

Demystifying Shame for AAPIs: *Looking Beneath the Diagnoses*

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Presented by: Quynh Tran

I would like to acknowledge and honor the beauty, richness, and vast diversity within the Asian and Pacific Islander cultures and history of the past and present.

Today is meant to be a small overview on the topic of shame and mental health through an intersectional lens, not a comprehensive representation of everyone's experiences in the AAPI community, Asian or American culture. I'd encourage you to take what resonates with you and leave the rest.

I'm not claiming to be an expert, just a fellow traveler who want to share what I've learned from my own journey and experiences. We're all here to learn from each other, so I would like to ask that we can extend some grace to one another for any oversights in advance. Of course, any feedback is welcomed and appreciated. Thank you for your understanding!

Who Am I?

Highlights



I'm a 1.5 generation Chinese-Vietnamese American woman and the oldest among my four siblings.



Prior to becoming a healer, I was an optometrist for 10 years.



After a personal crisis that led to a psychosis and spiritual awakening in 2017, I decided to follow my soul's calling toward deeper healing work with shame and trauma.



Now, I help support those in the AAPI community who are struggling with shame to see their pain and suffering through new eyes and perspectives.



Since shame is deeply held in the body and not just the mind, I use an integrative mind-body experiential approach to healing shame.

The Basics



- Shame is a universal, natural, and normal part of the human experience.
- We're all born with the capacity to feel shame, just not all the time.
- We learn shame through being shamed (socialization, conditioning, trauma).

Shame - The Elephant in the Room



Purpose of Shame

1. **Survival Defense** - Triggers a submissive physiological response to protect us from getting ostracized from the tribe or family when we misbehaved, especially when we're young and helpless.
2. **Socialization** - Helps us fit in and get our needs met by adapting to social rules and norms of our external environment.
3. **Self-reflection** - Motivates learning and growth by changing our attitudes and behaviors when we fail to live up to our own values or standards.

Healthy Shame/Guilt

Action/Behavior focused

"I did something bad."



**Protects, Teaches
& (Re)connects**

Toxic Shame

Self/Identity focused

"I am bad"

"...and therefore **unworthy of love and belonging.**" -Brene Brown



**Disconnects, Dehumanized
& Isolates**

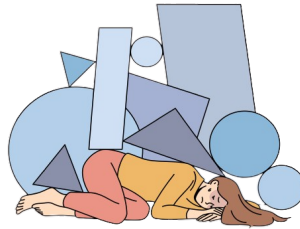
Agents of Socialization - Safety, Belonging, Identity



- Age specific
- Gender specific
- Culture specific
- Family specific
- Social-economic class
- Time period

Complex Identity Development for AAPIs

- Collectivism (conformity to norms, interdependent, deference to authority, indirect communication)
- Formal Hierarchical relationships (priority to the elders, man, group needs)
- Filial Piety obligations and Parentification
- Family recognition through external achievements and success
- Save "face" and avoid conflict to keep peace and harmony
- Intragroup Discrimination (Colorism, Sexism, Fatphobia, Education level, Job titles, Income, Socioeconomic class, Disabilities, Language/Cultural fluency and knowledge).



- Individualism (self-expression, initiative, independent, self-referencing)
- Little social hierarchy (equal, informal, direct communication) mostly
- Reward extroversion, competitiveness and aggressiveness socially
- Western beauty standards: white, skinny, blond hair, blue eyes for women and tall, muscular, athletic, extroverted for men
- Racism, micro-aggressions, xenophobia (Model Minority Myth, Perpetual Foreigners, Anti-Asian hate crimes)
- Sexual Stereotypes (China Doll/Dragon Lady, Undesirable/Desexualized Asian men)

Asian*

Mixed messages with competing and conflicting values, norms, standards

American*

* These are generalized descriptors for educational purposes only and do not represent or apply to the entire group of people or culture.

Disempowering Parenting

Culturally Disjointed

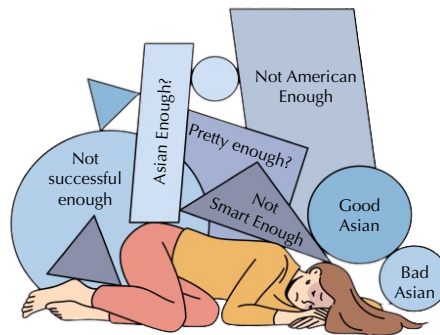
Generational and cultural gap between different mindsets, expectations, values, and language barrier

Burdening

Sense of indebtedness and responsibilities payable through academic achievement, financial success, marriage & elder care. Carrier of intergenerational trauma, shame, parents' unfulfilled hopes and dreams.

Abusive

Physical, verbal, emotional, sexual, neglect, abandonment



Disengaged

Emotionally invalidating, unavailable, dismissive, belittled, ignored, no praise or expression of pride unless it reflects well on the parent or family.

Gender Prescriptive

Preferential treatment, favoritism, comparison, sexual and social control around schooling, work, independence, friend/dating choices (ie. Slut shaming, golden child/scapegoat/black sheep)

A Fractured Self - 4 Core Shame Wounds



Shame Binds and Hides

...whatever we or the socialization agents find unacceptable and becomes internalized as toxic shame.



Examples:

1. Parts of ourselves that we can't control or change like our identity/body.

"Too much/not enough"

"Who I am is not ok."

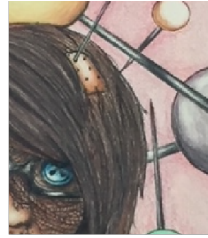
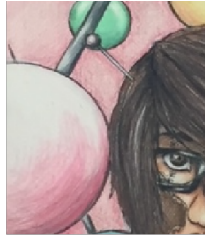
"There is something fundamentally wrong with me."

2. "Bad" emotions to lower its intensity to keep us safe from being rejected or hurt

Shame Binds Manifest as Mental Health Symptoms

Shame + Anger

- Helpless Anger
- Depression
- Suicidal Ideation
- Eating Disorders
- Self-harm/Cutting
- People pleasing
- Codependent
- Lack healthy boundary
- Can't say no or speak the truth effectively

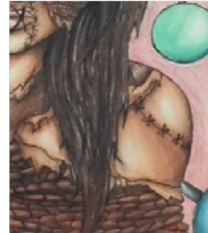
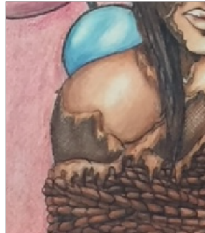


Shame + Fear

- Hypervigilant
- Social Anxiety/Avoidance
- Withdraw/Silence/Invisible
- Performance Anxiety
- Imposter Syndrome
- Catastrophizing
- OCD, Panic Disorders
- Can't self-assert or self-advocate
- Self-doubt/Rumination
- Perfectionism
- Overly responsible/over-functioning

Shame + Sadness

- Complicated Grief
- Self-blame
- Self-loathing
- Self-punishing
- Can't let go or move on
- Difficulty recognizing or accepting loss
- Wishful thinking/fantasy
- Addictions



Shame + Joy

- Self-sabotage/"Unlucky"
- Feel like you're a burden/problem
- Unworthiness (ie. love, goodness, help)
- Undeserving (ie. forgiveness, happy)
- Feel guilty for one's success
- Survivor's guilt (loyalty pact)
- Can't relax or trust
- Can't play, enjoy life, feel pleasure
- Can't receive or accept compliments

What's Your Origin Story?

My core wound of [core shame wound] keeps me from [a dream/want/desire in life]. It manifests as [mental health symptoms] as a way to cope with the pain and avoid the shame while getting my [needs of safety/belonging/identity/others] met.

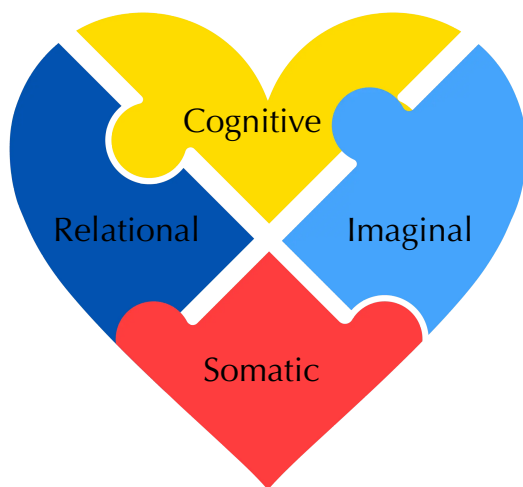
Example: My core wound of attachment keeps me from being in a fulfilling relationship. It manifests as codependency and people pleasing as a way to cope with the pain and avoid the shame while getting my needs of love and safety met.

3 Approaches to Shame



Healing: Finding the Medicine in the Wound

Healing Shame Path



- Integrative
- Non-Pathologizing
- Strength-based
- Safe and Contained
- Experiential
- Spontaneous and Creative

Spontaneity is "an adequate response to a new situation or a new response to an old situation."
~ J.L Moreno

Healing Shame Path



3. Heal - understand the deeper meaning within the suffering and transform the wound into strengths and wisdom

2. Feel - process, grieve, and integrate the disowned feelings, sensations, and memories to release the toxic shame binds

1. See - become aware of how the patterns operate externally and internally without denial or minimization

Transforming the Shame Binds



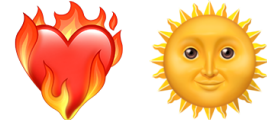
Anger → Skillful
& Wise Protector



Fear → Self-
Assurance & Resilience



Sadness → Self-
Compassion &
Forgiveness



Unworthiness →
Passion, Love &
Hope!

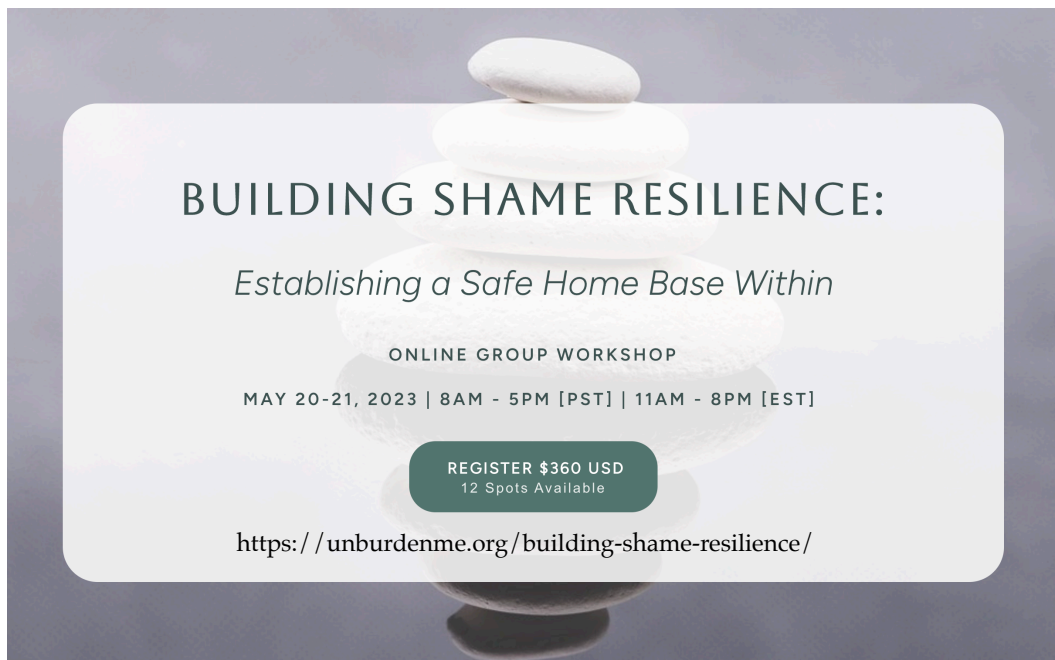


What's Your Healing Journey?

My journey of getting [a dream/want/desire in life] and [needs] met is to heal my core wound of [core shame wound] by learning to transform [mental health symptoms/patterns] into [strengths and wisdom].

Example: My journey of being in a fulfilling relationship that feels safe and loving is to heal my core wound of attachment by learning to transform the codependency and people pleasing patterns into being a skillful and loving protector for myself and others.

Next Step - Experience the Transformation!



BUILDING SHAME RESILIENCE:
Establishing a Safe Home Base Within

ONLINE GROUP WORKSHOP
MAY 20-21, 2023 | 8AM - 5PM [PST] | 11AM - 8PM [EST]

REGISTER \$360 USD
12 Spots Available

<https://unburdenme.org/building-shame-resilience/>

Who is it for?

- Interested in personal growth and self-development
- Have an open mind with the willingness to self-reflect and try new things
- Tired of feeling anxious, depressed, or angry about life and want to do something about it
- Struggled with shame and want to learn how to manage it more effectively in a safe and supportive group setting

What you'll learn

1. How to regulate feelings of shame when triggered
 - Become an expert at identifying your shame triggers and learn how you can gently calm and soothe yourself.
2. New Understanding of the Shame Spiral
 - Gain a practical and experiential understanding of the shame spiral and what to do when you're in one.
3. How to Establish a Safe Home Base Within
 - Experience ways to build, strengthen, and connect yourself to a safe and secure inner foundation to compassionately counter the self-shaming cycles.