“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.”  — Maya Angelou

I. **SHAME - The Powerful Silencer**

- Why is it we find it so hard to tell our story?
- What is at the root of our silence?
- What is the powerful force that stops us from talking about our sexual abuse?

The answer is **SHAME**. It immobilizes us with **FEAR of rejection**

Children act and react in ways that if adults did it, normal adult observers might find it seductive.

Abnormal adults who are sexually drawn to children and lack self-control, however, will find the behavior of normal children seductive.

Children are oblivious to this unless it is later drawn to their attention, in which case they can be made to **feel very guilty** about their **normal, age-appropriate behavior**.

As they grow older, they can **forget what young children are like** and apply **adult standards** to judging their past behavior. Not realizing that they had been simply acting and responding like normal children, they can wrongly condemn their former age-appropriate actions and feelings as being despicable or perverted.

As a result they are likely to **mistakenly blame themselves** for child molesters criminally taking advantage of their innocence.

**SHAME is**: a negative emotion that combines feelings of dishonor, unworthiness, and embarrassment – feelings brought on by doing or participating in something wrong, dishonorable, or disgraceful.

**SHAME always involves at least one OTHER PERSON**. The EYES of another brought awareness that something is wrong; exposure is realized.

A. Let’s look at a couple faces of Shame:

1. The first is **AUTHENTIC SHAME**.
   a. Feel when we willfully do something wrong and others find out
   b. Comes after we commit bad deeds that we know we are **guilty** for doing.

2. The second is **BORROWED SHAME**.
   a. Causes us to embody the disgrace for what **another person** has done, told us, or made us do
   b. Attacks our personal dignity and eats away at our self-worth
   c. Feel shameful, and sometimes even responsible for what our abusers have done
   d. The **secrecy** that accompanied our abuse only intensifies it.
   e. **Borrowed shame** is overwhelming and suffocating.

3. **RESIDUAL SHAME**
   a. Feel for being a part of the sexual abuse, for participating in it
   b. Though you were coerced, forced or manipulated into participating, you may feel a tremendous amount of responsibility for it.
      • Maybe you loved your abuser
      • Maybe you enjoyed the arousal
      • **Residual shame** can also be added by those who refused to believe **you**, or by **those who did nothing to stop the abuse**.

SHAME  1
(Because no one rescued you, you may think you were not worth saving.)

B. Difference between GUILT and SHAME

1. **GUILT** is a God-given emotion in response to a bad choice, bad act, and/or sin. One experiences feelings of guilt **INTERNALLY** when we know we have done wrong.

2. **SHAME**, however, begins **EXTERNALLY** and says that the person is bad, has no value, and is unworthy to exist – that he or she is hopelessly defective, unlovable, inferior, and worthless. **Shame requires the presence of another individual.**
   a. When such messages are repeated often enough, whether through words or actions, they become internalized into a **FALSE BELIEF**. “I must be bad to deserve the terrible treatment I receive.”
   b. Where there’s SHAME, there’s CONTEMPT, and with CONTEMPT goes **PERFORMANCE**. Thus begins the “Performance-Based” attempt to find wholeness, peace, love.

3. When facing guilt feelings, the most important thing is to establish whether your **guilt** is real or imaginary.

4. If, after God has forgiven us, we won’t forgive ourselves, we are implying we have a higher sense of justice than the Holy One.
   a. We are also implying that Jesus is inadequate - that he didn’t suffer enough for our sins, or that his sinlessness cannot swallow up our sinfulness.
   b. There is **no shame in a forgiven person** **feeling** guilty. That is simply the Deceiver at work. For a forgiven person to **believe** he or she is guilty, however, is a concern.
   c. **Our beliefs** drive our actions. So even more important that what anyone does, is what a person believes.

**The SHAME of being exposed is often stronger**

than the GUILT brought on by a wrongdoing.

Shame will dissipate when TRUTH is revealed and accepted.

Satan is our biggest enemy as his delight is for us to ABSORB the SHAME that does NOT BELONG to us, but to our abuser. He wants us to live paralyzed from our past pain and give up hope that we can live without the bondage of addictions, destructive defense mechanisms, and self-hatred.

**GUILT** is a sense that you **have DONE** something **wrong** that needs to be punished.

**SHAME** is a sense that something **is WRONG WITH YOU**; you are broken or defective in some way.

**EMBARRASSED** is a sense of being **self conscious or distressed by “PERCEIVED” social humiliation or rejection.**
The Dilemma of Feeling Pleasure When Abused

So powerful is sex that it is almost inevitable that any sexual encounter – no matter how despised and unwanted – will contain elements of pleasure and deep bonding. In an unwanted encounter, these are highly obnoxious consequences of sex but they are such an integral part of sex that they are almost impossible to completely remove from forced sex. This fact is so rarely understood that sex crime victims usually end up loathing themselves or at least being confused and deeply disturbed over what is just a normal reaction to unwanted sex.

Vast numbers of abuse survivors know from bitter experience that pleasure inflicted by a sexual predator can be more damaging than severe physical pain. Some survivors, however, have experiences so different that they find this incomprehensible or even offensive. Experiences differ for the simple reason that abusers differ in their techniques.

If predators are sufficiently skilled, the pleasure they inflict will be sexual. Otherwise – in the case of pedophiles – the pleasure their victims feel will be the gifts they bribe children with or the attention they give love-starved children. Rapists can even force unwilling adult victims to experience sexual pleasure. This very pleasure inflicts horrific, but quite unnecessary, pangs of guilt.

A degree of pleasure or bonding in no way justifies the offender, nor in any way hints that the victim might be perverted or immoral.

The memory of pleasure suffered (yes, “suffered” is the right word) during abuse might currently be suppressed but it could surface at any time. So it is good to prepare oneself by learning about this rarely understood consequence of unwanted sex.

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Our bodies respond differently to sexual abuse and incest, but bodily response is irrelevant. The only things that are relevant are consent and legality.

If you did not consent to the sexual contact, then it was wrong. It was a crime. Some criminals will try to convince you that the orgasm proves that you consented, and some ignorant judges or juries may believe it. But it simply IS NOT TRUE. Our bodies are made to respond to touching and contact even under severe duress. This does not mean you are in any way responsible or that you participated willingly. Incest most often happens to small children, who are in no way capable of providing consent to a sexual act. An orgasm is not considered consent. It was an involuntary reaction by your body, like a sneeze or a hiccup.

In the context of incest, or sexual assault, the situation is even worse. In these instances, incest and the sexual abuse isn't even about sex. Sex is merely the weapon used by the attacker to demean the victim as much as possible. In Old Testament times, soldiers of a victorious army would often rape the soldiers of the losing army -- not because they were gay, not because they wanted sex, but because rape was the ultimate humiliation, the ultimate act of domination and violence. And everyone knew it.

It's understandable that survivors of incest or sexual assault would be confused by their body's response especially if an orgasm occurred. But make no mistake about it -- that does not make it a mutual, acceptable, or desirable sexual experience. It does not imply consent to sex or negate the horrible emotional wounds that are inflicted by sexual abuse.

If you felt pleasure or had an orgasm as a result of incest or sexual abuse, please do not let that stop you from telling your story and getting help. You needn’t be ashamed. You were a victim and deserve the help you need so you can live a healthy and happy life.
HONESTY is the very First Phase of the healing process, and involves SHOCK, PAIN, and ANGER.

FACING THE TRUTH

(Information on this page was taken from “Right to Innocence,” by Beverly Engle(1989))

The Truth About the Abuser:

- He was NOT “teaching you” about sex or “preparing you for womanhood/marriage.”
- He did NOT “need” you or your body.
- It was NOT his “right.”
- He was NOT making sure you wouldn’t be “cold like your mother.”
- He was NOT “checking to make sure you were developing properly.”
- He was NOT in love with you.
- He was NOT “too sick or too drunk to know what he was doing.”
- He WAS using you to satisfy his own selfish needs.
- He was not considering your feelings or the effect it would have on you, and he didn’t care enough about you to stop.
- He forced his adult body onto or into your child’s body.
- He betrayed your trust and in doing so caused you to be unable to trust others.
- He was responsible for his behavior, no matter how disturbed, alcoholic, or pathetic he seemed.
- He used his power, authority, and age to overpower you, threaten you, and instill in you a fear of others, of intimacy, of sex and sexual pleasure, and of yourself.
- He put an emotional wedge between you and your mother and the rest of your family.
- He made you feel “weird,” “perverted,” “different.”

The Truth About Your Childhood Family

The responsibility for the abuse is ALWAYS the fault of the abuser. However, families often “set the stage” for abuse to occur in a number of ways:

- By denying you attention and affection.
- By leaving you unsupervised--or poorly supervised--for lengthy periods of time.
- By leaving you with caretakers who were abusive, disturbed, and neglectful.
- By abusing you physically, verbally, or emotionally.
- By ignoring obvious signs of abuse and cries for help.
- By making you feel they wouldn’t believe you.
- By showing other people they did not value you.
- By making you feel they couldn’t or wouldn’t protect you.

The Truth about the Sexual Abuse of Children

- Incest and child molestation are NEVER Non-Abusive; COERCION is always involved in sex between an adult and child. It is NEVER a mutual decision or agreement.
- A child never “wants” to have sex with an adult. She or he may want affection, attention, closeness, approval, or to please the adult—but NEVER sex.
- Normal sex play and exploration can only occur between those of the same age, sexual experience, and power.
- Sexual abuse is an act of violence or selfishness; it is never an act of love.
• There is no such thing as “mild” childhood sexual abuse. It is ALWAYS traumatic!