

BODY SHAME TRIGGERS INVENTORY

LEARN HOW TO
USE THIS
SECRET WEAPON
TO SPOT SNEAKY
SHAME ATTACKS

THE FIRST
ELEMENT IN
BUILDING
SHAME
RESILIENCE

EATING DISORDER

Freedom
Coach 

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USING THIS INVENTORY

This inventory helps us to recognize when we are experiencing shame, in what situations and what defensive strategies we naturally employ. Armed with this knowledge, we can learn to spot shame where it hides and know when it attacks. Write out your answers to these questions here or in your journal.

Step #1

**SEE THE TARGET. KNOW YOUR IDEAL
& UNWANTED BODY IDENTITIES.**

"To start the process of recognizing our shame triggers, we need to look at the concept of unwanted identities. "Unwanted identity" is the quintessential elicitor of shame... Unwanted identities are characteristics that undermine our vision of our "ideal" selves." - Brené Brown, quoting Tamara Ferguson, Heidi Eyre and Michael Ashbaker, I Thought It Was Just Me (But It Isn't)

In her book, *I Thought It Was Just Me (But It Isn't)*, Brené Brown, Ph.D, LMSW, Shame Researcher and Storyteller, emphasizes the importance of naming our ideal and unwanted identities. That is to say, how we want to be perceived (ideal) and the things we avoid being perceived as (unwanted). The word *perceived* here is very intentional. Since shame is a socially shared experience, it's how we are perceived, or how we think we are perceived, that usually matters the most to us.

My Ideal Identities

**IT IS IMPORTANT FOR ME TO BE
PERCEIVED AS...**

i.e. I really want people to think of me as having toned arms. I agree when people say strength is beauty.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

My Unwanted Identities

**IT IS IMPORTANT FOR ME TO *NOT* BE
PERCEIVED AS...**

i.e. I'm so ashamed to show my ankles. I hate people thinking that I have thick ankles.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Step #2

**KNOW YOUR VULNERABILITIES.
KNOW YOUR SHAME TRIGGERS.**

"For most of us to successfully begin to recognize and understand our shame triggers, we first need to accept that acknowledging our vulnerabilities is an act of courage. We must be mindful in our attempts not to see vulnerability as weakness." - Brené Brown, I Thought It Was Just Me (But It Isn't)

Your body shame triggers are the things that start the shame tapes rolling. Brené calls these our "shame gremlins". These little guys always know how to hit us right where it hurts. Our shame triggers and vulnerabilities usually go hand in hand. Your body shame vulnerabilities are those parts of your body or appearance that are the most susceptible to shame attacks. Answer these questions.

What parts of my body are just not good enough?

I'm getting dressed for the day, which parts of my body am I most embarrassed about?

Which parts of my body am I accepting of only in certain conditions? i.e. In the right lighting, from specific angles and positions, in the right outfit, etc.?

Which parts of my body do I most quickly turn on and attack, criticize or reject?

Which parts would I happily "throw to the wolves" any day of the week?

What is the worst thing somebody could say about the way I look?

Step #3

**IDENTIFY YOUR PHYSICAL
SIGNS OF SHAME.**

"When we know how shame feels, we have an important resilience tool. Often, we feel shame before we think it. Recognizing our shame allows us to find the space we need to process the experience and gain some clarity before we act out or shut down." - Brené Brown, I Thought It Was Just Me (But It Isn't)

Our bodies are major defensive weapons for recognizing shame attacks. While we may not be consciously aware of the white noise of body shame, our bodies always pick it up. It is our helpful warning alert system. Tuning into your physical symptoms can help us identify shame when it is happening. In order to answer these questions remember back, imagine a future time or pay attention this week to a current shame attack. What do you notice about your body? Ask yourself "When I think I'm being perceived in a way that I don't want to be ..."

Body Shame Triggers Inventory

What do my hands do? Do they clench into tight fists, grab something to hide behind, fidget, get clammy, something else?

What happens to my breathing? Does it become quick and shallow? Slow and steady? Labored? Non-existent?

What do my muscles do? Which ones do what? What about the muscles in my face? My forehead? My jaw?

What happens to my eyes?

What happens to my energy level? Does it spike for a fight? Drop for a long winter hibernation? Get really antsy and anxious?

What happens to my body temperature? Does my face flush?

What do my nerves feel like?

What happens to my brain? Is it hyper-focused inward (I could walk into a wall and probably not notice)?

Is it hyper-sharpened (ready to fight for survival)? Is it fuzzy and slow (seeing the world in slow motion)?

What am I embarrassed somebody will notice about me right now?

What part of my body am I hyper-aware of right now?

What else am I noticing?

Step #4

TUNE INTO YOUR NATURAL DEFENSIVE STRATEGIES

Dr. Brené Brown adopts Karen Horney and Dr. Linda Hartling's use of the three categories of defensive shame strategies (or "shame screens") that we all use when we're experiencing shame. She calls these strategies moving away (withdrawing and hiding), moving towards (appeasing and people-pleasing), and moving against (using aggression and shame to fight shame). It can be very freeing to realize why we act the way that we do when we are experiencing shame- whether or not we are consciously aware of it. Once we are aware, we can begin to take ownership and control over our reactions. We can begin to act constructively instead of reacting destructively. Answer these questions.

"Most of us use all of these- at different times with different folks for different reasons. Yet all of these strategies move us away from connection- they are strategies for disconnecting from the pain of shame." - Brené Brown, Daring Greatly

When I'm experiencing body shame...

My "moving away" (withdrawing and hiding) strategy looks like:

I use this strategy when:

My "moving towards" (appeasing and people-pleasing) strategy looks like:

I use this strategy when:

My "moving against" (aggressive fight shame with shame) strategy looks like...

I use this strategy when:

Of these three strategies, I'm most likely to engage the strategy of:

Step #5

MAP OUT THE DANGER ZONES.

Your vulnerabilities (identified in Step #2) are those parts of yourself that are susceptible to shame attacks. Those are internal. The danger zones are the people, places and times that are most likely to trigger shame for you. These are external.

"In a very interesting series of studies, researchers found that participants who thought they were not susceptible or vulnerable to deceptive advertising were, in fact, the most vulnerable. The researchers explained, "Far from being an effective shield, the illusion of invulnerability undermines the very response that would have supplied genuine protection."

"And just like building resilience to shame, the critical issue is not about our level of vulnerability, but the level at which we acknowledge our vulnerabilities."

- Brené Brown, I Thought It Was Just Me (But It Wasn't)

Where can I not go unless I am looking "good enough" and will be perceived as my ideal identity?

In what situations do I notice my defensive shame strategies (Step#4) showing up?

What relationships are affected based on whether I'm feeling like I look good enough or not?

Who am I most afraid of seeing my unwanted body/appearance identities?

What time of day am I most critical of my body?