



Dialogue

For People Who ENJOY Learning About Themselves!

May 2009



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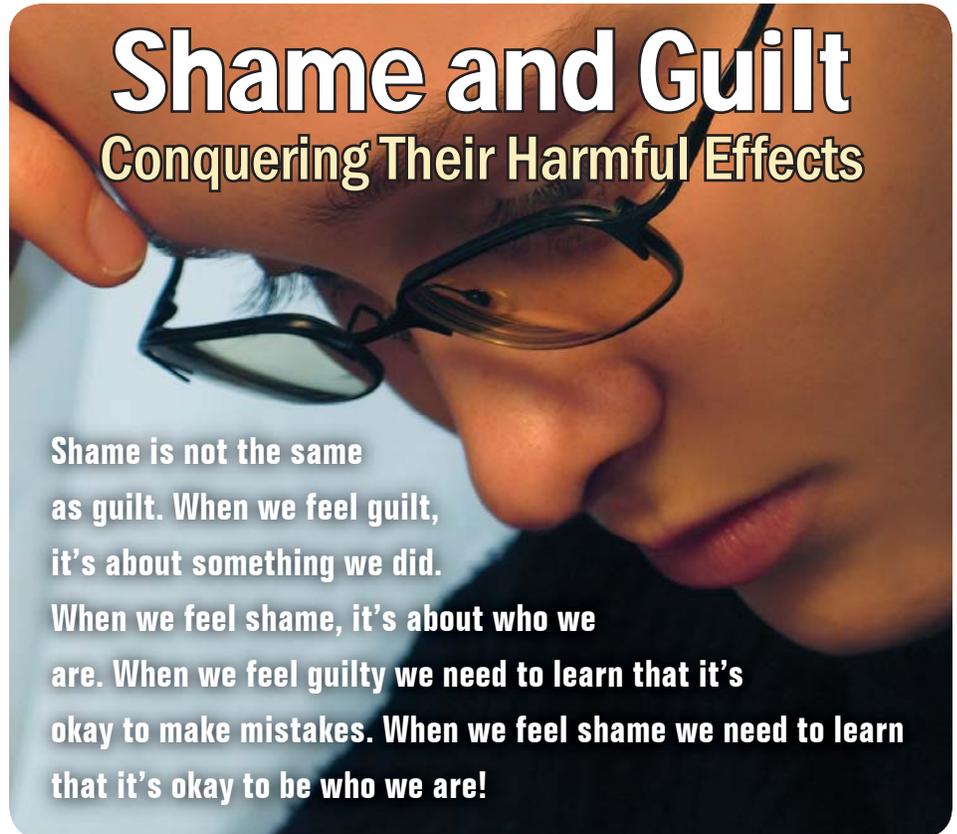
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Shame and Guilt Conquering Their Harmful Effects

Shame is not the same as guilt. When we feel guilt, it's about something we did.

When we feel shame, it's about who we are. When we feel guilty we need to learn that it's okay to make mistakes. When we feel shame we need to learn that it's okay to be who we are!

Where Shame Comes From

Shame comes from being taught that we are worthless, or bad, or something similar. It comes from adults who say things like:

"You'll never amount to anything!"

"You are worthless!"

"I wish you were never born!"

"Shame on you!"

It also comes from severe physical "discipline," since each hit of the hand or fist or belt or stick says to the child:

"You don't matter at all. Only what you do matters!"

Shame also comes from being humiliated for our behavior. It comes from adults who say:

"What would the neighbors think of you if they knew...?"

"You look ridiculous!"

"Don't you have any pride?"

"What's wrong with you anyway!?"

And it also comes from being threatened with shaming, or physical discipline, or humiliation. When we are threatened with these things, the psychological message is the same: *"I can and will treat you any way I want to. You are a worthless weakling at my disposal!"*

What Happens to People Who Are Shamed?

People who are shamed have to live in the same world as all the rest of us, but they have to live in it with the deep-down conviction that they are worthless. The amount of continuous pressure a deeply shamed person feels is immense. When they are doing well, they think it's only a matter of time before they are discovered as useless. When they make mistakes, they expect a terrifying degree of anger from the people they disappoint. Every act is a "test"—and they are convinced that it's only a matter of time before they fail completely.

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■ Shame and Guilt

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Living in Shame and Living “As If” You Are Okay

Some people who are convinced they are worthless live out their lives to prove they are worthless! The most severe alcoholics, drug addicts, and impulsive criminals of the world are some good examples. Like all of us, they have a deep need to be known and to be seen and to be “recognized for who I really am.” But since they actually believe they are worthless, they have a strong need to prove their worthlessness to everyone in their lives. They don't hurt their families and friends because they don't love them or because they want to hurt them. They hurt their families and friends out of this need to be known—and the wrong belief that they are worthless.

Most people who are convinced they are worthless live out their lives trying to prove they do have worth! These are the people who are constantly worried about what you think of them, and who constantly think that you are judging them. When you tell them they did a good job they feel good for a few minutes, but they soon feel worthless again and think that you wouldn't like them “if you really knew them.”

If you tell them they did a poor job, they will either feel a strong urge to cry or they will show an immense amount of anger at you

for saying such a thing! They don't understand you are only commenting on the last thing they did. They think you are commenting on them, and on their worthlessness as human beings.

What Helps?

People who've been deeply shamed need to be fully loved and accepted and valued. Some people find a lover who deeply accepts, loves, and values them. Others find a group of friends who deeply accept, love, and value them. Most people need a therapist along the way who also shows them their value, and who, perhaps more importantly, helps them to stop all the repetitious self-talk about their lack of worth.

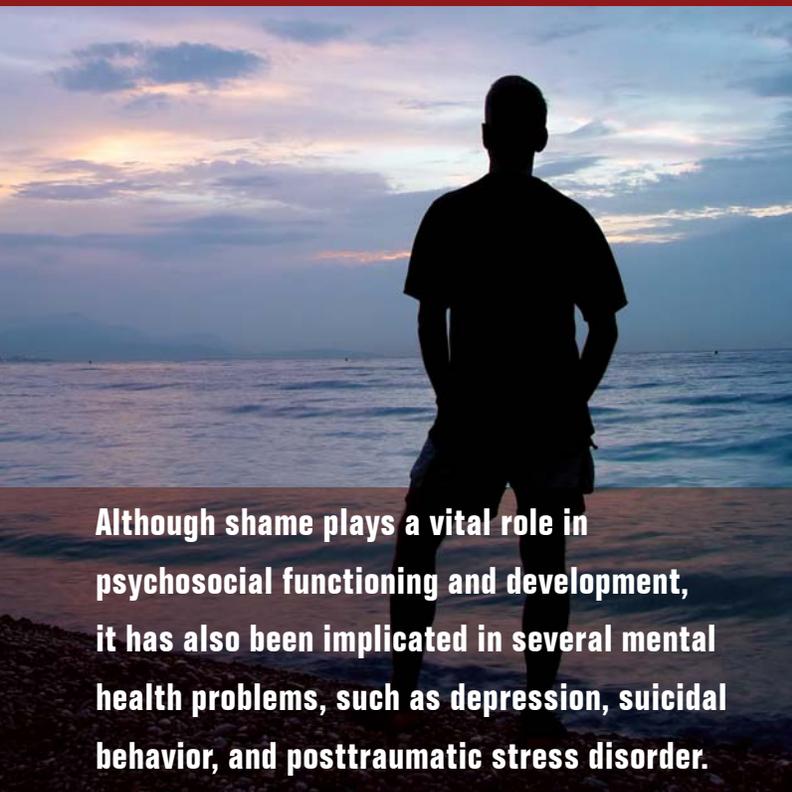
Every person who is overcoming shame will need to have many sources of love and acceptance. One lover or friend or therapist is never enough. The more totally they can trust these new sources of love in their life, the more deeply they will accept the love they need. (The love of less trustable people is also valuable, of course—just not nearly as valuable.)

Overcoming shame takes a long time. But it is well worth it for the moment when the deeply shamed person finally says with unmistakable surprise and amazement in their voice: “You know, I really am a good person!”

Shame and Resilience in Adulthood: A Grounded Theory Study

By Dr. K. Jessica Van Vliet

Journal of Counseling Psychology, Vol 55(2), Apr 2008, 233-245



Although shame plays a vital role in psychosocial functioning and development, it has also been implicated in several mental health problems, such as depression, suicidal behavior, and posttraumatic stress disorder.

Given the potentially debilitating impact of shame on adjustment, an understanding of resilience in the face of this emotion is essential. The purpose of this study was to explore how adults bounce back from significant shame experiences, based on the subjective perspectives of participants. Interviews were conducted with 13 adults who recalled events or situations that elicited intense feelings of shame. Grounded theory was used in the collection and analysis of the data. In the findings, shame is conceptualized as an assault on the self, where the individual's self-concept, social connection, and sense of power and control come under attack. Individuals bounce back from this adversity through a process of self-reconstruction. This process is represented by the core category rebuilding of the self and by 5 interrelated subcategories, including connecting, refocusing, accepting, understanding, and resisting.

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Sexualization of Girls is Linked to Common Mental Health Problems in Girls and Women—Eating disorders, Low Self-Esteem, and Depression—An APA Task Force Reports

Psychologists call for replacing sexualized images of girls in media and advertising with positive ones



A report of the American Psychological Association (APA) found evidence that the proliferation of sexualized images of girls and young women in advertising, merchandising, and media is harmful to girls' self-image and healthy development.

To complete the report, the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls studied published research on the content and effects of virtually every form of media, including television, music videos, music lyrics, magazines, movies, video games and the Internet. They also examined recent advertising campaigns and merchandising of products aimed toward girls.

Sexualization was defined by the task force as occurring when a person's value comes only from her/his sexual appeal or behavior, to the exclusion of other characteristics, and when a person is sexually objectified, e.g., made into a *thing* for another's sexual use.

Examples of the sexualization of girls in all forms of media including visual media and other forms of media such as music lyrics abound. And, according to the report, have likely increased in number as "new media" have been created and access to media has become omnipresent. The influence and attitudes of parents, siblings,

and friends can also add to the pressures of sexualization.

"The consequences of the sexualization of girls in media today are very real and are likely to be a negative influence on girls' healthy development," says Eileen L. Zurbriggen, PhD, chair of the APA Task Force and associate professor of psychology at the University of California, Santa Cruz. "We have ample evidence to conclude that sexualization has negative effects in a variety of domains, including cognitive functioning, physical and mental health, and healthy sexual development."

Research evidence shows that the sexualization of girls negatively affects girls and young women across a variety of health domains:

- ▶ **Cognitive and Emotional Consequences:** Sexualization and objectification undermine a person's confidence in and comfort with her own body, leading to emotional and self-image problems, such as shame and anxiety.

- ▶ **Mental and Physical Health:** Research links sexualization with three of the most common mental health problems diagnosed in girls and women—eating disorders, low self-esteem, and depression or depressed mood.

- ▶ **Sexual Development:** Research suggests that the sexualization of girls has negative consequences on girls' ability to develop a healthy sexual self-image.

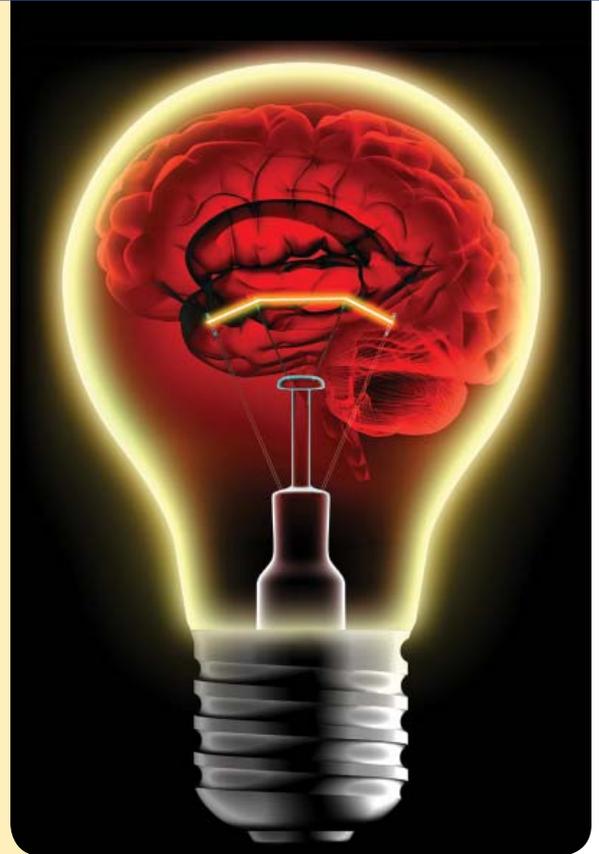
According to the task force report, parents can play a major role in contributing to the sexualization of their daughters or can play a protective and educative role. The APA report calls on parents, school officials, and all health professionals to be alert for the potential impact of sexualization on girls and young women. Schools, the APA says, should teach media literacy skills to all students and should include information on the negative effects of the sexualization of girls in media literacy and sex education programs.

"As a society, we need to replace all of these sexualized images with ones showing girls in positive settings—ones that show the uniqueness and competence of girls," states Dr. Zurbriggen. "The goal should be to deliver messages to all adolescents—boys and girls—that lead to healthy sexual development."

(American Psychological Association, February 2007)

FACTS & STATISTICS: Mental Health

- Untreated mental health disorders cost American businesses \$79 billion in lost productivity per year. (Surgeon General's Report on Mental Health 1999)
- 97% of Americans believe access to mental health care is important. (APA Survey 2004)
- Nine out of ten Americans say psychotherapy helped them. (APA, How to Find Help Through Psychotherapy, 1998)
- More than 44 million Americans suffer from a mental health disorder. (National Institute of Mental Health)
- 95% of women say they are likely to consult a mental health professional or recommend a family member do so, versus 87% of men. (APA Survey 2004)
- Nearly 50% of American households have had someone see a mental health professional. (APA Survey 2004)



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