

Ep #273: Recognize and Release Internalized Shame



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[How to Love Yourself No Matter What](#) with Amanda Hess

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Shame often creeps into our lives without warning. But when you learn to spot it in the small moments, that critical self-talk, that urge to shrink, you start to take your power back.

This show is for women who've been labeled, misdiagnosed, or misunderstood. Whether you have a diagnosis or just know deep down that you experience life differently, this is your space to stop fixing yourself and start trusting who you already are. My name is Amanda Hess. Let's go.

Hello, my friend. Welcome to today's episode. Today we're going to talk about recognizing and releasing internalized shame daily.

Shame is something that creeps into our lives without warning, and it can be something that can wreak a lot of havoc without us really knowing that that's what's happening.

I think that for many of us, internalized shame actually shows up in our everyday thoughts and behaviors, and we don't even realize that that's happening. And so today I want to talk about how to gently begin releasing it one day at a time. Now, you might already know that you carry shame, but there's knowing that it's there, and there's being able to catch it in the moment, and those are two very different things.

Internalized shame is sneaky. It doesn't always sound like, "I'm ashamed." It sounds like, "I should have known better. Why do I always mess this up? I'm always extra. I'm always too much," or, "I always shrink down. I always am the person that is quiet and that isn't the outgoing fun one." It can be a compulsion to be better or quieter or more perfect or less emotional. And what it is is it's that constant feeling that you're the problem.

It's not that the situation is the problem. It's not that your trauma is the problem. It's not the external pressure that's the problem. You are the problem.

And for many of us, we have lived our whole lives being told, both subtly and out loud, that our intensity and our emotions and our difference, the way that we are, the way that we interact, the way that we process, the way

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that we communicate, is too much. And then you start to believe it, and that's the internalized part.

The thing about shame is that it is baked into us and we don't even know it. Living in the patriarchal culture that we live in, we have this upbringing that is in many ways steeped in religion where we are taught that we are bad, that we are wrong, that we are evil, that we are sinners.

And this is something that is not just told to us. Yes, in many cases it is. For many people, they are walking into the world, and they are going to church, and they are potentially being told this in this space. You know, when you read the Bible and they talk about Eve in the Garden of Eden and her being the original sinner, right? That whole story, that whole thing is steeped in shame.

And I think that for women in particular, shame is a currency. And what ends up happening is shame is used in a lot of ways to control us. And we see that, right? We see that in religious circles, not just in Christianity, but also in other religions. But we see that in parenting. We see that in school.

I remember having this really fascinating conversation with somebody at a fire where they were telling me that their daughter was a good girl. And I just thought that was such an interesting statement, and it rubbed me the wrong way so hard because we have been raised to be a bunch of good girls. And then for many of us, we're adults, right? We're in our 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s, and we're still on the hunt to be a good girl. And if we're not a good girl, then that's something to be ashamed of.

So shame starts to be just a part of us. And I've had several coaching conversations this week where I've spoken to clients and they've talked to me about what's happened in their week, what's happened in their marriage, what's happened at work, what's happened with their friendships, what's happened with their kids. And what is ever-present is shame.

Really shame and guilt. I think those are, you know, sister, cousin emotions. They go together, but something that we carry as being the truth.

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And what I guess I want to start with is understanding what shame is. Shame is a feeling that we experience based on thoughts that we think. The thoughts that we think are sometimes our thoughts. They're sometimes thoughts that come from us that we think on purpose. But a lot of times the thoughts that we are thinking come from other people. They come from other places. They didn't start with us.

And so we experience this shame, and it's being created by our subconscious. It's programming of sorts that's going on.

So when we start becoming aware that the shame is there, and when we become aware that the feelings that we feel are generated by the thoughts that we think, we can get into this really toxic cycle where we are feeling shame and then we're angry at ourselves for thinking those thoughts and believe that we could do better and that we should do better. And so then we experience more shame. And it just repeats and continues ad nauseam forever. This is just our experience of being ourselves.

And the thing about the experience of being ourselves is that only we live in our own brain. So nobody else really knows what we're thinking or what we're feeling. But at the same time, we feel like our feelings are being lived outside of us. So a lot of times what I find is when we're in emotional distress, we have this view that the world can see that. And what I've really seen over the years is that that is just not true.

For some people, they might externally wear their shame, but most of us what we've done is we've built up armor for shame. And we've really armored up around the shame because shame is a very difficult emotion to feel. Shame is a kind of emotion that likes to grow in the dark.

It loves hiding. And so we hide shame. And we don't show it to people. So the things that we're most ashamed of, we don't shine light on them. We don't show them to ourselves because that's very painful. And then we don't show it to others because we wouldn't want anyone to know that that shame is there because it's nasty, it's bad, it's wrong, it's dirty.

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And this is how many of us live. I think the majority of us, you know, we just end up in this position where we are having this experience with shame. And it rears its ugly head in moments where somebody inadvertently steps on our shame. So what will happen is somebody might make a comment to you, and it might trigger that shame, but what will come out of you won't be shame. What will come out of you is anger, rage, resentment. That's what comes from the shame.

I really have found with myself and then with coaching so many others that when we start looking at emotions like rage, and we look at emotions like resentment, that underneath those emotions is a self-loathing of sorts. And I would really say that like what shame promotes is self-loathing.

And self-loathing is something we have to look at to be able to get rid of it. And we have to be honest that we're feeling it, and that can be very difficult. This can be so hidden inside of us that we don't know that it's there.

And it will come out many times as perfectionism. So if you are the type of person that is a perfectionist, that everything needs to be just so, that you have high expectations of people and you expect them to be like you, to be a good person, you just have this very, very high bar that you expect everyone should meet. And if they don't meet it, you're furious, right? Your kids, your partner, your friends, your mom, your dad, your sister, your teammate, your coworker, your employee.

And that is coming up for us again and again and again where we feel this friction, this anger, this inability to cope. And a lot of times, the reason why it's there is that there's so much shame riding under the surface.

Step one is we need to really look at where am I guarding and armoring up for shame. And I'm sure that I could not do this book justice right now because I have not read it in so long, but Brené Brown has several books actually written about shame. And I read them long before I was a coach, and in fact, in recording this, I'm going to go back and reread some of them because they are so excellent.

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But even if you don't pick up her book, if you just research her TED Talk, it is a fabulous TED Talk. It's world famous. It's really worth a watch because she actually has researched shame.

But where shame can be changed and I would say obliterated in some cases is by shining a light on shame. What is universal for all people is that we crave and desire connection. But we don't connect when we're experiencing a lot of shame because then we're just hiding pieces of ourselves all the time. We're not showing it to other people. We're not letting them see those hurt and vulnerable pieces of ourselves. We don't let those out.

And in fact, we feel shame about even being vulnerable because we make vulnerability mean that we're showing weakness. And I would say that that's one of the big things when it comes to shame, is that we have things that we've done or said that we think are bad or wrong, and that can be where it begins.

And then also, we can have things that we have had happen to us or that has like occurred in our life, and we feel like if we were to show that to people, they would see us as weak. And so we don't show it because that vulnerability, that showing would create so much shame.

So one of the things that Brené Brown talks about is shining a light on shame, that shame can't grow in the light. And that is a wonderful thing to know. But then the question becomes, how do I become safe enough, feel safe enough with myself, feel safe enough with my emotions to be able to shine a light on it?

You know, I put in what I wanted to talk about today into ChatGPT to try and, you know, create an outline for myself. And honestly, what it spit out was garbage. Garbage because there was nothing human about it, and there's nothing more human than shame.

How do you shine a light on shame? Well, step one, you're going to have to know when you feel it. And so it's very likely that it's coming out as resentment or rage or some other type of emotion like that. It could be

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overwhelm, frustrating. Shame lives under those emotions. So we got to look under the rock. We got to take a look. We got to pick that rock up and see, you know, like you would be looking for moss. We're looking for shame. Is there shame here? Why am I so mad about this?

What's under this for me? What is the story that I'm telling about this? Why am I so pissed at this other person? Maybe it's your partner, maybe it's your son, maybe it's your daughter, maybe it's your friend, maybe it's your mom or your aunt or your boss. Why am I so upset?

A lot of times the reason why we're so upset is because we believe that the way that they are acting is indicative of our lack of self-worth. And we're ashamed that we can't meet the standard that we want to meet. And so now we're mad at the other person for also not being able to meet that standard. It's fascinating. It all just drives together, this experience of shame.

The other places where we feel shame might feel less aggressive. Sometimes it's, "I'm not good enough. I'm not smart enough. I'm stupid. I'm fat. I'm useless. I can't make friends. I'm not lovable. Nobody would want to date somebody that's like me."

But we will flip that. So where I see this changing and shifting is, "All the men out there are garbage. My husband is an idiot. My kids are so selfish." And I see this coming up for people because they don't know how to fix this, because it's too mixed together. It's too commingled to pull it apart. But what's under it is, "I'm not good enough. I'm not smart enough," and ultimately, "I'm not enough."

So when you experience those emotions, or when you experience that actual shame where you can actually identify it, the first thing we really want to do is go in the body. We have to experience shame in the body. There's no other way because shame is a feeling. And we are in a hurry to get rid of shame, and we can't be in a hurry. We've got to get better at feeling shame because shame is a part of life. It's a part of being.

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Yes, it's programmed into us. Yes, it's part of our culture. And guess what? It's not going anywhere. I think we're so cerebral now in a way that we never were in the past because we're no longer fighting for our survival.

We're not out in the world making sure that the war is being won. We're not out in the world making sure that food is on the table. We live a very comfortable life in comparison to our parents, even. And then if you think about your grandparents and then your great-grandparents, and then your great-great-grandparents, and you go all the way down the line, we have such a beautiful life.

But we have such a complex brain, and our brain is always problem-solving. And so if it doesn't have to solve for food and water and shelter and safety, well, it's going to go find other things to work on. And what it's going to work on is your self-worth. What's my purpose? Why am I here? Am I good enough? Why don't I have the things I want? It's probably because I'm not good enough.

And this continues and cycles through and repeats, especially for people that are neurodivergent, especially for people that are highly sensitive or have experienced PTSD. We have this experience in our brain that is very different than other people might be experiencing.

So what I will say is that we've got to first of all just really understand what does the feeling of shame feel like in my body? Because when we can do that, we can start to grow the capacity for this is just a feeling, and while it is uncomfortable, I will not die from this feeling. I am not in danger. Nothing is happening other than this feeling. Can I breathe through it? Can I allow it?

When we start getting better at allowing shame, then we can get curious about what's causing the shame. But you can't have one without the other. And what I find is people get so locked in to the thought portion of this, and we don't want to do that. We have to go in the body. We have to allow. We have to give ourselves the ability to find the sensation of it and just notice

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that we are safe and okay. So we don't need to be in an argument with our thoughts all the time.

When you hear that voice inside of you saying, "You're failing. You should be better at this. You were stupid. You should have done it better. You should have known better. Why can't you keep it together?" Whatever it is, we can start noticing, "Oh, that - that is interesting. That is shame."

And that is not the truth because no thought is true, not even this one. Because shame is not the truth about you. The feeling of shame is a fact. You feel it. Therefore, it's a fact. But the creation of shame is being created by something that isn't the truth. It's just a thought, and we want to get better at being able to release thoughts. Not get rid of them, not shut them down completely because I don't think that's necessary, but simply release them and give them less meaning, not more.

Shining a light on shame looks like, "Maybe it's not a big deal that I did X. Maybe it's okay to restart and begin again. Maybe I don't have to participate with this version of what happened anymore. Maybe that doesn't serve me." And maybe that doesn't serve anyone else either."

And I will offer that it doesn't. Because if we're constantly pushing down shame, hiding shame, walking away from shame, not being with shame, then of course we feel more resentment, more rage, more frustration, more overwhelm. Who wins? Absolutely nobody.

One thing that I was coaching a client on today that I think could be extremely helpful for you is when you notice that shame is coming up for you, it could be a challenge, and it could be a game. How could I make my experience of shame be better today? What might that look like?

I was saying to her that we could look at our life like a video game. And you know how you're getting through a video game, and for some reason, like Mario Brothers is in my head because that's what age I am, so that's relevant for me. I know there's so many more complex games now, but that's the one that's in there.

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And I think about up-leveling in levels in Mario Brothers, right? When you pass a level, you're past the level. So then if you die, you don't start at the beginning. You start at the level that you haven't passed yet. So what if now you're at this level, and we don't need to worry about all the levels that went on before, we just focus on this level?

So, "Oh, I noticed that like when this person said this to me, I got really upset because I felt like my self-worth was in question, and then I reacted in a really aggressive way. And that's, you know what? That's a good learning experience for me. That's interesting. I can restart. Let's do that again."

Now, of course, we can't just redo conversations with people. That's not possible. But here's what I will say. When it comes to experiencing emotions like shame or any other emotion, the one thing, the drum that I beat all day long because it's so effective, is growing your capacity through nervous system regulation.

Now, when you look at it through the lens of experiencing shame, it can be really, really tempting to think that I need to figure out how to not react to shame. And that will become the thing that you try to do. That will be the problem you try to solve. We don't want to try and solve that problem.

Because can we do some things in the moment? Sure. But what I find is more effective is I have an awareness that shame is something that comes up for me and that will create a stress response for me and potentially put me in a situation where I'm not creating results that I want in my life. I'm not creating the relationships I want. I'm not creating the money I want. I'm not creating the job that I want. I'm not creating my parenting the way that I want it to be.

And so if we look at it from that stance, what we can do is we can go, "Okay, what do I need to do here? I need to grow capacity." So to grow capacity for shame, what needs to be happening? Well, you're going to need to be moving your body. For me, hard workouts work best. I don't know for you because I'm not in your brain, but I will say, I think you should

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try it. Go outside, be with nature, run through your senses. Use these tools in a very detailed, effective way so that you can go in and repeat and repeat and repeat day after day.

As you do that, your capacity for emotion will grow. Your brain will be a little bit more bendy. And then when your brain's a little more bendy, we can start introducing thoughts that might also be true, such as, "Yeah, I did that when I was younger, and I forgive that version of me. And now I get to be this version, and she's pretty great."

It could be something as simple as that. It could be that's just a thought, and no thought is true, not even that one. Shame is just a feeling, and no feeling lasts forever, not even this one. Finding anchoring thoughts, down-regulating thoughts that you can use to navigate the shame is also part of the regulation process. Our thinking can be regulating, but we can't start with thinking. We must start with the body.

So when it comes to shame and internalized shame, it's important to know that it can't be white-knuckled away. It has to be seen. It has to be witnessed. It has to be felt, and then slowly rewritten with compassion.

When you start recognizing it daily, you loosen its grip, and you reclaim your inner authority, and you start to live from a place of truth and not fear. You stop feeling like you have to hide pieces of yourself, and instead, you just love them, and it grows you, and your life improves.

This is the work, and it is so worth it.

My friend, this is what I've got for you today. Shame is something that I coach on all day long. And if you want to have a conversation about it, you should come over to Instagram. It's theamandahess. Send me a DM. Let me know what's going on for you. I'll give you a little help right there.

All right, my friend. That's it for now. I'll see you next time. Bye.

Thanks so much for listening today. If this podcast is helping you, please follow wherever you listen and consider leaving a review. It truly helps this

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community grow and allows me to support more women like you. I'm excited to see you back here next week with a brand new episode. Until then, take care, friend.