



Tyranny of the Shoulds podcast

Episode 2: Milestones that become millstones

Psychoanalyst Karen Horney coined the phrase in the 1950s, yet we still struggle with “shoulds” today. “Shoulds” come from our families, friends, society and sometimes from ourselves. The tyranny is that we struggle to be our ideal self yet it’s something we will never reach.

We often work hard to reach goals in life, like passing qualifications, getting married, or buying a house. And the rub is, that after all our efforts, achieving these milestones doesn’t even feel that good. In this episode I talked with Yasmin and Lizzie about their milestones that became millstones.

- **Bupa research on milestones – 2019:** In this research project Bupa (healthcare and health insurance group) found having a baby, getting married and buying a house were voted the most significant milestones in a person’s life. Despite expectations of these being happy moments, they often leave us feeling vulnerable and stressed when the reality doesn’t live up to the social media hype. This are some of the statistics they gathered:

- 86% of respondents think society puts too much pressure on achieving life’s milestones
- One in 10 respondents feel unhappy about a significant moment in life because of social media
- 58% believe social media creates an expectation of what life’s key moments should look like

- More here: <https://www.bupa.com/newsroom/news/lifes-milestones-can-impact-mental-health>

- **Psychotherapist Alfred Adler** once said “*to be human is to have inferiority feelings*” and in the age of social media it’s amplified a hundred-fold. Social comparison used to involve around 10-20 close relationships. In the digital universe there’s limitless potential - our average number of online ‘friends’ is over 300. See more about Adler here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Adler

- We’re rewarded for comparing. Former Facebook president, Sean Parker, describes Facebook as a “*social validation feedback loop*” admitting the “*like*” button was introduced to give “*a little dopamine hit*” to drive use. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/nov/09/facebook-sean-parker-vulnerability-brain-psychology>

- Something I didn’t have time to mention was **Sociologist Festinger** who talked about comparing up vs. comparing down. We reduce our self-esteem when we compare ourselves to those who have more than us. But conversely, we raise our self-esteem when we compare ourselves to those less fortunate than us. More here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leon_Festinger

- **Frank Zappa:** This is a light-hearted quote I was going to use but didn’t find the opportunity during the podcast. “*If you end up with a boring miserable life because you listened to your mom, your dad, your teacher, your priest, or some guy on television telling you how to do your shit, then you deserve it.*”

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