



Companion Worksheet

I THOUGHT IT WAS JUST ME (BUT IT ISN'T): MAKING THE JOURNEY FROM “WHAT WILL PEOPLE THINK?” TO “I AM ENOUGH” (Gotham, 2007)

Brené Brown, Ph.D., MSW

RECOGNIZING SHAME

The first element of shame resilience is recognizing shame and understanding our triggers. Men and women who are resilient to shame have this capacity. This enables them to respond to shame with awareness and understanding.

When we can't recognize shame and understand our triggers, shame blindsides us. It washes over us, and we want to slink away and hide.

In contrast, if we recognize our shame triggers, we can make mindful, thoughtful decisions about how we're going to respond to shame – before we do something that might make things worse.

Shame has physical symptoms. These might include your mouth getting dry, time seeming to slow down, your heart racing, twitching, looking down, and tunnel vision. These symptoms are different from one person to the next. So if you learn your physical symptoms, you can recognize shame and get back on your feet faster.

I physically feel shame in/on my _____ .

My shame symptoms include:

I know I'm in shame when I feel _____ .

If I could taste shame, it would taste like _____ .

If I could smell shame, it would smell like _____ .

If I could touch shame, it would feel like _____ .

EXPLORING TRIGGERS AND VULNERABILITIES

Our unwanted identities dictate our behavior every day. It's worth it to figure them out and get real about them. Often, you'll see that the perceptions you want to have and want to avoid are totally unrealistic.

To get at shame triggers, figure out how you want to be perceived around a specific identity. So for example, with regards to motherhood, one might want to be perceived as calm, knowledgeable, educated and not perceived as overwhelmed, stressed out, too ambitious, or unable to balance career and mothering. When we write these down and look at them, we understand the perceptions that make us vulnerable to shame. In the process, we learn a lot about ourselves.

To start, pick a shame category (body, work, motherhood, parenting, etc.) _____

Then, answer the following questions.

3-5 Ideal Identities

I want to be perceived as:

01. _____
02. _____
03. _____
04. _____
05. _____

3-5 Unwanted Identities

I do NOT want to be perceived as:

01. _____
02. _____
03. _____
04. _____
05. _____



Looking at your list of unwanted identities, answer the following questions:

Unwanted Identity 1. _____

01. What does this perception mean to me? _____

02. Why is it so unwanted? _____

03. Where did the messages that fuel this identity come from? _____

Unwanted Identity 2. _____

01. What does this perception mean to me? _____

02. Why is it so unwanted? _____

03. Where did the messages that fuel this identity come from? _____

Unwanted Identity 3. _____

01. What does this perception mean to me? _____

02. Why is it so unwanted? _____

03. Where did the messages that fuel this identity come from? _____

Unwanted Identity 4. _____

01. What does this perception mean to me? _____

02. Why is it so unwanted? _____

03. Where did the messages that fuel this identity come from? _____

Unwanted Identity 5. _____

01. What does this perception mean to me? _____

02. Why is it so unwanted? _____

03. Where did the messages that fuel this identity come from? _____



Looking at your list of unwanted identities, complete the following sentence:

If you label me and reduce me to this list of unwanted identities, you will miss the opportunity to know that I'm complex and that I have many strengths, including:

01. _____

02. _____

03. _____

STRATEGIES OF DISCONNECTION

01. We have learned to move away by withdrawing, hiding, silencing ourselves and secret-keeping.

02. We have also learned the strategy of moving toward. This can be seen when we attempt to earn connection by appeasing and pleasing.

03. We have developed ways to move against. These include trying to gain power over others, and using shame to fight shame and aggression.

Reference: Hartling, L., Rosen, W., Walker, M., and Jordan, J. (2000) Shame and humiliation: From isolation to relational transformation (Work in Progress No. 88). Wellesley, MA: The Stone Center, Wellesley College. To learn more about the work being done at the Stone Center and the Wellesley Centers for Women, visit www.ucwonline.org.

I use the strategy of "moving away" when: _____

I'm most likely to "move away" with: _____

I use the strategy of "moving toward" when: _____

I'm most likely to "move toward" with: _____

I use the strategy of "moving against" when: _____

I'm most likely to "move against" with: _____



CONNECTING

We are wired for connection. It's in our biology. As infants, our need for connection is about survival. As we grow older, connection means thriving – emotionally, spiritually and intellectually. Connection is critical because we all have the basic need to feel accepted and to believe that we belong and are valued for who we are.

As you work through *I Thought It Was Just Me*, remember to reach out and stay connected. I recommend reading the book with a trusted friend or family member.

As you make this journey, I'll leave you with this affirmation. It's something that I try to remember as I travel my path.

“OWNING OUR STORY CAN BE HARD BUT NOT NEARLY AS DIFFICULT AS SPENDING OUR LIVES RUNNING FROM IT. EMBRACING OUR VULNERABILITIES IS RISKY BUT NOT NEARLY AS DANGEROUS AS GIVING UP ON LOVE AND BELONGING AND JOY—THE EXPERIENCES THAT MAKE US THE MOST VULNERABLE. ONLY WHEN WE ARE BRAVE ENOUGH TO EXPLORE THE DARKNESS WILL WE DISCOVER THE INFINITE POWER OF OUR LIGHT.”

————— BRENÉ BROWN, Ph.D., LMSW —————