

# Shame – Perception of God – What Can Shape It? How Does Perception Impact Emotional Wellness?

## Part 2 of 2 Part Series

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Shame does not simply appear in a woman's psyche, it is caused by something, perceived and real. This segment will explore various causes. Shame has been referred to as a *master emotion* and presents a challenge to the clinician frequently as negativity oozes from clients in self-deprecating remarks. Many spiritual and religious women express that they are a continual disappointment to God, feelings of unworthiness trap them emotionally and they believe that they are unable to change. The inability to change provides so-called proof of her lack of faith and spiritual inadequacy (Horak, 2006). After all, the writings of the Apostles compel mankind to be conformed to the image of Christ. "The Xerox Syndrome" (Berecz & Helm, 1998, p. 9) is a subtle and powerful attempt by well-meaning Christians to be like Jesus. However, the blueprint of how it is rationally possible to achieve is not as obviously defined. In fact, theorists have defined a "real self and ideal self" (Rickner & Tan, 1994). 8) which creates dissonance in the ego state that contributes to feelings of shame by not living up to a perfect standard which is perceived to be God's edict upon humankind. Albert Ellis, recognizing that pathology is distinguished by a disparity in thinking patterns of how one should live and how one actually does live, is notorious in utilizing therapy with clients which denounces, the *shoulds, musts and oughts* (Rickner & Tan, 1994). Perfectionism contributes to feelings of shame and shame compounds destructive thoughts.

Not so long ago in the Pentecostal and Faith Churches, doctrines disallowed physicians to prescribe medicine to the sick or that person was considered to be lacking in faith. Taking this dogma further, for a woman dealing with depression to even consider psychotherapy or heaven-forbid obtain anti-depressant medication would simply compound her shame. Women suffered in silence without anywhere to turn because if depression was voiced the woman was viewed with contempt as not having enough faith to be healed. Instead of offering empathy and support, fellow female parishioners could be heard exasperatingly saying, "She should just get over it – she must like being that way or she would not stay depressed."

It was perceived that there was no one to whom women could turn – no one who would understand – no one to whom this inner shame could be revealed. These scenarios emphasize the importance of the shift in the realm of psychotherapy, tending toward the inclusion of spirituality in the counseling room; a place where women can go in discretion to deal with any contributing shame issues and deal with the accompanying spiritual needs as well (Evans, 2005).

In his dissertation, Weaver (1997) studied the effects of religious dogmatism, internalized shame in pastors within a "closed ideological system" (Abstract ¶ 1). Dogmatism plays a role in organizing one's belief system and is defined as, "A content-independent way or organizing beliefs and making decisions. A person could be either open or closed minded, depending on the degree of dogmatism" (p. 4). Weaver's study revealed the interplay between religious dogma, perception of God and how this impacted pastors. Although this article has a foci of women's perception of God, Weaver's literature provided a good resource in revealing that within closed systems dogmatism is very impactful in forming a certain perception of God. Ganje-Fling and McCarthy (1996) articulated the value of spirituality in effort to make gain in therapeutic work, "Another obstacle that hinders spiritual development is religious conflicts" (p. 254). Conflict arises within a woman's psyche when there is a violation by any trusted authority, especially when the authority represents the church and is supposed to be a representation of God. This is a form of spiritual abuse and conveys a subtle lie that God cannot be counted on to protect. The woman ponders why God did not intervene to save her from this form of trauma.

### For more information on issues of shame

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