

Working with Core Beliefs of 'Never Good Enough'

How to Resource Clients Against Toxic Self-Judgment

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Working with Core Beliefs of 'Never Good Enough': Shelly Harrell, PhD

How to Resource Clients Against Toxic Self-Judgment

Dr. Buczynski: Could “Likes” and “Shares” be contributing to our client’s negative self-worth?

Dr. Shelly Harrell thinks so. You see, back in the horse-and-buggy days, social comparison took a while to marinate. But with advances in technology, Shelly sees greater advances in self-judgment.

Dr. Harrell: The first thing that came up for me with this concept of working with clients who are never good enough and the sub-question that you shared, was *why is this such a common issue?*

What comes up for me is when something is so common – we need to look beyond the individual and look at our culture. What is it in our culture that perpetuates this sense of people just not feeling good enough?

I think there are a lot of levels to that.

One of the aspects of our culture that I think plays into this is social media. And social media is so powerful – but it's also very selective.

When we think about something like Facebook and what people post, a lot of people are posting a little sliver of their lives when something wonderful happens. So here are the pictures from when we went out to dinner and had a great time. And here's these wonderful things.

It almost gives a view that life should be these celebrations, and great things are happening. And if someone feels, “All those things aren't happening to me” – that social comparison process is intensified. Social comparison is a natural human process, but I think that social media intensifies that.

So, this phenomenon of people never feeling good enough – “My life isn't good enough. I'm not good enough” – is so much from looking at what others are so wonderful, so successful.

I think another feature of social media are the articles that say, *10 Ways to Be Your Own Person*, or *5 Things You Need to Do to Have a Great Relationship*, and *8 Ways to Make Your Dreams Come True* – somehow, it's simple; having a great

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relationship, being successful, making your dreams come true – if you just do those five things, those ten things, those eight things, it should happen for you!

And we know, as therapists, it's not that simple.

But I think that it can perpetuate a sort of self-blame and perpetuate this sense that people have of, "I'm not good enough! I've done those 10 things, and things still aren't good in my life." Or "Somehow those eight things aren't working for me, but I'm reading that those eight things should work."

Again, in addition to the very human struggle to find a sense of purpose – a sense of value, a sense of meaning – which, again, I think is a part of what's a challenge for all of us – I think social media may exacerbate that quest in the attempt to be helpful through the articles, and also in the very narrow and selective view we get of other people's lives.

It's not an easy challenge for us as mental health professionals because it's larger than a person's just internal process. It has to do with social, cultural factors.

But that said, what can we do with that? What can we do with that challenge when clients bring to us of not feeling good enough?

With the questions that we've talked about so far, I've really centered this process of *meaning* and *meaning-making*, and I believe that this is another question where that process is very centered as well.

When we look outside of ourselves for value and worth, that's fleeting.

We can help clients by helping them center in that meaning-making process, that process of finding, *what really matters to you? What is important to you? What are your most precious values?*

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Once we've done some of that values work, there are some strategies. There are values card sorts that I've used with clients. There's values questionnaires. There's one in ACT, a valued living questionnaire that can be very helpful with that process.

But, once we really work on identifying values and what's most important, then it becomes a question of congruence. And by *congruence*, I mean that task of walking our talk.

How do we take the things we believe and what's most important and manifest that in actually how we live our day-to-day lives?

The identification of values and meaning are important, but without that next piece of walking the talk – like brainstorming and problem solving and doing behavioral experiments — what does it feel like when I make this choice in my life? When I do this? If I interact with my boss in a different way? Or talk to my friend about this thing that's hard to talk about? How do I bring to life my values and what's meaningful?

I think it's *congruence* – the more that we can have our walk match our talk, the more that sense of not being enough will decrease. We'll be able to help clients build a sense of integrity and a sense of finding a compass that helps direct their lives that is not about external social comparison.

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Dr. Buczynski: When a client shifts their focus from external to internal, they can build that stronger connection to self-worth.

For some more research-based perspective on how social media is affecting our clients, let's visit now with Dr. Kelly McGonigal.

Dr. McGonigal: I thought I would give you a research perspective on this.

There was a very recently published review paper that looks at the consequence of social media on psychological wellbeing and different ways of engaging with social media. This review was a collaboration among researchers in the Netherlands, Belgium, and the USA.

They looked at all the published papers on how engaging with social media has positive and negative effects, and they found two main trends:

The first is, *passively using* social network sites.

Passive use means, let's say, you follow people on Instagram, and you scroll through their photos. Or, on your Facebook feed, you're scrolling down and seeing what people have posted.

That provokes social comparison and envy, which has — I'm quoting — "negative downstream consequences for subjective wellbeing."

In contrast, there was another trend they observed that *acted and targeted use of social media* predicts positive wellbeing by creating social capital and stimulating feelings of social connectedness.

So, what does that look like?

That's when you go to your Facebook feed and you look at a few of your friends' posts, and you give them some encouragement or some feedback on what they've posted or shared. Or, maybe you send a private message to someone you want to engage with. It's this more targeted and active use.

And by the way, they didn't focus on it in this review, but it has also been shown to have negative effects — approval seeking where you are constantly posting and then monitoring how many likes you get, or hearts, or forwards, or retweets and that sort of thing.

That is not a positive trend — even though it's a very popular trend, particularly among younger people.

When I think about this, it can be very useful to attend to how you're using social media, and any time you find yourself scrolling, that's time to disengage.

Or, ask yourself, *how could I positively engage?* — Particularly thinking about focusing on others rather than the self.

The other thing that Shelly mentioned that I think is really useful to reflect on is the content that you share.

There was the observation that articles that get forwarded or shared that say things like, *10 Ways to Make Sure Your Life is Stress Free*. And then you're like, "Well, why isn't my life stress free? It should be stress free."

Things that I see in my feed that immediately I think, "Why would someone share this?" — *10 Ways to Get*

Bikini-Body Ready, as if your body requires fixing quickly before summer.

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My hypothesis is, if you bring a lot of attention to what you share and you make what you share connected to your values, it's another way of increasing social wellbeing. You feel like you're active engagement on social media is a representation — *not* of your

ideal self from that *image management*, but a representation of your ideal self in terms of *what you truly want to share with others*.

So, my hypothesis is that would also lead to improved wellbeing and less of the social comparison stuff.

Dr. Buczynski: That was another interesting take – the idea of extending our values to what we share on social media.

In the next video, we'll look at one connection that can help dissolve feelings of worthlessness.

I'll see you then.