Villains, Victims, and Vigilantes
The Portrayal of Scars in Pop Culture | 4
HEROES ARE GREATER THAN VILLAINS

“It would be nice to see a character just be an ordinary person – living and loving like everyone else – not despite their scars, but with them.”

LYNDA LLEWELLYN
VILLAINS, VICTIMS, AND VIGILANTES
THE PORTRAYAL OF SCARS IN POP CULTURE

by Karen Badger, PhD, MSW
+ Niki Acton, Marketing Communications Manager, Phoenix Society

REPRESENTATION AFFECTS REALITY
Prior research and advocacy efforts have shown that film characters can influence feelings about physical appearance and contribute to biases and stereotypes. Characters presented in films that reinforce negative stereotypes may be detrimental for burn survivors with scarring and other physical alterations.

Burn survivors with scarring or appearance alterations are vulnerable to social stigma and bias, experiences that can influence psychosocial healing. Those with facial scarring or disfigurement may often experience discrimination in their work, social, education, and community environment, to which negative stereotyping contributes.

Burn survivors with scarring or appearance changes may struggle with self-acceptance and social comfort—facial burns and scarring present additional adjustment challenges. Burn survivors reported struggles with acceptance of their appearance and encounters with social stigma in response to their scars—which they described as “being re-scared” in one study.

Characters presented in films that reinforce negative stereotypes may be detrimental for burn survivors with scarring and other physical alterations.

“WHAT IS BEAUTIFUL IS GOOD”
In 1972, Dion and colleagues investigated the association of physical attractiveness with assumptions of positive social and personality characteristics, along with the expectation of better life outcomes. They found the presence of a stereotype they called “what is beautiful is good”, which was later confirmed by others.

Some studies explored how characters were portrayed in films relative to this stereotype. In these studies, characters considered physically attractive had good qualities and moral behaviors, while ones with facial scarring or other physical differences or disabilities were villainous or evil. These studies examined decades of films and reached similar conclusions supporting the presence of the stereotype.

Smith et al. rated top-performing films produced in 1940-1989 on variables of attractiveness, and found that characters scored as more attractive were also scored higher on all other positive variables—regardless of gender or year of the film. They found that viewing films with a what is beautiful is good bias impacted perceptions of others. Study participants viewed biased films and then rated applications of prospective college students. They gave applicants they perceived as more attractive higher scores—even though the applicants were equal in all other qualifications. Viewers of strongly biased films gave the highest ratings to applicants perceived as physically attractive.

Bazzini and colleagues observed that Disney films with at least 3 animated human characters for the what is beautiful is good stereotype. They used the same method and rating scales for these non-animated films as Smith et al. and obtained similar results. Characters who received higher ratings for attractiveness also received higher scores for other desirable variables as portrayed in their roles and had better outcomes in the movie. Bazzini also found that children who watched a Disney film with an attractive bias who then rated their perceptions of other children, preferred the attractive child over the non-attractive child as a friend.

The portrayal of scars in pop culture...
After a brief review of 32 English-language films, Phoenix Society found that the same stereotypes surfaced again and again: characters who were burn survivors (or could be assumed to be burn survivors) were evil, masked, alone – and often, by the end of the movie, dead. In the 80-year timespan in which the films were produced, little appeared to have changed.

While this quick look at films isn’t generalizable research, it does suggest that, as survivors look for role models in movies and TV, they may often find villains, victims, and vigilantes with scars like theirs. They may seldom see burn survivors save the day, make friends, or fall in love. They usually will not see healing journeys or happy endings.

So we think it’s time for a better story. It’s time for a hero.

Karen Badger is a social worker with 25 years of experience, as well as an Associate Professor in the College of Social Work, an Associate Dean and Assistant Provost in Undergraduate Education at the University of Kentucky. Karen has been recognized through the UK Alumni Association Great Teacher Award (2013) and was also selected to represent UK as a 2014-15 faculty fellow in the Southeastern Conference (SEC) Academic Leadership Development Program. Her research interests have focused on psychosocial adjustment and support of survivors and their families following a burn injury, along with education/programming initiatives and evaluation.

Niki Acton joined the Phoenix Society team in 2017. She worked as a freelance copywriter and a KnoxCorps Civic Theatre. In addition to non-profit communications, Niki has earned awards for her work as fiction writer, playwright, and director. Now, she is honored to be telling the stories of the burn community.

REFERENCES
10 Changing Faces. (n.d.) Face Equality Campaign. Available at: https://www.changingfaces.org.uk/campaign

METHODOLOGY
To gather this information, the movies were located from a scan of a variety of sources and then reviewed. Only those with characters whose scars were confirmed or could be assumed to be from a burn were included. In the case of a movie series, the character was counted only once. If movies were re-made with a different cast, the character in each version was counted.

32 MOVIES
from 1933 to 2017

ROLE
VILLAIN 62% (20)
HERO 6% (2)
IT'S COMPLICATED 16% (5)
KEY
VILLAIN antagonist
VIGILANTE deeply flawed protagonist
HERO good guy

ROMANCE
None 69% (22)
Ended Badly 22% (7)
Happy Ending 9% (3)

DIE AT THE END
13

32
were ashamed of their scars
22/32 (69%)

22/32 (69%)
hid their scars

17/32 (53%)
had their scars revealed as a plot point

50%
were stable and good, but became evil after their injury

20/32 (62%)
sought revenge

Just 5/32 (16%)
had any friends

Just 4/32 (12%)
had a hopeful ending

If movies were re-made with a different cast, the character in each version was counted.
WE ASKED THE BURN COMMUNITY WHAT THEY THOUGHT OF THIS ISSUE. HERE’S WHAT THEY TOLD US:

“I can’t recall seeing an empowering portrayal of a burned person. Unfortunately it’s mainly been villains/evil characters with burn scars who get shown on TV. This makes me feel like people with scars and burns are unwanted, unloved, and unequal to society.”

ANGIE MCKENZIE

“I was definitely called Freddie Krueger, Kentucky Fried Chicken. Things that they watched had an impact on the way they saw me.”

JENNIFER BAXTRON

“I personally believe that any human will struggle with self-image after a major body change. The media just amplifies that situation, but the media can only impact my perception of my scars if I allow it. The goal is to promote self-care and love beyond media impact.”

RUDY REYES

“My daughter is two years old with scars on her right hand. When she was a flower girl, a five-year-old boy wouldn’t hold her hand. I’d love to see a movie with kids. Something that shows scars are signs of healing and hope.”

JILL CUSICK

“Those who have burn injuries or scars are often the "bad guys" or the one no one hangs out with. That causes many issues for me.”

KELSA PARROTT

“During my childhood, I was bullied and often nicknamed Freddie Kreuger’s daughter. In early adulthood, I was even called his wife. It was not until my mid-20s that I started saying ‘thank you,’ even though I was crying inside.”

DEE HAM

“Today, the hairstylist refused to do my hair because of my burn injuries.”

ALEXANDRA GUTIERREZ

“We are portrayed as horrifying ugly and, in many cases, that are the reason why we look like this: as in, we did bad things that had bad results. Media also does not show the wide range of burns—some are not even visible. Many burned characters are recluses and don’t adapt well to society. I haven’t seen an empowering movie about a burn survivor yet. Not to be sappy, but I’d love to see some sort of positive relationship with a burn survivor. It’s difficult for many of us to see that others can look beyond our skin and still see beauty.”

ALLISON OFFERMAN

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ALEXANDRA GUTIERREZ

After serving as a peer mentor for two years, Branden Winters was recruited as a team member for Phoenix UBelong. Branden had a new opportunity to remain involved with Phoenix Society and extend his own skills and survivor story to some of the community’s youngest members.

In our programs, young leaders are empowered to be the voice they need to hear, be the face of the positivity they and other survivors need to see. . . and to take these and other opportunities to help lead for our community, together.

Jess Irven’s expertise includes supportive and therapeutic programming and resources for those impacted by illness and injury. She has nearly 20 years of experience with youth, young adults, and families in various settings, including clinical health care (both medical and mental health). Her experience in the hospital inpatient, outpatient, and community settings includes burn center work and pediatric aftercare as well as workshops for young adults, families, burn camps, and retreats, both in the U.S. and abroad. She is passionate about empowering youth leaders and using a mix of purposeful activity, supportive interactions, and individual reflection and growth as part of the coping and healing process.

“I really enjoyed gathering people, creating a sense of community and fellowship amongst the group.”

— MICHELLE ANDERSON, peer mentor

INTRODUCING FELLOWSHIPS
Our leadership opportunities continue to evolve: we’re recruiting three young professionals to serve in specialized Fellowships during 2018. Fellowships will transform our 20-week Internship into a customized 9-10 month training program for experts working in a broader definition of the burn support field. In return for a small stipend and a chance to build expertise, Fellows will become a functioning staff member and contribute to numerous projects in their area of interest.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?
We keep in touch with our past leaders and continue serving. . . together! Phoenix leadership programs have helped springboard to other forms of leadership in the burn community. Recently featured in Burn Support Magazine and on our blog, past Peer Mentor Hyuen Kiki Vo is finishing her Masters of Social Work program and serving as an international

MICHELLE VALLADARES, BA, Intern

“I find myself learning more about the different dynamics of teamwork and continue to learn about adapting to my surroundings at all times. I feel blessed to have had this experience and to be able to network with amazing people who believe in a similar cause of helping the burn community to thrive and continue living. This has given me motivation to pursue a career in advocating for positive self-image, confidence and self-esteem.”

TESSA MENDEL, RN, Intern

“I made the effort to open up to people and in turn it inspired me to keep opening up and connecting to more burn survivors.”

ALEXI PYLES, Peer Mentor

“I made the effort to open up to people and in turn it inspired me to keep opening up and connecting to more burn survivors.”

BECOME A PHOENIX SOCIETY FELLOW

• Applications Open Until March 9
• Applications open to college students and young professionals; no need to be a burn survivor.
• Positions are virtual but require adequate internet access and workspace to engage in tasks and virtual meetings.
• Applicants should possess an educational background or be on a professional path related to their area of interest: Youth + Family Programming, Supportive Programming + Planning, or Communications.
• Modest stipend offered. 8-12 hours of work per week; applicants must commit to full attendance at Phoenix WBC, September 11-16, 2018 in Grand Rapids, MI.

www.phoenix-society.org/leadership

BECOME A PEER MENTOR

• Applications Open April – May 14
• Open to burn survivors aged 18 – 25 as of 9/1/18 with past leadership experience
• Positions are virtual but require adequate internet access and workspace to engage in tasks and virtual meetings.
• 2-5 hours of work per week; applicants must commit to full attendance at Phoenix WBC, September 11-16, 2018 in Grand Rapids, MI.

www.phoenix-society.org/leadership

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5 THINGS A BURN SURVIVOR WANTS YOU TO KNOW

By Orrealus Harris

I’ve been a burn survivor for the majority of my life. Over the years, I’ve been in many scenarios where the person I was talking to found themselves at a loss for words...or just chose the wrong words.

Here are a few things I wish they’d known:

1. I AM A HUMAN, AND I DON'T WANT TO BE TREATED LIKE AN OUTSIDER.
   For burn survivors, our “new” appearance is something we have no choice but to face. Imagine you looked one way on Monday, then you get into an accident and wake up on Sunday looking nothing like you did before. This can be a lifelong struggle for some burn survivors. It helps to be treated as the human beings we are.

2. IT’S OKAY TO ASK ME HOW MY INJURY HAPPENED.
   If you’re curious about my scars, I’d prefer you to approach me and ask — instead of staring at me and making me feel uncomfortable. But it is all in the delivery. Some people ask because they truly want to hear my story. Others just ask, with no intent on educating themselves about people living with burn injuries.

3. I’M A SURVIVOR, NOT A VICTIM.
   When I interact with someone new and share my story with them, I really do not want them to pity me. Yes, my story is sad, but my story does not end with my accident. Having my own self-confidence was essential in living day to day. I had to get comfortable in my new skin and take the time I needed to get myself back in my old routines. Now? I have a whole life in front of me.

4. I AM A FULLY FUNCTIONING, SUCCESSFUL ADULT.
   I have been in job interviews where the person interviewing me seemed hesitant to offer me the position due to my scars. They assumed because I had scars, I would not be able to perform the job successfully.

5. FOR MOST SURVIVORS, EVERY DAY IS NOT A BAD DAY.
   Many of us have loving friends and families, who are there to help pick us up when we don’t feel our best or when we don’t want to share our stories.

Burn survivors are fighters. We fought our injuries and we fight to overcome our daily struggles. The scars we wear on our outside don’t indicate our personalities, the way we interact with others, or any limitations. Our appearance might be changed, but our personalities still shine bright. We do not let our scars define who we are.

PHOENIX SUPPORTERS COME TOGETHER + CHALLENGE ALL TO HELP FINISH THE NEVER ALONE CAMPAIGN

Jim Pauley, president and CEO of NFPA, is one of the donors who came together at Phoenix WBC 2017 to create a match pool of $165,000. For the duration of the Never Alone Campaign, every gift under $10,000 will be matched dollar for dollar.

Until coming to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) more than three years ago, I had never heard of the Phoenix Society. Since that time my wife, Lisa, and I have had the opportunity to attend the last three Phoenix World Burn Congresses. Each one has been an amazing experience. It is quite moving to see not only the interactions between burn survivors but to witness the spirit by which each and every one handle their own unique circumstances.

As the Never Alone Campaign got underway, it was easy for us to make the connection between what had been unfolding before our eyes at Phoenix WBC and the organization’s need for increased resources to meet the varied and increasing needs of the burn community.

Now you might think our decision to support the Never Alone Campaign as part of the match program was born out of connecting the dots of what we saw happening at Phoenix WBC and the need, but it is much deeper for us.

My mother was a burn survivor. She was burned at age eight (the 1940s) when her nightgown caught on fire from a cigarette that had been discarded in a couch. We saw later in her life how she continued to live with her burn injury – she was truly a burn survivor. We lost my mom in 2011 so she never had the chance to get to know the Phoenix Society.

We are convinced that if she had, she would have made a great advocate for the burn community. It is from that viewpoint we decided to give some of what we have been blessed with to help others find the key part of the healing equation that Phoenix Society provides.

DOUBLE YOUR IMPACT
Invest in Phoenix Society and the burn community’s future with the enclosed envelope or at www.phoenix-society.org/never-alone-campaign-donation.
PAM ELLIOTT
PHOENIX SOCIETY ADVOCACY AWARD 2018 RECIPIENT
by Peg Paul

This award recognizes an individual whose advocacy efforts have brought greater awareness to the burn community by actively providing information, education and promoting positive change.

A burn survivor and registered nurse, Pam Elliott has spent countless hours advocating for burn survivors. At 5 years old, Pam received third-degree burns over 50% of her body in a house fire. Despite the challenges from the injuries, Pam had a positive childhood. Her mother instilled in her that she could do anything other little girls could do.

In her small West Virginia hometown, everyone knew her story and other children didn’t make fun of her appearance. Her experience changed when she went to college, where she planned to become a physician’s assistant. Medical personnel told Elliott that because of her appearance, patients would have a deeper fear of doctors.

“That’s when I became acutely aware of my appearance,” said Elliott. “I became a bitter, angry woman.”

When Elliott took a class on the Old Testament, her world turned back around. One story resonated deeply: Jeremiah went to a potter’s house, and he worked at his wheel. The vessel he made of clay was spoiled in the fire and life safety across the country, Congress to pass the Fire Sprinkler Incentive Act, and new media outreach, and volunteers to help.

Today, Elliott is a registered nurse who speaks about her experience, participates in media outreach, and volunteers to help survivors at local burn units. She lobbied U.S. Congress to pass the Fire Sprinkler Incentive Act, as well as spoke to the North Carolina building code committee and various city councils in support of home fire sprinklers, Arc Fault Circuit Interrupters and other fire safety topics.

In her 40s, Elliott connected with other survivors and volunteered in her local hospital’s burn unit. She attended her first Phoenix World Burn Congress in 2008. When Amy Acton, Phoenix Society Executive Director, encouraged Elliott to tell her story, she was trained as a Phoenix Advocate and fine-tuned her presentation skills.

“If you don’t deal with your trauma, your trauma will deal with you,” said Elliott. “I encourage people to talk about it now. Others will see it in you, like Amy saw it in me. Suddenly you realize its not about you, its about others. Just hearing other people’s stories puts your own story in perspective.”

Eight years ago, Elliott received a letter from a parent after talking to middle school children. After her daughter shared Elliott’s story with her siblings, the mother wrote: “Your personal statement, ‘Purpose through Tragedy,’ has been passed around the kitchen table already, and we are all very moved by your determination. The odds that you made a life-lasting impression on at least one 13-year-old girl today? Not slim to none. Thank you again from the bottom of my heart.”

AWARD NOMINATIONS

We received nominations for seven outstanding advocates for the 2018 Advocacy Award. Here are a few highlights from the nominations:

LORI JANIK: DIRECTOR OF CLIENT CARE SERVICE, ARIZONA BURN FOUNDATION
Nominated for her tireless efforts to introduce burn care information in every hospital and skilled nursing facility and mainstreaming patients into programs where burn patients are not typically seen. Lori brings awareness to the community about the critical needs of burn survivor aftercare.

SAM MATAGI: SURVIVOR/SNOWBOARD CROSS PARALYMPIC TEAM
Sam is an active member of the burn survivor community, Phoenix SOAR volunteer, and member of the Snowboard Cross Paralympic Team and the National Ability Center. Sam is a bilateral arm amputee and represents the survivor community in a way that brings dignity and humor to very difficult situations.

JEN HARTLEY AND CHRIS HALLWAS: SURVIVORS/LICENSED MASSAGE THERAPISTS
Handle with Care Burn Scar Massage is run by Jen and Chris, burn survivors and licensed massage therapists (LMT). They travel throughout the country teaching other massage therapists about proper knowledge and touch when working with burn survivors. They provided massage therapy at Phoenix World Burn Congress 2017; their team worked on 486 burn survivors.

REBEKAH ALLELY: NURSE, MEDSTAR WASHINGTON (DC) HOSPITAL CENTER
Rebekah brings cohesion to the burn survivor community in Washington, DC. She introduces every burn patient treated at the Washington Hospital Center Burn Unit to the burn survivor community and ensures they know about the support groups and other mechanisms available. She is the main liaison to the DC Firefighters Foundation. Rebekah organizes summer and winter visits for burn survivors to the Adaptive Sports Center in Crested Butte, Colorado. Rebekah goes above and beyond her job duties to be there for her life long patients.

BECOME A PHOENIX ADVOCATE
If you are interested in working with NFPA and Phoenix Society to advance fire and life safety across the country, contact us at info@phoenix-society.org or 1-800-888-BURN.
"I can’t make all your scars go away,” the doctor says as he inspects my face, his eyes drawn to the large scar under my nose. It all feels like déjà vu. The nice, plush office. The polite receptionist sitting behind the desk. The clipboard of paperwork she expects me to fill out as accurately as possible. All leading up to the moment in which the doctor tells me about the future of my face.

“You are very lucky,” Dr. Barry Cohen tells me. “I am not minimizing the pain you went through, but just saying it could have been much worse.”

He has kind eyes, making me feel comfortable during the initial exam – far from an easy feat. He bats away my apologies for posing additional queries. “That’s what I am here for,” he says. “I just want to make sure you are comfortable.”

Surprisingly, I am. The shape of my nose does nothing to faze him; he remains confident throughout the appointment that his hands can produce the desired outcome: preserving a disappearing airflow.

He has spent decades working within the burn community. As the appointment unfolds, his passion becomes more evident, making it clear that this is the doctor I have been searching for over the last several years.

Meeting Dr. Cohen was just one of the many gifts to come about as a result of attending Phoenix World Burn Congress 2017. At the farewell banquet, my mother and I met a woman who works in a hospital near our home. After we briefly described our story, she conjured up a name of a doctor who might be able to help.

My initial response was to immediately tamp down my own expectations. Years of doctor’s appointments and subsequent surgical procedures – rather unpleasant and equally scarring experiences - reinforced the idea that nothing else could be done to prevent my right nostril from collapsing, unable to withstand the pressure exerted by a large, red scar. Thankfully, meeting this doctor far surpassed my expectations, a common theme of this beautifully unconventional gathering that caught my attention from the very first night.

“I am greater than what happened to me, and hope is greater than fear,” Tony Gonzalez, fellow burn survivor declared during the opening night of Phoenix WBC. His words caused my initial trepidation over attending the conference to evaporate, paving the way for a sense of excitement to completely engulf me in the days ahead.

My decision to travel to Dallas was made in conversation with a fellow burn survivor. After interviewing Amy Acton for a two-part series published in the Blue Ridge Leader, she sold me on the merits of attending Phoenix WBC. The promise of gathering with fellow burn survivors in an environment completely devoid of judgment proved appealing.

Her description proved apt indeed. A strong sense of love and compassion emanated from fellow burn survivors and their families, with so many willing to offer a helping hand to those farther behind them on the road toward recovery.

My own accident occurred more than eight years ago, a gut-wrenching and pivotal experience that in some ways I am still trying to make sense of despite the passage of time. My worry stemmed from the fear that being in a room full of survivors might trigger past emotions that I had worked hard to conquer. Would this experience prove to be a setback?

My fears could not have been more misplaced. The power of this conference lies in the ability to gather with nearly a thousand others,
Hope is borne out of the stories of others, tales filled with courageous acts in the face of great adversity. Sometimes the rawness of emotion snuck up on participants, who would begin weeping uncontrollably when confronted by the past. Yet there is strength in numbers. None of us are alone in our collective pain - or in our collective hope.

The largest gathering of burn survivors in the world, nearly a thousand people came together to celebrate the life we have while mourning the one we lost. Yet Amy Acton, Phoenix Executive Director, reminded us of the urgency surrounding this movement.

“We need to make sure that everyone can find us,” she said. “Recovery is a lifelong journey - and it’s more than the physical.”

Despite the large turnout, there are thousands of others left in the dark, not knowing about this opportunity to share and grow. In the U.S. alone, more than 40,000 people a year are hospitalized after suffering a burn injury.

Only a few years ago, I was one of those 39,000 left in the dark when it came to available resources. Learning about Phoenix Society after much time had elapsed – I went several years before meeting a fellow burn survivor, contributing to a deep feeling of loneliness as I traveled the road back from my own injuries. “If only we had known about this eight years ago,” my mother told me. “Our lives would have been so different.”

Perhaps. Although, in the words of T.S. Eliot, “It is never too late to be what you might have been.” After more than eight years - spurred on in part by the courage displayed by nearly a thousand people at the Sheraton Hotel in Dallas - I was willingly photographed in front of a banner declaring that #burnsarebeautiful. After more than eight years of wrestling with the implications of losing my face, I decided it was time to leave the remaining strands of anger and bitterness behind. For beauty can only be found in the eyes of the beholder.

My scars, both invisible and visible, are beautiful. Beauty stemming not only from the symbolisms of survival but also from the choices I have made to thrive, to grow, to become greater than and to help others realize the effects of their own scars - both visible and invisible.

Join the movement to bring all scars to light, and share your story with those around you. “The future is greater than the past,” Amy declared. Grab hold of the future by allowing your scars to change the world. It starts with you.

Samuel Moore-Sobel is a business process consultant and freelance writer. He is nearing completion of a memoir focusing on his experiences revolving around both trauma and recovery. He writes a column for the Blue Ridge Leader and has written numerous guest blog posts concerning his experience as a burn survivor. Visit his website and blog, www.holdingontohopetoday.com or follow him on Facebook at Holding Onto Hope Today and Twitter @holdhopetoday.

*Samuel Moore-Sobel and his mother, Kate, at Phoenix WBC 2017.*
WHY WE FEEL SHAME + WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT

DISCARDING OUR TOXIC ARMOR

By James Bosch

Joseph Campbell called shame a “toxic armor:” it protects you, but in hurtful ways. Like most outdated survival mechanisms, our job in healing is to find a way to set aside that heavy burden and move more lightly and freely through life.

There are many possible reasons a burn trauma survivor experiences shame. I was burned as an infant, and I carried a story of shame that I somehow caused the accident. I also felt the shame from being teased and feeling different from everyone around me. All around, there were societal images of perfection that reinforced those deep feelings that “something is wrong with me.”

My shame was unconsciously reinforced because no one was talking to me about my burns and my feelings. I didn’t develop the emotional intelligence – the language, if you will – to even identify that what I was experiencing was shame. Then you add other layers to the cake: alcoholism in the family, divorce, having a different sexual orientation from most around you, undiagnosed mental health issues... The cake gets very lopsided and doesn’t taste very good — no matter how much protective frosting you pile on it.

For several years, I’ve worked with Megan Bronson to help members of the burn community break the cycle of shame and addiction. We strongly believe that if the core issues and causes of shame can be addressed, then we can break out of the shame spirals we are stuck in. Because shame produces self-loathing and isolating feelings, common coping mechanisms for “numbing” these feelings include drugs, alcohol, or addictive behaviors like sex or gambling. Addiction itself is a shame producing act: we use to numb pain, we act in ways that create more shame, and then we medicate those feelings. The goal of this article is to offer some alternatives to get us out of these cycles.

In the world of psychology, most make a distinction between guilt and shame. Some healthy guilt is believed to be an important part of living in a communal society. Guilt produces “feeling bad” when doing things that hurt others, and that bad feeling will help you change your behavior.

Of course, guilt can also be used to control and hurt people, but the big difference between guilt and shame is that one is something you do and the other is a deep negative belief of who you are at your core. “I do bad things,” vs “I’m a bad person.” That deep feeling of being “a bad person” is often the root of the negative thoughts we use against ourselves. Shame eggs on that internal critic, blocking us from joy and expressing our true self to others.

Some neuropsychologists believe that there are similarities between the “freeze” or dissociated state some trauma survivors experience and the feeling of shame. They both hijack your nervous system and evoke a feeling of powerlessness. Trauma and shame also can inhibit our ability to feel accurately, trapping us in extreme “all or nothing” thinking states.

Therapy with a professional who understands trauma is often a first brave step toward healing shame as well. Here are three more steps you can take:

1. SPEAK YOUR SHAME

How do we start to break the pattern of shame in our lives? I believe the number one way is to talk about it. Start by finding someone you can trust. Tell them your feelings of shame and the stories about yourself that your brain is creating.

Brene Brown, a well-known researcher and writer on shame, believes: “If we can share our story with someone who responds with empathy and understanding, shame can’t survive.” She often says that shame cannot survive in the daylight. Think of the feeling you get when you have been holding a shameful secret and you “finally get it off your chest.” That feeling of relief, a lighter step: shame dying in the light of day.

2. PRACTICE SELF-COMPASSION + LOVING YOURSELF

Shame is intricately fed by negative self-talk, which makes self-compassion a great healer of shame. This is simple 3 step process, developed by Kristine Neff, is great for when you catch yourself judging or criticizing yourself. Stop and say ouch!

Picture someone you love unconditionally and imagine what you would say to that person if they were talking about themselves in that way. Say those same words to yourself.

It only takes one moment to do this in your head. Sometimes you’ll do it over and over again, but it can help you break the trance of negative self talk.

3. FIND A SAFE SPACE

Peer support is another balm for shame. To be in safe groups of people such as a support group or a conference like Phoenix WBC and hear others speak about their struggles with same issues and feelings. Just by being in this counter-shame environment can normalize your own shame. It can be the starting point to allow yourself to let go some of the stories that for so long you may have felt were uniquely your own. This is why 12 step and similar self help groups have been so successful. A safe place where people speak your shame language.

However you decide to take that step toward healing the shame keeping you from living a happy and engaged life, be gentle to yourself. These patterns were often developed to protect you. Maybe they were instilled over long periods in your early life. Breaking the shame of asking for help is often the first step. Making that first step is magic. I wish you well on your journey.

REFERENCES

http://www.self-compassion.com
https://brenebrown.com
www.HealingShame.com
www.janinafisher.com

Burned as an infant, James Bosch has dedicated much of his professional life to helping other burn survivors and their families heal and find meaning after a burn. Acceptance of new life, new body, and finding new meaning are at the core of his work. James is a Licensed Marriage Family Therapist practicing in California and a member of the Mental Health Support Team at Phoenix World Burn Congress. James is part of 1amainglife.com providing online trainings, tele-psychotherapy and life coaching.
WHAT DREW YOU TO PHOENIX SOCIETY? I’m a mission-driven person and I want to make the world a better place. This is a new sector for me, and I had never heard of Phoenix Society, but the stories and programs drew me in. As I got to know the organization and the people I wanted to be a part of it. Phoenix Society is a healthy organization positioned for growth, with high energy about the future. I really appreciated the recognition that culture is critical to the success of the organization — something I really felt as I got to know Amy and others. She is very inspirational and I know I can learn a lot from her.

WHAT ARE YOU MOST EXCITED ABOUT IN YOUR NEW POSITION? Working with the staff and board to advance the mission and achieve new levels of impact. I want to take the success of the Never Alone Campaign, and carry the momentum forward to a robust philanthropy program that ensures the long-term growth and success of Phoenix Society. I’m excited to build relationships with current and future supporters invested in serving the burn community and meeting everyone who cares about advancing the organization. It’s such a treat for a development professional to work with an Executive Director who makes fundraising a priority, loves it, and is great at it!

WHAT TALENTS ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO SHARING WITH OUR COMMUNITY? My passion is working with donors to help them realize their philanthropic vision and goals for impact — there is nothing better than working with a donor to help them achieve the impact they want to make in the world, while also advancing programs that advance the mission/impact of an organization. Finding that connection is a very special thing. In addition, I look forward to building a strategic and sustainable fundraising program.

MEET MOLLY RAND DIRECTOR OF PHILOANTHROPY

Molly Rand comes to Phoenix Society from The Nature Conservancy in Illinois, where she was Director of Philanthropy. Her background includes 25 years of progressive experience in fundraising, including eight years as a consultant.

Molly is a firm believer that a culture of philanthropy is vital to success, providing the opportunity to raise transformational investments. Below, learn about her hopes for her new position as Phoenix Society’s Director of Philanthropy.

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Executive Director

Niki Acton
Marketing Communications Manager

Kerri Hanson
Business Administrator

Jess Irven
Adult + Support Services Program Manager

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John O’Leary
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Mike Williams
Burn Survivor
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Captain, Northwest Harnett Volunteer Fire Department

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