Addictions and Compulsions: An IFS Perspective

Seen as a process between polarized parts:

- **Managers and Firefighters. In extremes, intense power struggle, roles carried out in more extreme and intense ways**
- **A cycle the escalates**
- **Shame being the core (exiles)**
- **Fear of overwhelm**

Addictive and Compulsive Process: An IFS Perspective

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IFS Therapy with Addiction/Compulsions

- **Identify Parts and the inner conflict (name the inner constellation of parts involved)**
- **Start with either FF or Mgr**
- **Build trusting relationship – Self to Part – usually begins with direct access (The Self of the therapist)**
- **Be a hope merchant**
- **Get therapist Managers to step back**

3 Characteristics of an Addictive Relationship (Mike Elkin)

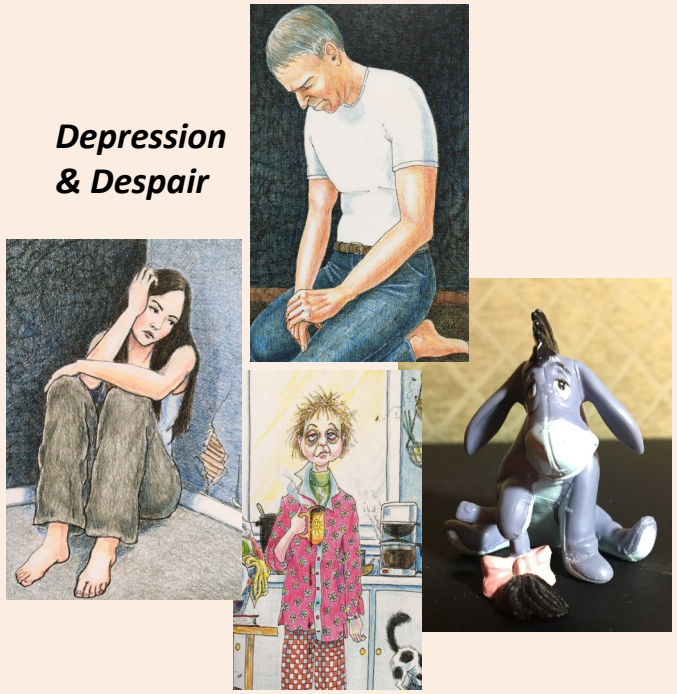
1) Shame and deceit (secrecy)

2) Can't stop behavior, even when you recognize it's harmful (can't control)

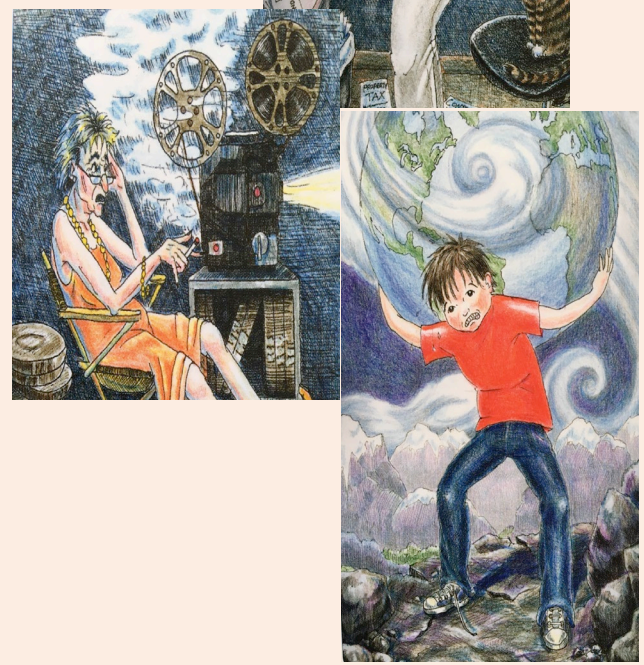
3) Undermines relationships – internal and external (connection, trust and predictability)

The Many Constellations of Parts

Depression & Despair



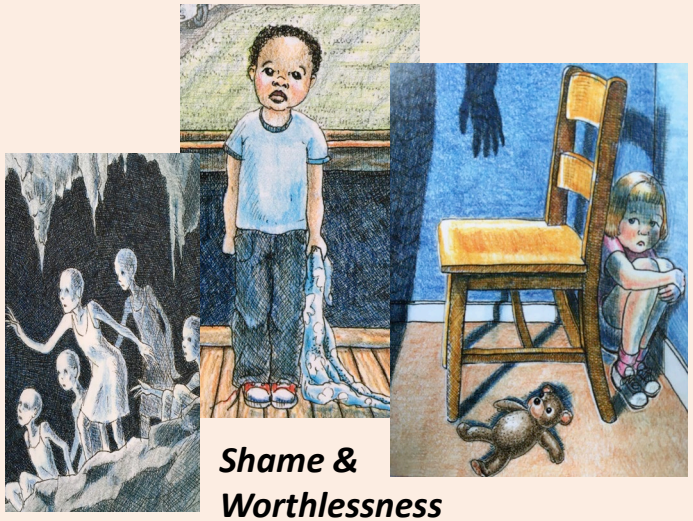
Judge & Critic



Anxiety and Worry

Reactive & Compulsive

Shame & Worthlessness



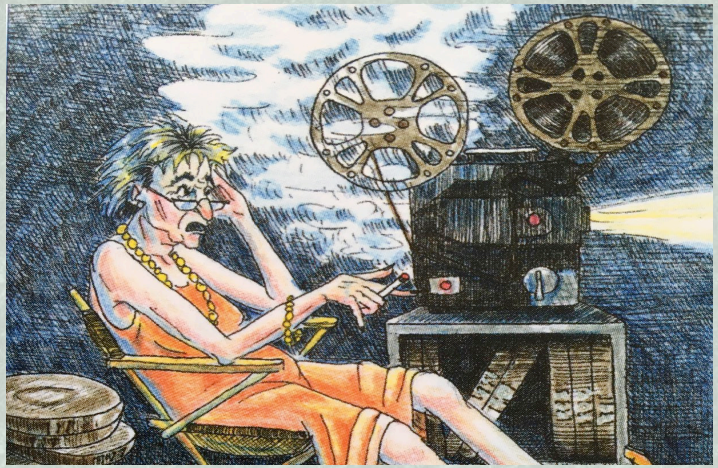
IFS and Depression

IFS views depression as a parts' coping mechanism in reaction to another part's extreme behavior or feelings in the internal system

Depression is best understood as operating within a constellation of parts. We view depression as a relational process

Anxiety; What Is It And What Causes It?

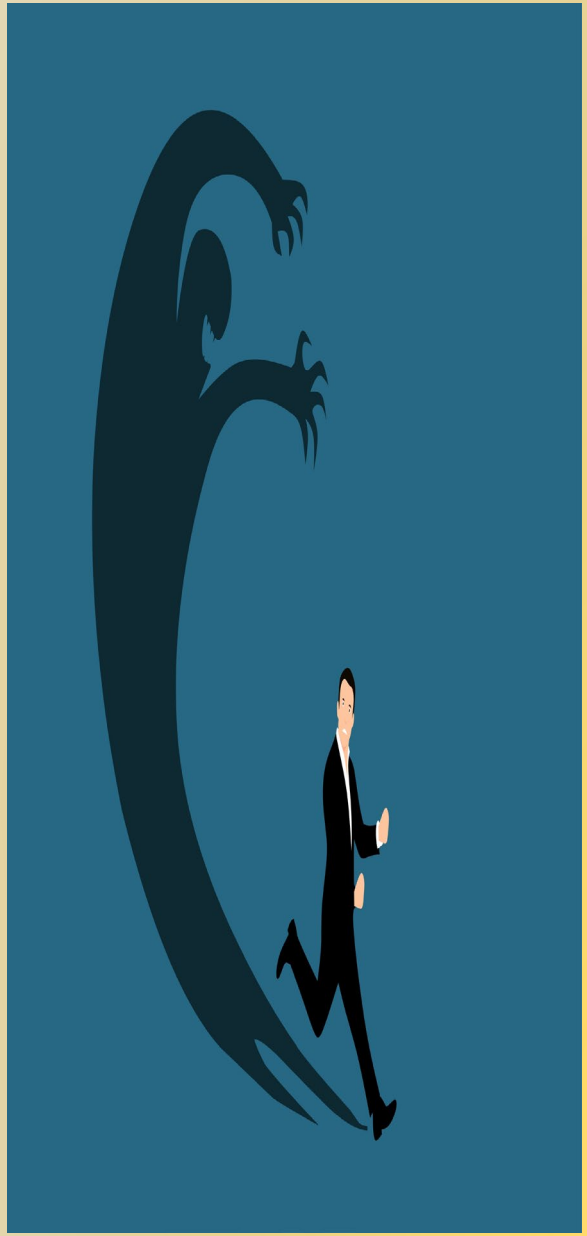
Anxiety



- It’s an emotion with a cognitive, physical and behavioral level of response
- Signals our nervous system to take action and moves into fight, flight or freeze

Anxiety

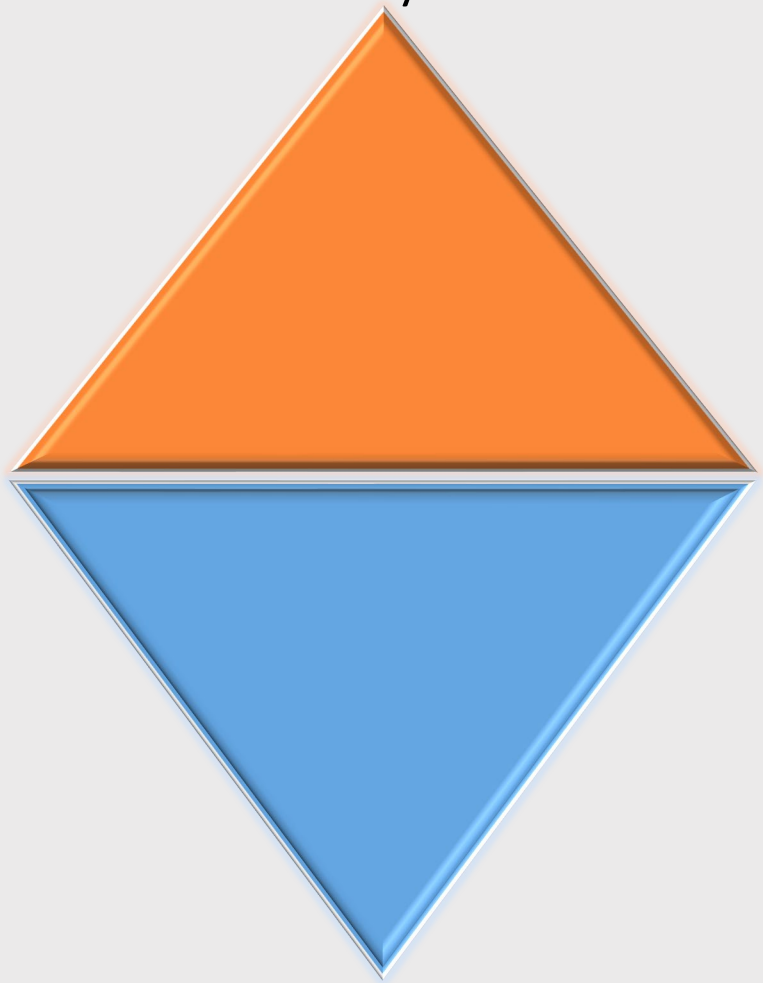
- The more exiles, the more anxiety
  - Protectors fear of exiles vulnerability/feelings
    - Triggered exiles resulting in more controlling, perfectionism and feelings phobia, adding to the anxiety
      - A result of conflict in the system
        - Future focus of managers
        - Anxiety as a distractor
          - Anxiety as an exile
            - Fear



Parts Fears

- Rejection
- Failure
- Loss and Abandonment
- Not being good enough
- Asking for too much/being too much
- Invisibility
- Being seen
- Worthlessness
- “Fear of having your badness witnessed”

FF = manic = brings energy to the system



Gloom/doom
Mgt or FF
Closes down the bodies energy

Critic = Manager
Beats up with judgments and messages of worthlessness

Exile = shame and worthlessness

A. Sinko

IFS and Grief

- Grief is best understood as a Constellation of parts around the issues of loss
- Grief is a feeling and a process
- Thinking of grief as a process of many parts, not stages to mourn through
- The power of reframing

- Not necessarily parts stuck in extreme role

GRIEF

Grief is a natural and normal response to loss. It is a process that is both universal and personal. It's the emotional suffering you feel when something or someone you love is taken away.

MOURNING

Mourning is the outward expression of grief.

There is no one right way, mourning has many flavors.

Frequently, the way we express our outward grieving is culturally determined.

The difference between Grief and Depression
An IFS Perspective

- **Grief – is not a parts' coping mechanism – nor a part stuck in an extreme role**
- **Parts can have their own grief, be responding to grief in the system and have a fear of grief and grieving.**
- **How do our parts cope, if we do not allow the flow of feelings and expression of grief?**

- **The symptoms of acute and complicated grief in the body and psyche can be/feel very similar to symptoms of depression and anxiety**

- **Frequently, people say they are depressed when in fact they are grieving. Anxiety is a normal response to the unknown**

- **Grief involves feelings of deep sorrow (and other feelings) that are usually caused by a specific event, person or situation**

- **Depression, by contrast, is a lack of feelings, a numbness and is frequently reported to be of unknown origin**

How we move through grief and what helps from a parts perspective

- **Identify & normalize feelings that are being experienced are a reaction to loss**
- **Name the loss(es)**
- **Let parts know they need support - seek out the right kind of social support**
- **Inform parts our intention is to help them process their grief, not “get over it”**
- **Certain losses there is no “getting over”**
- **Work with the protective parts who have fears of overwhelm**

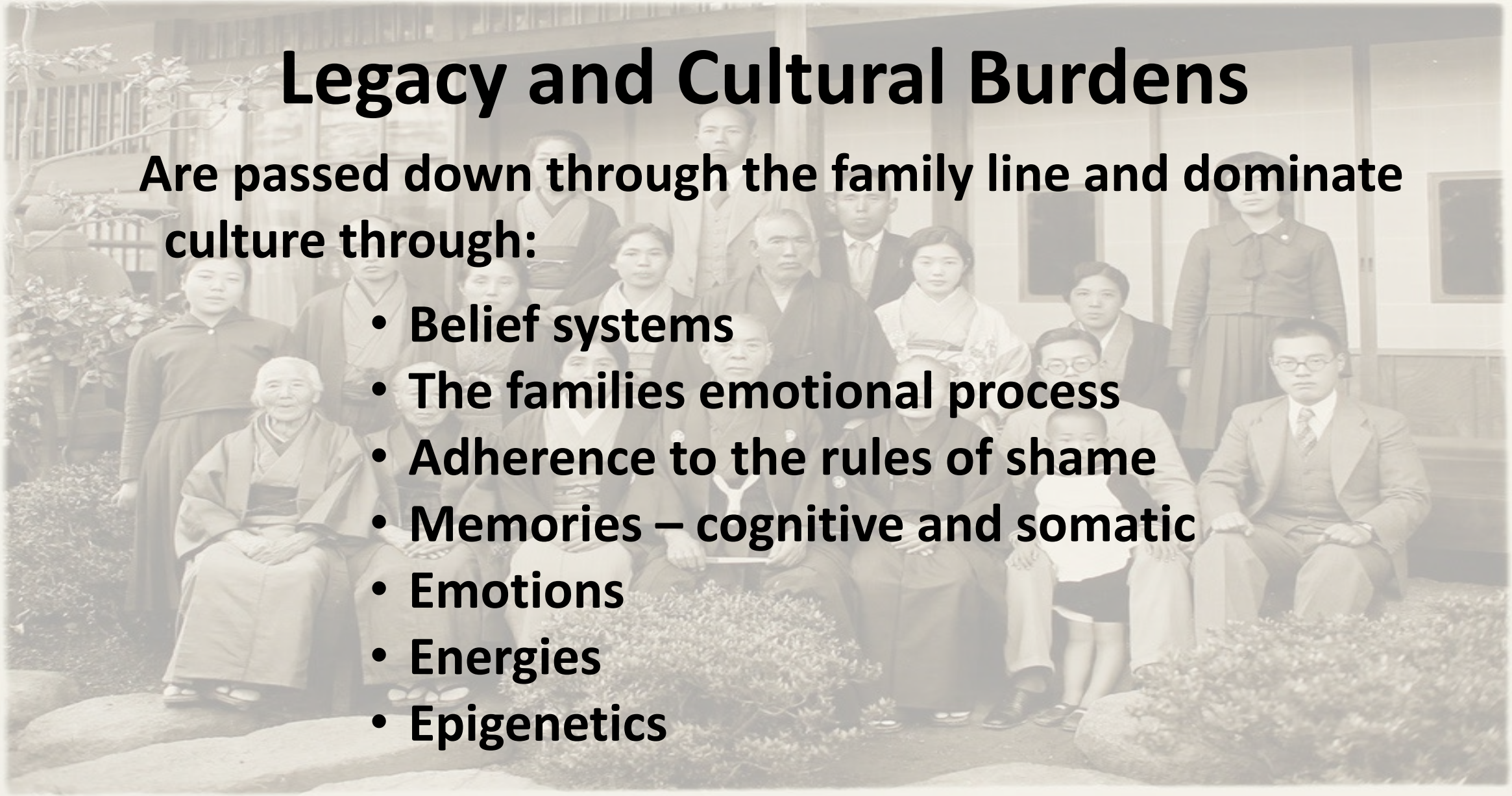
- **Educate about feelings: no moral meaning to feelings - are not right or wrong, they are information, they move through - if allowed**
- **Different parts need different types of help with their grief, be curious, just ask**
- **Parts need to share their stories and talk about their feelings – encourage group sharing, grief *Requires* witnessing**
- **Check for polarizations and legacy burdens**
- **Help create therapeutic rituals**

How to move through grief, cont.

- Grief has cords that can connect to past unresolved grief or future losses.
- Educate parts about the grieving process and what to expect.
  - We can’t control the grief process, trying to shut it down robs us
  - Mourning takes time, we can’t hurry it up, no time limits
- Resist comparing your grief to other people's
- Spend time grieving intentionally – What would this look like?
- Allow and encourage parts to feel more than just sadness
  - Generally, the pain of grief lessens as time passes, adaptations to the loss are made - if feelings are allowed.
- Take self-care seriously

Legacy and Cultural Burdens

Legacy Heirlooms



Legacy and Cultural Burdens

Are passed down through the family line and dominate culture through:

- **Belief systems**
- **The families emotional process**
- **Adherence to the rules of shame**
- **Memories – cognitive and somatic**
- **Emotions**
- **Energies**
- **Epigenetics**

Multi-generational Transmission

- Overt and convert
- Exiling of anything that is deemed unacceptable or shameful
- Family and Culture process of silence and secret keeping maintains and perpetuates legacy burdens
- The more stigma the greater potential of shame and silence
- Over generations stories and context can be lost but the feeling can be passed down through the generations

Rules of Shame – "The Manager Creed" = Never Again

1. **Control:** Be in control of all behaviors and interactions
2. **Perfection:** Always be "right", do the "right" thing
3. **Blame:** if something does not happen has you plan, blame (self or others)
4. **Denial:** deny feelings, especially negative or vulnerable ones
5. **Unreliability:** do not expect reliability or constancy in relationships, watch for the unpredictable
6. **Incompleteness:** Don't bring transactions to resolution or completion because you might have to face what feelings or honest revelations you're protecting against.
7. **No Talk:** Don't talk openly and directly about shameful, abusive, or compulsive behavior.
8. **Disqualification:** When disrespectful, shameful, abusive or compulsive behaviors occur, disqualify it, deny it, or disguise it.
9. **Compare:** Yourself to others and highlight how you are not as accomplished, attractive, smart – or have a level of privilege so you don't deserve to feel the way you do. Be acutely aware of how you don't measure up.

Adapted from Evan Imber-Black's 8 Rules of Shame from Secrets in Families and Family Therapy (1993, p. 37)

Indications there may be a legacy burden:

- When symptoms persist after unburdening or return after unburdening
- Client states “my mom, dad, grandmother, has this too”
- Unrelenting symptoms
- A client’s personal history does not support the degree of their symptoms

Indications there may be a Legacy Burden:

- Repeating language of fear and shame
- During unburdening a client witnesses memories that are not theirs
- Fear that seems irrational in the context of the clients life, fear of illness, postpartum depression, abandonment, starvation, violence, not enough, early death, etc

Cultural Burdens

Are absorbed as parts of us take on the messages of dominate culture.

These burdens are systemically reinforced in our cultural values & institutions

Oppressed groups carry heavier burdens than the dominate culture

STOP YOUR CRUEL OPPRESSION OF THE JEWS.

ROOSEVELT (*to the czar*)—"Now that you have peace without, why not remove his burden and have peace within your borders?"

Everyone in a society is affected by cultural burdens, though not equally

- Oppressed groups carry heavier burdens
- The dominate group has privilege. A dynamic of privilege is blocked awareness of inequities.
- Everyone has internalized biases; some are conscious and some are unconscious or implicit
- Young parts of us take on the messages of the dominant culture and our family of origin

Cultural Legacy Burdens

USA's 4 Main Burdens

- Racism
- Patriarchy
- Materialism
- Individualism

Richard Schwartz

Working with Legacy Burdens

Some Questions to Ask:

- Do your symptoms make sense to you given your life experiences?
- Does this energy belong to you and you alone?
- When did you take on this belief or burden? If answer is “always” suspect a legacy burden
- Who else in your family has these symptoms? (anxiety, depression, shame, fear, grief, etc.)

Once a Legacy Burden has been Identified:

- Ask what % of the burden is inherited
- Ask parts if there is any reason they need to hold on to the % of the burden that is *inherited*
    - Address fears and concerns of unburdening inherited %

Main Protector Fears Working With Legacy Burdens

- Loss of connection
- Loss of identity
- Disloyalty
- Burdening the ancestor by passing the burden back

Working with Cultural and Legacy Burdens

Using the IFS protocol:

- **Identify**
- **Unblend**
- **Address protectors fears & concerns**
- **Witness**
- **Unburden**
- **Invitation of lost or needed qualities**
- **Integration**
- **Appreciation**