

Whether it's your parent scolding you for something you did wrong, or your boss calling you out in public for making a mistake, we've all experienced a feeling of shame at one point or another. As a matter of fact, shame looks like an inborn part of the human condition. However, are you aware that shame is extremely harmful and it hinders us from living up to our full potential?

In this book, you will get to know the actual meaning of shame and where it comes from. You will also know how it causes a feeling of unworthiness and how it is rampant in our culture.

Also, you will find the cure for feelings of shame which is vulnerability. Vulnerability means the willingness to openly acknowledge failures and weaknesses, and it will enable you to develop resilience to feelings of shame and be happier with what you have.

However, if you are then able to create a culture of vulnerability either at work, at school, and at home, you'll rid those places of shame, and then discover that it leads to more creativity, more engagement, and healthier families.

**Shame is as a result of the fear of social disconnection; it's only human, however harmful.**

We've all felt shame. The majority of us know that shame is caused by our opinion of what other people think of us.

However, in order to really understand how shame works, we have to consider a basic human need for connection, love, and belonging.

As "social animals," we're structured to search for the company of others; being part of a group has continuously been vital to our survival. For instance, during the Stone Era, group members would fight any intruders in order to protect themselves.

This desire is really strong that socially disconnection leads to real pain – one that neuroscience has illustrated that it is reinforced by our brain chemistry.

Hence, what's behind our feelings of shame? The conviction that we're not worthy of the love, connection and belonging that we need to survive.

If we feel like that, whatsoever we do or achieve in our lives will not be sufficient enough to please that basic need.

For instance, the connection between shame and worthiness can be seen in those cases when we show to others something we've done –like an essay we've written or a painting we've done.

Mostly, we attach our self-worth to the way others react to our creations. The outcome? We fear they will be criticized for it, or even rejected.

Definitely, shame is harmful to us. It hinders us from trying, making us disconnected from others.

Shame prevents us from putting ourselves out there, whether it's showing our work, showing our feelings or trying something new. If we have a sense of our unconditional worthiness, we'll be brave when it comes to taking a chance.

The author found out in her research that shame weakens our ability to believe that we can develop ourselves. Also, other researchers have discovered that shame only causes negative, destructive behavior; in direct terms, shame has no positive effects.

Though it's only human to feel shame once in a while, the acceptance of shame-related acts in our society is concerning.

**Shame is part of our present culture and it encourages fear of unworthiness – of not having or being enough.**

In a world pervaded by social media, we're always showing ourselves as well as our lives to the public. We show our holiday pictures, the total number of “friends” we have or our professional achievements for everyone to see it – and to envy.

Such envy mostly produces a feeling of scarcity that we've all experienced sometimes –maybe while we listened to a friend's exotic adventures, or as we stared for a long time at things we could never afford.

This is our “never-enough” culture: we live in continuous fear that we're not, or we don't have, enough.

The traumatic incidences of the new past – for example, 9/11, random acts of violence and natural disasters – have formed the current never-enough culture, and its impacts are obvious not just in bigger society but in our families, workplaces, and schools.

When we cannot heal, fear of scarcity controls the purpose performed by “post-traumatic stress.” Instead of conquering the trauma by processing it – which needs vulnerability – we try to numb the fear by pursuing to gain more things and to be more.

The origin of this act is the false conviction that accruing things or endlessly improving ourselves will protect us from the uncontrollable misfortunes of life.

This never-enough thinking begins a cycle of comparison, shame, and disengagement.

For example, we compare ourselves with Hollywood stars, models, millionaires – even with ourselves from a romanticized past. Such types of comparisons are commonly based on criteria we possibly can't live up to.

The comparison causes shame, signifying our fear of not being enough, and therefore unworthy of human connection. Shame causes disengagement: we stop trying to develop ourselves because we assume, we can never be good enough nevertheless.

Therefore, feelings of shame and disconnection are common and harmful in our society.

Hence, how can we leave this destructive way? In the following chapter, you will learn about the methods to conquer shame by accepting one's vulnerability.

## Vulnerability is the fundamental of all human emotions and it is by no means an indication of weakness.

If you ask people what they know about vulnerability, perhaps only a few people would see it positive. We've been brought up in a world where being vulnerable is linked with failure and disappointment, while success and strength are seen to be more significant than connecting with our feelings.

However, if we examine what vulnerability is actually about, then we get to completely different results.

First, vulnerability is neither good nor bad. Instead, being vulnerable shows that you have the ability to feel emotions.

Although we regularly link vulnerability with dark emotions, such as fear, grief or sadness, as a matter of fact, vulnerability is also the source of our positive emotions like love, joy, empathy and so on.

For the author, vulnerability means uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure. You might love someone, for example, and in doing so expose yourself emotionally; but you can never be certain that they'll reciprocate, thus you risk being rejected. Like any other feeling, love entails vulnerability.

Second, enabling yourself to be vulnerable signifies strength and courage – not weakness.

If we expose ourselves, it shows that we make ourselves vulnerable. Also, it means that we're being courageous; it's very easy to evade all chances of failure than to take a risk. For instance, the author was very fearful of speaking publicly about her research, she was scared of exposing herself to the audience. However, by doing it irrespective, and therefore accepting her vulnerability, she was being courageous, not weak.

We all want love and relationship in our lives. What we must completely know is that such positive feelings are fixed in our vulnerability. If we can embrace this fact, and accept our vulnerability, we can use it to our advantage in both our private and professional lives.

Instead of disregarding our vulnerability, we should embrace it in order to develop ourselves as well as our relationships.

Vulnerability is normally recognized as a negative quality, however, it's an important quality of being human – a vital part of who we are.

Therefore, how can we deal with our inborn vulnerability in a positive and productive manner?

It is simple: embrace it.

By embracing our vulnerability it can help us learn and improve ourselves both professionally and socially.

In terms of our social development, embracing vulnerability enables us to feel our emotions genuinely and be empathic, making us connect with others. Just as you'd appreciate others opening up to you and being honest with you, your vulnerability and readiness to share your feelings and thoughts will be received positively. Certainly, the moments we feel most connected to others are generally those in which we opened up to someone and felt their empathy.

In terms of professional development, we can develop ourselves by taking risks and being courageous to show our work and ideas to external criticism. If you practice just what you know you're good at, you, certainly, you should avoid the risk of failure, however, you will also miss out on a possible new experience. Failing shows that we're learning something new.

What if you don't want to accept your vulnerability? If you disregard your vulnerability, or you're simply ignorant of it, you might end up increasing it. As it was shown in a study that, people who believed themselves to be invulnerable to the influential power of advertising were, the most vulnerable to it; participants who believe to be unaffected by commercials reacted more to them than those who accepted their own susceptibility.

Obviously, vulnerability is nothing we have to fight, however, it is a crucial part of our emotional lives. If we embrace its existence, vulnerability can become a positive tool.

On the other hand, shame is a common way in which we attempt to fight our vulnerability. Therefore, in order to embrace vulnerability, we need to first learn how to free ourselves of shame.

Through understanding and expressing our shame, we form resilience to it and experience others' empathy instead.

Because shame is exactly a fear of self-exposure, it's not a feeling we regularly share easily with other people.

We've all sometimes desired for the ground to open up and swallow us up, protecting us from the judgmental looks and suppressed laughter of others. And a lot of time the feeling of shame is very painful to us than whatever it is we're ashamed about.

Shame can definitely be awful. Therefore, how can we resolve it?

By talking about our feelings of shame and identifying them frequently reduces their influence. As a matter of fact, expressing our shame truly makes us resilient to it.

This is because shame gets power through being unspeakable: the less we talk about our shame, the more influence it has over our lives.

The issue is that keeping our shame to ourselves is normal. Shame doesn't even need the company of other people: a lot of us are probably to be our own worst criticizer and keep a mass of shame to draw from.

However, if we create adequate self-compassion, we're capable of withstanding shameful experiences not just without feeling crushed but to also occur on the other side as more engaged and courageous.

In other words, we make ourselves shame-resilient.

When we're resilient to shame, in a circumstance where we'd usually feel shame in its place we can feel the empathy of others instead.

Since we experience the feeling of shame just when we fear others' views of us, we can become resilient to the feeling of shame by reaching out and verbalizing it. By doing that, others can then comprehend our fears and emotions, making them empathize with us, and we can then change any feelings of shame with those of received empathy.

We've all felt the relief of opening up to others, our problems reducing as we start to feel understood. This is an essential strong instrument against shame.

The first step to accepting vulnerability and to living a more engaged as well as connected life is gaining resilience towards shame.

**If we feel contented with what we are and what we have, we'll dare to stop hiding our vulnerability.**

It's normal, and common for us to want to improve ourselves or gain more. This desire comes not just from general competitiveness but also from the urge to protect ourselves from harm.

"If only we were rich/successful/famous enough," we tell ourselves, "we'd be protected from pain and disappointment." Simply put, behind wanting to be and have more is our hope that we can free ourselves of vulnerability.

Vulnerability cannot be conquered; it can only be hidden in reality. The majority of the people are so uncomfortable with their vulnerability that they try to not to show others, even themselves.

How do we hide vulnerability? Through behavioral patterns such as perfectionism, "foreboding joy" and numbing ourselves by using alcohol and other drugs.

For instance, we've all felt happy moments that ended up bitter because we start to think that something bad would occur. We do this to stimulate ourselves against the (imagined) looming doom, rather than stay vulnerable to the feeling of joy itself.

Perfectionism works the exact way: we struggle for perfection in order to protect ourselves from the likelihood of failure.

However, instead of letting our fear of never-enough to take charge, we begin to embrace that we are and have enough already, this will make us reveal ourselves and show our vulnerability.

For instance, by purging ourselves of the unattainable goal of perfection, we're capable of opening ourselves up to likely criticism or failure without allowing it to shape or define who we are.

Also, instead of ruining happy moments by thinking of bad things, we can admit that we're worthy of that brief happiness. We need to be grateful when those happy moments occur, not scared of imagined tragedy.

Therefore, by being contented with what we are and have, we're able to accept our vulnerability, releasing us to reveal the masks that only work to harm us. Without those masks, we can finally see ourselves and also be seen by people that surround us.

In the next chapter, you'll learn about how a culture of vulnerability can be useful at work, at school, and at home.

## **An environment of shame is lethal to any workplace or school.**

We've all heard about some suspicious motivational approaches that are meant to push people toward desired aims at school or at work. These include concepts such as benchmarking, where performance is compared to specific set rates or standards, and shaming and blaming, where people's weaknesses or failures are openly shown. Office employees have to sell a specific number in order to get their bonus, school teachers read out pupils' grades to the class, and universities let just the best undergraduates further to their graduate programs.

However, anyone who's been under the threat of being publicly shamed knows very well about the harmful impacts it can have on one's efficiency.

First, shame can cause disengagement.

If we're forced to work or learn in a shame-based atmosphere, we stop being emotionally invested at a point because the feeling of shame detaches us from our environments. Due to this, we possibly won't work as hard anymore – or we might even disengage totally by quitting.

Secondly, such disengagement threatens creativity, innovation, and learning.

Either at work or at school, if you want to create a new creative idea or a rare but effective solution to a problem, you need to feel connected in what you're doing. If through being shamed, you become disconnected, this causes disinterest and inaction, refraining you from being connected and also from learning about and improving yourself.

Certainly, no workplace or school can work without creativity and innovation.

Can you think of a school without creativity? Learning includes beginning to think independently and create your own questions, answers, and ideas. Simply put: being creative.

Also, businesses can't work without innovation: making new products, adapting old ones for a fickle, ever-changing marketplace. No enterprise could endure without it.

As you can see, an environment of shame in our workplaces and schools is risky and counterproductive. It's obvious that if they have to stay effective and productive, companies and schools should embrace or develop a different set of motivational strategies – for example, by encouraging vulnerability.

**Leaders in education, work, and society at large should fight disengagement by encouraging vulnerability over shame.**

Changing common patterns in society regularly needs engaged people taking the first steps. Whether it is influential employers or managers, teachers or parents, they all play their role in creating a culture of vulnerability into our society.

There are signs of shame culture in nearly all workplaces or schools. For instance, you might have heard, of several circumstances where employees' failures were showed publicly in the office. In one case, company employees were shamed into trading offices, and other ways of public shame have been used too.

But these behavioral patterns can be changed in order for people to be encouraged to embrace their vulnerability. Such a culture of worthiness and openness towards vulnerability can fight shame-based problems, and if we learn to involve our own vulnerability we can transmit the exact values and concepts to our workplaces, schools, and families.

The power to accept vulnerability on a professional and societal level depends on leaders – those that are in charge of influential positions – and, by doing that, they can rehumanize education and work.

For example, if you're the leader of a group, you possibly have more opportunities to control the behavioral patterns of that group, and so fight shame, than any other employees do. And it's in your best interests to do so: the success of your entire group – and so your success – will be associated with every change that you encourage.

Also, if you, as a person of influence, show the problems you're feeling, or ask for assistance, this can form an atmosphere of trust, where vulnerability is not disregarded, but used to develop the working and learning atmosphere.

Work, family, schools are places that suffer from symptoms of shame and disengagement, however, they can be changed around by a culture of worthiness and by accepting vulnerability.

**Engaged and involved parenting in a shame-free surrounding will enable children to cultivate a sense of their worthiness.**

We only want the best for our children. Therefore, if we want them to have engaged, connected lives, we need to teach them the basic principles of worthiness and vulnerability.

Firstly, we need to know that children experience shame as trauma. Shameful occurrences in children's early lives can affect not just their childhood but the remaining of their lives as well. Just remember the moments when you felt shame in your own childhood. Are they still intense to you?

In contrast, if children don't feel shame, they feel worthy because they are loved totally and the sense that they belong.

A family should be where we can really be ourselves. For our children to mature with a deep-rooted sense of worthiness and for them to know that they're good enough just as they are, they must have a shame-free home surrounding. It's far easier for them to learn to love themselves if they are loved unconditionally by their families.

This is precisely why, as parents, we need to teach our children shame resilience; we do this by being involved and engaged, and also embracing our own worthiness.

Establishing such a surrounding needs parents to act as role models, committing themselves to the standards and values of worthiness that they want their children to have, instead of only preaching them. This forms an open and consistent surrounding for our children to develop in.

If parents want to teach their children that they're worthy, they need to first embrace their own worthiness. No child can get quality from a parent that the parent does not really have.

These principles of good parenting – being engaged and creating a culture of worthiness, not shame – are only one part of a much bigger picture:

If you follow these principles daily, you and those around you like your friends, family, and colleagues – will gain from it and lead better lives.

# Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead by Brené Brown Book Review

In order to live a shame-free life, we need to learn to love ourselves unconditionally and to depend on our inborn worthiness when relating with friends, family, and colleagues. By doing that, we dare to be vulnerable because failure and rejection cannot reduce our sense of worthiness. By accepting our vulnerability, by putting ourselves out there and being engaged, we can create deeper relationships with others and change our private and work lives for the better.

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