



# **GUILT AND SHAME IN THE CONTEXT OF GAMBLING DISORDER TREATMENT**

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## **Learning Objectives:**

1. Define guilt and shame and differentiate these negative emotional experiences as they relate to gambling disorder.
2. Identify methods to assess guilt and shame.
3. Discuss how results of this assessment can guide gambling disorder treatment.

# The Social Context of a Gambling Disorder



## Gambling Disorder Criterion #7

Lies to others to conceal gambling behavior = feelings of guilt and shame.

## 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.

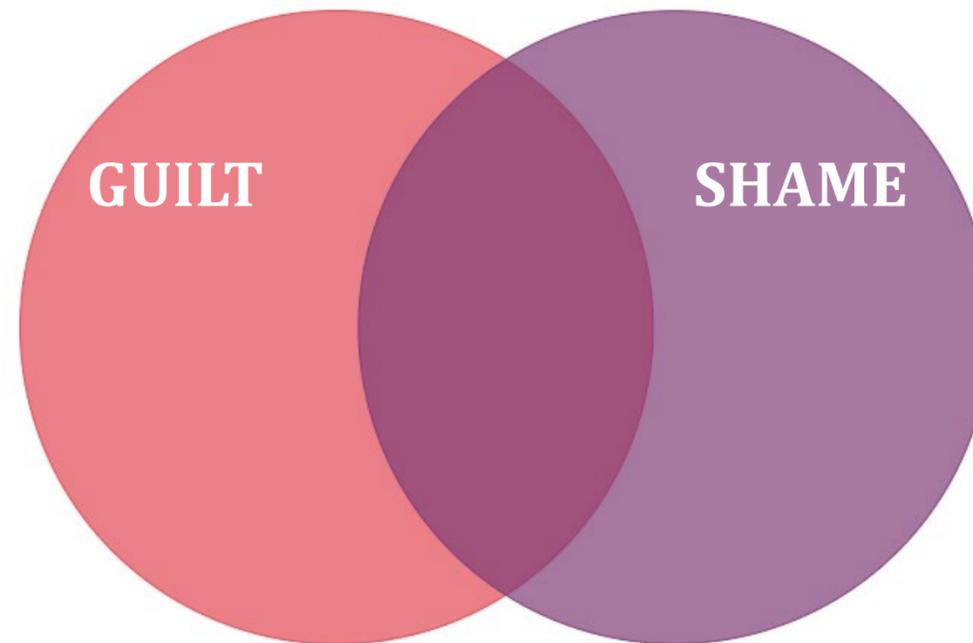
# Distinction between Guilt or Shame

**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.”



## 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 her money. Like my dad always said, “I’m a waste of oxygen.”

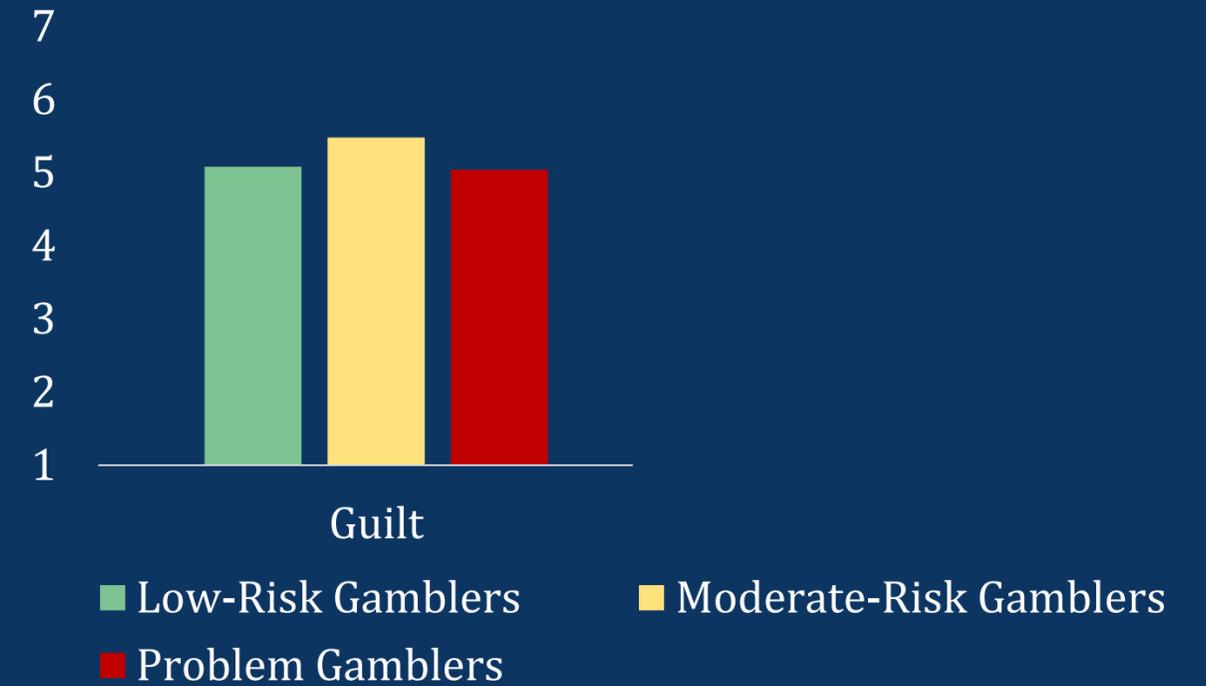
SHAME

GUILT

SHAME

# Guilt and Shame in Relation to Gambling

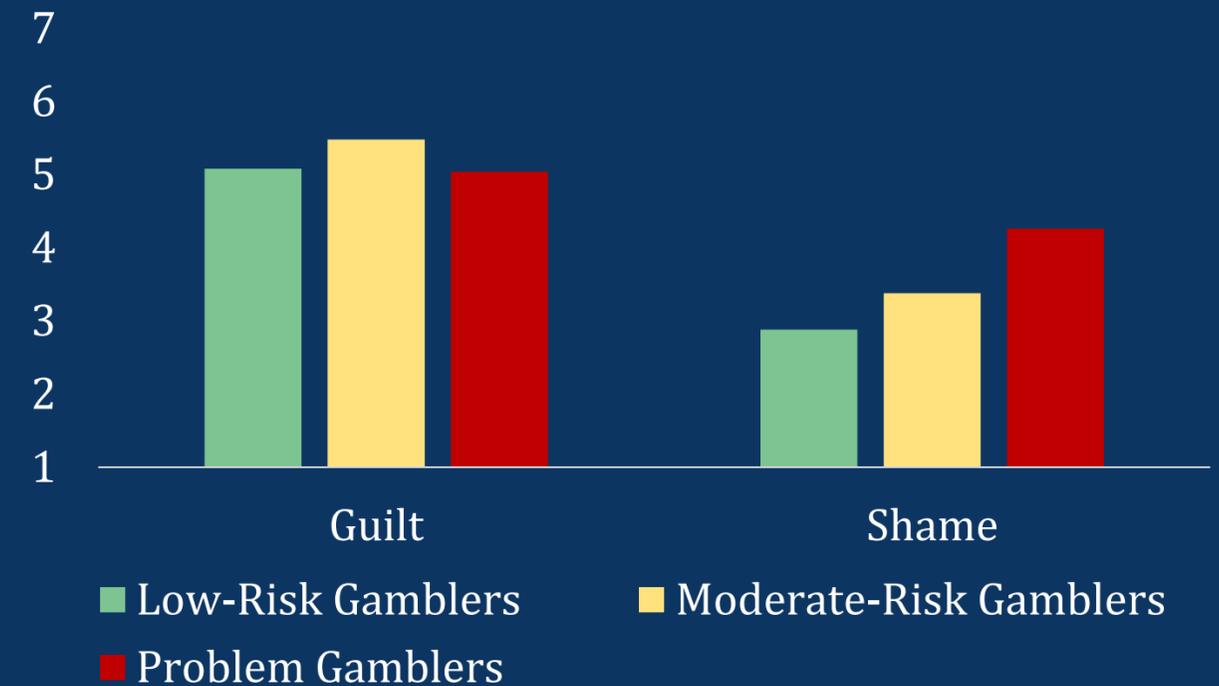
Many individuals who gamble, regardless of problem gambling severity experience guilt about their gambling losses.



# 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.



Several studies demonstrate that the 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?”
- “I’m never doing that again!”
- “How do I repair the damage done?”

# THE EXPERIENCE OF SHAME



# 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.**

Two Common Types of Shame:

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

## **Primary Adaptive Shame**

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

## Primary Adaptive Shame Example:

“Over the past six months, I withdrew \$50,000 in my daughter’s 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.**

**Think of an example of primary adaptive shame in your work with clients struggling with gambling disorder. In what ways do you see primary adaptive shame present in your clients?**

## Primary Adaptive Shame Example:

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

“The sports betting app 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!”

# Defining Types of Shame

Two Common Types of Shame:

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

## **Primary Maladaptive Shame**

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

## 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.



## 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 avoiding feelings of 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 and expression of shame?**

**What happens if we do not assess and talk about guilt and shame with our clients?  
What message does it send?**

Clients wonder if therapy is a safe place to explore negative emotions and aspects of their identity that might be judged.



**Assess to identify and label the client's feelings.**

**Guilt?**

**Shame masked as outward anger?**

**Shame? – What type of shame?**

**Norm the experience by providing psychoeducation**

**“Many individuals with gambling disorder experience feelings of guilt and/or shame. I am wondering if you are feeling some guilt about your gambling.”**

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

**“In what ways have you noticed feelings of shame impacting you?”**

**Shame can only be used as a motivating force for behavior change when the client perceives that repair is possible.**



The experience of guilt generates agency for corrective action.

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

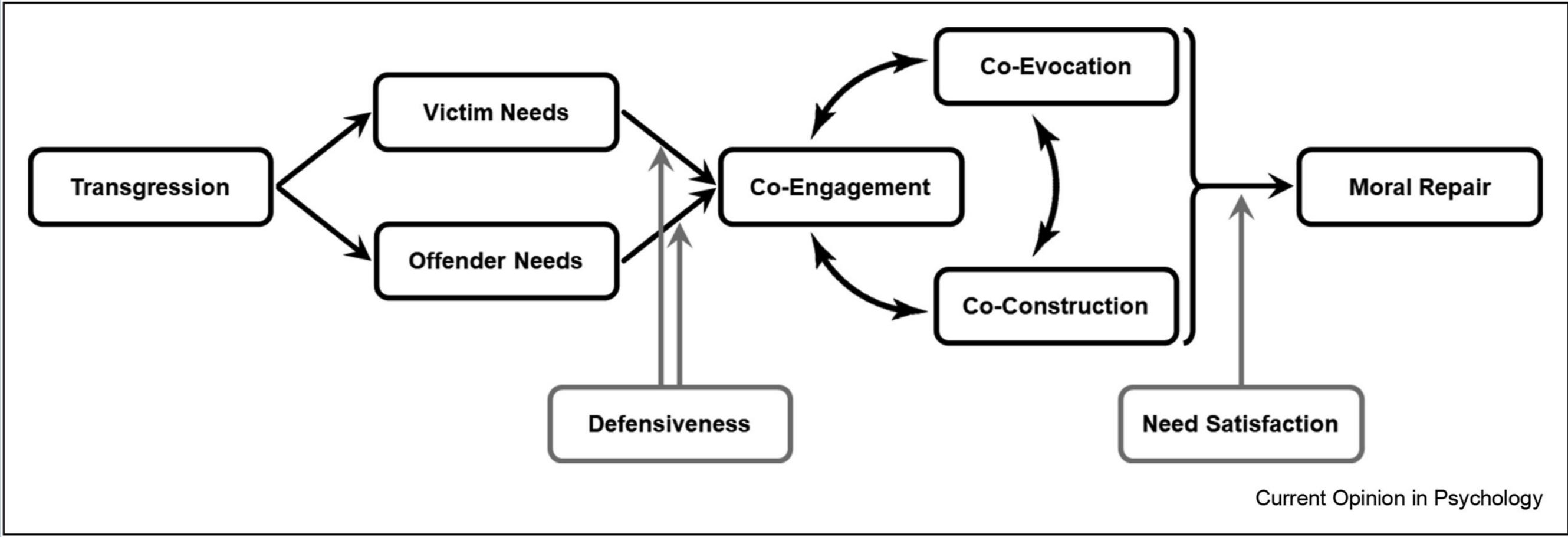
- Pros and cons of each potential action?
- Which is one(s) are more appropriate/realistic?
- Are multiple actions required?

## **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)

# Co-Engagement with Client & Partner



1. Can they sit in the same room and discuss what transpired?
2. Individual pre-meetings to set goals and expectations.
3. Rules of engagement?
  - a. Explicit about your role and who is your client (e.g., the relationship).
  - b. Review assertive communication strategies.
  - c. Scaffolding listening by the other party.
  - d. Check in with other party about what they heard.
  - e. Summarizing what was said.
  - f. Take turns talking about the events.



## **Transgression – Questions to Explore:**

- a. How did it impact each party?
- b. What was the meaning of these events?
- c. What narrative did it create?
- d. What values central to their relationship were damaged?

**What if the partner is gone? Repair is not possible. How do we address shame from gambling?**

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)

- a. Acceptance and Mindfulness
- b. Cognitive Diffusion
- c. Self-as-Context

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

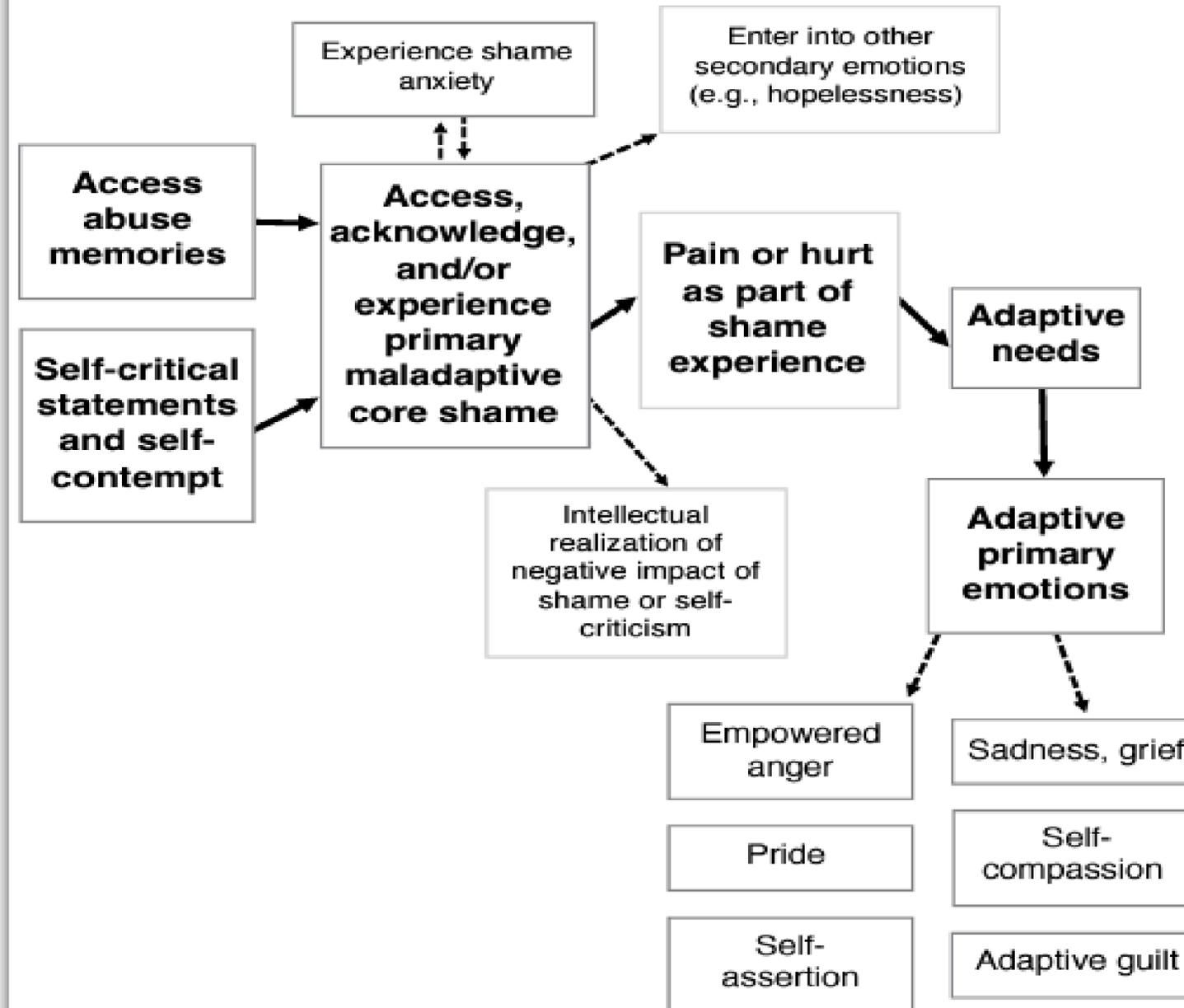
Therapist's task is to facilitate a new emotional experience:

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.



# Treatment Approach for Primary Maladaptive Shame

FIGURE 6.1. Model of Resolution of Shame–Client Process



Thank You!

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# External and Internal Shame Scale

I feel that...	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Often	Always
1. Other people see me as not being up to their standards	0	1	2	3	4
2. I am isolated	0	1	2	3	4
3. Other people don't understand me	0	1	2	3	4
4. I am different and inferior to others	0	1	2	3	4
5. Others are judgmental and critical of me	0	1	2	3	4
6. Other people see me as uninteresting	0	1	2	3	4
7. I am unworthy as a person	0	1	2	3	4
8. I am judgmental and critical of myself	0	1	2	3	4

Robin is a single 48-year-old Caucasian gay woman who lives on the outskirts of a city with 150,000 people. Overall, the political leanings of the area are conservative. Three years ago, a long-term relationship ended because of her gambling and inability to quit (despite numerous attempts).

At that time, Robin was admitted to an inpatient facility for suicidal ideation due to her gambling behavior, relationship loss, and depression. Her employer was very supportive of her during this difficulty time.

**Today**, she continues to mourn the loss of that relationship.

Robin is now seeking treatment again after her employer caught her embezzling money from the upscale fast-food restaurant she manages. She was using the money to gamble.

Robin reports relapsing to gambling 3 months ago. She gambles 3 times per week on the slot machines in the nearby gas station to escape her problems and de-stress. She works long hours at local chain restaurant often 6-7 days/week due to staffing shortages.

Robin owns and lives alone in the same 2-bedroom home that she used to share with her partner. She does not report many friends and few activities. Her parents live about 30-minutes away and she sees them irregularly; they talk on the phone every other day.

She declared bankruptcy two years ago and still owes \$55,000. She feels very trapped! She does not have much money after her wages are garnished due to the bankruptcy and paying her monthly bills. She is considering selling her house to get out from under the debt.

She is very spiritual and watches several online sermons per week. Her faith is a source of comfort. Yet, she is hesitant to attend church locally because of past experiences where she did not feel welcomed due to her sexual orientation.

She currently attends Celebrate Recovery semi-regularly but does not feel fully comfortable there. She has not disclosed to anyone in the group that she is gay. Lastly, her employer is paying out of pocket for one-on-one gambling disorder treatment with a therapist as she is a longtime employee. He supported her through her prior inpatient admission and believes in her.

**What questions do you have about Robin?**

**What are some of the sources of Robin's shame?**

**How does her shame impact her daily functioning and relationships?**