

Shame is . . .

the emotion which occurs when others ridicule, demean, discount, or minimize personal needs, feelings, and sexuality.

“ . . . an inner sense of being completely diminished or insufficient as a person. It is the self judging the self. A moment of shame may be humiliation so painful or an indignity so profound that one feels one has been robbed of her or his dignity or exposed as basically inadequate, bad, or worthy of rejection. A pervasive sense of shame is the ongoing premise that one is fundamentally bad, inadequate, defective, unworthy, or not fully valid as a human being.”

(Fossom & Mason, Facing Shame, 1986, p. 5)

Guilt is . . .

an emotion which
occurs when an
individual
violates
his / her value
system.

"It is thought that shame becomes activated and eventually internalized when significant and powerful people *ignore, minimize, ridicule, deny, or demean* another person's **NEEDS, FEELINGS, and SEXUALITY.**"

(C. Morgaine, 1992, Indo-Canadian Women's Association)

Types of systems that use shame to socialize children:

- Perfectionistic Social Groups: groups that have strong ideas about what should be--and expect their members to adhere to this standard;
- Enmeshed Social Groups—Groups that require conformity and constant togetherness;
- Social Groups that have age-inappropriate expectations for children;
- Alcoholic Families or Social Systems based on "addictive" thinking;
- Abusive Social Groups: Physically, Verbally, Emotionally, Sexually Disrespectful or Abusive;
- Social Groups that Live with Chronic Stress: Illness, Poverty, High Risk, Funding Crisis, Unstable Staff;
- Social Groups in which the adults are emotionally unavailable to children or which encourage emotional distance and isolation.

MESSAGES GIVEN BY SHAME-BASED SYSTEMS

CONTROL: "It is important to be in control of your behavior and your interactions with others as much as possible. Bad things will invariably happen if you lose control."

PERFECTION: "It is important to always be 'right' and always do the 'right' thing."

NO TALK: "Keep shameful experiences, behavior, and feelings a secret. Never talk about them openly."

DENIAL: "It is important not to acknowledge feelings and needs-especially ones that make you more vulnerable or make you appear as though you have lost control."

DISQUALIFICATIONS: "When things don't go as planned or expected, someone must be blamed. If you can't blame others you must blame yourself."

UNRELIABILITY: "Never expect things to go the way you want them to. Be prepared for the unpredictable. Don't expect constancy. You can never feel secure in relationships."

INCOMPLETENESS: "Don't even try to bring personal transactions or interactions to completion or resolution. It just won't happen."

Shame encourages the development of people who . . .

- assume that others are rejecting them when they are angry at them or confront them with a problem...which can inhibit people sexually or contribute to feelings of sexual aggression
- develop a sense of self as unworthy. This can distort authentic sexual expression.
- have difficulties establishing or respecting boundaries between themselves and others. They feel that either they have to let anyone do anything to them or they have the right to do anything they want to others. This can apply to aspects of sexuality: people can “believe” that others have a right to their bodies or that they have a right to the bodies of others.
- keep a barrier between themselves and others. They avoid true intimacy. This has obvious implications if sexual intimacy is desired.
- give off a double message:
 “I need you desperately . . .but don’t get too close to me.”
- seem to have part of themselves missing:
 Self-Nurturing Part (Martyr-like behavior)
 Self-Protection Part (Risk-taking behavior)
 Self-Worth Part (Self put-down behavior)
 All of these can be applied to a person’s sexual life.
- tend to use others (to try to “fill up” their missing parts) rather than develop interdependent relationships.
- have frozen or out-of-control emotions.

Ideally, people interact together in respectful ways.

Respect means...*to notice with special attention, to regard, to consider, to view, treat, or consider with some degree of reverence, deference, or courtesy, to feel or show honor or esteem for (Webster).*

Respect can be used as a basis for interacting with others—of all ages!

RESPECTFUL VS SHAME-BASED SYSTEMS

Respectful Systems

- Violation of values leads to guilt
- Self is separate as well as part of a relationship
- Rules require accountability
- Relationship is maintained by dialogue

Shame Based Systems

- Violation of person leads to shame
- Self has vague personal boundaries
- Rules require perfectionism
- Relationships are uncertain; in jeopardy

PRODUCE INDIVIDUALS WITH :

- Accountability, repair, and resolution
- Deepening & modifying of values over time
- Growing empathy
- Growth of self as a whole person
- More shame & despair
- Increasing rigidity
- Alienation & distance
- Development of a controlled image

CUES TO SHAME

