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FREEDOM FROM SHAME

COMPLETE EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

Are YOU ashamed?



An unconscious shame
self-awareness test

Are YOU ashamed?



Introduction

Those staring eyes... that bushy moustache... that accusatory finger. It's one of the most iconic posters in history. With the stark call to action *Your Country Needs You*, this poster encouraged thousands of young men to join the British Army during World War I.

The poster works for a very simple reason: it triggers a deeply unpleasant sense of shame.

In World War I, the poster's unconscious message was: "You're not brave enough." Petrified by this fear – and the even greater fear of exposure and humiliation, epitomised by the pointing finger – young men flocked in their thousands to fight and die in history's most appalling war.

A century later, the fear and shame of not being good enough still lurks in the basement of all our psyches.

But if you ask people whether they have any shame, the reply is often "no." This is accurate – to a point. We may not be aware of a sense of shame. Yet it is there, unconsciously affecting every moment of our lives.

Are YOU ashamed?

Emotions, body, sexuality

Shame centres on the emotions, the body and sexuality. It underlies all forms of abuse and sexual dysfunction as well as a family of self-destructive emotional disorders including anxiety, panic attacks, self-harm, comfort eating and pornography addiction.

Shame is present when we have behaviour we can't control, or things we avoid or can't talk about.



Photo by Ian Espinosa on Unsplash

Are YOU ashamed?



Shame affects our ability to truthfully present ourselves to others – due to fears of exposure, ridicule, humiliation and rejection.

Origins

This shame originated in prehistory when early patriarchal societies fought over scarce food sources. Only the strongest won. This led to masculine qualities being prized while feminine qualities were denigrated as weaknesses that threatened survival.

Over time this denigration turned into emotional and sexual repression and was passed from one generation to another.

Take the test

Can you recognise your unconscious shame? Take this self-assessment. Please be as gentle and as honest as you can.

The purpose isn't to make you feel bad. It's to open your eyes to the extent of shame in our lives, and to provide you with a road map for self-development.

Are YOU ashamed?



Emotional issues

- You dislike public speaking
- You dislike having your photograph taken
- You sit at the back in classes/seminars
- You have a fear of being late
- You have a fear of authority
- You have a fear of responsibility
- You have difficulty making decisions
- You have difficulty handling change
- You have difficulty handling conflict
- You make promises but don't keep them
- You are a perfectionist (and feel ashamed when you get anything wrong)
- You avoid situations where you are measured, e.g. exams, job interviews
- You self-harm (e.g. self-injury, eating disorders, binge drinking)
- You experience stress, anxiety and/or panic attacks

Are YOU ashamed?

- You feel you cannot cope
- You feel like a loser, loner, outsider or the 'black sheep' of the family
- You feel like you are sometimes invisible to others



Photo by Stefano Pollio on Unsplash

Note how *ordinary* much of this behaviour is; so commonplace that it's considered normal and no one ever notices it.

That's how shame works – it's invisible.

Are YOU ashamed?



Shame always diminishes us. It makes us smaller than who we truly are and keeps us there – without us even knowing.

Shame cripples our self-esteem.

Shame doesn't just imprison us emotionally. It affects our relationship with the physical world as well.

Physical issues

- You avoid eye contact
- You dislike physical contact
- You dislike the way your body looks
- You feel squeamish at the sight of blood
- You feel embarrassed at being seen in the toilet
- You feel uncomfortable when naked
- You back your genitals away from others when you hug them
- Your social media avatar shows your dog, your partner, your children – anything but you

Are YOU ashamed?



Photo by Alessio Lin on Unsplash

The cumulative effect of all this shame is to make us feel like we're living behind a barbed wire fence. Life is happening somewhere else that we can never quite seem to reach.

Yet the biggest effect of unconscious shame is on our sexuality.

This is because the early patriarchies felt their bloodline was sacred. This meant sex had to be controlled so women only mated with the strongest males. Those who broke the rules were brutally punished.

Are YOU ashamed?



Result: thousands of years later we still have deep anxieties that our sexuality is going to land us in trouble.

Shame makes every aspect of our sex lives a minefield. Many of us simply avoid it.

Sexual issues

- You feel sex is somehow 'dirty'
- You feel sex is only for procreation
- You get little or no pleasure from sex
- You lack sexual confidence
- You lack sexual experience (other than 'vanilla sex' in a bed/missionary position)
- You don't initiate sex
- You don't experiment with sex
- You have difficulty discussing sex
- You have sex from a sense of duty
- You want sex to be over and done with (no emotional engagement)

Are YOU ashamed?

- You want to avoid your partner straight after sex
- You are addicted to sex or pornography
- You suffer from erectile dysfunction
- You suffer from premature ejaculation
- You are unable to perform oral sex
- You are unable to masturbate



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Are YOU ashamed?



Well done!

How did you do?

The more boxes you ticked, the greater the extent to which your life is being negatively impacted by unconscious shame.

Of course, some of these might be 'maybes' rather than a straight 'yes' or 'no'. Your score isn't the point. The point is to see through the fog of shame to what lies beneath.

Some aspects of your personality you may have thought were just 'who you are' are in fact 'who you have been conditioned to be'.

We all carry 'hangover programming' from previous generations that no longer serves.

Once you understand that, you move into a position to make changes – which starts with recognising what needs to be changed.

Notice the inter-relationship of thoughts, feelings and actions whenever something happens that makes your emotions slump.

When this happens, we tend to run away. Don't. Stay with the feeling, painful though that may be. Stay neutral. Accept it without beating yourself up. Then let it go.

Are YOU ashamed?



Photo by Mohamed Nohassi on Unsplash

This is a key skill to develop on the journey out of shame to a life of positive feelings, clear thoughts and empowered actions.

For more tools please visit my website.

I know that peering under the rock of our shame and seeing all the creepy-crawlies can be frightening. But it's also illuminating – and it can, ultimately, be freeing.

Michael