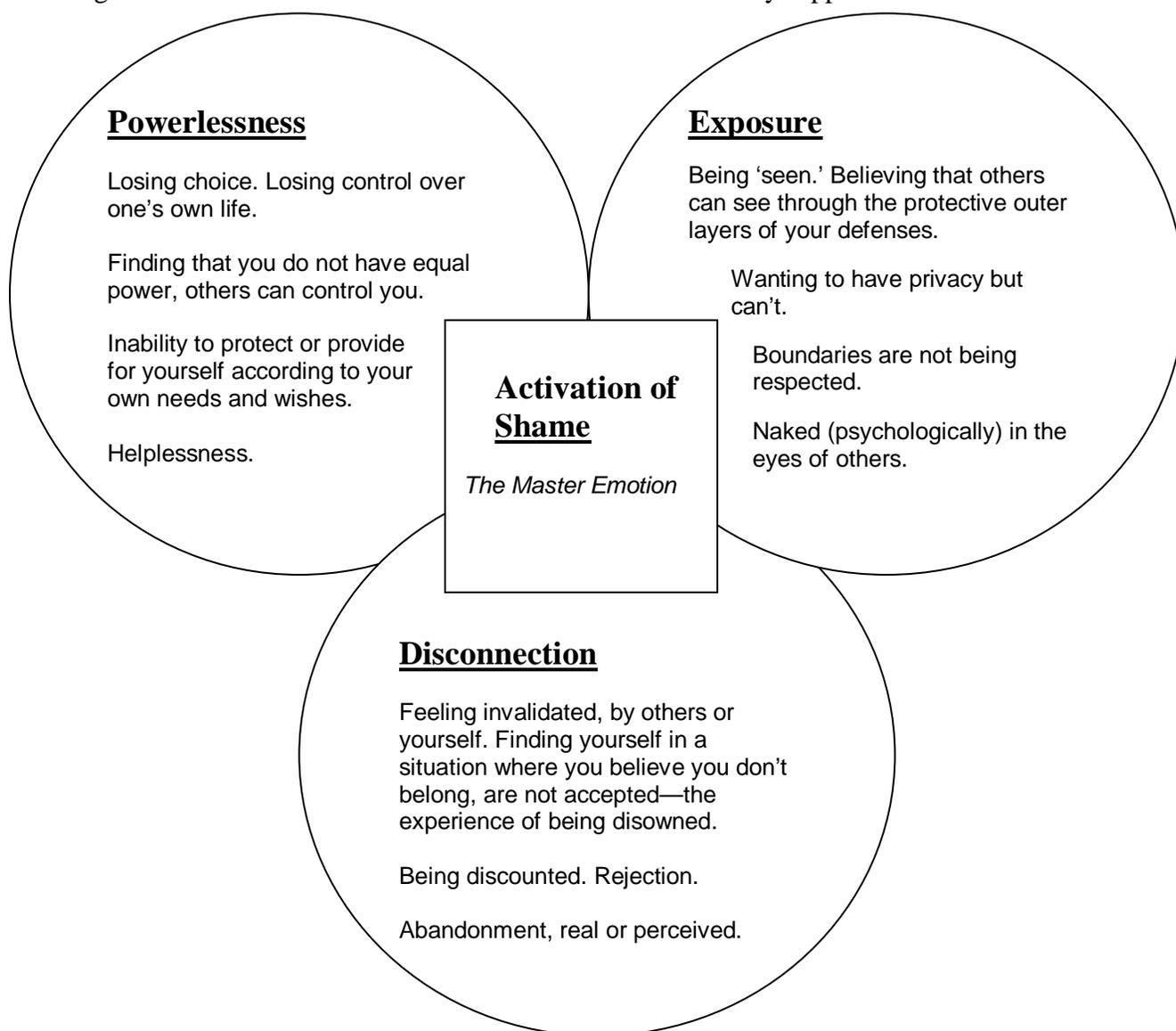


Shame and interpersonal behaviors

Shame can be thought of as a natural part of the way we are put together. It is an emotional capacity that is just as valid a part of us as is the capacity to feel other feelings, such as anger, happiness, joy or sorrow. The ability to experience shame is part of what makes us human.

Shame does have some special functions, however. It is important to recognize how shame interacts with other feelings and affective states. For instance, shame functions as a regulator providing “braking action” when we detect the environment is not sufficiently supportive.



Example #1: Seeing someone coming that you are glad to see, having an inner excitement but responding in a guarded manner inconsistent with how you really feel—the fear of shame has throttled back a fuller expression of the true feelings. **Example #2:** Excitement and happiness over some small success (receiving a nice gift at your birthday party, finding out you made an ‘A’ on your test, getting a hit at bat in a baseball game) only to then encounter a disappointment such as noticing your new gift is chipped or “I got an A but Jimmy got an A+,” or realizing the girls in the stands weren't watching you get your hit, they were talking to the popular guy in the stands with them.

Shame in manageable doses is a normal part of life. Shame becomes a problem when it is internalized over time and builds up into toxic levels that cripples or destroys our lives. When this happens we are at risk of becoming “shame-bound” or “shame-based,” where our identity has been invaded by an overactive shame. This is a condition that requires healing and recovery.