

# Understanding the Impact of Invisible Disabilities Part 1

## “The People We Interact with as Individuals Living with Invisible Disabilities” Zoom Presentation

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**My goal is not to affix blame on anyone — as that does no one any good – but to share what has helped me in my process.**

My interest is to empower individuals who are also living with an invisible disability — due to a brain injury or due any other type of organic, medical, psychological or mental health condition.

May you find the hope and courage — by listening to and watching this presentation — to both love and accept your reality and yourself.

### **4 Groups that I Interact with as an Individual Living with an Invisible Disability**

As a person with an invisible disability, I have interacted with four different groups of individuals over time.

The **first group** involves people who are completely oblivious to my being a traumatic brain injury (tbi) survivor or for that matter do not care.

The **second group** of individuals who hear that I am a tbi survivor, but because my disability is invisible believe that I am somehow using my invisible disability as an excuse. These individuals treat me with contempt, either overtly or covertly because I am unable to satisfy their expectations.

The **third group** of individuals knows that I have am a tbi survivor and that my brain injury has affected me in some manner, but still want me to function as an individual without a brain injury.

The individuals in the **third group** also believe that I use my brain injury as an excuse when I tell them I am unable to fulfill their expectations. The individuals in the **third group** refuse to accept that I have legitimate limitations and deficits.

When I state that I cannot do something because of my brain injury — or what some people refer to as a “head injury” — individuals within the **third group** blame me for reminding them that I have a brain injury.

The **fourth group** of individuals thankfully realize that I am a traumatic brain injury survivor and that my brain injury interferes with my ability to work with people, especially with those in the first three groups.

The **fourth group** understands that I am not making excuses for what I cannot do and accept and value me as a friend.

With the **fourth group** I do not have to be more than I am, nor do I have to continue to convince them that I have an invisible disability.

### **Give me Lip Service**

The **second** and **third groups** of people give me lip service when they tell me they understand and accept that I am a traumatic brain injury survivor.

Nevertheless, when I interact with the **second** and **third groups** of individuals, I feel less than because I cannot measure up to their expectations. Nothing I can say or do can convince them of my predicament – being disabled despite not appearing to be disabled.

**When I interact with the third group of individuals, I feel like I am between a rock and a hard place.**

The **second group** blatantly chides and ridicules me with disdain.

The **third group** has a degree of awareness and acceptance until individuals within the **third group** want me to be or give more than I am capable of giving.

In my experience, when members of the **third group** have an expectation of me — which I am unable to achieve — I also receive ridicule and covert contempt from them.

When I tell these individuals that I am unable to be more or do more they want me to buy back into their denial system.

## **Denial Systems**

Their denial system includes manipulation through shame, guilt, and emotional coercion. I have spoken of this denial system dynamic throughout *Second Chance to Live*. The denial system wants me to believe that my invisible disability is all up in my head. That if I just tried harder then, I would not be impacted by my brain injury and invisible disability.

### **In My Experience**

I have spent countless hours attempting to disprove the reality of my disability. For many years I internalized the impact of my disability as a reflection of my being.

I shamed, blamed, berated and criticized who I was because of my inability to perform as an individual without a traumatic brain injury. I allowed my Dad to treat me with contempt for many years because I did not know the significance of my invisible disability.

### **Trying to Figure Things Out After Our Brain Injuries**

#### **Being Vulnerable**

Being vulnerable can leave or open us up to being bullied. Being vulnerable can leave us susceptible to being bullied.

**As a result, we may be led to believe that we cannot trust ourselves.**

By not trusting ourselves we may be led to believe what other people want us to believe about ourselves.

**Through buying into those beliefs, we may find that we deserve to be mistreated and bullied.**

Such treatment and bullying can lead us to believe that we don't deserve to be more than we are led to believe about ourselves by those individuals.

Individuals who then take advantage of our being vulnerable.

#### **Intimidation Defined**

**Merriam Webster** defines intimidation as: to make timid or fearful; frighten; especially: to compel or deter by or as if by threats.

**Dictionary.com** defines intimidation as: to make timid; fill with fear, to overawe or cow, at through force of personality or by superior display of wealth, talent, etc, to force into or deter from action by inducing fear.

**Vocabulary.com** defines intimidation as: You can see “timid” in the middle of intimidating, and to be timid is to be frightened or to pull back from something. When you intimidate, you frighten or make someone afraid. To frighten” or “make fearful” is at the root of the verb intimidate.

**Intimidation can be mental, emotional, spiritual and physical or a combination of one or more ways.**

### **Challenged**

As a traumatic brain injury survivor, I struggle with a sense of inadequacy at times. At times I listen to messages that seem to challenge me for not being more than I am today. I am encouraged to be more, but for some reason, I simply do not believe I can be more.

Innuendos of shame — in these messages — trigger the notion that I am not enough, I don't do enough and that I am unlovable.

### **Controlled**

Unconsciously, shame seeks to discredit my desire to succeed in life through minimizing and marginalizing my best efforts.

Shame seeks to keep me distracted by a faulty notion that tells me that what I do and who I am is not enough.

**Shame seeks to keep me in denial.**

Shame seeks to rob my energy. Shame seeks to silence my efforts through criticism, minimization and marginalization.

As a person with a brain injury and an invisible disability, I allowed the message of shame to bully me for many years. The shame bully controlled and manipulated my every move.

**Shame told me that I was not enough and that my best efforts were never quite good enough.**

When I attempted to justify, answer, defend and explain myself to the bully, the bully would jeer at me.

**Shame mocks me through patronization, minimization,  
marginalization, dismissing and discounting.**

The more I attempted to appease the bully — through striving to do more to be enough — the more the bully would remind of the reasons why I felt inadequate and insecure.

With time and through my process I began to realize that no matter how much I did to appease the bully, the bully would still abuse me.

**Essential**

With time and through my ongoing pain I began to realize what the bully was doing to me.

**With time and when I got tired of being bullied, I realized that if nothing changed, it would remain the same.**

Consequently, I made the decision to examine why I believed that I deserved to be bullied.

With my decision, I made several other decisions. I realized that I needed to examine how the bully kept me distracted.

**I Needed to Examine**

Why I believed that I was a mistake?

Why I believed that my best efforts were never quite good enough?

Why I felt a need to justify, defend, answer and explain myself to the bully?

Why I had such a difficult time living in my own skin?

Through my recovery process and my pain, I found the motivation to confront the “shame bully”.

**Through My Process**

Through my recovery process I discovered the origins of the lies and how I had been set up to be bullied.

Through my pain and my recovery process I discovered why I had so readily accepted what I was being told by the bully.

Through my recovery process I discovered why I felt minimized and marginalized by the bully.

Through my recovery process I discovered how the bully used shame to keep me in denial.

**Through my process, I discovered that the shame bully echoed the voice of perfectionism — at my every move.**

The voice of perfectionism crippled, devalued, minimized and marginalized who I was and what I had to contribute.

Through my recovery process and my pain, I discovered that my ability to heal and grow in my mind, body and spirit were hindered by the voice of fear of failure.

### **Perfectionism**

Perfectionism cut with a two-edge sword — telling me my efforts were not good enough and that I should not try because I would probably fail.

Shame also stymied my efforts by threatening me with the fear that I would be abandoned physically and emotionally if I did not do things perfectly.

### **The Bully created Drama**

At the core of my being the fear of abandonment kept me enslaved by the bully.

**Because the bully was unrelenting, I had no idea that there was life beyond the drama.**

I had no idea how much energy I was using to avoid being attacked by the bully.

### **Energy Drained**

Through my recovery process and pain, I began to recognize that my internal energy was being drained in my attempt to avoid being attacked by the bully.

Through recognizing how shame was draining my life, I was motivated to look for solutions.

These solutions helped me to begin to heal emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

### **Three Rules**

Through my recovery process and my pain, I discovered that there were **three rules** that enforced the power of the bully.

As I began to talk, trust and feel my eyes slowly opened. Through my recovery process and my pain, I discovered how the bully gained access to my life and to my world. I discovered how the bully perpetuated the lie.

**Through my recovery process and my pain, I became aware of what was blocking the peace that I longed for in my life.**

I found that I needed to work through the pain to get beyond the pain.

I had to do the work to gain the awareness, to move beyond the awareness to a place of acceptance. A place of acceptance where I could stop losing myself.

### **Not Blaming Anyone – Including Myself**

With my awareness, I realized that I had to move beyond the pain through the pain before I could accept what had occurred to me — without blaming anyone.

I found that I had to do the work to gain the acceptance before I could take the action to stop being bullied.

**I discovered that I had to do the work before I could break free of the denial systems that contained the lie.**

Through my recovery process and my pain, I began to realize that I had been living my life through vicarious demands.

Through my recovery process and my pain, I discovered that – over the years — I had willingly discarded parts of myself in an attempt to comply with the demands of the bully.

### **Finding Freedom**

In my experience, I had to begin healing from the effects of shame that the bully foisted upon me.

**I had to break free from the illusion of power that the shame bully had over me before I could hope to live life on life's terms.**

Through my recovery process and my pain, I have discovered that I am still susceptible and vulnerable to being exploited by the "shame bully".

I have also found that my susceptibility and vulnerability — to being exploited by the "shame bully" — increases when I am hungry, angry, lonely, tired or sick.

**Through recognizing when I am more susceptible and vulnerable to the "shame bully", I am able to take the necessary steps to take care of myself.**

Through being aware of the lies, distortions and illusion of power purported by the shame bully I was able to address a vital part of my recovery process — denial.

A vital part of my recovery process evolved because of my emotional, mental and spiritual pain.

**Because of my pain and anguish. I was motivated to address both my denial and the denial of family and friends.**

In my experience, I found that as I addressed my denial and the denial systems of family and friends, I experienced a new freedom. The freedom to accept my limitations, while not beating up on myself for them.

**No Longer have to be Held Hostage**

The good news is that I no longer need or have to be held hostage by the bully.

I no longer need to believe that I deserve to be bullied.

**I no longer need to internalize the lie that I am not enough and that I do not do enough.**

I no longer need to live in denial or defend other people's denial. I no longer need or have to discard parts of myself.

**I no longer need to stoop to the vicarious demands of other people's expectations.**

I no longer need to carry other people's shame or sadness. I no longer need to be bullied by a fear of abandonment.

**I no longer need to sit and be minimized, marginalized, discounted or dismissed by the bully.**

By accepting that I am a work in progress — not a work in perfection — I have changed the way that I look at my process.

**Consequently, I have had a change of perspective. I now look at myself and my experience in a different way.**

I now realize that I no longer have to answer, defend, justify or explain myself to the bully.

**I now realize that I no longer have to be accountable to the bully.**

With my change of perspective — I now realize that my circumstances and experiences are meant to build me up, not to be used to devalue and shame me.

**I now realize — as Eleanor Roosevelt poignantly stated — that no one can make me feel inferior without my consent.**

“No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.” Eleanor Roosevelt

### **In Conclusion**

In my experience, I had to address how the bully (shame) crippled my life and my relationships. In my experience, I knew that something needed to change.

In my experience, I became willing to do whatever was necessary — because I no longer wanted to be bullied.

**Because I no longer wanted to be bullied, I looked for solutions.**

Because I no longer wanted to be crippled by the bully (shame) I reached out for help.

**In my reaching out for help I found a new way of living.**

I found solutions for living life on life's terms.

In my experience, I discovered solutions that help me to live life on life's terms. A book that helped me understand and find solutions is **Shame and Guilt – Masters of Disguise by Jane Middleton Moz**. This book helped me to understand why I abused myself and allowed other people to abuse me through the “shame bully”.

For many years I did not know how to distinguish between guilt and shame.

Through my recovery process I learned something that changed my life and my world.

### **Let me share what I learned with you.**

Guilt is different than shame. If you made a mistake you can make an amends and thus resolve the guilt.

Shame on the other hand is a being wound which leads the person to believe that they just don't make mistakes, but that they are a mistake.

### **Compensating for a Sense of Shame**

Shame can lead the individual to compensate by over achieving (develop a sense of grandiosity) or to under achieve (develop a sense of helplessness) can be seen in individuals who have been bullied by shame

Being bullied by shame can lead the individual to develop a learned helplessness, which can in turn undermine the individual's desire, ability and their motivation to succeed.

### **Grandiosity and Learned Helplessness**

Grandiosity (stiving to be more than so as to not feel less than) and a Learned helplessness (that I cannot do anything to change my situation and circumstances)

**Both grandiosity and a learned helplessness perpetuates and gives power to the “shame bully”.**

A learned helplessness occurs when an individual is subjected to what it perceives to be “adverse” stimulus that is believed to be inescapable. With this “stimulus” the individual is led to believe that they are helpless. Even when opportunities to escape or change are presented, this learned helplessness will prevent any action.