

Childhood, Toxic Shame, Toxic Guilt and Self-Compassion

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Poster (optional)

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This study discusses the links between attachment relationships or basic needs fulfillment in childhood, toxic shame, toxic guilt and self-compassion. It presents the results of two questionnaire surveys.

Background and objectives: Feelings of toxic shame and guilt are common symptoms of many mental disorders. Both these feelings arise from self-referential processing and it is supposed that they (1) result from maladaptive emotional schemas developed during childhood in interaction with parents and (2) are connected with lack of self-compassion. The aim of this study was to determine the correlations between these variables in two nonclinical samples.

Methods: Two questionnaire surveys were conducted to investigate connections between (1) parental emotional warmth in childhood or attachment in adulthood, (2) shame-proneness or omnipotence guilt and (3) self-compassion.

Results: In sample 1 (N1 = 302) weak to mild correlations were found between parental emotional warmth, omnipotence guilt and self-compassion. In sample 2 (N2 = 263) weak to moderate correlations were found between avoidance or anxiety, shame-proneness and self-compassion.

Discussion: We hypothesize, on the one hand, that deprivation of basic needs in childhood as well as the child's efforts to fill the holes in the roles, leads to lack of self-compassion and toxic shame and toxic guilt-proneness in adulthood. And these transdiagnostic factors seem to cause many symptoms of mental disorders. The corrective experience with the image of "ideal parents", on the other hand, probably induces memory reconsolidation, changes the relevant emotional schemas, encourages the development of self-compassion and, as a consequence, many symptoms disappear.

Conclusions: Two independent surveys confirmed links between (1) parental emotional warmth in childhood or attachment in adulthood, (2) shame-proneness or omnipotence guilt and (3) self-compassion.

PhDr. Jan Benda (CZ)

Jan Benda is an integrative psychotherapist with 20 years of experience. In his practice, he uses procedures of Mindfulness-Based Psychotherapy, Emotion-Focused Therapy, Compassion Focused Therapy and Pesso Boyden System Psychomotor. In the last years, Jan started to do research focused on transdiagnostic factors in psychotherapy. He is particularly interested in the role of self-referential processing and the lack of self-compassion in the etiology of mental disorders. He believes that Pesso Boyden System Psychomotor (PBSP) procedures cause therapeutic change through memory reconsolidation and development of self-compassion.



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Antonín Vyhnánek is a student of psychology at Palacký University Olomouc.

