

Definition of Shadow

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What Do I Mean When I Use The Word Shadow?

Understanding Wound, Shadow Story & Shadow Behavior

Everything I ever did, I chose to do. I chose wittingly; I chose unwittingly. There are crimes of commission and crimes of omission - I caused things to happen or I allowed things to happen - but everything I ever did, I chose to do.

This work is NOT about owning my choices. This work is about coming to understand how each of my choices has SERVED ME. Each choice was a 'win' for me in some way, either serving my Shadow or serving my Gold.

Gold nurtures; Shadow sabotages. But Gold and Shadow are NOT 'Good' and 'Bad'; each has my interests at heart. My Gold is the things I aspire to in life, while my Shadow is simply trying to protect me, to get me safely through today. In the long run, however, my Shadow sabotages my Gold.

Definition of Shadow

Shadow is based on three (3) interrelated concepts: Wound, Shadow Story and Shadow Behavior.

Wound is an event or series of events. It is something that happened, or my imprecise recollection of what happened. Wound is data, about actions or fact, not judgments.

My WOUND is that when I was five years old my father would say to me, "You will never amount to anything; you will never be a quarter of the man my father (my deceased grandfather, who I was named after) was." He would beat me almost every day — I waited in fear each day expecting to be terrorized when he arrived home — and during those long beatings, my mother would run and hide.

Shadow Story is the belief I took on about myself in response to the Wound, "The Story I Tell Myself About Me, About How Things Are And How Things Should Be." The Shadow Story helps the child make sense of his existence, make sense of his Wound, and allows him to survive the trauma of his childhood.

In response to that Wound, I came up with a SHADOW STORY that I told myself about me, and about how things are and how things should be. The story I told myself in response to my Wound had four parts: that I was never going to amount to anything; that I was unlovable; that I was undeserving; and that I was not worth protecting. This story worked for me as a child; it helped me make sense of my existence while I was being beaten by my father and abandoned by my mother. It got me safely through my childhood, and perhaps saved my life by allowing me to continue breathing, without hanging myself from a doorknob.

Shadow Behavior is continuing to hold onto and act out my Shadow Story; to sabotage myself; to keep myself in my safe, familiar and comfortable Shadow place.

The problem is that to this day, I continue to hold onto that (Shadow) story—to believe that I'll never amount to anything, that I am unlovable, undeserving and not worth protecting. The problem is that holding on to these childhood beliefs sabotages me now ... and yet is a safe, familiar and comfortable place. The problem is that to keep myself in that safe and comfortable place I continue to act out being “unsuccessful, unlovable, undeserving and not worth protecting”, and in doing so sabotage myself and my relationships. This ‘acting out,’ this self-sabotage, is called SHADOW BEHAVIOR.

The word ‘Shadow,’ therefore, refers to my Wound, my Shadow Story and my Shadow Behavior.

Every day I am told I am loved, respected and looked up to. I’m told I am a leader. So why do I hold on to believing this Shadow Story that sabotages me by telling me I am “unsuccessful, unlovable, undeserving and not worth protecting” in the face of so much evidence that the story isn’t true? Because if I let go of my Shadow Story, there will be a cost. And the cost will be painful.

For me, that cost might be descending into sadness; the sadness of early years unloved, abused and abandoned; grieving for the blessings I never received from the good parents I never had; and the price that I—and those I care for—have paid as an adult in terms of the love and connection I didn’t allow myself to experience. That cost might mean even having to accept that as a child my brain was biologically hardwired in a crucible of shame, terror and abandonment, and that this hardwiring continues to affect my interactions and relationships.

The best way to examine my Wound, Shadow Story and Shadow Behavior is to work backwards: If I have a Behavior, I must have a Belief I need to behave that way. If I have such a belief, I likely took it on in response to something that happened, often something that occurred when I was young: my Wound.