



**Episode 06**

# **Guilt in Everything**

We go deeper with customers to discover that  
guilt isn't entirely successful at keeping us in check

## **We before Me**

People feel guilty as much for what they do, as for what they don't do. In the context of COVID-19, people are doing less... but feeling more guilty. They are feeling guilty for how they feel; guilty for how they don't. Guilty for not spending more time with their kids; guilty for not wanting to. Guilty for going on a walk; guilty for staying at home.

With so many mixed messages of what we SHOULD do or SHOULDN'T do; what we CAN do vs. what we CAN'T...the feeling that breaks through is guilt. And it's getting to be a little much.

Within the physical constraints of COVID-19 and the emotional weight of "guilt-in-everything," we are feeling less joy. We are suppressing pleasures – both small and large – all of which feel more guilty. However, like with most things we suppress, we can only keep them contained for so long.

To get underneath this guilt, C Space held a "virtual confessional." We asked people to anonymously share what they were doing and feelings that they WEREN'T sharing with others. And what they shared with us – in some cases, whispering into their computers – ranged from heart-wrenching to hilarious. From sneaking around on their spouses to sneaking a toke with their friends. In all the confessions, we saw people feeling guilty AND justifying their own behavior. People bending the rules to take calculated risks, to squeeze out a bit of pleasure through the cracks of their constraints.

In these small cracks, we see pent up pleasures – an increased tension between the guilt one feels and the lack of pleasure in it. Under "regular conditions", the good feelings of pleasure balance out the bad feelings of guilt...and vice versa. However, right now, guilt is winning. It's a powerful force. Mixed together, guilt is the cement of constraint's concrete, the force keeping our behavior in check. HOWEVER, pleasure is like water...it creates cracks, it finds gaps, it seeps through. And over time, it will breakthrough.

## **What's next for brands?**

Brands have an opportunity to tap into how people have been neglecting themselves and offer opportunities to feed their deeper desires. Beyond indulgences and splurges – which are typically short bursts of pleasure – we look at how brands can create greater "durability of pleasure" using a framework for human desires.

## Parenting Guilt



“I know I should make the best of my time with my family, but it’s not always easy to come up with things to do everyday and sometimes you have to do things for yourself.”



“I know I should be spending more time with my kids, but I wish schools would open up faster.”



“I know I should make the best of my time with my family, but it’s not always easy to come up with things to do everyday and sometimes you have to do things for yourself.”

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## Pandemic Protocol Guilt



“I know I should wear a mask in public, but I haven’t yet. I try to blame it on the fact that our small town hasn’t had a case of COVID-19 yet, but I know I just don’t want to stand out.”



“I know I shouldn’t see anybody, but my friend still comes over and we share a marijuana pipe.”



“I know I should have my groceries delivered, but it’s so time consuming in my opinion.”



“I know I shouldn’t be seeing anyone, but have gotten together with some friends to work on some projects.”



“I should be more careful with doing things around the community, but I feel like there are too many restrictions being put in place with everything that’s going on.”

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## Personal Guilt



“I know I should be supporting local businesses by ordering takeout, but my family has been trying to cook at home and work on saving money.”



“I am really enjoying this stress-free, no social pressure life, and I really don’t want to go back to normal life because I’m scared of it being overwhelming and I’m scared of that anxiety coming back into my life.”



“I wish my husband would go back to work as I miss my time on my own. He works 12 hour shifts so normally I get to have some time to do the things he doesn’t like to do and I miss that time.”



“I know I should be happy but I am NOT ! I am so TIRED of this virus, it has robbed me of being able to go work out and i have gained 3 pds now and I am so FRUSTRATED and am depressed some days! I have no desire to do much of anything and I have been SICK most of the days, every time I go outside to grocery shop I come back sick or my roommates do and they pass it on to me, its been such an unhealthy time and to have to do this for another month I don’t know if I can bear it or not.”

## Career Related Guilt



“I know I should be grateful to still have a job, but its frustrating there may be restrictions when going back to the office.”



“I know I should be getting more done for work since I’m not being pulled into nonstop meetings or people coming by my desk but I find myself browsing the Internet reading random stories or playing games on my mobile phone.”

## Financial Related Guilt



“I know I should be happy my husband can go back to work soon, but I am enjoying getting his unemployment since its more money.”



“I know I should be watching my finances more carefully right now but I honestly feel like spending money more than ever.”



“I know I should have told my husband that I lost a lot of money on the stock I secretly bought last year because I didn’t listen to his advice, but I still don’t tell him the truth until now.”

## Productivity Guilt



“I know I should only exercise once a day and only with members of my household but sometimes I go out twice and meet up with my cousin for a walk with the dogs or a bike ride.”



“I know I could be getting more projects done around the house but I hate the idea of starting something and then either needing to make a trip to the store or getting pulled into something else.”



“I know I could be using this time to be productive and to be getting things accomplished but I seem to spend most days just wasting my time more than anything.”

# Enabling Desires

The “virtual confessions” highlighted people’s neglected selves – their desires that have been muted (but not nearly extinguished) through the context of COVID-19. Brands have an opportunity to tap into how people have been neglecting themselves and offer opportunities to feed their deeper desires. Beyond indulgences and splurges – which are typically short bursts of pleasure – we look at how brands can create greater “durability of pleasure” through the following framework of human desires.

## **1/** **Power**

One’s ability to lead and influence others. This is not “power over,” but giving “power to”. How can brands give power to the people to make a bigger difference?

## **2/** **Attraction**

The force bringing people together. Attraction is as much about how we see others as how we see ourselves... only then does it result in how others are attracted to us. How can brands help one another see the better parts of ourselves... so to speak ?

## **3/** **Comfort**

Where we feel most vulnerable... and most secure. How can brands help us re-imagine the social contracts with brands and between one another? Where we can move from fear and distrust of one another to greater connection and belonging?

## **4/** **Play**

What we turn to for fun... to unwind, relax and enjoy. How can brands give people the environments, tools and permission to be more creative?

As people have been living through the constraints of what they CAN’T do... brands have the opportunity to be the leading enabler for what people CAN do. The key will be turning on these desires, while turning down the guilt people feel for engaging in them.