

**Reintegrative Shaming Theory:**

**Domestic Violence Policies**

Jasmyn Wilhelm

Department of Criminal Justice

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Dr. Ruth Triplett

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## **Introduction**

As domestic violence remains a primary social issue, the methods used have leaned towards penalties and punishment without addressing the root or underlying issues. Without addressing these issues, rehabilitation efforts could prove ineffective. John Braithwaite developed the Reintegrative Shaming Theory (RST) to provide a different perspective, help encourage the support of the community, rehabilitation, and reintegration. The aim of this paper is to inform readers about RST, evaluate the current domestic violence programs participating in recovery efforts, evaluating the ongoing programs through the prospective of RST, and provide recommendations for different initiatives to support both the victims and rehabilitating offenders.

## **Reintegrative Shaming Theory**

Braithwaite's Reintegrative Shaming Theory specifies two different types of societies responses to deviant behavior. The two terms Braithwaite defines these responses were, reintegrative shaming and disintegrative shaming (stigmatization). In laymen's terms, shaming can be defined as the societal or social disapproval of criminal behavior. Reintegrative shaming does not encourage the deviant act, but it allows offenders a different path to rejoin their community. However, disintegrative shaming rejects the offender, which often involves exclusion, and labels the offender often leading to relapse of the offending behavior (Braithwaite, 1989).

RST implies societies with a strong sense of community and interconnected have increased success of implementing reintegrative shaming. These environments often see the behavior outside of the prospective as law breaking, but as broken relationships. This prospective

can increase the chance for rehabilitation over alienation. Applying this theory to domestic violence suggests the focus should shine on healing the broken relationships and reintegration in the community compared to punishment.

### **Current Policies and Programs**

There are many programs that aim to use the principles of RST in the response of domestic violence. The three programs being examined are the Center for Court Innovation based in New York City, Restorative Justice Programs, and Parental Sanction and Delinquent Behavior Programs. The Center for Court Innovation promotes the practices of restorative justice which prioritize the engagement of victims and holds the offender accountable. Offenders partake in the rehabilitation programs, along with community service and self-reflection (Packer, n.d.). General Restorative Justice Programs have initiatives across the United States and organize communication for offenders and the victims through supervised gatherings. These programs can encourage accountability and support from the community (Lu et al., 2002). Lastly, parental sanction and delinquent behavior programs are inspired by RST. These programs use parental or community shaming to support the correction of behavior, especially in younger offenders. This type of program can set a baseline for a wider range or approached surrounding domestic violence contexts (Hay, 2015).

### **Critiques**

Although they try to lower recurrence and encourage victim engagement, restorative justice initiatives like the Center for Court Innovation have not proven effective. These programs struggle to address domestic abuse, when safety and relationships within the

community and others have unresolved conflict. The community has remained reluctant to rejecting punishments, and victims may be emotionally unprepared or fear reprisals. Programs for parental penalties have shown promise in adolescent settings, but domestic violence has more significant hazards and needs to be applied with greater caution. For these programs to be completely successful, safety, voluntariness, and community buy-in must be addressed.

### **Recommended Initiatives**

Three initiatives suggested by RST require safety assessments, education campaigns in the community, and support for reintegration programs. One goal of these initiatives is to promote the safety of the victims while providing physical and emotional support. Along with this, promoting reintegration of offenders over shaming or stigmatization. Lastly, the reinforcement of the reintegration process through programs that can provide job search assistance, mentorship, and counseling. All these initiatives align with RST's approach on the healing and reintegration beliefs while addressing the root issues. Implementing these initiatives can encourage the rehabilitation of offenders causing a higher success rate and minimize the risks of reoffending.

### **Conclusion**

Reintegrative Shaming Theory can be seen as a great baseline for a new perspective in the response to domestic violence, with accountability, healing, and less punishment or exclusion. The current programs in place aim for this goal, but there are risks and apprehension with victim safety, participant volunteering, and the willingness of the community to support. These initiatives proposed is aimed at decreasing the gap between theory and reality. While these

initiatives are proposed with no statistics to provide a foundation, it is a step needed to move forward in expanding on a solution from theory to practice. Domestic violence can cause harm which may reach beyond what can be addressed through these practices, flexibility and willingness for adaptation can still make a difference for offenders, victims, and society.

### Resources

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