

I Thought It Was Just Me Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *I Thought It Was Just Me (But It Isn't)* helps you understand and better manage the complicated and painful feeling of shame.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



This week I went on a trip with my dad. We visited my godparents in Switzerland and our neighbors from over 20 years ago. He'd also planned a bunch of surprises on the way. There was only one problem: We were on the road for four full days.

I had everything planned and my daily Quora answers drafted and ready to go, but somehow, I didn't feel like publishing them. I knew I wanted to quit publishing daily once the year was up and my gut seemed to tell me I shouldn't wait. So I didn't.

What followed was a mix of feelings. I was proud of letting go of an outdated rule, while at the same time feeling ashamed for breaking my promise and "being unprofessional." Blinkist's summary of Brené Brown's *I Thought It Was Just Me (But It Isn't)* helped me understand myself a bit better. I hope it'll do the same for you the next time you feel ashamed.

Here are the 3 lessons I learned:

1. To understand shame, first learn to put it into words.
2. Practice critical awareness to react differently to shame when it happens.
3. You'll be tempted to turn your shame into anger. Don't.

We all feel ashamed at times. It's not unnatural and there's no need to apologize. Here's to learning to deal with it better!

Lesson 1: The first step of understanding shame is to define what it means to you.

We talk about our feelings all the time, yet we know quite little about them. When you say “I’m hungry,” do you know where that hunger comes from? What happens in your body when you feel it?

Now, hunger is an easy one, because it’s mostly physical, imagine how complex the situation becomes when you try to understand shame. In her initial research, Brené Brown interviewed over 300 people, after which she arrived at the following definition:

Shame is a deeply painful sensation that stems from the belief that we’re not good enough, and that this shortcoming will prevent us from being accepted by and belonging to a group.

In that sense, shame usually arises in conjunction with other people, for example when we seek compassion by sharing one of our vulnerabilities and end up being rejected instead. However, this lack of empathy can also come from yourself.

In my case, I felt embarrassed for not being “a prolific writer” any more, but the only one who could forgive me was me. One of the most productive steps you can take to better understand shame is to **think back to a few instances where you felt it and use those to define the feeling for yourself.**

Lesson 2: You can react better when you feel ashamed by practicing critical awareness.

The point of defining what shame means to you isn’t having some arbitrary definition locked and loaded to spit out in a quiz show. It’s mostly a small step towards helping you *notice* when you feel ashamed. Seeing yourself from the outside in any present moment is the key to adjusting your reaction to the situation.

Brené calls this critical awareness. For example when she noticed her audience dose off during a talk she gave, she said she knew they only had a short lunch break and that the promised pizza was most peoples’ major incentive to be there in the first place. Thus, she prevented going into shame mode and kept her cool.

Critical awareness allows you to see why and how things happen, as they happen. You get a chance to pause and see the big picture before shame takes over and freezes your mind. If you use this pause to consider the context of where the feeling of shame came from and address it directly, you can dodge the bullet.

Lesson 3: Anger is an easy outlet to channel shame into, but it’s the wrong one.

I spent a lot of time in the car with my dad this week. Unfortunately, I didn't have the critical awareness to see shame about my broken promise as one of the causes of my discomfort. Therefore, another feeling tried to creep up a lot: anger.

Anger is a tempting and easy cop-out when we're ashamed. Blaming others feels relieving in the moment and creates the illusion of regaining control by taking charge, but we all know how this ends: you regret your outburst, know it's really your own fault and ultimately feel worse.

In my case I mostly got angry at myself and outside circumstances: traffic, noisy hotels, lagging internet connections. I managed to remain Stoic and surely didn't let it ruin our trip, but admitting shame was part of the issue would have allowed me to get over it a lot sooner.

Brené doesn't condemn anger, though. She says it's a useful emotion – just not when it's used to cover up another one.

I Thought It Was Just Me Review

As a classic read-it-when-you-need-it example, I chose this summary because I figured it would help me with my current situation. It did. However, I bet there are plenty more insights from all the interviews Brené conducted in the book. If you struggle with shame a lot and often lack self-esteem, I recommend you take the time to check out *I Thought It Was Just Me (But It Isn't)* in detail.

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What else can you learn from the blinks?

- What shame looked like for two of Brené's study participants
- Why two-sided empathy is at the core of solving shame
- What you can learn from a protracted cold about shame
- How our relationships help combat shame most effectively
- Why TV and the media ruin everyone's day and what we can do to deal with it

Who would I recommend the I Thought It Was Just Me summary to?

The 15 year old who just got glasses and doesn't want to go to school any more, the 33 year old mother who's constantly doubting herself, and anyone who regularly gives talks or holds presentations.

