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The public shaming game within Traveller communities

Introduction

The idea of public shaming has been around for centuries, but technology and social media has taken it to new heights

Most of us will be aware of the many different forms of public shame, (*although we may often not associate or connect it with the term shaming*), that are circulated on various social media platforms and outlets. [Fat shaming](#) and [body shaming](#) is one most of us will have heard about. The internet is filled with examples of celebrities that are continuously shamed for weight gain and body 'flaws'.

This concept of public shaming and humiliation is not new and instead is a concept that has been around for centuries in various guises. For example, the shaming of offenders has been in existence since the late 18th century; it was a form of correction that was used to serve justice by offenders who had committed criminal acts. Offenders who had committed crimes against persons or property were likely to be handed a *sentence of shaming* in lieu of serving a sentence in a cell or incapacitated place. Popular methods of late 18th century shaming included the whipping post, the pillory, stocks, branding, banishment and the dunking stool. All of these devices were used as a form of public shaming in order to humiliate the individual.

Women in particular have been the victims of public shaming. In the 16th and 17th-century in Europe, tens of thousands of women were rounded up and slaughtered for being different, non-conforming or outcasts in some of the earliest witch hunts.

This short briefing looks at the recent rise in the use of social media platforms by Irish Travellers to create ‘*shame pages*’ to humiliate and publicly shame members of their own community. In response to this we have developed a specific project and campaign to challenge this inappropriate practice of public shaming.

What is public community shaming?

Shaming is a form of *social behaviour control* that is used in many different cultures in many different ways. Whilst ‘*shame*’ is an emotion that all of us will identify with about oneself at some stage or another, ‘*shaming*’ is an action that is intended to cause *someone else* to feel shame for being or doing something that another person(s) feels is wrong or undesirable by their ‘*community behavioural standards*’.

Many health professionals describe it as:

“Public humiliation or public shaming is a form of punishment whose main feature is dishonouring, hurting or disgracing a person, especially in a public place.”

Shaming within the Irish Traveller community against other Irish Travellers is no different. It is an ugly practice that is designed to cause as much public humiliation, hurt and shame to the reputation of an individual and their family name. It is designed to cause damage to a person’s self-image or sense of self-worth.

Why shame others?

Motives for shaming are usually born out of resentment, jealousy or prejudice, and the desire to harm and humiliate another person.

In the Irish Traveller community, women and LGBT+ people are the most common targets for shaming. Women’s honour and reputation is directly linked to her family’s honour and reputation, and therefore the behaviour of Women is more closely scrutinised than men. This makes them easier targets for shaming as even a small action that differentiates from the accepted, and often extremely strict behavioural

norm, can '*bring shame*' to the whole family. This can be from talking to a boy, to having a divorce and remarrying. Gay men are shamed not only on religious grounds but also for not fulfilling the extremely *masculine* role of a Traveller man that expects them to be good fighters, to marry, have children and provide for their family.

What are the consequences of public shaming?

The World Health Organisation (WHO) states that shaming can cause depression, suicidal thoughts and other severe mental health problems. The humiliated individuals may develop a variety of symptoms including apathy, paranoia, anxiety or PTSD, among others. The rage and fury may arise in the persecuted individual, themselves lashing out against innocent victims, as they seek revenge, or as a means of release.

In the Irish Traveller community, the consequences are often severe. In recent years, several young Irish Travellers have taken their own lives as a result of being publicly shamed by people in their own community.

Why is shaming not acceptable?

The shortest answer to why shaming is inappropriate in a community aiming to be positive and respectful, is in the definition of shaming itself: it is an action that is intended to make someone feel bad about themselves or their worth. Making someone feel bad about themselves, does nothing to achieve the goal of building a healthy community.

Travellers experience enough hostility and discrimination from the outside society, in order to be better prepared to fight against prejudice, a community needs to work as a whole and to have each other's back.

Our campaign

#StopShaming is an awareness raising social media campaign that uses a variety of tools including videos and blogs to campaign and spread the '*stop shaming*' message within the community.

We want to encourage Gypsy and Traveller people who have or have not been shamed by their own community, to post a short video clip condemning shaming, finishing their video with #StopShaming. The video clip can be about a personal experience or something that they have observed.

Our aim is to start an honest discussion about shaming and its devastating consequences. We also want to show to those Travellers who are being shamed that most people in their community are not accepting of this cruel and dangerous practice and will do their best to call it out and stop it.

As part of our direct action is to get all 'Traveller shame' accounts on Instagram and fake Identity profiles on Facebook to be removed. We use our Facebook '*trusted flagger*' status to do this.

'Traveller shame' Instagram accounts are accounts set up by usually young Traveller men who share pornographic pictures and videos of young Traveller girls and women in order to publicly shame them. This phenomenon is also called 'revenge porn' in the wider society. The victims are usually tricked in sending pictures of themselves or are secretly filmed.

Facebook 'fake pages' are profiles created by other Travellers in order to publicly shame and scandalise the victim. They share pictures, videos and posts pretending to be the victim.