

Understanding the Impact of Shame

In a "state of shame" which is associated with dishonor, disgrace, or condemnation, the core sense of self is stigmatized, denigrated, wronged and overtly rejected as being faulty in some manner. **It is the most contractive self-imposed projection possible by a human being.** "To shame" generally means to actively assign or communicate a state of being wrong on another and/or towards an aspect of your being or your inherent Self.

Shame is probably one of most destructive and devastating abuses to the self and to one's sense of core identity. It inherently makes you wrong at the very essence of who you are, creating a ripple effect throughout every level of your consciousness. People become even more ashamed when they judge their original shameful issues as trivial or ridiculous in the first place. The voice of shame will encourage the contractive energy to continue and convinces you that the more trivial the cause of your shame, the more shameful and foolish it is to ever acknowledge it.

SHAME – I am (who I am or an aspect of who I am) is WRONG or BAD

(Judgment + Anger projected inward at self or an aspect of self)

- **The secrecy of shame:** Shame thrives in dark recesses of the consciousness in secrecy: unspoken, unexpressed, unconscious and suppressed within the being. A shameful narrative develops building a layer of shame for feeling shame in the first place. These layers of shame develop over time creating different coping mechanisms to prevent discovery analysis or consideration. Shame is an unspoken epidemic, which is secretly behind many forms of other broken behavior.
- **Toxic shame:** Is a neurotic, irrational feeling of worthlessness, humiliation, self-loathing that has been inflicted and then self-inflicted through repeated trauma. This complex trauma created in a child is creates coping mechanism and is often managed through disassociation, depending on the level of severity.
- **Vicarious shame:** refers to the experience of shame on behalf of another person. Individuals vary in their tendency to experience vicarious shame, which is related to neuroticism and to the tendency to experience personal shame. Extremely shame-prone people might even experience vicarious shame to an increased degree: shame on behalf of another person who is already feeling shame.

Excessive shame can feed ongoing guilt. If you are inherently wrong at a core level, then your actions must also continue to be wrong as well as they come from your perception of broken self. And excessive ongoing guilt can also feel the already contractive shame-filled state. Guilt and shame feel the similar, but they are caused and managed differently within the being.

Each of us has a unique set of ways to feel shame. To survive and thrive, the first step is to identify your **PERSONAL SHAME TRIGGERS (the place where you most feel shame)**. These are the unwanted and projected ideal identities or images that you may use as ammunition as a point of comparison that makes you feel wrong. Shame is about how we wish to be perceived in the world and how we feel we "should be".

Some Common places where people experience shame:

Appearance/body image • motherhood/fatherhood (parenting) • family • money/work • mental/emotional physical health • intelligence/education • sexual • aging • religion • cultural • being stereotyped/labeled • speaking out • surviving trauma • the need to look strong • level of success • creativity

Some Behavior patterns:

- Ongoing contractive negative self-talk and self-bashing
- Impacted, contractive or diminished behavior on all levels: posture, dress, speech, social interactions
- low self-esteem, diminished self-image, poor self-concept, and deficient body-image
- Shame itself produces self-doubt and disrupts both security and confidence
- Difficult experiencing a sense of belonging and intimacy
- Shame is central to the emergence of alienation, loneliness, inferiority and perfectionism
- Psychological disorders as well, including depression, paranoia, addiction, and borderline conditions
- Sexual disorders and many eating disorders are largely disorders of shame
- Unshakable belief that you are totally worthless and unlovable
- Self-talk, a routine self-abuse and self-neglect, rigid denials, harsh self-criticism
- Compulsive apologizing, inability to accept merited praise and love, and many others

The difference between Embarrassment and Shame

Embarrassment is an emotional state that is associated with moderate to high levels of discomfort or contraction. It is usually experienced when someone expresses a socially unacceptable, frowned-upon act or condition that was witnessed by or revealed to others and something secret that was exposed.

Embarrassment can be personal, caused by unwanted attention to private matters, personal flaws or mishaps. Some causes of embarrassment stem from personal actions, such as being caught in a lie or in making a mistake. In many cultures, Personal embarrassment can also stem from the actions of others who place the embarrassed person in a socially awkward situation—such as a parent showing one's baby pictures to friends, having someone make a derogatory comment about one's appearance or behavior, discovering one is the victim of gossip, being made the focus of attention (birthday celebrants, newlyweds), or even witnessing someone else's embarrassment. But either way the foundation has to do with varying elements of self-worth.

Usually some perception of loss of honor or dignity (or other high-value ideals) are involved, but the embarrassment level and the type depends on the situation. Embarrassment is similar to shame, but shame may be experienced for an act known only to oneself. Embarrassment is usually considered a mild form of shame but there is a major difference in the two.

Embarrassment usually carries the connotation of being caused by an act that is **merely socially unacceptable**, rather than **morally wrong**. This is the big distinction since there is a big difference in the impact that can have on your psyche. There is a big difference between unacceptable and inherently wrong.

Understanding the Impact of Guilt

Guilt is a cognitive or an emotional experience that occurs when a person believes or realizes—accurately or not—that he or she has compromised his or her own standards of conduct or has violated an ascribed or predetermined moral standard and bears significant responsibility for that violation. As a result, the individual sees their behavior as wrong and often believe that they deserve to be punished for their perceived misaligned act.

GUILT – My behavior, action, pattern or dynamic is WRONG or BAD

(Judgment + Anger projected inward at action or an expression of my behavior)

Guilt, like shame, also imposes the same sense of wrong or bad judgment, but instead of focusing on total self-condemnation the wrong applies to an action, behavior or way of being instead of to the self or an aspect of self. Guilt is often closely related to the concept of remorse, but it is not remorse. Authentic remorse is healthy; guilt is destructive and relentless.

The Difference between “Healthy” Remorse and “Unhealthy” Guilt:

UNHEALTHY GUILT:

- Takes on excessive self-punishment and more judgment than the situation warrants
- Self-condemning rather than focused on correcting the wrong
- Is unforgiving and distracts from an expansive outcome
- Not accountability because it requires punishment
- Guilt is self-destructive and manipulates through condemnation

HEALTHY REMORSE:

- Assumes appropriate responsibility for wrong doings
- Focused on correcting behavior and returning to balance if possible
- Gives permission to actually forgive yourself
- Prefers we don't act a certain way rather than demands it
- Is not self-destructive with unhelpful self-criticism – remorse leads to resolution

A common troubling emotion, guilt is witnessed in folks hammering themselves with “shoulds”, “musts”, and “have to” rules, and then down themselves with critical name calling or self-punishment. Guilt distracts from behavior change and righting wrongs. Many people feel guilty about things, yet still continue to break their rules. They are quick to judge themselves but not necessarily quick to change. They construct guilt-based identities such as “I'm useless and no good.” But they still break their demanding rules so guilt is not a very good motivator because it keeps the contractive cycle alive, while remorse inspires behavior change.

Guilt also does not work as well as remorse where we become fixated on strong negative consequences instead of empathy for self and others. Guilty individuals become immune to self-punishment. They actually

get used to it and feed on it in lieu of change. The internal negative self-label loses its sting. While guilt makes us feel bad, it doesn't really stop bad behavior. In fact, it may even contribute to it by creating negative self-images that the guilty come to believe.

- Guilt is a by-product of disapproval from an externally imposed moral code
- Feeling guilt is supposed to demonstrate that you care. Do you need to feel guilt to prove you care?
- Guilt is always a choice and responsibility - Do not accept undeserved guilt to be approved by anyone
- The most common result of guilt is heightened states of anxiety and depression
- When guilt is present it has to focus on an unresolved past event or experience
- Guilt is a tactic of disapproval “you are bad boy” or “what would the neighbors think?”
- Guilt can be used as a form of manipulation “if you really loved me you would...”
- Guilt can be imposed as punishment “I cannot forget how you behaved in the past when you...”
- “Guilt trips” are just a form of retroactive punishment
- Guilt is a powerplay to manipulate to make someone earn your approval (applying conditions + disapproval) For instance, Saying to a redhead or a brunette – “yes, you are cute (placing the onus on her) but I prefer blonds (creating disapproval).” This is used as a manipulation to make the redhead work to gain your approval.
- Obsessive guilt becomes a smoke screen and block from feeling other necessary emotions

Coping mechanisms to manage guilt

Defenses against feeling guilt can become an overriding aspect of one's personality. The methods that can be used to avoid guilt are multiple. They include:

1. **Repression:** Stuffing the emotion away from easy access in the consciousness. But the defense will inevitably fail, and eventually one may begin to feel guilty years later after the original actions and may even amplify the severity of those actions that may have been lightly committed at the time.
2. **Projection:** is another defensive tool that may take the form of blaming , even blaming, criticizing or disapproving of another victim. For instance, the theory that the so called “victim” may be at fault for having attracted the other person's hostility. So in this case not the suppressed guilt, but the condemning judgment and behavior, may be projected onto other people, in the hope that they will be able to consciously or unconsciously continue to hide their own behavior from themselves and or another.
3. **Sharing a feeling of guilt by activating the guilt in others:** to feel less alone with their own guilt. Guilt can be a strong motivating force in certain kinds of art and social joke-telling. it is also possible to "borrow" a sense of guilt from someone who already has guilt, and thereby share and minimize one's own unowned internal feeling.
4. **Self-harm, self-abuse or sabotage:** may be used as an alternative to compensate for the object of one's transgression – for example not allowing or sabotaging oneself in receiving or enjoying gifts, opportunities and benefits, self-punishment or self-destructive tendencies as a result of uncompensated, unowned or unacknowledged feelings of repressed guilt.