

# HANDOUTS

## **SHAME: The Misunderstood Emotion**

Presented By

# **Keith Witt, Ph.D.**

### Thursday

#### 9:00 **Developmental & Social Importance**

- Neurobiology of the shame response
- Beautiful, good, and true validity standards
- Growth mindsets and fixed mindsets
- Mind-map of our natural healing style
- Potential benefits of applying shame dynamics to our healing style

#### 10:20 **Break**

#### 10:35 **Shame, Intimacy and Evolution**

- Complexity theory
- The mammalian nervous system
- The crucial FOXP2 mutation
- Human shame, approval and disapproval of self and/or others in the past/present/future

#### 12:00 p.m. **Lunch**

#### 1:15 **Shame and Secure Attachment**

- Bowlby, Ainsworth, Main - Attachment Theory
- Requirements for secure attachments
- Shame and parenting

#### 2:35 **Break**

#### 2:50 **Developmental Lines and Levels**

- Integral Psychology and developmental lines and levels
- Spiral Dynamics: different worldviews
- Nature of shame dynamics with successive worldviews - applications to treatment

#### 4:15 **Adjournment**

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### Friday

#### 8:30 **Sexuality & Shame**

- Masculine and feminine aspects and core sexual essence
- Erotic polarity - how we can observe it and modulate it to enhance health, relationships, and healing
- How shame emotions inform psychosexual development
- How to minimize developmental distortion and unravel tangles of sexual identity & erotic polarity conflicts

#### 9:50 **Break**

#### 10:05 **Defensive States and Shame**

- Neurotic and characterological defensive states
- The human hierarchical response to stress
- Development and enactment of defensive states

#### 11:30 **Lunch**

#### 12:45 p.m. **Shame and Spirituality**

- Ascending and descending spirituality
- Using shame as a spiritual guide toward unity

#### 2:05 **Break**

#### 2:20 **Autobiographical Narrative & Personal Myths**

- Embracing and enhancing our personal myths
- Shame as a guide, moderator, and regulator in our personal myths
- "High variability" health standards

#### 3:45 **Adjournment (Pick up certificates)**

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# SHAME

## Natural Reaction to Disapproval

**SHAME BEGINS WHEN WE CAN WALK.** Disapproval freezes toddlers into parasympathetic collapse:

- **Approval/disapproval** are the **accelerator** and **brakes** of socialization.
- **Shame is preconceptual.** All mammals share this capacity for parasympathetic collapse. Young need loving regard to regulate back to happy sympathetic arousal.
- **Slack face, weak neck and chest muscles, lowered eyes, immobilization, blushing, and painful affect.** Children, until formal operational, *cannot maturely self-regulate shame and so generate defensive strategies to avoid it.*
- **Shame develops** into the **shame family of emotions** (e.g. guilt, humiliation, embarrassment, extreme shyness, chagrin, etc.)

**FOXP2 GENE: CONSCIOUSNESS** arises from our capacities for infinite *interior* and *interpersonal* relationships:

- **Every relationship, past, present, and future,** has the **potential** for approval/disapproval; and thus also **shame.**
- **Will** is the **conductor** of a maximum association and anticipation **express train to infinity.**

**INVARIANT REPRESENTATIONS: Our brains associate and anticipate constantly:**

- **Default mode** scans the social environment.
- **SHOULD-PATTERNS** are internal representations of how we and others should be. Violation can cue shame emotions.
- **FAALG:** Feel, Accept, Act on, and Let Go distress.
- **Adults and teens, formal and post-formal operational,** can **self-regulate shame; FEEL** it, **TOLERATE** it, and **CHANGE** behaviors and/or refine should-patterns.

# ATTUNEMENT

## Feel into Ourselves and Others with Caring Intent and Good Things Happen

**ATTUNING TO SELF:** I love myself. I discern and accept what I sense, feel, think, and want right now. What can I think and do to serve the highest good?

- **Primary emotions** elaborated into **categorical emotions**.
- **Defensive states:** Amplified/numbed emotion, distorted perspectives, destructive impulses, diminished empathy and self-reflection.
- **States of healthy response:** Harmony, compassion, and depth of consciousness.

**ATTUNING TO OUR LOVER:** I love you. I imagine and accept what you are feeling, thinking, and wanting right now. What can I think and do to serve the highest good?

- **Mirror neurons.** We replicate each other's states of consciousness including *intentionality*.

**MUTUAL ATTUNEMENT:** We love each other. I feel you feeling me feeling you.

- **Masculine/feminine** combinations. Tantric practice.

**ATTUNING TO CHILDREN:** I love you. I imagine and accept what you are feeling, thinking, and wanting right now with the *responsibility* to support your health and development.

- **Children** grow through **different worldviews**.
- Adult responsibility to adjust to children's worldview.

**ATTUNING TO CLIENTS:** Think Always of the Healing

# Interpersonal Neurobiology

## **MIND IS A PROCESS THAT REGULATES ENERGY AND INFORMATION FLOW:**

- Will is conscious intent.

## **BRAINS DEVELOP IN RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER BRAINS:**

- Mirror neurons. Resonance circuits.
- Mother's brain teaches the child's brain how to grow.
- Our brains influence and shape each other.

## **GENETICALLY DRIVEN GROWTH PLUS ONGOING EXPERIENCE = DEVELOPMENT**

**FACES** is healthy living: *F*lexible, *A*daptive, *C*oherent, *E*nergized, and *S*table. **COHERENCE** is *C*onected, *O*pen, *H*armonious, *E*ngaged, *R*esponsive, *E*mergent, *N*oetic, *C*ompassionate, and *E*mpathetic.

**COMPLEXITY THEORY:** An **open system** of **differentiated parts** that are hierarchical, connected, and **not lost in rigidity or chaos** naturally moves towards greater complexity—felt by humans as **harmony**. Examples are human brains, groups, cultures, nations, and ecosystems.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL/SPIRITUAL HEALING:** **Identify** and **feel** a **denied aspect** and **connect** through caring **acceptance**. True for individuals and groups.

**ADD COMPASSION AND LET IT HAPPEN**

# DEFT

## Developmental Engagement Field Theory

**Intersubjective fields** guide our neurological, physical, psychological, social, and spiritual growth:

- **Morphegenic fields** of species and extended family.
- Intersubjective fields **between fetuses/infants and mothers**.
- Intersubjective fields **with anyone** we come into contact with.
- One measure of maturity is increasing utilization of attention and intention to support an emergent *theory of development*.

**Infant nervous systems** go into **alarm and protest** when stressed and seek *secure attachment to self-regulate*. **Secure attachment** requires a **caregiver** who is **attuned** enough to self/infant to:

- Be *Present, Congruent, and Marked (PCM)*.
- Communicate nonverbally and verbally that the infant is *Known, Accepted, and Protected (KAP)*.

**Neglect, abuse, or poor attunement** can result in infant nervous systems *dissociating*, thus creating neurological substrates for defenses that can continue to be elaborated throughout life.

**At around 12 months old** an infant **walks**, realizes the need for **caregiver soothing** of painful affects, and can experience **shame emotions** in response to disapproval:

- Reflexively **avoiding shame** emotions forms the neurological/behavioral **substrate** for many **defensives**.
- To **relieve shame**, children can **be approved of** by a caregiver (KAP while PCM), can **comply with rules**, or reflexively **avoid** shame with **defensive maneuvers**.
- It requires formal operational cognitive capacities to **self-regulate shame** by **refining rules**, complying with standards, **forgiving** self, and **effectively being KAP and PCM** with *self*.

# Ken Wilber's Integral Perspective

Informed By:

## QUADRANTS

- Individual/subjective, "I"  
Beautiful
- Intersubjective. "We"  
Good
- Individual/Objective, "It"  
True
- Interobjective, "Its"  
True

## DEVELOPMENTAL LINES:

Examples are:

- Cognitive (Piaget)
- Values (Carol Gilligan)
- Interpersonal/psychosexual  
(David Deida)
- Needs (Maslow)

## DEVELOPMENTAL LEVELS:

- We hover and grow from a  
center of gravity on a line

## STATES:

- Gross: waking, Subtle:  
dreaming, Causal: deep  
sleep
- Defensive states – neurotic  
and characterological
- Drug induced (or  
influenced) altered states
- Healthy response to the  
present moment
  
- TYPES: Examples are:  
Masculine/Feminine,  
Enneatypes,  
Myers/Briggs.

# POLARITY

## **MASCULINE**

Trustable Presence

Deep Soul's Purpose

True to Principles

Deepening Consciousness

Penetrating

Seeks Emptiness

Drawn to the edge of death

## **FEMININE**

Trusting, Devotional Love

Wellspring of Love

Love through the Body

Clear Channel of Emotion

Opening

Yearning, Seeks Fullness

Wants to be seen as light

←greater distance, more charge→

## Mission and Practice

Open her to love and pleasure	Open me further
Unrecoiling	Pleasure in his integrity
Resolute acceptance	Shows suffering at collapse

## Levels of Sexuality

David Deida suggests that there are six include and transcend levels of sexual development that begin with DNA using all life to reproduce itself and end in the union of pure love and deepest consciousness:

1. We're born to the **genetic level of sexuality** where the purpose of sex is to pass on our genes.
2. We develop consciousness where we discover our bodies and want sex for pleasure. This is the **physiological level of sexuality**.
3. As children age they increasingly yearn to be included in family and tribal groups within which they want their sexuality to be considered *normal*. This is the **social level of sexuality** where the goal is acceptance.
4. Teens and young adults increasingly crave intimate lover relationships where they yearn for fulfillment. This is the **psycho-emotional level of sexuality**.
5. We can choose to consciously use erotic polarity to conduct energy through sexual bliss in service of healing. This is the **yogic level of sex**.
6. Ultimately we can give our deepest gifts of consciousness and love to the universe through masculine presence opening feminine erotic radiance expressed through pleasure in the body. This is the **spiritual level of sexuality**.

## **A PRACTICE FOR DISCERNING POTENTIAL FIVE STAR CANDIDATES FOR LIFE PARTNER**

Ask yourself these questions about any masculine or feminine person you encounter.

1. Is there sexual polarity? If you have a more feminine sexual essence, does your feminine have erotic sparks with his masculine? If you have a more masculine sexual essence, does your masculine have erotic sparks with her feminine?
2. Is she/he effectively self-regulating around physical and emotional health?
3. If there is conflict, is she/he able and willing to do what it takes to get back to love?
4. Would she/he be a superior parent?
5. Does he/she have deep souls purpose, or are they appreciative and admiring of your deep soul's purpose?

If the answer to one of these questions is “no”, the likelihood that the relationship will end in negative drama increases dramatically.

The way to attract a person like this is to cultivate these qualities in yourself, while practicing discernment as to how others embody these characteristics.

## DEFENSIVE STATES

**Defensive states** are **altered states**, cued by **perceived threat**, that involve **amplified or numbed emotions, distorted perspectives, destructive impulses, and reduced capacities for empathy and self-reflection.**

**Two categories of Defensive States: Neurotic and Characterological.**

- *Neurotic* defensive states allow insight—through confrontation and/or self-reflection—that we are in a defensive state. They also involve enough self-regulatory ability to limit emotional and physical violence to self/others. Responds well to uncovering therapies.
- *Characterological* defensive states allow little or no insight, and—when confronted—tend to decompensate towards more primitive and violent feelings and thoughts with compromised impulse control. Responds slowly to reality testing/emotional self-regulation therapies.

**Defensive states** have a complicated **etiology** based in genetic imperatives:

- Biochemistry/temperament + attunement of caregivers + capacities for dissociation + approval/disapproval shame dynamics + self-aware consciousness + neurologically/culturally/mystically based choices of life strategies + capacities of holding cultures to support self-regulation and unobstructed movement through developmental stages

### EQUALS →

**Defensive tendencies and habits** involving varying capacities for **violence, self-deception, self-regulation, self-reflection, empathy, and openness to external support/direction/regulation.**

## Synopsis

**Shame** is often a misunderstood emotion that can be pathologized to the extent that its interconnections with, and potential positive impacts on, development, relationship, transformation, and spirituality are overlooked. This class examines shame from a variety of perspectives including interpersonal neurobiology, evolutionary psychology, Integral psychology, development, and socialization.

**Shame is a social emotion that has gotten a bad rap in western society.** Shame is actually necessary for healthy individual development, social harmony, and optimal parenting, and can be a personal, relational, and spiritual guide throughout our entire lifespan.

**First of all, shame is central to a family of emotional states that includes embarrassment, guilt, chagrin, mortification, or even shyness.** Cumulatively, some refer to these as “shame emotions.” When we experience ourselves as disapproved of, we often initially have the reaction of a shame emotion that can include varying degrees of distress in our solar plexus and involve a slack face, weakened neck and chest muscles, lowered eyes, immobilization, and blushing. These experiences can lead to self-reflection, anger, immobilization, a variety of avoidance strategies, hunger for social contact, or laughter, depending on how they are identified and processed.

**All mammals develop capacities for shame responses as they grow to the developmental equivalent of human toddlers.** At this age, mammals are frisky, with the sympathetic branch of their autonomic nervous system (the accelerator) much more active than the parasympathetic branch (the brakes). A non-verbal signal of disapproval from a primary caregiver will instantaneously shift a young mammal from happy sympathetic arousal to painful parasympathetic collapse, thus freezing him or her into immobility. This process allows parents to control offspring at a distance and teaches them about adaptive and non-adaptive behavior. Nervous systems learn from experience and learn more from repeated experience. Thus, consistent disapproval experienced as an uncomfortable shame emotion has the dual function of controlling and protecting young from a distance while instructing them on what is safe, unsafe, appropriate, or inappropriate.

**Human children, around the end of their first year, learn to walk, discover that they need a caregiver’s positive attention to regulate painful emotions, and often respond with a shame reaction when experiencing disapproval.** One-year-olds often react to a disapproving glance or tone from a parent as if the parent has suddenly turned into a stranger. They can freeze, look down, cover their face, or begin to cry. If picked up and gazed at with loving approval, their nervous system generally regulates back to happy sympathetic arousal in about ten seconds.

**Our brains are hardwired to constantly associate, anticipate, and motivate us to optimally survive.** We are also hardwired to help our offspring and social networks

survive by providing ongoing feedback in the form of approval and disapproval about how well they are serving us, serving groups we identify with, and serving themselves. This is a major mechanism of how learning can be shared and passed on to progressive generations. The “carrot” of this magnificent social learning system is approval and the pleasure that usually accompanies feeling approved of, while the “stick” is disapproval, which often evokes painful shame emotions.

**All mammals have a FOXP2 gene, which supports communication, attunement, and relationship.** Around two hundred thousand years ago there was a mutation on two sites of *Homo sapiens*’ FOXP2 gene that *vastly increased* human’s capacities for grammar and symbolic communication. This mutation had such survival value that no humans today are without it. I believe this mutation was the birth of modern human consciousness. Grammar allows us to experience first, second, and third person in past present and future. Symbolic communication gives us the capacities to inhabit a potential infinity of perspectives with others. Since internal (*intrapersonal*) communication mirrors interpersonal communication, symbolic communication enables us to inhabit a potential infinity of perspectives within ourselves. I believe that human consciousness arises from *within* this infinity of internal perspectives that exist simultaneously for us in the past, present, and future. Consciousness is *interior* to this infinity of perspectives.

**How does shame fit in to the idea of consciousness existing within an infinity of intrapersonal perspectives?** As we “communicate” within ourselves from one perspective to another, each internal connection has the capacity for approval or disapproval. If I believe ice cream is not healthy for me, I can want an ice cream cone, feel disapproval at myself for desiring the cholesterol drenched treat, and feel ashamed of either *having* the ice cream now, *remembering* having ice cream in the past, or *imagining* having the ice cream in the future. I will potentially feel a shame emotion in response to *any* of these disapprovals. Since I have the capacities to remember the past, anticipate the future, and be consciously self-aware in the present moment, such disapprovals result in internalized rules, or should-patterns, about how I *should* be in the past, present, and future. When I observe myself violating these rules in the past, present, or future, I’m likely to disapprove of myself and feel a shame emotion. You’ll notice that such disapprovals don’t necessarily have to be rational, and often they are not. I could feel ashamed for *wanting* the ice cream, or for *remembering* wanting the ice cream, or for *anticipating* wanting the ice cream. Some people are crippled by networks of impossibly restrictive rules that result in layers of shame. What do humans do when they feel shame?

**A mature human can tolerate and accept a shame emotion, examine his or her feeling, thought, or behavior and the underlying rule that has been violated, and then comply with the rule or refine the rule to fit new circumstances.** For instance, I might feel the guilt about wanting the ice cream, examine the rule of “It’s *wrong* for Keith to eat ice cream,” remember that my cholesterol was an acceptable 200 at my last check up, and decide that this is a good time to have a treat. This refines the rule from “It’s wrong for Keith to eat ice cream,” to “It’s wrong for Keith to eat ice cream if it hurts his health, and right if it’s an occasional treat.” On the other hand, I might have the impulse to eat ice cream, feel the guilt, examine the rule, remember that once I start

eating ice cream I have trouble stopping, and comply with the rule and not eat any ice cream. Both activities result in reduced shame emotions and enhanced development.

**Children have immature brains that can't process shame like an adult.** A three year old can't go through the mental gymnastics I just outlined. What a child can do is to try to avoid the shame emotion by following a rule (don't eat the ice cream), looking into the eyes of an approving adult who sees the transgression and still loves them ("You broke the rule but I love you anyway), or engage in any number of avoidance strategies like denial ("I didn't eat any ice cream,"), projection ("Sally ate the ice cream,"), scapegoating ("I'll hit my dog, 'Bad dog!'"), repression ("What ice cream?"), or any of the other defensive maneuvers that, as they become habitual and hard wired into a child's nervous system, are templates for a lifetime of defense mechanisms.

**Human consciousness is so powerful, and even children's abilities to manipulate perspectives are so effective, that all humans develop defensive patterns where they have tendencies to go into defensive states when their brain (the supercharged association and anticipation machine) associates a current experience with a past threat and engages a defense.** By our teens our brains are mature enough to accept and tolerate shame emotions, examine the underlying rules, and either follow the rules or refine them. *By then we have had over ten years of learning, reinforcing, and practicing our strategies to avoid shame.* These strategies are our defensive patterns and states, and central to many of them is the *reflex* to avoid shame emotions. If I developed a rule at three for not being naked in public in response to lots of disapproval for nakedness, I might begin take my clothes off in front of a new lover, and my brain associates the two experiences and generates shame at me violating the "Don't be naked," rule. To avoid the shame I might just put my clothes back on, or make sure all the lights are off. It's *easier* to engage in the habit of defensive avoidance than to accept and tolerate the shame emotion and examine the rule. Herein lies the basis for much human suffering.

**Society needs shame.** Children learn right and wrong through approval/disapproval. Most people follow laws and treat others fairly well because they'd be ashamed if they didn't. The only way six and a half billion people can coexist on this planet is that most of us follow the rules we incorporated by various approvals and disapprovals over our lives, and we'd be ashamed to break many of those rules.

**On the other hand, if we can feel, tolerate, and accept shame emotions, examine should-patterns we think we're violating, and then either refine rules or consciously comply with them, shame emotions lead us to deeper insight and enhanced growth.** If someone feels ashamed of making a mistake, accepts and tolerates the emotion, examines the should-pattern of "I should be perfect," and the refines it to "I, and everyone else, should do their best and then accept themselves and their results gracefully," I have become deeper and wiser. This is the gift of shame.

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