



Jeremiah Weinstock, PhD

# **Guilt and Shame in the Context of Gambling Disorder Treatment**

Focus on the Future - 05/02/2024



# Workshop Goals

1. Define guilt and shame and differentiate these negative emotional experiences as they relate to gambling disorder.
2. Discuss how shame is associated with stigma and may be a barrier to treatment engagement.
3. Identify methods to assess guilt and shame and how results of this assessment can guide gambling disorder treatment.

# The social context of a gambling disorder



Goodwin et al. (2017)

**Gambling Disorder Criterion #7:** Lies to others to conceal gambling behavior. the feelings of guilt and shame.



# Terminology

## **Guilt**

- A feeling of remorse or regret which involves preoccupation with a particular transgression/event.

## **Shame (broadly defined)**

- A feeling/thought/belief that one is not good enough. Central to the experience of shame are feelings about one's inadequacy and lack of worth.

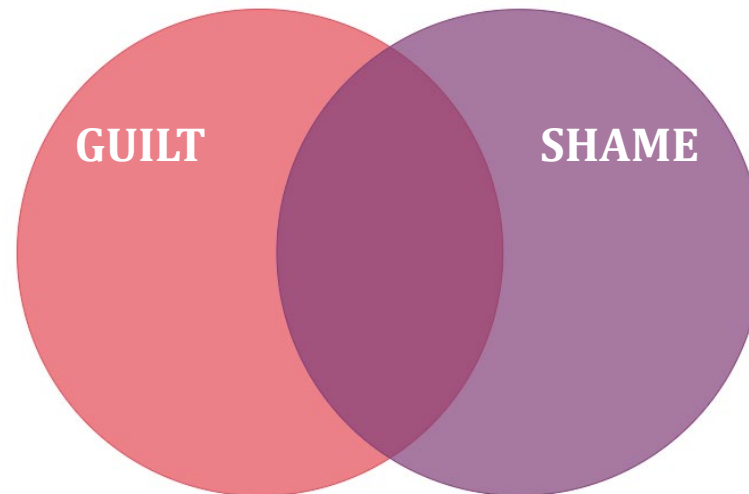
# Distinction between Guilt or Shame

**Guilt** recognizes the action as a transgression.

- “I did a bad thing.”

**Shame** recognizes oneself as being **unacceptable** in the eyes of others.

- “I am a bad person.”





# Guilt or Shame?

## Attributions about Recent Gambling

1. “My relapse this past week just proves once an addict, always an addict.”
2. “I drank too much while gambling that night. I shouldn’t have done that; I know better.”
3. “I am a pathetic gambler who constantly loses my money. Like my dad always said, “I’m a waste of oxygen.”



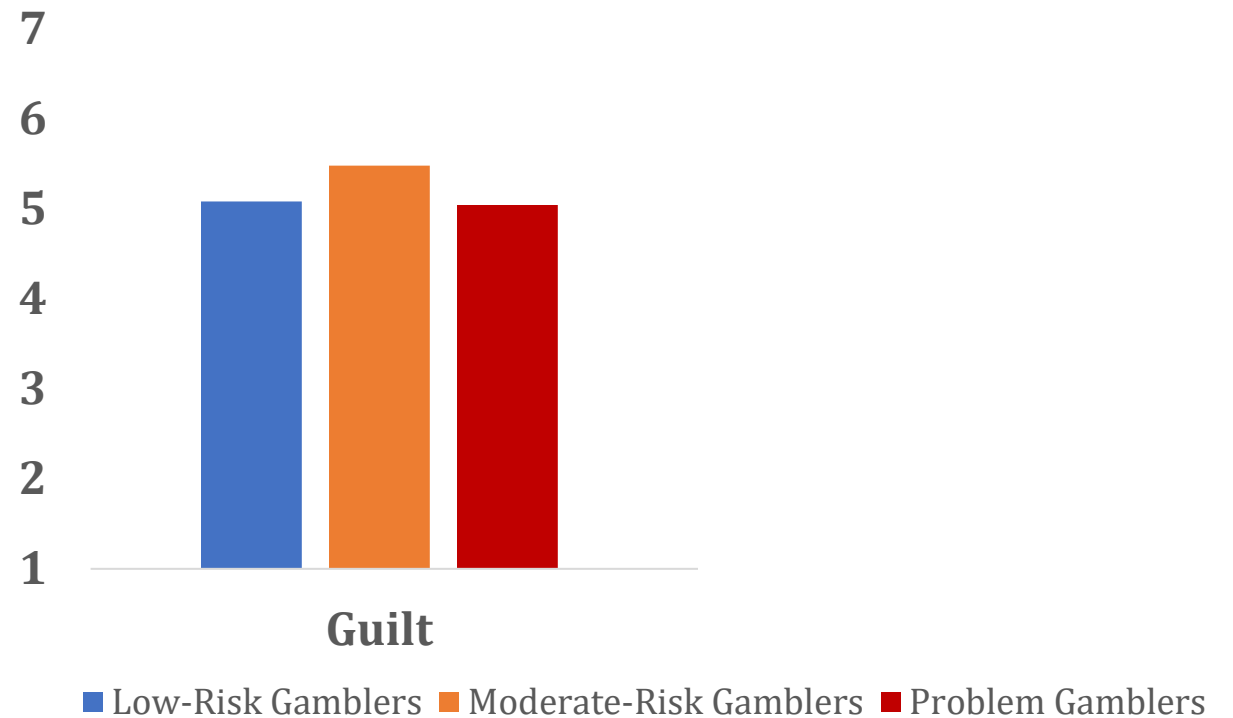
# Guilt or Shame?

## Attributions about Recent Gambling

4. **“I got carried away in the moment thinking I was due.”**
5. **“I bet \$10K on a Saudia Arabian soccer game. Did you even know they had a league? Who bets on that? I’ll tell you who, I do - a degenerate gambler...”**
6. **“I knew it was a bad decision to gamble; I just wanted to have fun. It doesn’t make me a bad person though.”**

# Guilt and Shame in Relation to Gambling

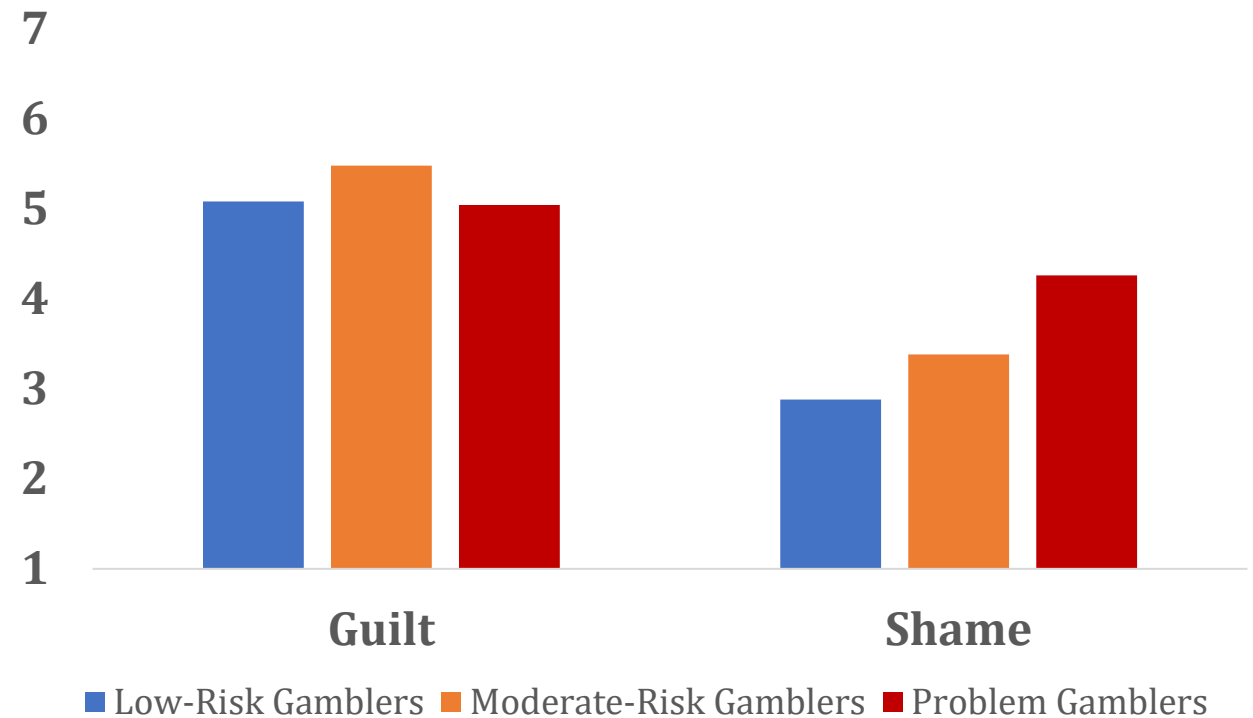
Many individuals who gamble, regardless of problem gambling severity experience guilt about their gambling losses.



# Guilt and Shame in Relation to Gambling

Many individuals who gamble, regardless of problem gambling severity experience guilt about their gambling losses.

As gambling problem severity increases, the likelihood of experiencing shame about their gambling losses increases.





# Gambling and Guilt

Several studies demonstrate that the feeling of guilt is not associated with gambling to cope motives. Feelings of guilt do not lead to future gambling episodes.

Rather the experience of guilt stemming from gambling creates agency to act and resolve the feelings of guilt.

- “What do I need to do to fix the situation?”
- “How do I repair the damage done?”



# The Experience of Shame

Greenberg (2024)



# Different Types of Shame

## Three Types of Shame:

1. Primary Adaptive Shame
2. Primary Maladaptive Shame
3. Secondary Shame



**These are not mutually exclusive categories. Individuals can experience multiple types of shame at the same time.**



# Defining Types of Shame

## **Three Types of Shame:**

- 1. Primary Adaptive Shame**
- 2. Primary Maladaptive Shame**
- 3. Secondary Shame**

## **Primary Adaptive Shame**

Adaptive shame informs people that they have violated important standards or values and their social group's norms.



# Gambling and Shame

## **Primary Adaptive Shame Example:**

“Over the past six months, I withdrew \$50,000 in my kids’ college fund, and I lost it all gambling. I am so ashamed of myself.”

**The act of gambling generates the shame for violating social norms and trust that exists in relationships.**

# Gambling and Shame

## **What happens next when the following occurs?**

1. The individual with a gambling problem has been drinking heavily (potentially intoxicated).
2. Others discover the gambling problem and the full extent of financial harm. “The ‘great’ lie is over.”
3. The individual has a history of making impulsive decisions.
4. Access to lethal means.

**Acute risk for suicide increases dramatically!**

# Acute Episode of Risk for Suicide

From the decision to die to a suicide attempt:



**36%**



**44%**



**73%**



# Gambling and Shame

## Primary Adaptive Shame Example:

- Shame in this instance can also be expressed as **outwardly directed anger**.

“The casino knows I have a gambling problem. Yet, they are trying to be my best friend. They keep sending me offers for “risk-free bets” and other comps to get me to gambling again. It’s just criminal! I can’t believe they get away with this stuff! This is what’s wrong with America today! People can do whatever they want, even it hurts other people..... It’s all in the name of the almighty dollar!”



# Gambling and Shame

## Three Types of Shame:

1. Primary Adaptive Shame
2. **Primary Maladaptive Shame**
3. Secondary Shame

## Primary Maladaptive Shame

An enduring part of a person's experience that influences their whole personality and forms the undercurrent of experience.

# Gambling and Shame

## Primary Maladaptive Shame

Early experiences of being ignored, invalidated, ridiculed, and rejected, as well as experiences of abuse and neglect, generally lead to the development of a core sense of self as flawed, defective, worthless, not mattering, and unlovable.





# Gambling and Shame

## **Primary Maladaptive Shame Example:**

“I gamble because when I am at the casino, I can forget everything. And if I win, I feel special!! It’s the only place where I have a chance of feeling good about myself.”

**The act of gambling is about the avoidance of the feeling of shame.**



# Gambling and Shame

## **Three Types of Shame:**

1. Primary Adaptive Shame
2. Primary Maladaptive Shame
3. **Secondary Shame**

## **Secondary Shame**

A person's emotional reaction to another (primary) emotion, such as when one feels ashamed of one's sadness or anger.



# Gambling and Shame

## **Secondary Shame Example:**

“I am so depressed and lonely. I am ashamed I am such a mess. I should have my act together! I gamble when I am lonely, I go to the casino to manage my depression. It’s a place to be social without having to be social. I am so ashamed of my depression though, I don’t know what else to do but gamble...”

**The act of gambling is a coping mechanism for feelings of depression and loneliness.**



# Conceptualizing Gambling and Shame

**Two primary relationships between gambling and shame:**

1. The act of gambling generates shame due to violation of norms/trust.
2. The act of gambling alleviates (temporarily) feelings of shame.

**Ask yourself, does culture play a role in the client's experience of shame?**

# Treatment Approaches for Guilt and Shame

Assess to identify and label the client's feeling.

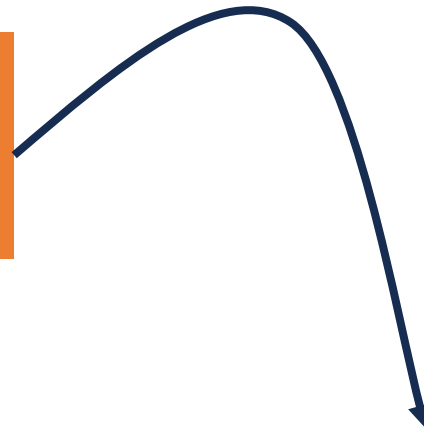


**Guilt?**  
**Shame masked as outward anger?**  
**Shame? – What type of shame?**



# Treatment Approaches for Guilt and Shame

**Norming the experience and providing psychoeducation**



**“Many individuals with gambling disorder experience these feelings. You are not the first nor unfortunately the last to experience this.”**



# Treatment Approaches for Guilt and Primary Adaptive Shame

The experience of guilt generates agency for corrective action.

**1. Problem-solve on potential correction actions.**

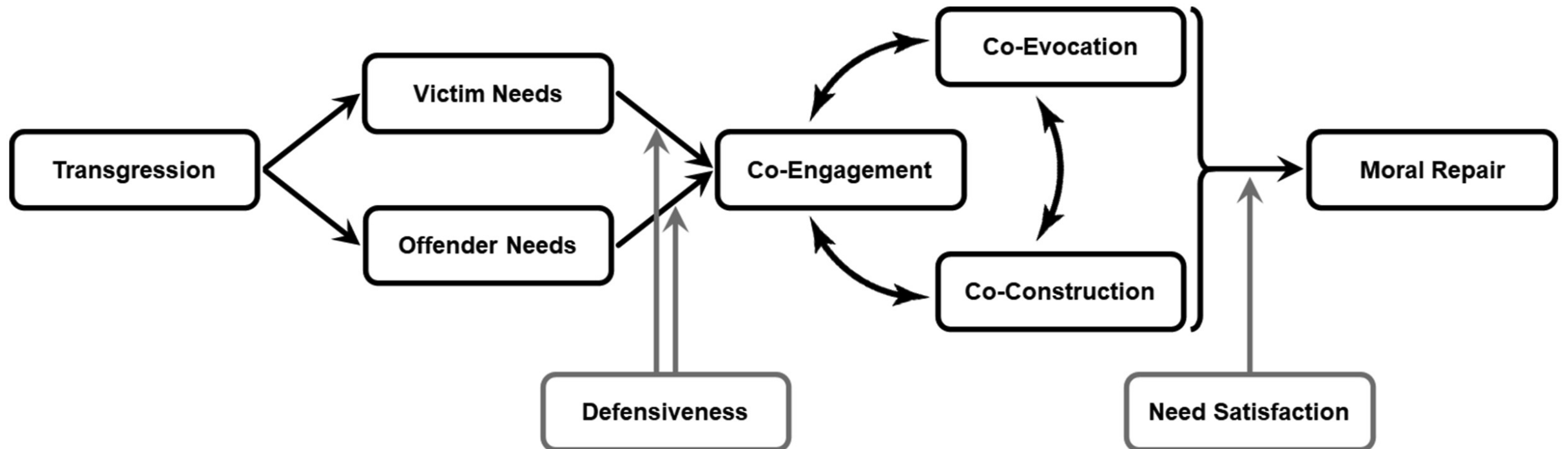
- Pros and cons of each potential action?
- Which is one(s) are more appropriate/realistic?
- Are multiple actions required?

**2. Support the client's action.**

**3. Co-engagement with affected others.**

- Co-construct an understanding of what happened, what it means for their relationship, and a way forward (if both parties so desire)

# Treatment Approach for Primary Adaptive Shame



Current Opinion in Psychology

# Treatment Approach for Primary Maladaptive Shame

**Transformation comes from close contact with new emotional experiences derived from content generating the feeling of shame.**

Therapist's task is to facilitate a new emotional experience:

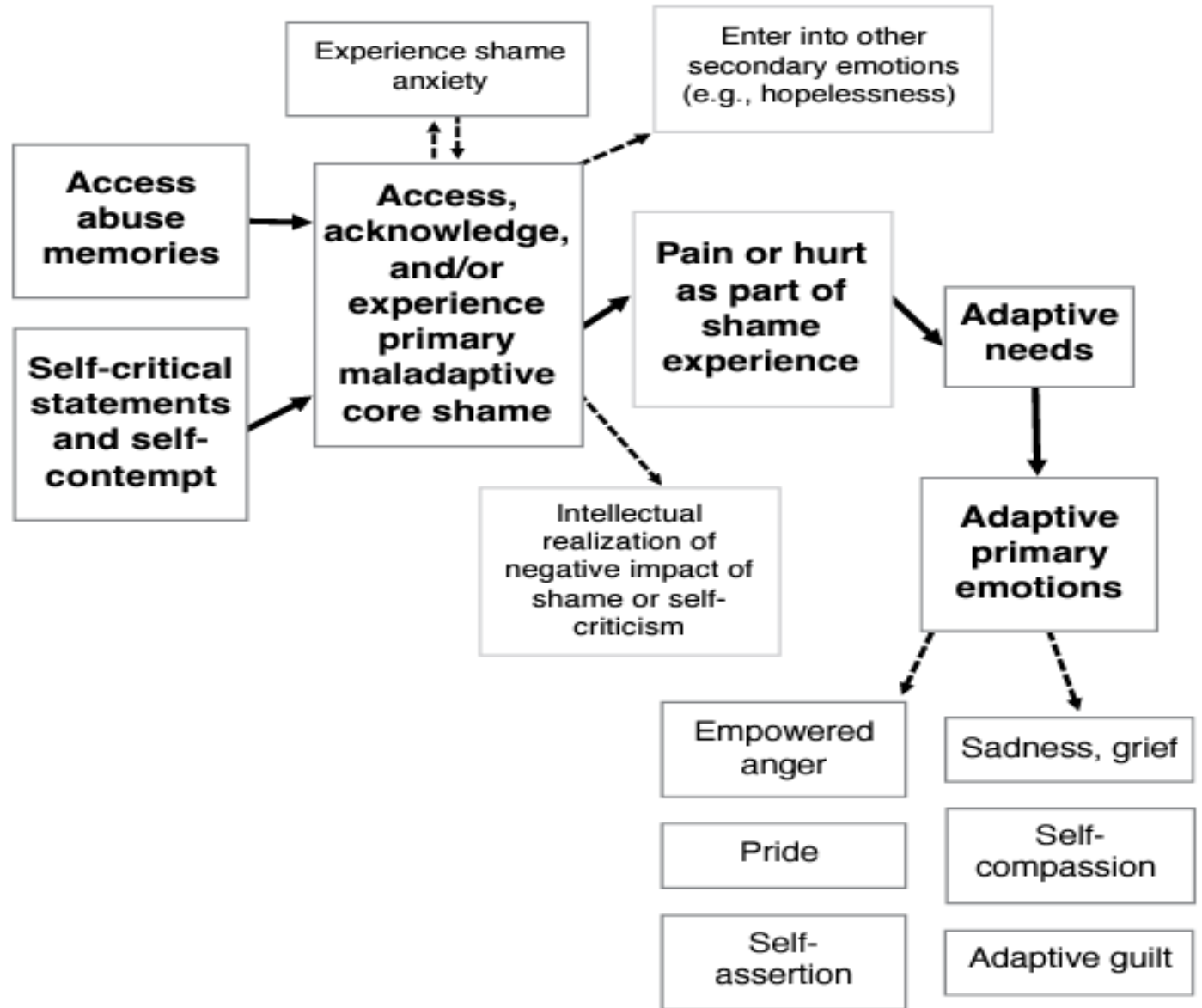
1. A client must first feel shame in order to change it.
2. What is shame's source? Review the narrative in client's head.
3. Activate other emotions in relation to the source: sadness, compassion, anger.
4. Anger requires action.
5. Cognitive restructuring of how past events are understood/interpreted to generate new/different emotions.



Greenberg (2024)

# Treatment Approach for Primary Maladaptive Shame

FIGURE 6.1. Model of Resolution of Shame—Client Process



# Thank you!

Jeremiah Weinstock, PhD

Professor of Psychology

Saint Louis University

[Jeremiah.weinstock@health.slu.edu](mailto:Jeremiah.weinstock@health.slu.edu)



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