be categorized as positive self-talk, which will promote a vital step to a successful recovery: a positive and productive mindset. The method by which the current curriculum was implemented is supported by the study of Dore (1994) that asserts group therapy as the most beneficial form of therapy. In Dore's study, the population agreed on how they would conduct themselves during this therapy, giving me a model for successful methods of group therapy. Another central part of the program of the population in this study was an emphasis on community. This is expressed through the living arrangements of the participants, as well as the group setting that each class or meeting was conducted in.

As previously stated, there is a multitude of research on the different factors that are a part of the current study: shame, identity, spirituality, and addiction. Research has also been conducted on the effects of shame, addiction, recovery, labels, and spirituality on identity, as well as the steps and processes involved in changing one's view of themselves. Each of these factors are complicated in and of themselves, so combining them creates a very complex and multi-layered project. The current study aimed to discover how one specific program will affect all of these factors on their different, and interrelated, levels. By use of these principles, participants started to identify with their

content, as opposed to the shame associated with their past mistakes. The reframing of identity by use of biblical principles of identification was predicted to reduce levels of shame and identification with addiction, while increasing positive identification, spirituality, and success in recovery.

Foundations of Shame Identity Resilience and Vulnerability (SIRV) Curriculum:

Daring Greatly and Scripture

Brené Brown and *Daring Greatly*

Brené Brown is a research professor and licensed social worker out of the University of Houston that has spent years researching shame and vulnerability. Her work with *Daring Greatly* focuses on the universality of shame and describes how to live a life of shame resilience. This piece was picked to help develop SIRV because of the focus on overcoming shame, labels, and living a life with a positive self-concept. In addition, Brown's work never encourages participants to avoid shame, but helps them work through it.

Daring Greatly and Scripture

Due to the beliefs of the authors, and the faith-based nature of the pilot-test program, biblical principles give a foundation of credibility to the therapeutic insights presented in SIRV. The scriptures coincide with the concepts presented in each lesson, providing an answer to the question of, "Who says these concepts are true?"

Development of the SIRV Curriculum

Throughout the preparation stage of creating this curriculum, my colleague and I specifically focused on the work of Brené Brown entitled *Daring Greatly*. Brown's work

addresses shame in populations of both men and women, and the difficulty of practicing vulnerability to work through that shame. Vulnerability is often accompanied with the stigma of an individual being weak, emotional, and irrational. However, Brown reframes the concept of vulnerability as a mark of bravery and the avoidance of bravery as “a measure of our fear and disconnection,” (p. 2).

The curriculum that was created consisted of ten lessons spread out over twelve to thirteen sessions; there may be more sessions depending on the length of conversation over content. According to Brown, “vulnerability is the core, the heart, the center, of meaningful human experiences,” (p. 12). This type of engagement can be scary, especially with the social stigma on vulnerability. Consequently, the content of this curriculum can be unpredictable and some sections spark more conversation than others.

Daring Greatly looks at the effects of labeling caused by our culture and society. This concept especially applies to those in the transitional program where SIRV was first used. Members of this program are majorly clients that were formerly incarcerated and struggle with substance abuse. When a person is viewed as a victim of shame, people show compassion and support. However, when a “stigmatizing label is applied,” those characteristics disappear (p. 22). My initial observation when starting this project was that clients in transitional programs and twelve-step programs repeatedly identify as addicts, causing them to reinforce the stigmatizing labels that have been placed by society through prison, rehab, and all of their social supports. According to Brown, this acceptance of a negative action as an identity is the definition of shame. Individuals dealing with shame cannot detach themselves from what they’ve done. What they’ve done becomes who they are.

The first concept addressed in SIRV also makes this differentiation. This lesson emphasizes that guilt is the thought of “I’ve done something bad,” and shame is the thought that “I am something bad.” Brown further describes shame as the “intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging,” (p. 69). Shame is often used as a tool to change behavior, but it has never proven to actually help (p. 73). Also stressed in this first lesson are the concepts that shame is universal, people are afraid to talk about it, and “the less we talk about shame, the more control it has over our lives,” (p. 68).

Furthering the introduction of shame, the second lesson focuses on the twelve categories of shame listed by Brené Brown on page 69 of *Daring Greatly*: Appearance and body image, money and work, motherhood/fatherhood, family, parenting, mental and physical health, addiction, sex, aging, religion, surviving trauma, and being stereotyped or labeled. Different categories of shame are felt by different people, and gender differences constitute a major distinction in these groups. Brown also found that the responses of the opposite sex tend to contradict the shame felt by the group. For example, in one of Brown’s group sessions, a woman expressed her frustration to be perfect during sex. She portrayed her shame about her appearance by talking about being “worried about our back fat,” and a young man instantly replied, “It’s not about the back fat!” (p. 101-102).

Lesson three focusses on what Brown proposes as the best option to combating shame: cultivating shame resilience (p. 74-75). One important point of this lesson is that resisting shame is impossible (p. 74). Resilience itself is defined as “the ability to practice authenticity when we experience shame, to move through the experience without

sacrificing our values, and to come out on the other side of the shame experience with more courage, compassion, and connection than we had moving into it,”; put more simply, it’s “moving from shame to empathy,” (p. 74). Brown describes four elements of shame resilience: Recognizing Shame and Understanding Its Triggers, Practicing Critical Awareness, Reaching Out, and Speaking Shame (p. 75). Recognizing triggers refers to the fact that shame stimulates the limbic system, causing fight or flight reactions to ensue (p. 76). Being able to recognize these triggers allows the individual to be proactive and take steps to move productively through the shame experience. Practicing critical awareness translates into thinking logically through the thoughts that shame places in one’s head. Critical awareness asks if shame statements are reasonable, logical, and attainable (p. 75). Reaching out is the practice of experiencing empathy through connection (p. 75). This involves being willing to share one’s story in order to not go through the shame experience alone. Finally, speaking shame means being up front about how shame feels and what the individual needs to make them feel better (p. 75-77). My colleague and I felt that these four elements were vital, concrete strategies to give participants to move through the shame experience.

Lesson four addresses three things that are goals of moving through the shame experience: empathy, self-compassion, and authenticity. Empathy can often be concerned with sympathy, but “empathy is connecting with the emotion that someone is experiencing, not the event or the circumstance,” (p. 81). When people realize that they are not alone in their shame, it is easier to move through it. Self=compassion acts as a motivator to move the individual toward empathy (p. 75). “When we’re able to be gentle with ourselves in the midst of shame, we’re more likely to reach out, connect, and

experience empathy,” (p. 75). Authenticity is the ability to be our true selves and act at our values.

Lesson five is an introduction to vulnerability. Brown defines vulnerability “as uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure,” (p. 34). There’s a distinct double standard, however, when it comes to vulnerability. “We love seeing raw truth and openness in other peoples, but we’re afraid to let them see it in us. We’re afraid that our truth isn’t enough,” (p. 41). This relates to the “scarcity” problem. This curriculum seeks to encourage participants that they are enough, so much so that they are able to practice vulnerability.

Lesson six addresses four “vulnerability myths” (p. 33-53). These myths include: “Vulnerability is a weakness,” (p. 33), “I don’t do vulnerability,” (p. 43), “Vulnerability is letting it all hang out,” (p. 45), and “We can go it alone,” (p. 53). According to Brown, the first myth, that vulnerability is weakness, is the “most widely accepted...and the most dangerous,” (p. 33). Vulnerability is experienced any time emotions are experienced. Brown asserts that “to feel is to vulnerable,” (p. 33). Brown also states that our societal rejection of vulnerability stems from confusing “feeling with failing and emotions with liabilities,” (p. 35). When we practice vulnerability, however, we are practicing truth and courage (p. 37). The reason that we are afraid of vulnerability is because it leaves us completely exposed to be rejected or attacked. Consequently, individuals attempt to become “invulnerable,” but being invulnerable “undermines the very response that would have supplied genuine protection,” (p. 40). If someone is sure they will not be attacked, that is not truly exposing oneself. It is only through practicing vulnerability that we can experience real connection.

The second myth, that someone is able to “not do vulnerability,” is logically simple to debunk as well. Taking from the last myth, an individual experiences vulnerability any time they are open or experience emotion. According to Brown, avoiding vulnerability causes us to live an inauthentic life. “Experiencing vulnerability isn’t a choice—the only choice we have is how we’re going to respond when we are confronted with uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure,” (p. 45).

Myth three, “vulnerability is letting it all hang out,” is another commonly accepted idea. While it may be thought that vulnerability means sharing without reservation, Brown asserts that this is not true. “Vulnerability is based on mutuality and requires boundaries and trust,” (p. 45). Vulnerability without a former relationship causes detachment (p. 46). It is only when we have the relationship to be open and vulnerable that empathy, engagement, and trust result (p. 45-46, 53).

The final myth, “we can go it alone,” is another defense mechanism against being rejected when we’re vulnerable. Research has shown that one of the most critical things we can do is ask for support (p. 54). When we are feeling attacked or unworthy, it is much more encouraging to have a loved one nearby to talk us through. The truth is that we can go it alone, but it is not healthy and it is lonely (p. 53-54). Trying to go it alone causes isolation, which can be much more overwhelming than practicing vulnerability itself (p. 55).

The seventh, eighth, and ninth lessons of SIRV process through the three “vulnerability shields” (p. 117) The first, foreboding joy, is “always waiting for the other shoe to drop,” (p. 118). This shield is illustrated as the disaster planning that occurs when everything is going well. It’s the expectation that something has to go wrong (p. 118-

119). Brown asserts that foreboding joy is just our attempt to “beat vulnerability to the punch. We don’t want to be blindsided by hurt,” (p. 121). If we expect to be disappointed, it won’t hurt as much when the disappointment comes. Browns, counter to this shield is to practice gratitude (p. 123). Foreboding joy stems from a question of whether or not we “deserve our joy,” (p. 124). Practicing gratitude, on the other hand, is all about appreciating the joy in the moment (p. 125). Brown recommends appreciating the small things, being grateful for what one has, and not writing off joy as a prediction of tragedy (p. 125-126).

The next shield, perfectionism, is one that many, many people are familiar with. “It’s the belief that if we do things perfectly and look perfect, we can minimize or avoid the pain of blame, judgment, and shame,” (p. 129). According to Brown, perfectionism is about is a self-harming and obsessive way of thinking that devalues achievement and that leads people to believe perfection trumps shame (p. 129) Perfection is harmful because “perfection doesn’t exist,” becomes obsessive because when we fail we just strive to be more perfect, and “actually sets us up to feel shame, judgement, and blame,” (p. 129-130). The counter to perfectionism is “appreciating the beauty of cracks,” (p. 131). This counter accepting that the individual is enough (p. 131). It is practicing “common humanity,” “mindfulness,” and “self-kindness,” (p. 131-132). Brown asserts that being imperfect is “to be alive,” (p. 136).

Numbing, the final shield, is especially related to those in the transitional program. It is a cultural mindset that “if we stay busy enough, the truth of our lives won’t catch up with us,” (p. 137). By numbing vulnerability, we also numb all of the positive emotional experiences that create empathy and connection (p. 137). Brown asserts the

final counter to this shield is “setting boundaries, finding true comfort, and cultivating spirit,” (p. 142). Research by Brown showed that “reducing anxiety meant paying attention to how much they could do and how much was too much, and learning how to say, ‘Enough,’” (p. 142). These boundaries set up an environment that promotes vulnerability and, therefore, contradicts shame. Finding true comfort means engaging in an act that “nourishes our spirit,” as opposed to temporarily soothing our anxiety (p. 147). Finally, cultivating spirit is less about religion and more about acknowledging that we are all connected in our humanness (p. 151). These three counters allow us to fully engage in our emotions and experiences, rather than numb them.

The scripture that is used throughout the SIRV curriculum is tailored to each of the lessons objectives. The three mantras used in the sessions were “I am God’s beloved,” “I am worthy of love and belonging,” and “I am enough.” The scriptures used revolve around the mantras and seek to spark conversation about what Christianity, God, and the Bible say about each of the topics. These pieces of text, paired with the concepts from *Daring Greatly*, culminate in the final lesson on Identity. For the purpose of this curriculum, identity is the belief set that we choose to accept as defining of ourselves. In this case, scripture is provided that asserts the unconditional love of human beings by God. Consequently, the curriculum asserts this concept as evidence of our worthiness to belong.

The Shame Identity Resilience and Vulnerability (SIRV) Curriculum

Overview of Materials

This section presents the SIRV Curriculum as developed by myself and my colleague, Raychel Duncan. As described earlier, in each lesson the curriculum sought to

1) introduce the participant to the concepts elucidated by Brené Brown in her book, *Daring Greatly*, 2) encourage the participants to apply those concepts to their own life experiences and 3) make connections with biblical texts, which we selected. Below are the Session Leader Lesson Plans for each of the eleven sessions. The Lesson Plans provide the Session Leader with an outline of the session along with prompts and guidelines to encourage and direct the conversation during the session. Following this are the Worksheets provided to participants before each session. These Worksheets provide space for participants to respond to the open-ended questions posed in each session along with the text of the various biblical passages. By providing the worksheets ahead of time, participants are able to get a head start on creating responses to the discussion in the classes. In this manuscript only two lines are shown for each open-ended response. On the original worksheets more space was given to questions requiring longer answers.

SIRV Curriculum Session Leader Outlines

Lesson 1: Guilt vs. Shame

- Begin by stating that this class will not teach them how to not feel shame.
 - Shame resistance is NOT possible.
 - Shame resilience is the practice of moving productively through shame and coming out stronger on the other side.
- Ask the participants
 - What is shame?
 - Take time to get answers from everyone.
- Ask the participants:
 - What is guilt?
 - Take time to get answers from everyone.
- Discuss how guilt = I did something bad, while shame = I am something bad.
- Come up with a group definition of shame.
 - State Brené Brown's definition of shame: "shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging." Pg. 70 of *Daring Greatly*
- Discuss how shame comes from being undifferentiated.
 - Example: attaching worth to a product you created.

- Differentiated is defined as to recognize or ascertain what makes something or someone different.
- Talk about how shame is common:
 - We all have shame.
 - We're all afraid to talk about shame.
 - The less we talk about shame, the more control it has over our lives.
- Begin discussing how labels can cause shame:
 - What labels have you been called in your life?
 - How did they negatively affect you?
- 1 Samuel 16:7 NLT "People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."
 - God does not judge us by our mistakes or how we look on the outside, he judges us for our true heart. He is concerned by who we are as people, not the mistakes we have made. He has created us with great potential and knows us better than we know ourselves.
- Despite our pasts:
 - We are all worthy of love and belonging.
 - We are enough.
 - We are God's beloved.
 - These are the mantras that we will be focusing on throughout these classes; by the end of them we want you to see these as being true for you.

Lesson 2: Shame Categories

- This week's lesson will be focusing on the different categories that we feel when we experience shame.
- Brown's 12 Categories of Shame
 - Appearance and body image.
 - Money and work.
 - Motherhood/fatherhood.
 - Family.
 - Parenting.
 - Mental and physical health.
 - Addiction.
 - Sex.
 - Aging.
 - Religion.
 - Surviving Trauma.
 - Being stereotyped or labeled.
- Ask participants:
 - Do you feel that men and women experience shame in specific areas of their lives?
 - If so, do they share any of these areas?
 - Where do men or women experience shame while the other doesn't?

- Explain that both genders experience shame.
- Ask the female participants:
 - In what ways do they experience shame?
- Ask female participants:
 - Where do these come from?
 - What makes you not feel good enough?
 - What causes you to feel shame in these areas?
 - After all have shared, ask the men if they have any comments based off of the women's answers.
- Ask the male participants:
 - In what ways do they experience shame?
- Ask male participants:
 - Where do these come from?
 - What makes you not feel good enough?
 - What causes you to feel shame in these areas?
 - After all have shared, ask the women if they have any comments based off of the men's answers.
- Genesis 1:27 NLT "So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."
 - Ask participants:
 - How does this verse apply to both areas in which men and women feel shame?
 - Discuss how it talks about both men and women are created in His image, it is the image of society that promotes shame.
 - Identifying with God's image of you...

Lesson 3: Elements of Shame Resilience (Part 1)

- Repeat to participants that shame resistance is not possible!
- Resilience is the goal: to be able to productively move from shame to empathy.
- Recognizing Shame and Triggers:
 - Ask participants:
 - What makes you feel shame?
 - How does shame feel physically to you?
 - Take time for elaboration and discussion.
- Practicing Critical Awareness:
 - Ask participants:
 - What are you ashamed of?
 - Is it realistic? Is it internal? Is it external?
 - Take time for elaboration and discussion.
- Micah 6:8 NRSV "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"
 - What is it that God wants for our lives?
 - Are these expectations practical or realistic?

Lesson 4: Elements of Shame Resilience (Part 2)

- Reaching Out:
 - Ask participants:
 - How do you share your story?
 - How do you feel while sharing your story?
 - Take time for elaboration and discussion.
- Speaking Shame:
 - Ask participants:
 - When you feel shame, how do you express it?
 - What helps your shame go away?
 - Take time for elaboration and discussion.
 - Remind participants that their stories are worth telling, and that they are worth saving.
- Discuss the story of the woman at the well in John, chapter 4.
 - Jesus knows her story immediately.
 - How does he react?
 - How do you think he reacts to your story?

Lesson 5: Shame to Empathy

- These three elements are all important to productively moving through shame:
 - Self-Compassion
 - Empathy
 - Authenticity
- We have to go from shame → empathy
- Self-Compassion
 - Being gentle with ourselves
 - Ask participants:
 - Are you hard on yourself?
 - Why are you this way? Do you deserve the criticism?
 - Allow time for elaboration and discussion.
- Empathy
 - Best reminder that we are not alone
 - Connecting to the emotion and not the circumstance.
 - Ask participants:
 - In what ways have you experienced empathy?
 - In what ways do you show empathy?
 - How does receiving/giving empathy make you feel?
 - Allow time for elaboration and discussion.
- Authenticity
 - It's easier to become real when we know that we are loved.
 - Don't sacrifice values.
 - Ask participants:
 - What do you think it means to be authentic?
 - When do you feel loved?

- When are you comfortable being real with others?
 - When do you put up walls?
 - Are there times when you sacrifice values to fit in?
 - Allow time for elaboration and discussion.
- When we have these attributes it results in us having greater courage, connection, and compassion.
- Song of Solomon 8:6 (NLT) “Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death, its jealousy as enduring as the grave. Love flashes like fire, the brightest kind of flame.”
 - How do you interpret this verse?
 - If this illustrates God’s love towards you, how does that make you feel?
 - What does that mean for your life.

Lesson 6: Introduction to Vulnerability

- Ask participants:
 - What do you think vulnerability is?
- Ask participants:
 - In what ways do you experience vulnerability?
- Ask participants:
 - How does vulnerability feel?
- Come up with a group definition of vulnerability.
- Compare group definition with Brown’s definition of “vulnerability as uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure.” Pg. 34
- Discuss how we hate to see our own vulnerability, it makes us feel weak, but we love to see it in others. We thrive to see others be vulnerable, it makes us feel closer to them, or as if we have a better relationship with them; but to see vulnerability in ourselves shows us as weak and as incapable of being worthy.
 - Ask participants:
 - How do you feel about this statement?
 - Do you feel as if being vulnerable makes you weak?
 - How do you react when feeling vulnerable?
- Ask participants:
 - Are we enough?
- Genesis 2:25 (NLT) “Now the man and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame.”
- Psalm 139: 1-5 (NLT) “O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I’m far away. You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord, You go before me and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head.”
- What do these verses suggest about God’s knowledge of us?
- Regardless of what he knows about us, how does God feel about us?
 - We ARE enough.

Lesson 7: Vulnerability Myths

- Go back over definitions of vulnerability from last lesson.
- Talk about why we would avoid vulnerability.
- There are 4 vulnerability myths according to Brown:
- For each myth, discuss whether or not participants agree and if they experience the same feeling.
 - “Vulnerability is a weakness.” Pg. 33
 - Counter: Vulnerability is the core of our feeling, the core of all emotions.
 - “I don’t do vulnerability.” Pg. 43
 - Counter: Vulnerability is inescapable; even if we choose to push it away we are still acknowledging some form of vulnerability.
 - “Vulnerability is letting it all hang out.” Pg. 45
 - Counter: Vulnerability is a part of life; it is a part of all of us.
 - “We can go it alone.” Pg. 53
 - Counter: Vulnerability is shaped with those that we trust.
 - Counter: If we keep it all in it cases us to become isolated which is a major burden.
- Psalm 139 NLT “For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed. How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! I try to count them—they are more than the sand; I come to the end—I am still with you.”
 - God knows us better than we know ourselves. AKA he knows it all.
 - God has been with us from the very beginning and will never leave us.

Lesson 8: Foreboding Joy

- One major way that we try and avoid vulnerability is called foreboding joy:
 - This is not fully experiencing joy because you expect something bad to happen.
 - It is when you are waiting for the other shoe to drop.
- To counteract this, or to dare greatly, one needs to practice gratitude.
- Ask participants:
 - Have you ever experienced foreboding joy?
 - If so, tell the story.
 - Allow time for elaboration and discussion.
- Ask participants:
 - What ways do you practice gratitude?
 - How does it feel when you practice gratitude?
 - What is risky about practicing gratitude and fully experiencing joy?

- Allow time for elaboration and discussion.
- Ask participants:
 - What ways can you begin to practice gratitude more in your day to day life?
- Philippians 4:4 (NLT) “Always be full of joy in the Lord, I say it again—rejoice!”
 - If we never fully feel joy then we never live, this sense of foreboding prevents us from fully experiencing life, and from fully experiencing the greatness of God, or the greatness of the world around you.
 - In God, there is fullness of joy. How can we rely on Him to fill that need in our lives?

Lesson 9: Perfectionism

- Another shield for hiding from vulnerability is perfectionism
 - This is a defensive move to minimize the pain of blame, judgment, and shame.
- To counteract this, or to dare greatly, one needs to appreciate the beauty of cracks.
- Ask participants:
 - In what ways are you a perfectionist?
 - How has being a perfectionist negatively impacted aspects of your life?
 - What about you do you view as a crack?
 - How can you begin to appreciate this “crack”?
- Psalm 139:14-15 (NRSV) “I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.”
 - We are fearfully and wonderfully made by God. In fact, he made us in his image.
 - We must realize that we are beautiful, even with our cracks; everyone has them. They make us who we are.
 - Ask for reactions to this scripture.

Lesson 10: Numbing

- A third shield that we use to try and prevent vulnerability is by numbing:
 - We numb to deaden our feelings of discomfort and pain.
 - We all have methods for numbing, alcohol, drugs, sex, and eating, massive binges on tv shows. We ALL have a way to get away from our feelings.
 - Ask participants:
 - What ways do you numb yourself?
 - What are you numbing yourself from?
 - Allow time for elaboration and discussion.
- To combat this shield, or to dare greatly, one needs to set boundaries, find true comfort, and begin cultivating the Spirit.
 - Ask participants:

- What does setting boundaries accomplish? (It allows us to know when we've had enough.)
 - Where do you need to set boundaries in your life?
 - Where can you find true comfort?
 - What ways can you begin to cultivate spirit?
 - This means realizing the connection we all have to each other. We're in this together.
 - How will you make this an everyday activity?
- Philippians 2:5-8 (NLT) "You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross."
 - What would it look like to imitate the attitude of Christ?
 - How would this affect your battle with shame?
 - How would this compare with your numbing strategies?

Lesson 11: Identity

- From this entire program there are major takeaways that we want you to leave with:
 - You are enough.
 - You are worthy of love and belonging.
 - You are God's beloved.
- Shame is the experience of feeling and believing that we are somehow bad, not enough, and unworthy. This goes against everything that God says about us.
- The battle against shame and to identify with what God says about us is constant and new every day.
- Jeremiah 31:3 (NLT) "Long ago the Lord said to Israel: 'I have loved you, my people, with an everlasting love. With unfailing love I have drawn you to myself.'"
- 1 Corinthians 6:11 (NLT) "Some of you were once like that. But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."
- Galatians 4:5 (NLT) "God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children."
 - What do these verses say about us and how God feels about us?
 - (We are his kids that he loves unconditionally.)
- With this knowledge of how to combat shame, and our identities through Christ, what are our next steps?
 - How do we share this with others and keep implementing this in our own lives?
 - It's an every-day battle.

Lesson 1: Guilt vs. Shame

- What is guilt?

- What is shame?

- In your life, have you ever been called something that hurt you? If so, tell that story. What were you called?

- Where did this/these label(s) come from? (Why were you called this?)

“...The LORD doesn’t see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” 1 Samuel 16:7 (NLT)

- When you read this verse, what do you think?

Lesson 2: Shame Categories

- What do you think are some “proper” roles for women to fulfill?

- What do you think are some “proper” roles for men to fulfill?

- What do you think are the biggest areas in which women feel shame?

- What do you think are the biggest areas in which men feel shame?

“So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” Genesis 1:27 (NLT)

- How does this verse apply to the areas in which both men and women feel shame?

Lesson 3: Elements of Shame Resilience (Part 1)

- What makes you feel shameful?

- What are your physical reactions to feeling shame? (e.g. stomach in knots, cold sweats, heart racing)

- What is required for you not to feel shame? (e.g. having a certain job, your child's grades, a significant other)

- Who sets these standards: you or others?

*“He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?” Micah 6:8 (NRSV)*

- With this verse in mind, what standards would you like to live by? How could you accomplish this?

Lesson 4: Elements of Shame Resilience (Part 2)

- How open are you to sharing your life story? Why?

- What does it mean to have a support person?

- Do you? If so, what does this person do for you?

- When you feel shame, what counters this? (e.g. coffee, movies, a hug)

- Who are some people that you are willing to ask for these things?

- Read the story of the woman at the well (John 4). What does this say about how Jesus reacts to our mistakes and labels?

Lesson 5: Shame to Empathy

- In your own words define:

1. Empathy

2. Self-Mercy

3. Authenticity

- Do you think these three things are important? Why or Why not?

- How can you practice these elements in your own life?:

1. Empathy

2. Self-Mercy

3. Authenticity

*“Place me like a seal over your heart,
like a seal on your arm.
For love is as strong as death,
its jealousy as enduring as the grave.
Love flashes like fire,
the brightest kind of flame.” Song of Solomon 8:6 (NLT)*

Lesson 6: Introduction to Vulnerability

- Define vulnerability:

- When other people are vulnerable, what do you think of them?

- Do you like to be vulnerable? Why or Why not?

*“Now the man and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame.”
Genesis 2:25 (NLT)*

*“O Lord, you have examined my heart
and know everything about me.
You know when I sit down or stand up.
You know my thoughts even when I’m far away.
You see me when I travel
and when I rest at home.
You know everything I do.
You know what I am going to say
even before I say it, Lord.
You go before me and follow me.
You place your hand of blessing on my head.”
Psalm 139:1-5 (NLT)*

- What does God know about us? How does that make you feel?
-
-

Lesson 7: Vulnerability Myths

- Why would you avoid vulnerability?
-
-
- What does vulnerability expose?
-
-
- Is vulnerability something that is experienced alone or in community?
-
-

*“For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother’s womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.
My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written
all the days that were formed for me,
when none of them as yet existed.*

*How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!
 How vast is the sum of them!
 I try to count them—they are more than the sand;
 I come to the end—I am still with you.”
 Psalm 139:13-18 (NRSV)*

Lesson 8: Foreboding Joy

- When are some times that you feel truly joyful? How do these events usually play out?

- What are some things that you are thankful for?

*“Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!”
 Philippians 4:4 (NLT)*

- How could the joy of the Lord change the way that you are joyful?

Lesson 9: Perfectionism

- What are some things that you do to avoid making mistakes or feeling shame?

- Name 5 good qualities about yourself.

*“I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
 Wonderful are your works;
 that I know very well.
 My frame was not hidden from you,
 when I was being made in secret,
 intricately woven in the depths of the earth.”
 Psalm 139:14-15 (NRSV)*

- How does this verse apply to you?

Lesson 10: Numbing

- What are some ways that you numb shame?

- Are these strategies effective? Why or Why not?

*“You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.
 Though he was God,
 he did not think of equality with God
 as something to cling to.
 Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
 he took the humble position of a slave
 and was born as a human being.
 When he appeared in human form,
 he humbled himself in obedience to God
 and died a criminal’s death on a cross.”
 Philippians 2:5-8 (NLT)*

- How does a relationship with God affect how you feel shame? Is having this relationship more or less effective than your numbing strategies?

Lesson 11: Identity

- If you were to describe yourself from an outsider’s point of view, what would you say?

- When do you feel most like yourself?

- What are some ways that you can combat shame and embrace vulnerability?

*“Long ago the Lord said to Israel:
 ‘I have loved you, my people, with an everlasting love.
 With unfailing love I have drawn you to myself.’”
 Jeremiah 31:3 (NLT)*

*“Some of you were once like that. But you were cleansed; you were made holy;
 you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ
 and by the Spirit of our God.”
 1 Corinthians 6:11 (NLT)*

“God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children.”

Galatians 4:5 (NLT)

- What do these verses say about our identities from God’s point of view?
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The Shame Identity Resilience and Vulnerability (SIRV) Pilot Program

Overview of Pilot Program

The Pilot Program was a product of the Feel, Imagine, Do, Share design of the JUST program. Author, Erin Zachary, interned with Skillman Church of Christ and was introduced to The Nehemiah Project through her time with Ministries 101 (one branch in the church). While interacting with The Nehemiah Project participants, the author noticed a recurring theme of negative self-concept. Participants repeatedly called themselves addicts and talking about their pasts as if they defined them. This observation caused the authors to feel as if there were an alternative course of action, imagine a solution, design the curriculum, and share the project by implementing it with The Nehemiah Project.

The Nehemiah Project was chosen as the test population because the participants were all individuals that had dealt with trauma, abuse, incarceration, and/or addiction. These factors made them prime victims of stigmatization and their pasts were overflowing with feelings of shame. Participants in The Nehemiah Project were already required to participate in a weekly, cognitive reconstruction class, every Tuesday from seven until eight-thirty p.m. Founders and program directors, Chuck Adair and Stek Steck, along with other board members, heard a proposal by the authors of the curriculum and agreed to implement SIRV in the Tuesday night classes. Starting on January 13, 2015, the authors led the weekly sessions in an upstairs-classroom of the Duncanville

Church of Christ. The classes ended on April 14, 2015.

Participants

The 15 participants of SIRV had all been struggling with some form of addiction at the time of the program. The researcher only asked for feedback from the fifteen participants that attended all eleven of the sessions. Out of these fifteen participants, nine were male, six were female, three were African American, one was Hispanic, and the other eleven were Caucasian. All of the participants were between the ages of twenty-four and sixty-five. All but one of the participants had been incarcerated at some point in their lives.

Description of Sessions

Sessions were held on Tuesday nights, from seven until eight-thirty p.m., in an upstairs classroom of the Duncanville Church of Christ. Coffee was provided for the participants and the classroom was set up with chairs in a circle in order to promote equality and a discussion environment. Session leaders sat in the same chairs throughout the circle with participants, and related their own life experiences to encourage the participants to share as well. Sessions usually opened and closed with prayer, along with one of the participants reading the related scripture for that night. In the beginning, it was extremely difficult to convince participants to sit in a circle, and specifically not to have their back to a wall. Some participants did not see the productiveness of discussing shame and others were eager to share their stories. Overall, discussion was plentiful, but sometimes veered off on a tangent, at which point session leaders would have to get the group back on track. The collective sessions came to a close by the head author sitting down with participants and discussing what did and didn't work throughout the

programming.

Qualitative Evaluation of the Shame Identity Resilience and Vulnerability (SIRV) Pilot Program

Personal Reflections of SIRV Curriculum and Pilot Program

Throughout implementing the SIRV Curriculum, there was content that was never reached, some things that just did not work, and rarely did any class go exactly according to plan. Specifically, there needed to be a greater emphasis on the three mantras of the curriculum: *We are all worthy of love and belonging. We are enough. We are God's beloved.* Additionally, we found that participants from Grace Place identified with the "Shame Categories" appearance and body image, motherhood/fatherhood, parenting, family, addiction, and surviving trauma. While the other categories were not relatable to this specific group, I think they could still be helpful in future classes or groups.

In regard to the lesson on the Elements of Shame Resilience, a greater emphasis is needed on resilience, and not avoidance, as the main goal and a definition of this goal. This lesson was by far the most challenging of the class. The following is a reflection of the class that I wrote after this specific lesson:

Tonight was probably the roughest class we've had so far. I thought it was going to start out great, because when we walked in people had already put chairs in a circle and sat down. All of the participants seemed to be in a good mood as class started, which made me hopeful as well.

We started the class by talking about physical triggers and reactions to shame. We had plenty of examples given by participants, and everyone was tracking well. Then, we moved on to situational and external triggers, and that's where we started to get a little off track. It started out well, we talked about people feeling shame every time they go

home, spend time with family, or hear their children's voices. Then, we started veering off onto the subject of vulnerability and trusting people. We started speaking about the reservations of opening up to someone and Trey even talked about how he doesn't understand because he's fine with spilling his guts to a stranger in the grocery store. [The program leaders] facilitated this rabbit trail by talking about the church of prison and the church of the outside world. At this point it sounded more like [one leader] was trying to vent about his current drama with the [local church] population. Somehow, I tried to grab on to a transition and bring it back to the lesson plan.

At this point I was trying to set up the idea of unrealistic expectations of ourselves, and critical awareness. I was setting up the example of pointing out that the ideal thing that they are ashamed of not being, is unrealistic. For some reason, the concept was not getting through. There was a lot of confusion about what I was trying to get across. I tried again and attempted the example of feeling shame about not being a size 2 when my body could never physically fit in a size 2 anything. This time, people were somewhat tracking, but the idea of expectations for oneself being unrealistic was not working. Once again, [the leader] interjected and publicly made it known that he did not understand what was happening. I did not appreciate his critique of our material in front of the entire group. I did my best to explain what I meant and move on. A woman named Jennifer piped up and asked how you let go of an event that haunts you and causes you to feel shame. [The leader] asked why you would want to let go of it instead of embrace it. I cut him off before he could expand to encourage her. I told her that you move on from something when you decide that it is a bad thing that happened but does not make you bad. I spoke of how God sees us as his precious creation that he cares for and loves so much, and how a negative event may affect us, but does not make us any less precious in the eyes of God. [The leader] then tried to expand on what I was saying, but it did not need to be expanded on. I don't even really remember what he said after that, because I was overly frustrated.

We tried to conclude by reading the scripture for the lesson, only to realize that we had printed and given out the wrong worksheet to the participants. So, we tried to read them the verse, and talk about how it illustrates God's expectations of us. We received no feedback.

I felt a lot of frustration tonight, mainly towards [the leaders] because they seemed to facilitate and expand on the rabbit trails, which I feel kept participants from absorbing the information vital to tonight's lesson. Later, we received feedback from Nikki, who said that the group may not have been receptive tonight. However, she did say that relating our "normal people problems" to hers helped her connect better with the material and enjoy the class because she is hungry to rid herself of shame. Overall, I appreciate the honesty and participation of the group, but I wish that we had prepared them better and kept [the leaders] from interfering as much as they did.

Finally, there also needed to be a greater focus on the scriptures that correspond with each lesson.

Retrospective Participant Feedback of SIRV Curriculum and Pilot Program

Feedback Questions. One year after implementation of the SIRV Curriculum, participants were sent three feedback questions. Overall, five of the fifteen participants responded to the request for feedback. These were the three feedback questions:

1. What was the most impactful portion of the SIRV Curriculum, in your opinion?
2. If there was a portion of the curriculum that you think could be improved, what would that be?
3. Finally, are there any parts of the curriculum that you still implement in your life? If so, what are those concepts?

Participant Feedback Question #1. Regarding what the participants considered to be the most impactful portion of the SIRV Curriculum the following responses were given:

- “Learning about all the things of a shame-based identity.” (L.J.B.)

- “Learning how to be vulnerable in situations. It really helped me to talk about things and get past them.” (T.M.)
- “I discovered I had a lot of shame.” (Anonymous)
- “Learning that there is a difference between guilt & shame; and conviction vs. condemnation.” (S.W.)
- “1) Embracing the fact that things which took place in my early childhood causing me so much shame, are deeply embedded in my being. They can be triggered very easily.
2) Empathy cannot be extended to another without first being vulnerable!!!”
(S.N.)

Participant Feedback Question #2. Regarding the question about what portions of the curriculum could be improved responses were:

- “Perhaps more interaction.” (L.J.B.)
- “In need of more tools to work on shame. Ways to practice resilience.” (T.M.)
- “Staying on topic; not allowing the group control the discussion.” (S.N.)

Participant Feedback Question #2. Regarding the final question as to what parts of the curriculum participants still implemented in their lives, responses were:

- “I walked away with information about shame that caused me to do more studying on that subject. I share a lot, because I’ve discovered many people in one form or another struggle with shame.” (L.J.B.)
- “I have done something bad, I am not bad. That is some[thing] that has happened to me it is not who I am.” (T.M.)
- “Yes talking about my shame. Putting it out there.” (Anonymous)

- “That I am not a bad person even though I have behaved badly in the past. Trusting God’s word is true.” (S.W.)
- “I try to remain genuine and authentic in my dealings with others. I continue to work on the areas that cause me to feel shame. I can be in closer relationship with the people in my life when we can both work to create a safe place that allows us both to be more vulnerable.” (S.N.)

Reflections on Participant Feedback. As an author of this curriculum, I am personally encouraged by the responses given by these participants. I know that some participants felt as though there were not enough tools or practical applications given to combat shame, and that has been taken into consideration while revising the curriculum. I think the issue of the group dominating the discussion had much to do with my colleague and my capacity to proctor a discussion group and our ages in comparison to those of the participants. It was sometimes intimidating to hear the experiences of people decades older than us that had much more life experience than we did as college sophomores.

Future Prospects for the SIRV Curriculum

Proposed Revision of SIRV Curriculum

Overview of Revisions. After reviewing the curriculum and the feedback of participants, the author felt as though a greater emphasis needed to be made on the mantras of the curriculum and the tools used to cultivate shame resilience. While sharing experiences of shame is vital to working through them, participants may feel bogged down by consistently dwelling on the negative experiences. In addition, there are minor changes that needed to be made to the flow of the curriculum. At first, it was thought that

the content itself may be too depressing to be doing anything good for the participants.

Although some sessions did not feel productive and were difficult for the session leaders, the feedback of the participants shows that the curriculum was actually helpful.

The Revised SIRV Curriculum. Based upon the experience of the pilot program and the feedback of the participants below is the Revised SIRV Curriculum. Material from the original has simply been deleted, the new, additional material is presented in a bold font, and material that has been moved is identified with a footnote and is in italics.

Lesson 1: Guilt vs. Shame

- Begin by stating that this class will not teach them how to not feel shame.
 - Shame resistance is NOT possible.
 - Shame resilience is the practice of moving productively through shame and coming out stronger on the other side.
- *Discuss how shame comes from being undifferentiated.*
 - *Example: attaching worth to a product you created.*
 - *Differentiated is defined as to recognize or ascertain what makes something or someone different.*
- *Talk about how shame is common:*
 - *We all have shame.*
 - *We're all afraid to talk about shame.*
- *The less we talk about shame, the more control it has over our lives.¹*
- Ask the participants
 - What is shame?
 - Take time to get answers from everyone.
- Ask the participants:
 - What is guilt?
 - Take time to get answers from everyone.
- Discuss how guilt = I did something bad, while shame = I am something bad.
- Come up with a group definition of shame.
 - State Brene Brown's definition of shame: "shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging." Pg. 70 of *Daring Greatly*
- Begin discussing how labels can cause shame:
 - What labels have you been called in your life?
 - How did they negatively affect you?

¹ This material was moved from after the group defines shame.

- 1 Samuel 16:7 NLT “People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”
 - God does not judge us by our mistakes or how we look on the outside, he judges us for our true heart. He is concerned by who we are as people, not the mistakes we have made. He has created us with great potential and knows us better than we know ourselves.
- ****EMPHASIZE THESE****
- Despite our pasts:
 - We are all worthy of love and belonging.
 - We are enough.
 - We are God’s beloved.
 - These are the mantras that we will be focusing on throughout these classes; by the end of them we want you to see these as being true for you.

Lesson 2: Shame Categories

- This week’s lesson will be focusing on the different categories that we feel when we experience shame.
- Brown’s 12 Categories of Shame
 - Appearance and body image.
 - Money and work.
 - Motherhood/fatherhood.
 - Family.
 - Parenting.
 - Mental and physical health.
 - Addiction.
 - Sex.
 - Aging.
 - Religion.
 - Surviving Trauma.
 - Being stereotyped or labeled.
- Ask participants:
 - Do you feel that men and women experience shame in specific areas of their lives?
 - If so, do they share any of these areas?
 - Where do men or women experience shame while the other doesn’t?
- Explain that both genders experience shame.
- Ask the female participants:
 - In what ways do they experience shame?
- Ask female participants:
 - Where do these come from?
 - What makes you not feel good enough?
 - What causes you to feel shame in these areas?

- After all have shared, ask the men if they have any comments based off of the women's answers.
- Ask the male participants:
 - In what ways do they experience shame?
- Ask male participants:
 - Where do these come from?
 - What makes you not feel good enough?
 - What causes you to feel shame in these areas?
 - After all have shared, ask the women if they have any comments based off of the men's answers.
- Genesis 1:27 NLT "So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."
 - Ask participants:
 - How does this verse apply to both areas in which men and women feel shame?
 - Discuss how it talks about both men and women are created in His image, it is the image of society that promotes shame.
 - Identifying with God's image of you... **what does that look like?**
- **Mantras**
 - We are all worthy of love and belonging.
 - We are enough.
 - We are God's beloved.

Lesson 3: Elements of Shame Resilience

- Repeat to participants that shame resistance is not possible!
- ****EMPHASIZE THIS****
 - Resilience is the goal: to be able to productively move from shame to empathy.
- Recognizing Shame and Triggers:
 - Ask participants:
 - What makes you feel shame?
 - How does shame feel physically to you?
 - Take time for elaboration and discussion.
- Practicing Critical Awareness:
 - Ask participants:
 - What are you ashamed of?
 - Is it realistic? Is it internal? Is it external?
 - **Practicing Critical Awareness means that you pay attention to how realistic your shame is and you recognize triggers when they come about.**
 - Take time for elaboration and discussion.
- Micah 6:8 NRSV "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"
 - What is it that God wants for our lives?

- Are these expectations practical or realistic?
- **Mantras**
 - **We are all worthy of love and belonging.**
 - **We are enough.**
 - **We are God's beloved.**

Lesson 4: Elements of Shame Resilience (Part 2)

- Reaching Out:
 - Ask participants:
 - How do you share your story?
 - How do you feel while sharing your story?
 - Take time for elaboration and discussion.
- Speaking Shame:
 - Ask participants:
 - When you feel shame, how do you express it?
 - What helps your shame go away?
 - Take time for elaboration and discussion.
 - Remind participants that their stories are worth telling, and that they are worth saving.
- Discuss the story of the woman at the well in John, chapter 4.
 - **Jesus speaks the things that cause her shame.**
 - Jesus knows her story immediately.
 - How does he react?
 - How do you think he reacts to your story?
- **Mantras**
 - **We are all worthy of love and belonging.**
 - **We are enough.**
 - **We are God's beloved.**

Lesson 5: Shame to Empathy

- These three elements are all important to productively moving through shame:
 - Self-Compassion
 - Empathy
 - Authenticity
- We have to go from shame → empathy
- Self-Compassion
 - Being gentle with ourselves
 - Ask participants:
 - Are you hard on yourself?
 - Why are you this way? Do you deserve the criticism?
 - Allow time for elaboration and discussion.
- Empathy
 - Best reminder that we are not alone

- Connecting to the emotion and not the circumstance.
 - Ask participants:
 - In what ways have you experienced empathy?
 - In what ways do you show empathy?
 - How does receiving/giving empathy make you feel?
 - Allow time for elaboration and discussion.
 - Authenticity
 - It's easier to become real when we know that we are loved.
 - Don't sacrifice values.
 - Ask participants:
 - What do you think it means to be authentic?
 - When do you feel loved?
 - When are you comfortable being real with others?
 - When do you put up walls?
 - Are there times when you sacrifice values to fit in?
 - Allow time for elaboration and discussion.
 - When we have these attributes it results in us having greater courage, connection, and compassion.
 - Song of Solomon 8:6 (NLT) "Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death, its jealousy as enduring as the grave. Love flashes like fire, the brightest kind of flame."
 - How do you interpret this verse?
 - If this illustrates God's love towards you, how does that make you feel?
 - What does that mean for your life?
- **Mantras**
 - **We are all worthy of love and belonging.**
 - **We are enough.**
 - **We are God's beloved.**

Lesson 6: Introduction to Vulnerability

- Ask participants:
 - What do you think vulnerability is?
- Ask participants:
 - In what ways do you experience vulnerability?
- Ask participants:
 - How does vulnerability feel?
- Come up with a group definition of vulnerability.
- Compare group definition with Brown's definition of "vulnerability as uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure." Pg. 34
- Discuss how we hate to see our own vulnerability, it makes us feel weak, but we love to see it in others. We thrive to see others be vulnerable, it makes us feel closer to them, or as if we have a better relationship with them; but to see vulnerability in ourselves shows us as weak and as incapable of being worthy.

- Ask participants:
 - How do you feel about this statement?
 - Do you feel as if being vulnerable makes you weak?
 - How do you react when feeling vulnerable?
 - Ask participants:
 - Are we enough?
 - Genesis 2:25 (NLT) “Now the man and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame.”
 - Psalm 139: 1-5 (NLT) “O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I’m far away. You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord, You go before me and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head.”
 - What do these verses suggest about God’s knowledge of us?
 - **Can we ever NOT be vulnerable with God?**
 - Regardless of what he knows about us, how does God feel about us?
 - We ARE enough.
- **Mantras**
 - **We are all worthy of love and belonging.**
 - **We are enough.**
 - **We are God’s beloved.**

Lesson 7: Vulnerability Myths

- Go back over definitions of vulnerability from last lesson.
- Talk about why we would avoid vulnerability.
- There are 4 vulnerability myths according to Brown:
- For each myth, discuss whether or not participants agree and if they experience the same feeling.
 - “Vulnerability is a weakness.” Pg. 33
 - Counter: Vulnerability is the core of our feeling, the core of all emotions.
 - “I don’t do vulnerability.” Pg. 43
 - Counter: Vulnerability is inescapable; even if we choose to push it away we are still acknowledging some form of vulnerability.
 - “Vulnerability is letting it all hang out.” Pg. 45
 - Counter: Vulnerability is a part of life; it is a part of all of us.
 - “We can go it alone.” Pg. 53
 - Counter: Vulnerability is shaped with those that we trust.
 - Counter: If we keep it all in it cases us to become isolated which is a major burden.
- Psalm 139 NLT “For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and

wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed. How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! I try to count them—they are more than the sand; I come to the end—I am still with you.”

- God knows us better than we know ourselves. AKA he knows it all.
- God has been with us from the very beginning and will never leave us.

- **Mantras**

- **We are all worthy of love and belonging.**
- **We are enough**
- **We are God’s beloved.**

Lesson 8: Foreboding Joy

- One major way that we try and avoid vulnerability is called foreboding joy:
 - This is not fully experiencing joy because you expect something bad to happen.
 - It is when you are waiting for the other shoe to drop.
- To counteract this, or to dare greatly, one needs to practice gratitude.
- Ask participants:
 - Have you ever experienced foreboding joy?
 - If so, tell the story.
 - Allow time for elaboration and discussion.
- Ask participants:
 - What ways do you practice gratitude?
 - How does it feel when you practice gratitude?
 - What is risky about practicing gratitude and fully experiencing joy?
 - Allow time for elaboration and discussion.
- Ask participants:
 - What ways can you begin to practice gratitude more in your day to day life?
- Philippians 4:4 (NLT) “Always be full of joy in the Lord, I say it again—rejoice!”
 - If we never fully feel joy then we never live, this sense of foreboding prevents us from fully experiencing life, and from fully experiencing the greatness of God, or the greatness of the world around you.
 - In God, there is fullness of joy. How can we rely on Him to fill that need in our lives?

- **Mantras**

- **We are all worthy of love and belonging.**
- **We are enough**
- **We are God's beloved.**

Lesson 9: Perfectionism

- Another shield for hiding from vulnerability is perfectionism
 - This is a defensive move to minimize the pain of blame, judgment, and shame.
- To counteract this, or to dare greatly, one needs to appreciate the beauty of cracks.
- Ask participants:
 - In what ways are you a perfectionist?
 - How has being a perfectionist negatively impacted aspects of your life?
 - What about you do you view as a crack?
 - **Cracks are imperfections.**
 - How can you begin to appreciate this “crack”?
- Psalm 139:14-15 (NRSV) “I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.”
 - We are fearfully and wonderfully made by God. In fact, he made us in his image.
 - We must realize that we are beautiful, even with our cracks; everyone has them. They make us who we are.
 - Ask for reactions to this scripture.
- **Mantras**
 - **We are all worthy of love and belonging.**
 - **We are enough**
 - **We are God's beloved.**

Lesson 10: Numbing

- A third shield that we use to try and prevent vulnerability is by numbing:
 - We numb to deaden our feelings of discomfort and pain.
 - *Ask participants:*
 - *What ways do you numb yourself?*²
 - We all have methods for numbing, alcohol, drugs, sex, and eating, massive binges on tv shows. We ALL have a way to get away from our feelings.
 - **Ask participants:**
 - What are you numbing yourself from?
 - Allow time for elaboration and discussion.
- *Ask participants:*

² This material was moved from after the paragraph starting with “We all have methods...” to right before.

- *What does setting boundaries accomplish? (It allows us to know when we've had enough.)*
 - *Where do you need to set boundaries in your life?*
 - *Where can you find true comfort?*³
- To combat this shield, or to dare greatly, one needs to set boundaries, find true comfort, and begin cultivating the Spirit.
 - **This means realizing the connection we all have to each other. We're in this together**
 - How will you make this an everyday activity?
- Philippians 2:5-8 (NLT) "You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross."
 - What would it look like to imitate the attitude of Christ?
 - How would this affect your battle with shame?
 - How would this compare with your numbing strategies?
- **Mantras**
 - **We are all worthy of love and belonging.**
 - **We are enough.**
 - **We are God's beloved.**

Lesson 11: Identity

- **Establish a personal self-concept: "Describe yourself from an outside view. What kind of person are you? Who are you?"**
- From this entire program there are major takeaways that we want you to leave with:
 - You are enough.
 - You are worthy of love and belonging.
 - You are God's beloved.
- Shame is the experience of feeling and believing that we are somehow bad, not enough, and unworthy. This goes against everything that God says about us.
- The battle against shame and to identify with what God says about us is constant and new every day.
- **We can combat shame by reminding ourselves what our God-given identity is: child of God, His beloved, treasured, etc.**
- Jeremiah 31:3 (NLT) "Long ago the Lord said to Israel: 'I have loved you, my people, with an everlasting love. With unfailing love I have drawn you to myself.'"

³ This material was moved from after the paragraph starting with "To combat this shield..." to right before.

- 1 Corinthians 6:11 (NLT) “Some of you were once like that. But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”
- Galatians 4:5 (NLT) “God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children.”
 - What do these verses say about us and how God feels about us?
 - (We are his kids that he loves unconditionally.)
- With this knowledge of how to combat shame, and our identities through Christ, what are our next steps?
 - How do we share this with others and keep implementing this in our own lives?
 - It’s an every-day battle.
- **Mantras**
 - **We are all worthy of love and belonging.**
 - **We are enough.**
 - **We are God’s beloved.**

Limitations and Future Prospects of the SIRV Curriculum

Limitations of Pilot Program. The main limitation of the study was that the sample size was small. The turn-over rate in transitional problems is extremely high. Consequently, although there were usually about twenty-five participants in each session, only fifteen attended all eleven sessions. In order to really evaluate the effectiveness of SIRV, a much larger and more diverse population would be needed. The program could possibly be tailored to only be used with men or women, but the only real difference between these lesson plans and those used with a mixed-gender population would be that the second lesson would be a discussion about the speculation of the opinions of the other gender, as opposed to having the other gender debunk insecurities in person.

Another limitation of this study was that the researcher was unable to quantitatively evaluate the effectiveness of SIRV. With future populations, a pre-test, post-test, and follow-up assessments of key outcome variables would be added. While the researcher can speculate that the curriculum was effective based on the reflections of the participants, a quantitative evaluation would solidify this speculation.

Future Prospects. If research is continued with SIRV, it is the hope of the researcher that the curriculum will be proven effective and able to be implemented in other therapeutic settings and even casual groups like youth and church groups. As stated by Brené Brown and SIRV, everyone experiences shame. Our society promotes shame by encouraging people to live up to impossible expectations of appearance, financial success, and trendy lifestyles. It is the hope of the researcher that SIRV can assist all types of people in working through shame and cultivating shame resilience.

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