Shame: A Long Ignored Key in SUDs

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MY JOURNEY

Began as a Counselor in a non-profit/NGO right after grad school
Ended up running programs and went to service delivery for ten years
Went to Yoga Teacher training and began to teach yoga
Became the head of training and credentialing support for two years at the NGO
Moved to the UTC Coordinating Center at the Univ of South FL
Deputy Director, ICUDDR

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

• Understand the difference between shame and guilt
• Become familiar with the research about the dangers of shame
• Learn the 4 elements of Shame Resiliency Theory (Brene’ Brown, PhD)
Dr. Brené Brown
- Dr. Brené Brown is a research professor at the University of Houston
- She has spent two decades studying courage, vulnerability, shame, and empathy
- Author of five #1 New York Times bestsellers
- She is in recovery and works closely with the substance use disorder prevention, treatment, and recovering community

WHAT THE RESEARCH TELLS US...

Guilt is the feeling you get when you realize you have done something you are not happy with

It is a motivating emotion

You focus on the behavior

Guilt can prompt you to correct the situation or do differently in the future

Guilt is “adaptive and helpful – it’s holding something we’ve done or failed to do up against our values and feeling psychological discomfort.”

Helps us stay on track because it is about behavior

Motivates real change, amends, and self-reflection
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SHAME AND SELF

While guilt is the sense that we have done something wrong, shame is the deeper sense that we are flawed and defective as human beings, that our core identity or body is somehow "bad".

Who we actually are gets lost in some cases as the shame takes over our identity.

Shame is kept locked away for fear that others will reject or abandon us if they discovered the false self we believe is who we truly are.

SHAME

"Shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging – something we've experienced, done, or failed to do makes us unworthy of connection."

WHAT THE RESEARCH TELLS US...

Shame...
- Is NOT helpful or productive
- Tells us we are not good enough which is demotivating
- Is an unspoken epidemic – the secret behind many forms of broken behavior
SHAME SPIRAL

- Tied to our sense of identity
- The etiology of the word shame is “to hide” or “cover up”
- We make the judgement that we are not good enough and that can lead to behaviors that we do not deem as good enough (self-fulfilling prophecies)

“Shame is like a prison. But a prison that you deserved to be in because something is wrong with you”
- Brené Brown

SHAME

- Shame says I am bad and therefore undeserving, unlovable, or unworthy
- Shame is correlated with using drugs and alcohol, bullying, depression, anxiety, disconnection
- Shame can shut down other emotions, can shut down your body, and even trigger the nervous system to perceive a potential threat
SHAME & ANGER

- Shame can result in a response very similar to a fight or flight response.
- Can result in anger because the person feels fearful or hurt.
- Why do people choose anger over the primary or deeper emotions?

WHY WE NEED TO KNOW THIS

- How we speak to clients can trigger shame.
- It can benefit us to be aware of our own shame triggers.
- We can help clients understand the differences between shame and guilt.
- We can help them, and ourselves, to address shame.

WHY WE NEED TO KNOW THIS

- We need to start to talk about shame in our practice, our families, our community in comfortable ways.
- We will see that this takes away the power of shame.
- We can help clients and ourselves have ah-ha moments and improve their lives.
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LANGUAGE OF SHAME

- You should know better
- That is not how we do it
- That is unacceptable
- Labels

LANGUAGE

- I am not good enough
- I am lazy
- I am dumb
- I never get things right
- I won't ever be able to stop using

LANGUAGE

- I can't support my family
- I am a failure at work/in my marriage/with money
- I am not attractive
- I should be able to do this effortlessly
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I am not _________ enough

- It may not be what you think as in I am not skinny enough, or smart enough or rich enough
- Not extraordinary enough
- Not authentic enough
- Not spiritual enough

Name-calling is one of the foundational aspects of shaming

We put ourselves in a box
“Be careful with the stories you tell about yourself”
- Glennon Doyle

SELF-TALK

- Shame self-talk
- Example: boss is rude to you, your self-talk can go different ways
  - “I deserve what just happened. I am no good. Look at me, I constantly fail.” (shame)
  - “That was uncalled for and disappointing. I did not deserve that treatment.” (humiliation)

PHYSIOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO SHAME

- Feeling flush / hot
- Sweating
- Tucking your head, shoulders slumped, bending slightly forward

Sometimes we don’t even know that what we are experiencing is shame

Different for everyone but often similar to our trauma response
PHYSIOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO SHAME

- Pit of your stomach feeling
- Brain going fuzzy
- Time standing still
- Heart racing
- Red face

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN FIGHT OR FLIGHT IS TRIGGERED?

ACTH: adrenocorticotropic hormone (cortisol, corticosterone, etc.)
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN FIGHT OR FLIGHT IS TRIGGERED?

THAT HAPPENED

Physiological Response to Stress

Notice
Notice where you feel shame in your own body

Discuss
Discuss with friends, family, children

Share
Share with your clients about it
KNOWING YOUR TRIGGERS

1. Think about something that makes you feel shame.
2. Notice where you feel it in your body.
3. Write how you feel, what is coming up for you.
4. Think about who you could safely share this with.

CYCLE OF SHAME

- Shame motivates us to save face so we may be inclined to hide when feeling shameful.
- Hiding often accompanies behaviors that are themselves a trigger for further shame, such as addictions, compulsive behaviors, harsh self-criticism, or self-denigration.

Let's use an example: My ex-partner says I am not a good mother. I feel shame as I have always felt not good enough as a parent. I drink too much and am not able to pick up my children at the agreed upon time.

- What do I feel?
- How do I behave?
- What is the cycle here?
When we experience shame and refuse to recognize it, we put up shame screens. A shame screen is a primal defense mechanism that we use to shield and protect ourselves as we experience an event that triggers the fight, flight, and freeze response.

**SHAME SCREENS**

When we put up these screens, we usually make one of three choices:

1. **Moving towards shame** by seeking a sense of belonging.
2. **Moving against shame** by trying to exert power over a situation or others by being aggressive.
3. **Moving away from shame** by hiding our experience, keeping secrets, and struggling in silence.

When we move towards, we appease, we become people-pleasers, we become what other people want us to be so we won't disappoint them and feel shameful.

When we move against, we try to gain power by fighting back, lashing out, using shame to fight shame; we try to hurt others before they can hurt us more.

When we move away, we withdraw, hide, silence ourselves, keep our own secrets; we avoid connection and true relationships.
FIGHT OR FLIGHT OR...

Fight: Get angry, fight or talk back, defend self
Flight: Leaves, hides, runs away
Freeze: Shuts down, numbs out, dissociates
Fawn: Please, appease, be overly submissive

SHAME IN THE SUNLIGHT

- Shame thrives in silence
- “Shame cannot survive being spoken”
- Shame requires the belief that I am alone; when I know other people have the same feelings, a lot of the power goes away

The less you talk about shame, the more power it has
Shame can creep into every corner and crevice of your life
Shame eats three things to grow: secrecy, shame, and judgment
EMPATHY

The virtual sunlight we need as the antidote to shame is empathy. As professionals, we can be a huge part of the healing process for this reason. A friend or therapist can provide this for us.

EMPATHY

What exactly is empathy?

“Empathy is connecting to the feeling under the experience, not the experience itself.”

Ex: me as a new clinician not understanding empathy

EMPATHY

- A skill – some may have it naturally but it can be refined, strengthened, practiced
- Infinite and renewable
- Motivational enhancement techniques
Empathy is a "brave choice to be with someone in their darkness, not to race to turn on the light so we feel better."

- Dr. Brown

Empathy

- If someone shares their story and it is met with empathy, the shame can't survive/thrive.

Continuums

Empathy ———— Disconnection, unraveling of relationships

Deep, meaningful relationships

Our brains are actually wired to run from pain — including emotional pain — whether it is ours or someone else's.

Empathy is a skill that can bring people together and make people feel included.

Be careful with words like, "at least," sometimes the best thing is to say "I don't know what to say, but I am really glad you told me."
EMPATHY

Requires us to see the world through someone else’s eyes.

To be non-judgmental.

To understand someone else’s feelings.

Communicate our understanding of the other person’s feelings.

EMPATHY EXERCISE

Think of a person who is difficult for you to deal with (specific or personality type).

Think

Imagine What this person thinks about.

Imagine

Imagine How this person feels.

Imagine

Imagine Why this person does what they do.

SHAME TRIGGER CATEGORIES

- Surviving trauma
- Sex
- Body image and appearance
- Addiction
- Money and work
- Parenting
- Family
- Mental and physical health
- Aging
- Religion
- Surviving trauma
- Being stereotyped or labeled
OUR SHAME TRIGGERS

- We may feel we are immune, that this is about others.
- Perfectionism is a defense against shame.
- If you have a sore spot, such as not being "successful enough," it can get triggered through something innocuous like someone asking what you do for a living.

SHAME TRIGGERS

- When children are emotionally or physically abandoned, abused, or neglected they often take on the shame by assuming that they are "bad.
- Situations that devalue self can trigger shame in the moment and when triggered again.

“If you are uncomfortable—in deep pain, angry, yearning, confused—you don't have a problem, you have a life.”
- Glennon Doyle
SHAME RESILIENCY THEORY

Developed by Dr. Brené Brown

A grounded theory attempt to explore how people overcome feelings of shame

A way to move on from feeling trapped, powerless, and isolated as a result of feeling shame, moving into empathy, connection, power and freedom

SHAME RESILIENCY THEORY

Recognizing and understanding

• Recognizing and understanding shame triggers

Practicing critical awareness

Reaching

• Reaching out to others

Speaking

• Speaking shame

4 ELEMENTS OF SHAME RESILIENCY

According to Dr. Brown, the four (or 5) elements of Shame Resilience are:

• Recognizing shame and understanding our triggers (e.g., physical responses like our heart racing or tightness in our chest).

• Practicing critical awareness (i.e., seeing any underlying beliefs, thoughts, and emotions). For example, if we recognize a trigger, we can reframe it in a more positive context.

• Reaching out and telling our story (i.e., reaching out to our support network and sharing our story).

• Speaking shame. It is important for us to unburden our feelings (i.e., through therapy and writing). Additionally, we can express and communicate our triggers, patterns, critical awareness, and reach out to others. We can also give our resilience to our network by communicating our shame with our most trusted friends and our loved ones and i

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SHAME RESILIENCY THEORY

RECOGNIZING & UNDERSTANDING SHAME TRIGGERS

WHAT PHYSICAL SENSATIONS ARE ASSOCIATED WITH YOUR FEELINGS OF SHAME?

EXAMPLES: TIGHTNESS IN THE CHEST, SHORTNESS OF BREATH, RACING HEART

Answering questions like:

I physically feel shame in/on my...
It feels like...
I know I’m in shame when I feel...
If I could taste shame, it would taste like.....

Answering these questions for yourself is the first step on your shame resilience journey.

By developing our understanding and our experience of feeling shame, we can learn to have control of those feelings and behaviors that are associated with it.
WORKING ON RECOGNIZING SHAME

I physically feel shame in/on my……

I know I am in shame when I feel

If I could taste shame, it would taste like

If I could smell shame, it would smell like

If I could touch shame, it would feel like

SHAME RESILIENCY THEORY

Practicing critical awareness

Are the expectations that are driving your shame realistic?

Are they really what you need or do they lead to the person you want to be?
COGNITIVE ERRORS

- All-or-nothing: Must be perfect at all times
- Catastrophizing: If I make one mistake, my boss will fire me
- Emotional reasoning: I am anxious and horrible so something must be wrong
- Discounting the positive: I made a mistake and it sucked so I must suck

COGNITIVE ERRORS

- Mind-reading: My friend must be mad at me and not want to hang out anymore
- Should statements: I should be this or that
- Comparisons: Everyone else at work seems to be doing fine, what is wrong with me?
- False expectations: If my mother really loves me, she will call this weekend. I really want her to call because I am down.

SHAME RESILIENCY THEORY: PRACTICING CRITICAL AWARENESS

In a moment where we are experiencing shame, it often feels like you are the only one in the world who is struggling

Question the isolation

Clubhouse of the Brave (Glennon Doyle)
SHAME RESILIENCY THEORY: PRACTICING CRITICAL AWARENESS

Ask questions like:

- Why do these expectations exist?
- How do these expectations work?
- How is our society influenced by these expectations?
- How realistic are my expectations?
- Can I be all these things at the same time?

You ask these to learn more about what you’re experiencing and why you’re experiencing it.

CRITICAL AWARENESS EXERCISE

- What expectations do I have of myself? E.g. perfection
- Where did this expectation come from?
- Is this expectation reasonable?
- Is it achievable?
- If it is something I do want to aspire to, can I make the expectation more attainable? E.g., instead of being perfect, can I be someone who is generally organized? With the understanding that I will make mistakes.

SHAME RESILIENCY THEORY

- Reaching out to others
- Empathy is a tool that helps us understand our own experiences as well as others’
- When someone shares their experiences of shame, we are better able to empathize and reach out to them, which also helps make us more resilient to our own shame
Think about how in your life you can reach out to others

Help your clients to reach out and rebuild relationships slowly and with reasonable expectations

Can use technology, can be spiritual, recovery groups

Talk it through

- Who is someone safe with whom you can share your story?
- How can you connect with others who have had similar experiences?
- What do you need from others right now?
- Who is capable of giving that to you?
TALKING IT THROUGH

- People need to own their context.
- They need to be safe.
- Can be helpful to specify what you need, if you have not told anyone else they need. E.g., “Do you just want empathy?”
- Ask: “Do you need suggestions?” How can I best be present for you right now?

TALKING TO OURSELVES

- We hear our own voice more than any other voice with our self-talk.
- We may not believe what others say – “they don’t really know me.”
- It’s good to practice and teach talking back to the shame in our head.

JOURNALING, AFFIRMATIONS, AND PRACTICING STATEMENTS TO SAY ARE KEY

- It won’t feel natural at first but that is OK. Set the right expectations for clients.
- Some examples: “I am worthy” and “I am allowed to feel however I feel.”
Brave means living from the inside out. Brave means, in every uncertain moment, turning inward, feeling for the Knowing, and speaking it out loud.
- Glennon Doyle

- **Burnout** – to deplete oneself, to exhaust one’s physical and mental resources. To wear oneself out by excessively striving to reach some unrealistic expectation imposed by one’s self or by the values of society.
- Dr. H. Freudenberger
WHAT SELF-CARE IS

About being deliberate in taking time for the betterment of your mind, body, and soul

Necessary self-preservation

Includes any intentional actions you take for your physical, mental, & emotional health.

Self-nurturing methods that affirm and protect helpers as they undertake the care of others

“An essential underpinning to best practice in the profession of social work”

AND FURTHERMORE, IT REQUIRES AUTHENTIC SELF-CARE

- Don't like yoga or meditation?
- Don't enjoy bubble baths?
- Not a fan of facials or massages?

AUTHENTIC SELF-CARE

- Authentic self-care means ensuring that all of our needs are met
- Spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical needs
- It requires self-knowledge and courage to listen to our needs
- Takes setting boundaries, being able to say no
- Is unique; no “one size fits all”
WE MUST KNOW OURSELVES

- What areas of life may be in need: relationships, work, physical health, spirituality, social, emotional wellbeing...
- What is the impact in my life if these needs go unmet?
- What is the cost of not meeting these needs?
- How can I go about meeting these needs?
- What feeds my soul? How do I recharge?

YOUR SELF-CARE PLAN

- As your self-care activities will be individual and unique, so will the way you plan
- You may schedule a certain amount of time every day to do self-care activities; maybe with your lifestyle it has to be weekly/ideally some moments daily—and a mindset!
- Many options – the important thing is that you do it
- Be creative and persistent
BRIEF PLUG FOR GRATITUDE

- Improves sleep
- Strengthens psychological well being
- Longevity
- Increased energy levels
- More likely to exercise
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Thank You

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