

# The WORTHINESS FACTOR



## **Worthiness or the Lack of it!**

*“The most exciting, challenging and significant relationship of all is the one you have with yourself. And if you can find someone to love the ‘you’ that you love, well that’s just fabulous.”<sup>1</sup>*

We have all been there - feeling betrayed by a friend, victimized by a boss or a lover who has treated us poorly. It is very easy for you to find someone to blame so that you come off as the innocent one, whilst looking for sympathy. But, if you look back and analyze a bit, you may realize that there is one common denominator in each situation you encounter –YOU.

We allow people to treat us the way they do. I know women who have settled for much less than they deserved and simply accepted things because deep inside they did not believe they deserved more.

Throughout our lives, we allow people to treat us the way they do. Most of us settle for things that are less than what we deserve, simply because we do not respect ourselves enough to realize that we deserve better.

*Why is it that we settle for less than what we deserve? Why do we insist on choosing someone who does not choose us back? Why is that we are so afraid to speak the truth? And why are we so concerned with what people think of us?*

*These are all classic signs of not knowing your worth.*

So, what is self esteem? How do you define it? How do you recognize low self esteem? Let’s figure it out!

Self esteem, according to most dictionaries, is a term used in psychology to reflect an individual’s evaluation of their self worth. It is simply our self evaluation and our sense of self worth.

The value you place on yourself and what you think about yourself determines whether or not you are fully aware of your self-worth.

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<sup>1</sup> Sex and the city

Many women like me have grown up with feelings of unworthiness. Lack of confidence, low self esteem and unworthiness can affect so many areas of our lives. It has taken me a lifetime to discover just how much these feelings overshadowed my life.

How you respect yourself, perceive yourself and talk about yourself eventually becomes your reality. And if you are in a habit of debasing yourself, putting yourself down, or using self deprecating humor, you will come across as self effacing, terribly low in self esteem.

**This is humiliation, self denial... an attempt to lessen your presence!**

Shame, guilt and unworthy feelings prevent us from discussing our opinions and thoughts with others and makes us believe we are misfits in a Utopian society. I had a very hard time making direct eye contact with people. I felt as if they could see inside me. I felt exposed... as if people would not like me if they knew my true identity.

It goes without saying that much of the influence over an individual's self esteem comes from their early experiences in life with parents or with other significant individuals.

**Most of the times our expectations are flawed since our childhood experiences enforced us to believe, "Good things do not happen to me."**

Some parents are very positive, supportive, and encouraging towards their children. Parents who express unconditional love and affection tend to have kids having high self esteem and self confidence.

On the contrary, in cases of low self esteem, negative experiences at an early age typically revolve around failing to live up to the high expectations of parents. From negative experiences like these, children begin to perceive themselves as inadequate or flawed.

Many parents believe they are only guiding and helping their children correct their behaviors, when in fact opposite often occurs. My parents always made comments which always made me feel that I was not good enough. My mother called me stupid all the time. She would never miss a chance to point out immature choices I made as a child.

My parents were perfectionists and they expected me to measure up to an impossible standard. I struggled hard to meet their expectations, but failed every time. The sense of being a constant disappointment to my parents made me feel ashamed of myself.

Since as children, our parents loom larger than life, so their comments, opinions and remarks carry weight. My parents always expected me to be the best! It was only years later that I discovered they were also suffering from low self esteem.

I grew up in a very dysfunctional family. I know this is a blanket term used by most people to cover any issues they might have. But in my case, three out of the four adults in my family – my mother, my step father and my half sister (who was 15 years older than me) were alcoholics.

Because of all the pain and trauma that I experienced as a child, I grew up different from other kids. Growing up in such a household can be very confusing and stressful.

Every kid reacts to this situation in a different manner. Some struggle hard to be perfect, some end up becoming the class clown, some seem to be always get in trouble, and some just fade into the corner of the room, until people forget their presence.

I was always paralyzed by a ubiquitous sense of dread, feeling constantly on edge like the other shoe was about to drop. I was a kid with low self esteem, a kid who felt scared all the time. Anxiety was my companion. My parents always fought with each other. There were arguments, disagreements and at times physical abuse.

I lived in an extremely unstable environment. The abuse I had suffered was much more insidious. It was mental, emotional and psychological. And then there were secrets – secrets about everything!

There were secrets about ME! There were secrets I did not know much about until much later in life and then there were FAMILY SECRETS. And I was not supposed to talk about them with anyone. My mother would constantly tell me, “We don’t tell our business in the street.” Her words always confused me as a child.

There was so much I wanted to share and I never really understood why my mom insisted on keeping my mouth shut all the time. And I never really understood why everything was such a secret.

*“And that’s the problem with secrets... like misery, they love company. They pile up and up and up until they take our ‘everything’... until you do not have a room for anything else.... until you are so full of secrets that you feel like you are going to burst....But the problem with secrets is, even when you think you are in control... You are not.” – Shonda Rhimes*

Add to this confusion was my father or fathers. I grew up in a house with two men. One who I thought was my father and whose name I bore until I got married, and the other man, who I thought was my Godfather. It wasn't until I was fifteen years old that I discovered that 'the Godfather' was my real father.

Because of all this secrecy, lies and shame, I was forbidden to talk about it. So, I went through life with a lot of confusion. My childhood was inconsistent and unstable. I was not permitted to ask any questions. I used to get infuriated at not being allowed to ask questions when my parents were alive.

Truth be told, I was too afraid to ask any questions. So I never did. For a long time, I thought there was something I did wrong or something I could have done to make things better. What I realize now is that all this secrecy and my parent's refusal to answer my questions was because of their own guilt and shame. Little did I know, their feelings of low self worth would not allow them to be honest – not with themselves or with anyone else.

Trying to please an alcoholic parent is an uphill climb. Alcoholism affected our lives as a family more than anything else. To take my focus off this chaotic life, I concentrated on my education and excelled in school. I was always the 'Star' student.

But there was a downside to this as well. My parents would just not tolerate any mistakes – because I was supposed to be PERFECT all the time. I still remember the reaction I got for getting a 95% on a history test. My mother was infuriated because I did not ace the test. She was so mad at me that she marched up to my school to talk to the teacher.

I felt so embarrassed and ashamed of myself. It spoke to me that whatever I did was never good enough. I felt humiliated, picked on and judged unfairly based on my mother's short temper.

Having extremely high standards for oneself is another signal of low self esteem. Expecting that you will never fail or make a mistake is a heavy burden for anyone to carry. Lamenting your mistakes or less notable achievements or anything that is less than your set standards of PERFECTION is very unfortunate.

We learn from our own mistakes. They teach us lessons. Parents who do not allow their children to make mistakes are doing their children a disservice. Learning to accept our mistakes as a part of life is a good step on the path to a healthy self esteem...