

Introduction to the Schema of Defectiveness

When the schema of Defectiveness gets activated in our system, we're usually filled with shame. This schema generally leaves us believing that we're flawed, that we're bad or evil at our core, that we're inferior to the people around us, or that we're completely worthless in some way. Our thoughts are dominated by our own internal critics, both punitive and demanding, which only contribute to the belief that we'll be rejected in some way if our deficiencies are exposed. This sense of "defectiveness" is constantly activating a debilitating fear in our system that revolves around our ineffective coping mechanisms for the shame we'll feel should these self-perceived defects be put out there for everyone in the world to see. We might be able to keep these "character defects" hidden away and private so they're rarely shared with other people, things like our own selfishness, our aggressive impulses, or our unacceptable sexual urges.

At the same time, we may believe that these self-generated flaws are actually available for others to see. Things like our belief that we have an unattractive appearance, or our own sense of "social awkwardness" that shows up whenever we're engaging in communal activities. This schema is predominantly developed because of exposure to excessive criticism and judgement as a child. Whether this criticism is perceived or if it's real is irrelevant at the time of the experience. It's also important to recognize that the schema of Defectiveness can be created as a result of sexual or physical abuse in your early years. Which can leave you with the experience of "toxic shame" due to the extremely inaccurate internal narrative that the abuse was actually your fault. It's also true that this schema may be generated as a result of parents that separated and an activated story of blame for the separation being down to you. This is despite the fact that you were very young at the time it happened and it's definitely not your responsibility in any way, shape, or form.

"I often felt like there was something wrong with me, and it was important for me to keep this hidden from other people, otherwise I would spend my life alone."

~ Steven Morris RP

For me, the Schema of Defectiveness was one of the most dominant schemas in my personality system. It was, more often than not, the primary schema that was the driving force behind every other story that followed on from it. This schema was also the reason I was left with a personality system that was filled with "Toxic Shame," and it was responsible for the internal narrative that gave me all the proof I needed for the reasons I was lonely, why I was an imposter, and why I would never be able to achieve the things I wanted to achieve, because after all, there's clearly something wrong with me.

The emotion of shame was also the trigger for most of my avoidant behaviours. The mere suggestion of its possibility would send my system into a state of panic that had me trapped in all of my addictive, compulsive, and obsessive coping mechanisms. Toxic Shame is only possible in our system if our own Internal Critics are pointing out our defectiveness. Unfortunately, while shame is definitely a necessary emotion for all of us to experience when it's justified, most of us have an awful relationship with it. This is mainly because of the way it was used to control our behaviour when we were children. The emotion of shame itself is not the problem though, it's the perception of what the emotion will do to us, and its impact on our own internal Vulnerable Child, that causes a strong desire to escape from the toxic reality we've now created.

Out of all the emotions we struggle with, shame is probably the one that people identify as the most problematic. When it's perceived as a problem, it's usually deep routed in our childhood experiences. It's because of this toxic relationship we develop parts of our personality that do almost anything to avoid its presence in our system. When dealing with shame there are a few ways that it can manifest in our behaviours. Regardless of how our system has learned to cope with the existence of shame, it is important to recognize its presence. Without this awareness we will continue to act with automatic behaviours that lead us to the exact same unhealthy outcomes. Building awareness for the stories associated with this schema, provides the possibility for change, and leads us in the direction we are heading to Live the Life you Want to Live.

Next, let's check in to see how you relate to this schema. Answer the questions below based on your personal experiences and the rating scale provided.

Never 0	Sometimes 1	50/50 2	Often 3	Always 4
Description				Score
Throughout my life, I have often felt like nobody that I desire, anyone who knew the real me with all my defects exposed, could ever love me for who I truly am.				
I often feel like there are things I have done in the past that I am ashamed of, sometimes I see myself as unworthy of love, attention, and the respect of others.				

Based on the scores you gave for the questions above, and the way you relate to the description provided on the previous pages, how Relevant is the schema of Defectiveness to you in your life? Add the two scores together to calculate your prevalence score. On a scale of 0 – 8, 0 being not present at all, and 8 being present in my life every day, rate your experience with the schema of Defectiveness.

My Schema of Defectiveness has a prevalence score of ___/8.

On the next page, take the time to explore your experience of the Schema of Defectiveness, see if you can identify how you feel when this schema is active, how you are thinking when this schema is active, what you do when this schema is active, and what situations you might need to be aware of that can activate this way of thinking in your personality system.

- a. How does the schema of Defectiveness impact your life when it is present in your system, what are the stories that show up for you, how do you know that it's present in your thoughts and feelings?

- b. How do you currently cope with this schema when it is activated in your system, in other words, what do you do when you feel this way, how do you normally behave?

- c. What are some new things you can do to cope with this schema when you are aware of its presence in your system, what would help you process the story in a healthy way? (Try to think in terms of the skill we learn in DBT)

- d. What would be a more balanced way of seeing the world when this schema is activated in your system, what would you say to someone you knew who was dealing with this type of story?
