

UNC School of Social Work Clinical Lecture Series

# Hidden No More: Moving from Shame to Wholehearted Living

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# Hello! Glad You're Here!

What are we going to talk about today?

- Shame: definitions, how shame shows up in the clinical setting, and teaching shame resilience, empathy, and self-compassion
- Wholehearted living: what it is, what gets in the way, and the 10 Guideposts

# Brené Brown and Shame Research

- Research professor at the University of Houston Graduate School of Social Work
- Published *I Thought It Was Just Me, But It Isn't* in 2007
- First became widely known after her TEDx Houston talk in 2010, “The Power of Vulnerability”, went viral
- Published *The Gifts of Imperfection* in 2010
  - *Connections* curriculum
- Published *Daring Greatly* in 2012
  - *The Daring Way*™ curriculum
- Published *Rising Strong* in 2015
  - *Rising Strong* curriculum
- *COURAGEworks* online curriculum in 2016

Let's hear from Brené on shame

# What is Shame?

Shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging.

# Shame, Shame, Go Away

- Everyone has it – it is our most primitive human affect.
- No one wants to talk about it.
- The less we talk about it, the more we have it. If you “don’t do shame,” shame will “do” you.
- Shame hates words wrapped around it.

# How Shame Grows

Shame is a social concept. Shame happens between people and heals between people.

Shame needs three things to grow exponentially:

- Secrecy
- Silence
- Judgment

# Definitions

- Shame: “I am bad.” Focus on self, not behavior, with the result that we feel alone. Shame is never known to lead us toward positive change.
- Guilt: “I did something bad.” Focus on behavior. Guilt has the potential to motivate us toward positive change.
- Embarrassment: fleeting, sometimes funny. “I know I am not alone - it could have happened to someone else.”
- Humiliation: the variable that differentiates humiliation is: “Did I deserve this?”



# Shame in the Clinical Office

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Eating disorders
- Infidelity
- Addiction
- Appearance/body image
- Money
- Work
- Family
- Parenting
- Sex
- Aging
- Religion
- Surviving trauma

# Clues to Shame in the Room

- “Negative tapes” or “gremlins”
- Keeping secrets - from you, from others
- Doing the same negative behavior repeatedly
- Avoiding or minimizing a topic that causes pain
- People-pleasing
- Aggression, anger

# Women and Shame

Shame is...

- when you are anything less than “perfect”
- being judged by other mothers
- being exposed
- never “good enough”
- when you can’t pull off looking like it is all under control
- “never enough”
- having no seat at the “cool table”

# Men and Shame

Shame is...

- failure
- being wrong
- a sense of being defective
- when people think you are “soft”
- revealing a weakness
- showing fear
- being seen as “the guy you can shove up against the lockers”
- being criticized or ridiculed

# You try it

- Shame is....

I get it, shame is bad.

Now, what do I do to help clients deal with it?

- Awareness → Shame resilience
- Empathy
- Self-compassion

# Shame Resilience

Shame resilience is the ability to...

- practice authenticity when experiencing shame
- move through the experience without sacrificing our values
- come out the other side with more courage, compassion, and connection than we had going into it

Shame *resistance* is not possible - it will only further the disconnection between people and encourage shame to grow.

# Teaching Clients Shame Resilience

Three steps to becoming shame resilient:

- Recognizing shame and understanding its triggers
- Practicing critical awareness
- Reaching out and speaking shame



# Step 1: Recognizing Shame and Understanding Its Triggers

- “Shame is biology and biography.”
- Learning to physically recognize when you are in the grips of shame, feel your way through it, and figure out what messages and expectations triggered it

# Questions to Ask Clients

- What does “shame” mean to you?
- What are some of your physical symptoms that let you know you are experiencing shame?
- When you feel shame, do you:
  - Go quiet and disappear? (moving away)
  - Do whatever the other person wants in order to make the shame stop or disappear? (moving towards)
  - Go on the attack, trying to make someone else feel bad? (moving against)

# Step 2: Practicing Critical Awareness

- Reality-checking the messages and expectations that are driving shame
- Are the messages what YOU want to be or what you think OTHERS want/need from you?

# Questions to Ask Clients

- What were the messages you got as a child from loved ones or people who were important to you?
- When you hear a “gremlin” in your head, are you hearing someone else’s voice? Who? Why?
- Ideal identities: I want to be seen as \_\_\_\_\_
- Unwanted identities: I do not want to be seen as \_\_\_\_\_

# Step 3: Reaching Out and Speaking Shame

- Owning and sharing your story
- Connection is critical (and often difficult for clients)
- Asking for what you need

# Questions to Ask Clients

- Does anyone else know your story?
- Who is someone safe with whom you can share your story? How do you know this is a safe person?
- When might be a good opportunity to talk to this person to share your story?
- If there isn't anyone you can talk to, how might 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?

# Shame and Empathy

Shame results in fear, blame (of self or others), and disconnection.

Empathy is the most powerful antidote to shame.

Clients need to understand the difference between empathy and sympathy because empathy heals shame while sympathy reinforces it.





# Self-Compassion

- Kristin Neff, PhD is an associate professor human development and culture at the University of Texas at Austin, and a leading researcher on self-compassion.
- We are generally fine with giving compassion to others, but typically not so good in being compassionate towards ourselves.

# Three Elements of Self-Compassion

- Self-kindness
- Common humanity
- Mindfulness

# Self-Kindness

Being warm and understanding toward ourselves when we suffer, fail, or feel inadequate, rather than ignoring our pain or flagellating ourselves with self-criticism.

- “I just need to try harder.”
- “I should have known better.”
- “I've always been this way” and/or “I am never going to change.”

# Teaching Self-Kindness to Clients

- Soothing ourselves taps into our “mammalian caregiving system” and triggers the release of oxytocin
- More than just stopping critical thoughts, self-kindness requires actively comforting ourselves, as we would a loved one who is in pain
- Use kind words
- Give yourself a hug, tenderly stroke your arms or face, or imagine giving yourself a hug

# Common Humanity

Recognizing that suffering and personal inadequacy is part of the shared human experience – something that we all go through rather than being something that happens to “me” alone.

- “Everyone else seems to get it done.”
- “None of the other moms have problems like this.”
- “I’ve failed at being an adult.”

# Teaching Clients about Common Humanity

- Help clients remember that all humans make mistakes, have challenges in life, and suffer
- Help clients identify the ways in which their experience was connected to the larger human experience, such as acknowledging that being human means being imperfect
- Have clients think about the various causes and conditions underlying the painful event

# Mindfulness

Taking a balanced approach to our negative emotions so that feelings are neither suppressed nor exaggerated. We cannot ignore our pain and feel compassion for it at the same time. Mindfulness requires that we not be “over-identified” with thoughts and feelings, so that we are caught up and swept away by negative reactivity.

- “I’m always going to feel this way.”
- “I can’t think about this – I’ll get so \_\_\_\_\_, I’ll never recover.”
- “It is not okay to feel \_\_\_\_\_.”

# Teaching Clients About Mindfulness (in the context of Self-Compassion)

- Help clients be *aware* of their feelings as opposed to *becoming* their feelings
- Suffering = Pain x Resistance
- Encourage regular mindfulness practice when they are not experiencing pain



# What Self-Compassion is *Not*

- It is not self-pity
- It is not self-indulgence
- It is not self-esteem

# Self-Compassion Mantra

This is a moment of suffering.

Suffering is a part of life.

May I be kind to myself in this moment.

May I give myself the compassion I need.

Questions?

Shame  
vs.  
Wholehearted Living

# Pause for a Reality-Check

- These are ideals.
- Every human on this planet has unique biology and biography.
- Clients may not have the resources (defined in many ways) to achieve wholeheartedness, but pieces of the following may be helpful.

# Scarcity Culture

- Daily messages: shame, comparison, disengagement
- Using weapons and armor
- Making choices that are not aligned with values
- Experiences of shame lead to deeper fear, blame, disconnection

# Wholehearted Living

- Daily practices: courage, compassion, connection
- Putting down the weapons and armor
- Aligning with values
- Shame is still painful and challenges our sense of worthiness, but can also lead to deeper self-compassion, empathy, and authenticity.

# Tenets of Wholehearted Living: Part 1

Love and belonging are irreducible needs of all men, women, and children. We're hard-wired for connection.

- The absence of love, belonging, and connection always leads to suffering.

What it is not: When clients say they have no family or friends they can trust, rely on, or ask for help.

# Tenets of Wholehearted Living: Part 2

Those who feel lovable, who love, and who experience belonging simply believe they are *worthy* of love and belonging.

What it is not: When clients say, “I’m such a terrible person, no one will want to be with me,” or “I don’t deserve to have good things happen to me,” or “I’m damaged goods.”



# Tenets of Wholehearted Living: Part 3

Having a strong belief that our worthiness is cultivated through our choices.

- Choosing on a daily basis to live according to our values, even if those around us disagree.
- Life doesn't just “happen” - we are deliberate.

What it is not: When clients complain that life is unfair or stressful, or that they always get the short end of the stick, but who also do not make choices that align with their stated values and goals.

# What are YOUR Values?

accountability	compassion	family	knowledge	service
achievement	competence	forgiveness	loyalty	simplicity
adventure	connection	generosity	openness	spirituality
altruism	courage	gratitude	optimism	success
ambition	creativity	growth	power	time
adventure	efficiency	health	pride	teamwork
authenticity	ethics	hope	reliability	vision
balance	excellence	independence	respect	wealth
career	fairness	integrity	responsibility	wisdom
commitment	faith	justice	safety	Your own?

# Tenets of Wholehearted Living: Part 4

Wholehearted people live lives defined by courage, compassion, and connection.

- They dare to be vulnerable.
- They express compassion towards self and others.
- They cultivate meaningful relationships.

What it is not: When clients are “all talk” and never take the next step, are constantly shaming and blaming self and others, and who have relationships fraught with drama.

# Tenets of Wholehearted Living: Part 5

Wholehearted people are willing to be vulnerable.

- These people attribute all of their life successes - work, relationships, parenting, etc. - to their ability to be vulnerable and take risks.
- These are not careless, thoughtless risks, but rather risks that involve showing up and being seen, and without any guarantee of success.

What it is not: When clients play it safe, let life happen to them, and hide in the shadows.

# What Stops Us from Living Wholeheartedly?

We “armor up” – being wholehearted requires vulnerability, and that is scary.

# Perfectionism

- This is not the same as striving for excellence. They are opposites. Healthy striving is internally motivating, directing us toward our own goals and values.
- Perfectionism is all about “What will people think?” It’s an external audit. It’s about managing perception.
- It’s a process addiction: because we try to do something perfectly and still get criticized, it reinforces the idea that we must be even more perfect next time.
- Shame is the birthplace of perfectionism. When perfectionism is driving, shame is riding shotgun, and fear is that annoying backseat driver.

# Foreboding Joy

- When we lose our tolerance for vulnerability, joy becomes foreboding. We find that no emotion is more terrifying than joy because we believe if we allow ourselves to feel joy, we are inviting disaster.
- We start dress rehearsing tragedy in the best moments of our lives in order to stop vulnerability from beating us to the punch. We will not be blindsided, so we practice tragedy and trauma. In the process, we squander the joy that we need to build resilience, strength, and courage.
- In sociological surveys, everyone who showed a profound capacity for joy had one thing in common: they practiced gratitude.

# Numbing

I can take the edge off emotional pain with: \_\_\_\_\_

*Examples include: alcohol, drugs, sex, food, relationships, money, work, caretaking, gambling, affairs, religion, chaos, shopping, planning, perfectionism, constant change, the Internet, and the list goes on...*



# Stories We Tell Ourselves

What we have made up in our heads about a struggle or challenge, which may include:

- facts
- interpretations
- conspiracies
- confabulations
- emotions
- messages (from family of origin, colleagues, society, etc.)
- filters
- self-protective measures
- and more

# 10 Guideposts for Wholehearted Living

1. Cultivating Authenticity: Letting go of what people think
2. Cultivating Self-Compassion: Letting go of perfectionism
3. Cultivating a Resilient Spirit: Letting go of numbing and powerlessness
4. Cultivating Gratitude and Joy: Letting go of scarcity and fear of the dark
5. Cultivating Intuition and Trusting Faith: Letting go of the need for certainty

# 10 Guideposts for Wholehearted Living

6. Cultivating Creativity: Letting go of comparison
7. Cultivating Play and Rest: Letting go of exhaustion as a status symbol and productivity as self-worth
8. Cultivating Calm and Stillness: Letting go of anxiety as a lifestyle
9. Cultivating Meaningful Work: Letting go of self-doubt and “supposed to”
10. Cultivating Laughter, Song, and Dance: Letting go of being cool and “always in control”

Wholehearted living is about engaging in our lives from a place of worthiness. It means cultivating the courage, compassion, and connection to wake up in the morning and think, *No matter what gets done and how much is left undone, I am enough.* It's going to bed at night and thinking, *Yes, I am imperfect and vulnerable and sometimes afraid, but that doesn't change the fact that I am also brave and worthy of love and belonging.*

*The Gifts of Imperfection*

Thank you!

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Questions?