

Episode 3: Why you feel shame and how to take back your power

Hi Guys!

Welcome to Episode 3 of *The Resilient Type* podcast! Today's topic is why you feel shame and how to take back your power.

Yep, it's a heavy one! I'll be explaining what shame is, how to identify your shame triggers, and I'll be sharing the practical steps you can take to develop shame resilience. By the end of this episode you'll understand what shame is, have a clear understanding of *your* shame triggers, and be able to start building shame resilience so you can reduce shame's power over you.

If you're listening on the go, why not take a screenshot and share it on Instagram? Don't forget to tag me @empoweredmillennialgirl so I can send you some love.

What is shame?

When I was working out what topics to discuss on this podcast, I did a bit of keyword research. I knew I wanted to talk about shame at some point, but I wasn't sure what people wanted to know about it. So I hopped on Google and Pinterest and I was actually quite surprised to find that people were searching things like "How to avoid shame" and "fear of vulnerability".

This immediately rang alarm bells because, to me, any time someone starts trying to avoid something, it's the equivalent of bottling it up. The more we avoid something, the more anxious and scared we become. And I am talking from experience here!

According to Brene Brown, a researcher who I believe is the foremost expert on the subject, "Shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging – something we've experienced, done, or failed to do makes us unworthy of connection."

We're wired for connection. It may've started out as a survival mechanism - think of how cavemen worked in tribes – but ask almost anyone these days and they'll still tell you how important connection is. These people might even say connection is what makes life worth living! Whether it's connection with family, friends or community, connection to others gives us support, happiness and purpose.

I can understand why we might want to avoid shame. It can feel too risky. Disconnection can literally feel like death, and no one wants to lose the relationships they've built up over the years. But what actually triggers shame?

How to identify your shame triggers

I talked about emotional triggers in the last episode and you may already have some idea of what your shame triggers are, but I still want to talk about how to clearly identify shame triggers because knowing our triggers can help us put strategies in place to become resilient to shame.

Shame loves to stay hidden and take us by surprise. That's how it holds power over us. But by shining a light on it and understanding our triggers, we can make conscious decisions about how we respond to it in advance.

You're going to need a piece of paper, or if you journal, grab your journal for this next part.

Shame has physical symptoms, right? You might feel like your face is getting hot, your mouth might get dry or you struggle to look people in the eye. That's how I respond to shame. You might respond in a different way.

How do you physically experience shame? I want you to write down your answer and finish the following sentences:

I feel shame in/on my [insert body part]

I know I'm experiencing shame when I feel [insert feeling]

And just for fun, if you want to, you can also get creative with this! Complete the following sentences:

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

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

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

If you can identify your physical symptoms, you're a quarter of the way there! When you start to experience these symptoms, you'll be aware of what's happening and can start to take action ASAP.

The next thing I want you to think about is how your identity comes into play. How do you want and *not* want to be perceived by others? Identity has many sides, so there will be lots of answers to this question.

One area of your identity might be your career. How do you want to be perceived in this area? I know I want to seem smart, capable and high achieving at work. I don't want to seem overwhelmed, confrontational or unprofessional.

Other areas of your identity might be your body, romantic relationships, friendships or religion.

Now it's your turn! Pick an area of your identity that might be a hot topic and do a sort of pros and cons list. On the left hand side of your page, write down 3 ways you want to be perceived in that area, and on the right hand side, write down 3 ways you don't want to be perceived in that area. Do that now.

Now to really get to the root of the thoughts behind all these points, I want you to answer 3 questions:

1. *What do the unwanted perceptions mean to you?*
2. *Why don't you want people to perceive you this way?*
3. *Where did you get these ideas from?*

I encourage you write your answers down because as you write you'll get a stream of consciousness flowing and you might be surprised at the things that come up. I know that when I journal, I go a lot deeper than when I answer something out loud or even when I answer something in my head. Pause this episode if you need a few minutes to complete this step.

The last thing that I suggest you do is to outline your honest strengths and weaknesses. This is going to be really important later on.

I've asked you to do this journaling exercise because I want you to be aware of your thoughts and have a clear idea of who you are.

There's a strong link between shame and vulnerability, so really, having any kind of ideal perception can make you vulnerable to shame. It's just a fact of life. But understanding your unwanted perceptions can prepare you better for shame.

So, now you're probably wondering, "How can I develop shame resilience?"

How to develop shame resilience

Well, you're already on the way! It starts with connecting with our true selves. In that journaling exercise, you would have identified your strengths and weaknesses and the type of person you are – this is a good start.

The next step is to develop strong connections with other people - so people you can trust and who can and will support you.

Then finally, moving towards empathy.

I'm going to reference Brene Brown here again. According to her, the 4 elements of shame resilience are:

1. Recognising the physical symptoms of shame and understanding your triggers.

2. Knowing why shame exists, how it works, impacts us and who benefits from it.
3. Reaching out to others and sharing your story.
4. Speaking about your shame.

Now I know you're probably panicking about the last two points. When we feel ashamed, we don't want anyone to know about it and we'd rather forget all about it. I get it. But as I said before, silence is what gives shame power.

If you want to develop shame resilience, you have to practice communicating your shame with someone you trust – someone who can be compassionate and supportive and help you move past the issue. Not only does this help you develop a deeper connection with that person, but it also allows you to connect with your true self. This is also why empathy is key.

Shame makes us feel unworthy and risks disconnection. Empathy allows us to be seen, valued and connected.

I'll give you an example of how you can approach a shameful experience and demonstrate shame resilience.

Recently, when I was applying for jobs, I emailed an employer with my application. I didn't hear from them, and then two days later... I realised I had forgotten to attach my cover letter and CV. Now this probably doesn't sound too shameful, but I pride myself on my attention to detail, and I wanted to seem competent and professional to this potential employer so I was literally squirming in my seat and going red in the face.

I could've beat myself up about it. But before it went any further, I turned to my husband and told him what happened. He listened, gave me sympathy and reminded me that it wasn't the end of the world. So I calmed down and reminded myself to double check for attachments before sending next time. And now I'm sharing my story with you.

While I agree owning up to your mistakes and potential flaws can be scary as you risk disconnection, but opening up to the right people is far more likely to improve your relationship with yourself and others.

And, worst case scenario, if someone does bring up something that "triggers" you, I want you to consider this. You have many strengths and good qualities. Even if someone does have an unwanted perception of you, you're more than that. If people want to label you, they'll miss the opportunity to know how complex you really are, and to be honest, that's their problem, not yours. You don't have to believe those people. Those people's opinions don't need to hold weight in your life.

We've gone through a lot in this episode, so here's a quick recap:

1. Shame can be defined as "the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging – something we've

experienced, done, or failed to do makes us unworthy of connection.” – Brene Brown

2. You can identify your shame triggers by picking an area of your identity and outlining how you want and don't want to be seen by others. Then questioning why this is and what you're making it mean.
3. You can develop shame resilience by a) recognising the physical symptoms of shame and understanding your triggers, (b) knowing why shame exists, how it works, impacts us and who benefits from it, (c) reaching out to others and sharing your story and (d) speaking about your shame.

I hope you've found this episode helpful. And if you want even more support, check out my [FREE resource library](#) at empoweredmillennialgirl.com. I add a new resource every single month. Talk soon!

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