

How to begin healing shame with A.J. Bond

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SUMMARY

AJ Bond, a certified shame healing practitioner and author of "Discomfortable," discusses the complexities of shame, its origins, and how it affects our relationships and self-perception. Through personal experiences and research, he emphasizes the importance of recognizing and addressing shame, not only for individual healing but also for fostering healthier connections with others.

- Shame often stems from childhood experiences and societal expectations, leading to feelings of inadequacy and self-judgment.*
- It manifests as a physical sensation and can be categorized into a spectrum, from mild embarrassment to deep self-loathing.*
- Healthy shame can motivate growth and repair, while toxic shame can lead to avoidance, self-attack, or aggression towards others.*
- The process of healing shame involves recognizing its presence, understanding its origins, and engaging in open conversations about it.*
- Community and peer support can be effective in addressing shame, as opposed to solely relying on professional therapy.*
- Mindfulness and self-compassion are crucial in navigating feelings of shame and fostering authentic relationships.*
- The journey of unpacking shame includes questioning the validity of internalized narratives and recognizing that they may not reflect reality.*

[Music] foreign hello and welcome to the your parenting Mojo podcast I recently researched the topic of Shame for content for the parenting membership which actually ended up going into three modules of content because the topic is so big and I read over 20 books for that episode and the best of them all was written by my guest today AJ Bond AJ is a former

child actor now a filmmaker a writer as he puts it a shame break Enthusiast he's a certified shame healing practitioner by the Center for Healing shame his book discomfortable what is shame and how can we break its hold reviews and interprets the research on shame in a lighthearted way that offers real hope for us to live more compassionately and effectively with our shame welcome AJ it's great to have you here thanks for having me thanks for the kind

words so I wonder um this this must have been quite a journey for you how did you get what shame is yeah I think a big component for me is growing up gay and struggling to um make sense of that and make that fit in the culture that I was being raised in and so that was just like a truth that I

felt like I had to hide and that I felt was very bad and dark and wrong in this just very visceral way and then I did a really good job of just hiding that from myself I just pushed it away out of my Consciousness for for like a decade and then I came out of the closet in my 20s and that all seemed fine but then in my 30s things just weren't really going well I

I felt like I was failing in a number of ways I was failing in my filmmaking career I was failing in my romantic relationships um so I finally went to therapy and it was just really fortunate that I had a therapist who was able to say I think you're talking about shame and he was able to help me see that this deep dark bad wrong place or feeling had a name

and was an emotion and was like a normal thing and that you could talk about it I actually feel emotion and shivers just thinking about it that it was like taking this this horrible unlook edible thing and saying this is normal this is okay so it was that was sort of the big moment was a therapist who who who got shame it's really interesting how that shame was still with you right there was a period where you were hiding this even

from yourself and then there's a period where you weren't hiding it from yourself or from other people and yet the shame was still there it was still unresolved still sitting there waiting for that therapist to uncover it is it does that how does that resonate with your experience yeah it's absolutely true it was like um around the time that I came out of the closet Canada legalized same-sex marriage and there was just a big cultural shift and so my sexuality came

out of the shame and was allowed to be seen But the shame itself was still not allowed to be seen so it was really only in therapy as my therapist um you know asked me questions about things that no one had ever asked me and and encouraged me that it was safe to like look at and unearth the shame itself um that's that's the real difference is to be able to see shame feel it talk

about it own it without feeling like it's this deep dark thing that owns you that's the big big shift I think yeah yeah so now we at the scene for where you came you came to this work from um can you help us to Define shame like what is it what does it feel like how do you know when you're in it yeah it's it's like a different slightly for different people but it's kind of the most basic for me is to say that

it's this highly unpleasant sensation in your body that seems to kind of reference you so it's like feeling bad about yourself feeling bad about your actions your your essence and or your place in the world or in a relationship or in the social scene any any deep discomfort that seems to reference those things is likely to be part of the shame family

and and I do think of it as a spectrum so it kind of at the core of Shame is what I'll call shame affect this is coming from affect Theory and that's just the feeling the the unpleasant feeling itself shame affect and in like little doses you might just call it like shyness or embarrassment and as it gets higher you might start to see self-consciousness guilt shame and then even higher humiliation mortification um self-disgust things like this so

everything along that Spectrum for me is what I mean when I talk about shame this whole family and and I just want to note that for some people it's really hard to feel because it's just so abhorrent or they're not they're not comfortable going into their body or their Sensations but there will still be some kind of wrongness or aversion there'll be some way to sense um a Badness about yourself yeah

it always seems to be social right so there's this Badness about ourselves but it's almost seen Through The Eyes of another person right like it's I I think that you think that I am not worthy in some way it's not just this evaluation of myself but it's evaluation coming through somebody else's eyes right and and thinking about your homosexuality is acceptance by Family exceptions by Society those things are lacking and so this comes back to reflect on ourselves

is that right yeah yeah I think there can be different versions for different people I think there's some shame that can be you know very me with myself but the most kind of toxic and disempowering kinds are the type where it is this sense of comparison hierarchy status everyone else is somehow better and I am worse I'm flawed I'm bad and and I do think that you know

while we are a social animal so I think in in a very powerful way our identity our sense of self is always in reference some somewhat to other people so it is both intrinsically social and yet it can be perceived as me judging myself as well yeah and I think that really gets to where this stuff develops right because I think it starts really early on in childhood yeah yeah can you talk a little bit about where it comes from

kind of how does this stuff build up been in our interactions with our family members yeah yeah I think again I'm I'll kind of uh talk using affect Theory because I I find that to just be a really powerful way to look at shame and they talk about shame as the discomfort that comes up when you don't meet the ideals and expectations you have of yourself so it's just almost like this alarm system saying like hey you said you were this

or that you should be this and it doesn't seem like you are but the way that we come up with this expectation and this ideal are Concepts that are that are conditioned into us or that we create with our own childlike sense making at an extremely extremely young age and the other part of Shame you know I talked about shame affect being the feeling but the other half is cognitive shame it's the story you tell yourself

about what the feeling means and that is also deeply based on the stories that we heard about ourselves from our caregivers our peers our siblings and from culture at large again as children so not only are the expectations that create shame often largely based in childhood sense making childhood experiences childhood trauma but the stories that we tell ourselves like oh when I feel this it means I'm bad that's a story that we came up with in

childhood or a story that we inherited in childhood so it really it really the the again the most toxic forms of Shame come are birthed in our childhood experiences and they stick with us yeah yeah and I I was trying to think okay when does this start right how does this begin and um to me it seems to come back to when the baby starts to become mobile right because before that point it's yes it cries and yes that can be frustrating

some of the time but by and large what we're trying to do is accommodate the baby's needs to the extent that we can and then at some point in that baby's first year the baby becomes mobile and at that point we're no longer accommodating all the baby's needs we're starting the process of socialization we're prohibiting them from touching things we're prohibiting them from doing things and increasingly we have these expectations uh that I've told you five

times you shouldn't touch that thing so why are you still touching that thing and it seems like these expectations build and build and build so um as far as I can tell I mean this stuff starts in in the child's first year late in the child's first year do you think it's do you think I'm on the right track absolutely absolutely I think even earlier in the sense that I think what a child is really looking for is

Attunement with a caregiver a sense of connection acceptance love having its needs met being cared for and any time that doesn't happen um this phrase from Gershon Kaufman comes to mind the breaking of the interpersonal bridge and that in Gershon Kaufman's mind is what causes shame there's so many different ways to Define it and I'm sure we'll touch on a bunch of them but that that breaking with the parent so early on could cause a sense

of shame because I think there's a built-in expectation of this kind of connection in a child and so this shame keeps coming up and it's in it's in need of repair it's in need of the caregiver noticing a rupture has occurred and and comforting the child and making it clear to the child that it's okay for the child to feel this pain and and it's and it's going to be okay it's going to be taken care of so the

child doesn't doesn't feel all alone and bad somehow unworthy in a very precognitive way almost but it also doesn't feel like it its bad feelings are themselves bad so that that does seem core throughout childhood that the parent can give the child that sense of connection um safety Etc does that does that make sense it does yeah and I think what you're saying is that I'm tracing it

back to back to the first year you're tracing it back even further and I think areas definitions of what shape is I'm sort of tracing it from the um the inhibition of the yes right um and you're you're facing it from the the mirroring which I think is equally valid just as important um and and saying that when when we when we don't receive that mirroring from another person that that itself is shaming and that happens you know from

day one right this is this is not into the first year this is from day one um so so we can have these potential ruptures very early on and and even I can imagine the two kind of coming together where the baby is sort of excited about a toy or something and the parent is not excited right the parent doesn't engage the parent doesn't make eye contact looks away and and and so then you have that rupture again

um and it seems to me that what's most important no matter where we think it starts is is the re-establishment of Harmony right like there's there's some sort of rupture because there are going to be ruptures in any relationship between two people absolutely and what happens then yeah I'm glad you referenced this um so the the the diminishment yeah this is affect Theory again that shame actually takes our positive affects what what I

call in the book 'The yes feeling'

yeah and our expectations of positive affect and shame diminishes them when it seems like they're inappropriate or unsafe so you're absolutely right the baby is like thinking it's about to get caregiver attention and it's so excited has the expectation of pleasure and then the caregiver doesn't seem to like notice or pay attention and and Shane will come in and be like no I guess that's not appropriate something's wrong and uh it flattens that effect and it

does that continues to do that throughout our lives the classic example I like is like I wave at a friend I realize it's not my friend and shame immediately like flattens the excitement and the the expectation of pleasure so that I look more appropriate acceptable just sort of neutral something like that I wasn't looking at you yeah yeah and so that expectation of pleasure can happen uh in many different ways for a child but the key I think is can the

parent recognize not even all the time um but uh more often than not or maybe even just I've actually heard someone say like it's something like 40 if you can recognize 40 of the ruptures and make a repair that's apparently good parenting yeah yeah and as you were talking about sort of recognizing a friend it reminded me of the still face experiment right where you can you can look that up on YouTube for folks who are listening and watching and

um and and see this baby in a chair uh in a high chair and the parent is sitting right there and the parent has been instructed not to respond to the baby and the babies just find this absolutely distressing I mean it's heartbreaking to watch these babies yeah trying to elicit a reaction from a parent who has been instructed to just have the still face yeah it's like you can see shame birthing the child's like what what's

wrong what's what am I doing wrong am I bad now like this used to be good it really is heartbreaking and I think it's such a vivid example of the way shame as a child births in that breaking of the interpersonal Bridge yeah and and so you talked about uh kind of rupture and repair and that you don't have to get this perfectly right you this is not a I have to do this right 100 of the time

where my kid is going to be you know somehow uh have really terrible outcomes out of this but but a relatively low percentage of the time that these repairs have to happen what does that repair look like um I'm thinking of the infant stage and also as as we get older what what is a good repair look like yeah I don't feel like I'm an expert in the subject of repair but what's coming up for me is a kind of a balanced

response where we're not we're not going too clingy where we're communicating to the child that it's discomfort hurts us so much that that can almost it's self be a little bit inhibiting for a child's uh you know I can think of experiences where I've withheld my own pain from someone because I don't want them to empathetically go into distress so so it's like wouldn't want it to be

too too clingy attachment but also wanting it to not be disinterest which is sort of the rupture in the first place

probably just a missed moment of Attunement or busyness or something like that so it's yeah it's for me I would long for a kind of boundaries but warm um kind of like a a space to witness oh what happened I'm really curious oh

that was like really hard for you kind of creating a space where it's comfortable for the child to be honest it's comfortable for the child to ask for a repair which I've actually seen children do they like come back and they ask like oh that's bad something like that so it's just it's I think it's really about the the welcoming and warmth and openness to have the child Express what happened I don't know that there is much to fix Beyond I'm here now

I'm interested in what went down and I get that that kind of witnessing and and holding space for that's what comes up for me but again I'm sort of not an expert so I actually would you know turn it back to you on that um I guess what comes up for me when you say that is yes yes that's what I want to when I'm on you know when I'm on the the end of the the shame

um and I'm thinking about it from the parents perspective and and the shame that's coming up in the parent at having uh sort of brought about this shame in the child it's like oh do I have to relive That Couldn't can we just forget about it like can we just say the Rock and pretend that it didn't happen and then maybe it won't be a big deal and uh if I don't have to go through it again

then you know what if it traumatizes them and it makes it harder for them and also it's embarrassing for me to admit that I did something that you know elicited this feeling in my child and um so there's I think a very strong cultural uh idea that when this thing happens that we should just kind of paper it over and pretend that it does yeah yes we have such a culture of get it right the first time be perfect yes

and and it really is a shame because as you've already said it's impossible and and actually um as I understand it in like the theory of relationship rupture repair that the rupture and repair makes the relationship stronger so it's actually like having a rupture is not a bad thing at all it's a beautiful opportunity for a repair which is a deepening and strengthening of the relationship so I'm

not you know encouraging purposeful ruptures like the still face experiment but I would I would love to get us thinking about shifting away from our Perfection get it right the first time culture and more of a future focused opportunity culture of like oh great yeah like let's really talk so when I wasn't paying attention in that moment like how did that affect you we're getting to like a deeper level of communication and understanding and I think it's again if I'm looking at

what Am I Longing For in a in a repair that the person making the repair can own um their experience if they are feeling some shame but again in a way where they're they're entirely owning the responsibility for it themselves so they're not putting any of their discomfort on to me but if I sense that they're in discomfort and they're not naming it that can also bring up shame

in me like are they mad at me what's going on why are they acting like this did I do something wrong again so it's just it's just worth noting that as a person in power as a caregiver the more we can own and be transparent about some of the discomfort we're feeling it can help to lift concern and responsibility off of those beneath us so that they understand oh okay so yeah you experience some shame that's why

you're like this it's not my fault does that make sense yeah in in some ways it feels sort of a scary line to walk like I I need to say enough about my experience that you see that it wasn't your fault but not so much that um that it puts it on but it becomes your fault yeah exactly or that it becomes your problem yeah um and I'm also I I don't know if this is taking it too meta but you know there

was an initial rupture and then we're repairing the rupture at a different level and then it's almost like there needs to be a third layer of how is that repair did that work for you did that help you to uh to feel more connected to me was there anything I said that was re-shaming or more shaming or it didn't didn't make the repair effective right um and that that could help us to to deepen the relationship one level

further which in some ways feels again intimidating like Syrian obviously I have to have this three layer thing but in other ways if we care so much about this person that we don't want them to feel shame right then isn't isn't that where we want to be spending our time with them in in this sort of super deep relationship building stuff yeah I mean what you're describing is what um some people call Meta conversation it's also something that they do in

processes like authentic relating and it's basically I think again we're in a culture where we think like okay I keep a bunch of stuff hidden and then I do perfect things that you see and this meta conversation is like no I'm actually just gonna kind of keep showing you what's true in the moment and so it's it's beyond just a three-step thing it's there's the possibility of always being ready for the meta conversation move of being able to say hey right now

what's happening for us like I notice I'm feeling a bit concerned about how I'm impacting you right now is that what's happening for you and so just it just like takes us into this really honest vulnerable authentic present moment place where we can really just see each other do you have friendships where you do that and Partnerships where you do that I have friendships where I try to do that I have a lot of practice doing that

in groups of authentic relating or circling is another modality where we do that but so it's like something I'm quite good at with a stranger but when it comes to my closest friends or family it becomes very very hard and so I want to just name that that's very very hard what I'm describing but it doesn't mean that it's not something that is valuable that could be experimented with yeah no that's a really interesting

point actually um I have been on a journey that my listeners will know something about and to discover that very recently discover that I'm autistic and uh so so the thought of uh of having that conversation in the moment where I'm understanding what's happening to the other person as and also understanding what's happening to me at this moment you know it feels overwhelming like how how could I do that with another

person in the moment and and I'm so interested

to hear you say I pick up on this with strangers because I do the same when I'm coaching right I can do this in a coaching relationship can I do this with my friends can I do this with my husband yeah I don't know that feels that feels very different and uh scary I'm I'm so glad that you mentioned that because no um you can't always do it in fact sometimes it feels deeply unsafe and if your

system's anything like mine sometimes discomfort gets whisked away because it will disregulate me to look at it and if I'm in a leadership position my brain will sometimes whisk these things away so that I can stay in my window of Tolerance so again it's not about always being able to do it in the present moment but it's it's something that we can pay attention to after the fact even like oh what happened

I kind of went all everything got blurry I got all confused oh I was angry oh my goodness I was angry and it did not feel safe to notice that so now that I've seen this if I want I can go back and make a repair I can say hey I just want to name that in that conversation I actually went into some anger which is really uncomfortable for me um but I really value this connection so

I just wanted to be honest about that's what was happening for me if you were wondering why I got all quiet and weird that's what it was um so again it's like I I can't always do it in the moment it's not always safe for people who um you know for people who like me have basically felt that's that's the systemic societal Norm was against them you know minorities people with um different sexual orientations trans people this will be increasingly unsafe

to do in the present moment and so you have complete Liberty to decide if that's something you even want to do and to do it after the fact if that's safer it's just an option yeah okay um and so and just before we sort of leave this where does it come from behind you in the book you mentioned a number of times this sort of cultural Evolution aspect and um and how we evolve to be around the

same pretty small group of people for a lot of the time can you can you connect those dots for us yeah it's a good based on what I just said it's it's you know I'm basing this on evolutionary psychology the belief that we evolved for for um you know millions of years in small packs or a pack animal and in that small pack if we got kicked out um we were gonna die yeah

that that's you know we weren't going to get uh adopted by it's very unlikely they're very Territorial and um so in the historical setting of I'm a in a tribe and I noticed that I am actually different than the tribes norms it actually is safest for me to try to fit in for me to try to be inauthentic if I have to because if I get kicked out of this tribe I will not survive and so

on well I don't know if it's unfortunate but that is still the way we're wired essentially you know we've been modern societal creatures for such a short amount of time and there's been some estimated 300 000 years where

the modern human lived in a tribe so it's just worth noting that shame will often feel like it's connected to survival and I think it will feel deeply unsafe to be different it will feel

deeply unsafe to name difference and in the world that we live in now that's really negatively impacting for lots of people because we're all still trying to fit into some kind of norm and so our society even though it encompasses millions of people will still broadly have things as we've seen like white supremacy and uh heteronormativity patriarchy these

Concepts will be adopted by most people because that's what feels safe even though uh in some of these cases it doesn't really matter as much like if I get kicked out of this yoga class I'm not gonna die but shame might make it feel like that but then it's also worth noting that for some people their differences really are having an impact on their safety and their quality of life people of color are coming to mind

trans people so it's it's increasingly less life or death the the the shame difference thing but it's not that's not always true and so you know sometimes I get really like you can be honest about your shame like you know it's safe but I have to remind myself that it's not always safe for for people that live in a country where it's illegal to be gay it's not safe to voice that shame and that truth so again I really want to

encourage people to trust their boundaries and trust their system and decide for themselves what is and is not okay yeah and um as you're saying that I'm thinking about uh sort of how do we move past this shame sort of shame-based world and uh thinking about in groups and out groups and how certain brands of politicians like to promote those differences right there's us and we're hard workers and we're deserving and there's them who are

not hard workers and not deserving of help and um and and the these divisions are stoked in in multiple ways in our society um and it seems to me that the powerful word is not to require everybody to be the same but to recognize that there are multiple kinds of differences and all of those are okay um do you see it the same way absolutely yeah um a culture that has more plurality uh

openness to disagreement openness to difference um I had a guest on my own podcast a while back Paloma Medina and she talked about how we get into this sort of mindset where everybody has to agree everything has to be one way uh and she was like no no like back when we lived in tribes each tribe probably had its own different way and it was like Live and Let Live and so I think there

is a possibility to get back to a place where we don't all need to agree on everything um I imagine there's sort of some core values of Tolerance that would be necessary to make this work so we'd have to kind of agree on a few key things but then beyond that it could just be so beautiful to not have to win every argument to to not have to be right all the time to just be like oh

this is the way I see it this is this is one possibility and not have to have this this mindset of convincing everyone to be part of our religion or convincing everyone to be part of our political party or convincing everyone to

think correctly yeah the the idea I would love that holding two things at the same time two two different things that both both of those things can be fine and true and good so okay um so shifting gears a little

bit into kind of the experience of Shame um are there common reactions that people have when they're feeling when they're experiencing shame yeah yeah there's a brilliant researcher named Donald Nathanson who wrote a book again based in affect Theory called Shame and pride and his observation was that there's actually kind of four broad categories of reaction that we tend to go into um when we're feeling shame and he calls it the compass of Shame and so at the

top of the compass he has avoidance of Shame this is the reaction where it includes things like denial repression and numbing like addiction type things so this is where we just don't want to look at the shame so it's a kind of uh psychological withdrawal from it and one way that we do that is I'll get drunk it's a very classic way to avoid shame it's I'll just get drunk and I won't have to look at the shame or I'll

pretend like everything's fine and I'll smile and we'll just pretend like I'm not feeling shame right now which is something that I am just girls through Facebook for three hours and just yeah that that's out there and not deal with it yeah so that's that's at the top of the compass and then as we move around on this side there is um the attack longitudinal line and on one end is attack self and this is sort

of the very classic reaction to shame like I'm the worst I'm so bad like I'm so stupid and this can also include like your inner critic it can include self-harm and it's basically blaming yourself for everything and then on the other side of the attack line is attack other and this is where we don't want to take any responsibility we go into blaming we want to shame back we don't want to shame someone else and this can even be like violence and

aggression in fact um you know brene Brown talks about this and James Gilligan who's a violence researcher says the same thing that shame and humiliation are the root cause of all violence so that's on the attack other side and then at the bottom we have actual withdrawal like physical withdrawal this is I will literally run away I will avoid you I will never talk to you again and um I'll I'll sneak off to the bathroom and hide

um things like that so it's um also worth noting that a lot of these reactions are very similar to fight or flight yeah and some people will add Fawn or people pleasing to fight or flight as well and I think you could plot that between denial and attack self I think that's where people pleasing shows up as in I'm not gonna tell you I mean shame I'm not going blue I'm just

trying to please you so that you know the the connection the harmony is everything yeah that's my go-to reaction um you're trained through the center because I read about it in your book I went all trainings as well and I know they talk about healthy shame do you use the concept of healthy shame yes absolutely I think that shame is a

is a very necessary uh emotion for us to have it's the feeling when I make a mistake and I actually think yeah that

was a mistake that's that's an expectation or an ideal that I really want to hold on to and it's necessary for me to feel bad as a way of orienting my system towards learning growth and change so that kind of Shame is so healthy and so necessary and is one of

the the beautiful things about being a human that we can feel bad when we've um gone outside of our values or made a mistake and we can use that bad feeling ideally as motivation to repair to make amends to fix it and to learn so that is healthy a healthy reason to have shame and a healthy reaction to shame the problem is when we get into what people

might call toxic shame um and that is when and this can happen in a few different ways on the one hand it might be that we make a mistake but then instead of interpreting it as just one mistake we think I'm a bad person there's something deeply wrong with me I'm flawed and when you think you're a bad person it's like there's no hope so it doesn't motivate growth change making amends

repair it's like oh I have to hide this or I'll be rejected or I have to like beat up on myself or I have to like dramatically change in ways that are unrealistic so that's the side where you're kind of being motivated to do things that actually deter you from making it right and deter you from learning it's it's more about hiding avoidance um Etc so that's a toxic reaction to shame but I would also say that there's

expectations that we can have of ourselves that are unrealistic and unhealthy the expectation that we're all going to be straight for example was an unrealistic and unhealthy expectation for me to hold so that's also a form of toxic shame for me these external expectations that aren't really my opinion but I've adopted them again as a child um and other expectations might be having to weigh a certain amount having to look a certain way that we can't look

um you name it the the possibility for unrealistic externally imposed expectations is huge and it really comes down to wanting to fit in with everyone else over wanting to accept ourselves so those are all kind of toxic forms of Shame yeah and I think what you're describing there is what you call in the book The One Two Three punch of Shame is that right but one of them is the feeling one of them is the thought and

then that drives us to do a certain kind of behavior yeah yeah yeah exactly the the first punch is that really unpleasant shame affect the pain of Shame and the second punch are these stories that we got from childhood I'm bad I'm the worst and then there's our threat response system or our Compass of Shame responses that instinctively push us towards a defensive strategy so we already have a behavioral impulse that's

really hard to avoid it's just you get hit with those three things and it's really hard to stay centered in your values to see that you have a menu of possibilities it just all that goes away and it just sort of you lose lose yourself so yeah that's that's what makes shame so powerful yeah in which those three come in and very often in our culture we're raised to

kind of do things the other way around to think that things happen the other way around right like we glorify rationality we think that our thoughts are everything that there is about us and that our thoughts are creating our emotions when actually probably it's the other way around yeah and the feelings are coming first and then that creates the story which creates the thought um and then thinking about the biological drives you know we have these

drives that have to be explained in some way and of course that reminded me of the Capilano suspension bridge story where the researchers had these guys walk and they were all guys walk across the capillary suspension bridge which is super rickety attractive female researcher at the other end offers her phone number and uh the majority of the men walking across this rickety Bridge want her phone number because they're misattributing their fear that they felt as they were going across the bridge for

desire and people who watch across a very safe low concrete bridge mostly didn't ask for the researcher's phone number and didn't follow up to caller so we have these drives and this you know this sexual attraction is an example of the drive in that study and we have we think we have to explain them in some way oh my explanation is I'm attracted to this researcher when actually the explanation is you were afraid because you were

walking across this scary Bridge um so it's so interesting that how you draw out this you know the feeling the thought the drive is more often than what actually happens but we think that it happens the other way and we try and make up these explanations yeah yeah I might even say that it's feeling Drive thought in some cases yeah um but the your point is exactly right in my mind that I'll think I want to be getting angry at

this person this is what I want because uh they wronged me when really it's like well let's just let's just backpack up a guy was feeling shame there was a disconnect you know disconnection between us I felt shame and these are just the most obvious uh thoughts and reactions to go with that and then when I see that and I just accept that that's okay it kind of opens up a menu wherein I can talk about those things because it's not

like I think this is where we get into trouble is we start to notice it all but then we want to reject it it's like oh well now that I notice my shame I don't have to do the impulse to be angry or attack other but I find that actually what I do have is just the ability to name it and see it but not to like necessarily get rid of the impulse it doesn't mean I have to do it but there's

like this this balance of accepting it all without doing it or without believing it that becomes the most powerful discernment in this shame punching bag name yeah so it's like it's fine for me to feel anger right especially as a woman conditioned that it's not okay to feel anger yes it's okay to feel anger is what we do with that anger that's the important part we can tell the other person I am feeling angry right now and still save ourselves

from the actual lashing out in anger saying something we don't mean which then makes all kinds of other shame inducing yeah anger is very healthy I'm discovering this is you know I come from a background where anger was shamed away anger was bad anger was violence and when we're in like people-pleasing type of reaction and

they talk about this at the Center for Healing shame your anger response gets frozen because it's it's like it's kind of the opposite of people

pleasing if I'm angry at you I want to create Harmony and warmth even if it's fake for my safety and that actually can kind of trap me in attack self um I can't see from that vantage point where my sh my anger is Frozen that actually other people have may be contributed to this situation and that actually might be very natural for me to have boundary setting anger where I say hey like actually this this wasn't okay

the way that went down so I when I talk about the reactions to shame it doesn't mean like they're all 100 bad sometimes um getting angry is exactly what we need to do I think the the way in which attack other becomes problematic is when it's misdirected anger so the the real anger is actually from childhood where I was never able to say hey it's not okay the way I was treated but I am now

misdirecting it in the present moment at you so that's an example of misdirected uh secondary anger coming out and that anger will just last forever in my experience because it's not addressing the real uh cause of the anger yeah but if if you have legitimately crossed my boundary and I want to muster the energy to say that I'm I'm personally on a journey of trying to find how to skillfully do that and support that okay

yes not not an easy task at all yeah no um okay so uh and I obviously we're coming back to Childhood again right the misdirected anger and um and I think that also has links to the idea of I should right or I have to I see that that idea coming up in parents all the time I should do this to to prove that I'm a good parent to make sure that I'm raising kids and and I'm

doing my part and if they if they get messed up then at least it won't be my fault right there's a there's so much shame uh linked to that and and going back to our own childhoods and what we want to repeat from what our parents did what we definitely don't want to repeat from what our parents did um so what's going on when we hear these when we in our own minds I I should I

have to um what do you see happening there yeah likely that's our own childhood conditioning it's our own Norms that we uh unconsciously accrued through childhood sense making culture family Norms peers Etc and in a way we're taking our own shame and we're putting it on our children in those moments when when we pass down those shoulds and and often that's how

we got them as well it's it's intergenerational shame and Trauma and so it can be very powerful to notice when that's driving your behavior because then you can own it oh I got really angry because you know when I was a child there was a lot of pressure on us to be quiet so that's just like a leftover in me that came out towards you but I I want you to know

that that's my thing and it's actually not I want you to just be yourself I don't know I'm sort of making this up as I go along but once again you're naming what it is and who's responsible for it so that the the young people

beneath you or the people that you lead can see that that's your stuff and they don't have to hold it for you yeah the shoulds that we hold are shoulds that were given to us

so often it's like our parents are like here hold these shoulds and we're like holding them for them and then eventually we internalize them and there are shoulds and then we pass them on to our employees and our spouses and our children so it's it's um a really powerful journey to start unpacking your childhood conditioning those messages and being able to see them and name them yeah and it seems as though they the the alternative to that

which is which is basically having somebody else decide how we're going to live our lives right our parents are these ex message messages we're getting from our external culture that those voices are deciding how we're going to live our lives the alternative to that is developing our values and and that we are the ones who get to decide what's important to us is that right exactly yeah and I I want to name that once again those shoulds aren't just going to

magically disappear so it's it's again a journey of noticing and accepting the shoulds so you can be like oh my I've got these old shirts coming up and now that I see them I'm going to look at my own value structure that I've created which is different because um I'm a modern human with my own sense making now and so I'm actually going to listen to this value and this is going to be some tension there might be a

wrestle and you might even be you might even hold it as an experiment you might even be able to say like I have a should right now that's like well I should always be really professional but my value in this moment actually feels like I want to be more vulnerable and authentic so I'm going to try that and let's see what happens I'm going to be curious what the impact is on those who are around me or working beneath me or

my children yeah and and I wonder if you'd be willing to talk a little bit about your unconscious values that you talk about in the book um and how how those show up and and how we can navigate those in the context of our conscious and chosen values yeah I think these shoulds are all going to start off unconscious and so there's going to be this like tension between the unconscious values that have been pushed into Shadowland like

um I might so this is a really interesting opportunity for shadow work here because there's sort of like a part of me that might be that I might judge is really superficial because it wants everyone to give me attention or something and so I'll shove that into the shadow but in the shadow it will actually be even more powerful so I'll have this unconscious value for attention but then I'll have my sort of conscious value of

um I don't know uh holding space for others or something like that and if I can't kind of own and see this unconscious value it will just sort of overshadow and make this value seem kind of inauthentic or something like that this this value will read I think as what they call virtue signaling or something like that so it becomes very important to look at the things that we hide from ourselves and we need to do that with a

lot of self-compassion and a lot of acceptance that it's okay for a part of me from childhood to want a lot of attention that makes complete sense and I can bring that part out and I can talk to it and I can be friends with it and I don't always have to put it in the driver's seat either so this is where Parts work becomes really important and I'm a big fan of internal family systems and focusing and other forms of Parts

work because it's just so true that I am not one homogeneous value of holding space for others no I have all these different values some of them I didn't choose some of them I have chosen as an adult some of them are from different ages and I want to kind of be able to see them all and welcome them all that's the most important thing because that's where I have the most menu the most optionality does that does that get at

what you were asking yeah yeah I think it does and and it sort of leads to a question about therapy and I know you're a massive advocate of therapy and I am too um but there really aren't enough therapists in the world for all of us to go and do this and and it just isn't access accessible to everybody and um I've been thinking a lot about Community healing right there there didn't used to

be therapists therapists are a relatively recent invention in human history um and and instead we used to process these things in community with other people um and I'm thinking about I know internal family systems uh there's a big thing on sort of self therapy and doing this work yourself or with a partner with a friend uh with somebody who isn't a trained professional um who can kind of witness us and our shame related feelings and and accept Us

in all of our Humanity um I'm wondering have you seen that kind of healing in action anywhere have you experienced it what are your thoughts on that yeah I love what you're saying you're absolutely right and I feel like even in the therapy World there is a movement towards uh more egalitarian kind of relationship anyway where there's more self-disclosure and things like that it's sort of like moving more towards a

Community member or a friend um so absolutely I think that in an Ideal World the time where we really work on our self-consciousness and our our self-awareness and our our vulnerability and our truth wouldn't just be one hour a week it would be a practice amongst our our friends our system our family so it's it's sort of like my dream that we would all be making a conscious

and open effort to do the healing in public with each other and it's not you know gonna necessarily all be the same again let's see each person their own healing and their own style of doing so but I I would absolutely love to see more um peer groups that do especially in a group setting group sharing um and but but always with an eye towards like this isn't just

an exercise or a ritual this like could be real life this this isn't just a practice this could be like the day-to-day so yeah I love that idea I don't know if I I'm suddenly feeling a little bit of self-conscious shame like a little bit like what did I just say I just said a lot but I feel like it wasn't I'm judging that it wasn't as juicy as I wanted it to be or as insightful So yeah thank you for for

living your value in the moment yeah so there you go so that's a little bit of Shame coming up and yeah I can feel it I mean and that's how it can be in a relationship you you just Illustrated the very thing that you were speaking about um and and I feel better see you are brilliant uh you know you can you can relax in in your Radiance and brilliancy um and and yeah that this doesn't have

to be my one hour week of Shame practice that it as we were talking about earlier with the matter conversations it can just be part of how we are in relationship with other people um and maybe then we could all feel more fulfilled kind of live in a way that that we actually get to express what's really going on with us instead of hiding away this this part that that feels shameful yeah and I think there is

a culture that's like oh you know don't talk about certain subjects it's not professional or it's not polite or it's not upbeat and I'm so a proponent of let's just talk about our shame let's talk about shame in theory let's talk about our shame in you know in the past and then when it comes up in the moment let's see if we can notice it and name it in the moment if that feels safe yeah even when that feels safe and

worth doing yeah okay so so you're leading us sort of into a conclusion here where I'm starting to think about well where do we start with this and I think that's an amazing place to start even just noticing it even if you're noticing after the fact right and I'm actually thinking oh yeah about sort of feeling triggered and you know when you're feeling triggered by your child's Behavior often you don't see it coming you see it after it's happened you look

back and you're like oh that's not how I hope that was gonna go and then over time you're able to create this little pause between the triggered feeling and the response and and then you can breathe and and actually take an an action that's based on your values instead of uh the the reaction that was coming in that Split Second and what I'm hearing from you is an echo of that process right is that I can look back

right now maybe and see oh yeah I I felt something that indicates shame maybe a physical sensation maybe a feeling maybe a drive a biological drive that indicates that I was feeling shamed and perhaps I can work towards noticing that in the moment creating a pause and then choosing a response based on my values instead of the instinctive thing that happened yeah do you see a connection there yeah totally I love that and I would also note to bring it back to

repair that noticing after the fact is great and you can make a repair if you need to so like even better perhaps yeah that uh I yeah I really want to emphasize the like a culture of repair is something I'm longing for where that's just built in it's just built in that leaders and parents are going to make mistakes and then they're going to come back and take responsibility for them that would be a beautiful culture

so yeah you will absolutely see shame after the fact more often than not because it's so unpleasant and that's great that's an opportunity to learn and if if you wanna if necessary you can make a repair yeah and it seems like mindfulness is a really key component to this right like being being absolutely conscious in the present moment about what is actually happening to me is a critical skill to be able to see to see that shame both after it's

happened and

and while it's happening yeah absolutely big fan of mindfulness meditation pausing slowness the longer I pause before I respond the more likely I am to see what's really going on yeah yeah is there any uh advice you would give to people who are just getting started here who are who are listening to this episode and they're thinking oh my goodness I I I can feel that there is so much shame in my life right now uh maybe they can even

identify the subjects that it comes out like it's about body image it's about you know my child a specific experience my child is having and how that reflects on me something like that um and and they're not quite sure what is what is the next the first next step to take what would you say to that listener this is what comes up for me in this moment um I would I would recommend some journaling around these this three

things that you just mentioned if they can if they can just find some time to look back at a recent experience where they think they might have felt shame and kind of like put themselves back into that and then I would really encourage them to just get curious about what does it feel like in my body when I revisit that so which is to say where where might shame live what might it feel like where is it in your chest

is in your stomach what is the shame affect sensation write that down that's a really important piece of self-awareness to start to kind of memorize that feeling and then the stories what are the stories about me that are coming up and particularly what are the stories as you mentioned before that I think people are thinking about me what are what are the stories about what people feel about me in that moment what are the stories about my place in

the social hierarchy in that moment so you can start to write those down that those will start to be themes you'll see patterns and then so that's that's just a great place to start now you're getting self-awareness about about how shame shows up in you and that kind of taking it further step when you have the space and time would be to look at those stories and say where did this show up in childhood are there some

patterns here what are what are the associations are there some moments that were similar where do these stories come from where where did this idea where is and and that's that's where you start to get into where the expectations and stories were born and that's the place where you can actually do some really really profound healing by noticing that those expectations and stories weren't really accurate and and weren't really fair for you to have been um burdened with and you can start to do

a journey where you let that stuff go yeah yeah and I I level that so much and and if I could add one step to to what you're saying about uh noticing the patterns nursing the stories nursing where the stories come from it would be to open up the possibility just to ask the question is it possible that my story is not true is it possible that there is another explanation for what happened here and I

think just the possibility that there is another explanation that somebody else sees it differently that the a thing

happened that wasn't actually our fault that somebody else did something and that's what created this situation or that this expectation this this story that we've been telling ourselves about this event in our head is it possible there's some other reason why that might have happened it opens up the idea that this isn't about me this isn't about my

shame uh I I didn't cause this thing and uh to for me that I think promotes an enormous amount of potential healing um just just to know that that possibility is out there yeah I love that and and I think that that goes back to that childhood experience as well like you interpret it like I'm bad that's yeah that's how it starts in childhood oh I'm the the interpersonal Bridge broke because I'm not worth interpersonally with yes but

then it's like what other story could be there what other what other what other reason yeah then that's so important yeah awesome where can listeners find you uh well I have a website uh it's www.discomfortable.net and on there I have um some podcasts and uh essays and uh links to the book if they want to read [discomfortable](http://www.discomfortable.net) the book and I also do coaching if people want to do a sort

of Deep dive into their own specific shame I do work around that and I'm I'm certified by the Center for Healing shame so I use their modality um and I also use some internal family systems work um which I'm currently being trained in so that's new and um yeah that's that's pretty much it awesome well thank you so much for being here and for writing the book it was really awesome to have this conversation so thank you so much

yeah thank you I really appreciated uh how prepared and detailed and deeply in it you were for this is really meaningful that I felt like I was really right there with you thank you um and just in in the uh spirit of the interview that we're doing part of that is because I enjoy the research and enjoy having an in-depth conversation and part of it is the potential shame of being caught not having done the research properly

and that you might say well actually I covered that on page 39. it's so nice to hear that for me to know like yeah we're both in here with our strategies to avoid shame together it's lovely I feel like yeah more closely connected to you super well I hope listeners can can take something out of even just that little you know 30 seconds of interaction and see you know this is how relationships develop um and so all of the references for uh

all of the books and materials that I read in preparation for this interview as well as the the broader content that I'm producing on shame as well as links to AJ's book and website can be found at yourparentingmojo.com forward slash [discomfortable foreign](http://discomfortableforeign.com)