

A person with long hair, wearing a red hoodie and black leggings, stands on a paved path covered with fallen leaves. They have their hands behind their head and are looking up at a large, leafy tree that dominates the upper half of the frame. The scene is bathed in warm, golden light, suggesting late afternoon or early morning. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

# Let's Talk About Gratitude Shaming!

A vertical photograph on the left side of the page shows a paved path in a park. The path is covered with fallen yellow and orange leaves. The background is filled with trees and sunlight filtering through the leaves, creating a bokeh effect.


# Let's talk about gratitude shaming!

**'Is it weird to think that your problems are not worth talking about because you know that other people have worse problems?'**

We all know that the past 12 months have not been great for our collective mental health. Everyone is feeling it in some way. Maybe you're feeling lower than usual, less motivated with your studies. Maybe you aren't sleeping as well, or experiencing anxiety around your safety or your future. Or maybe you are just feeling completely burnt out. Typically, if you had been feeling this way for a long period of time, a doctor or psychiatrist may consider these warning signs for a mood or anxiety disorder. However, these symptoms now also double as totally normal reactions to living through a pandemic.

But does the fact that we are all collectively experiencing these emotions, make them any less valid? Or does the spectrum of the tragedies many people have experienced affect the validity of what we are all feeling individually?

This year, I have felt a whole range of emotions. I'm homesick for my friends and family who are 18,000 miles away. I have anxiety about what the next 12 months might look like. I've felt extra sensitive, I've felt sad, I've felt fed up and overwhelmed. And then I scroll through my social media feed or turn on the news, and that all changes almost immediately, to a feeling of **guilt**.



# Let me list all the things I've felt guilty about so far this year:

I feel guilty that...

...I'm **not** on the front lines

...I have a **nice place to live** during the lockdown.

...people **have lost loved ones** and I have not

...for **not helping out enough**

...I **still have a job** and others don't

...for feeling **homesick, sensitive, sad, fed-up,** and **overwhelmed** when it feels like so many others **have it worse**

...I feel guilty for not feeling more grateful.



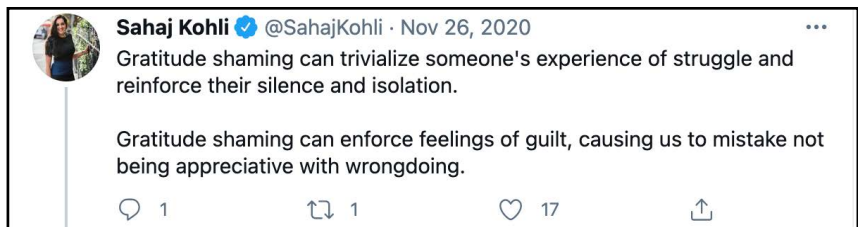
So many people have grappled with guilt and shame throughout the year about their relative safety, security, or privilege.

And we don't just do it to ourselves, we do it to others too. How many times have you said to a friend, or had a friend say to you, "it could be worse". All this does is make us feel like we should be grateful it's not worse, and feel guilty that gratitude isn't the initial reaction we had to that negative experience.

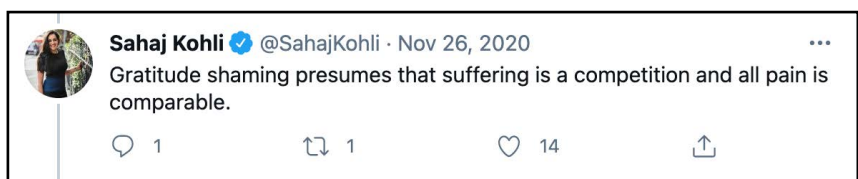
### In November 2020, Sahaj Kohli, founder of @BrownGirlTherapy tweeted about a concept called gratitude shaming



When you gratitude shame yourself, you don't accept, validate, or normalise your emotions, including the negative ones, which are both warranted and healthy.



The fact is, things can always be worse. And it's not helpful to get caught in an endless loop of telling yourself you don't deserve to be in pain because other people are in more pain. Over time, this could turn into a pattern of telling yourself that your feelings and experiences don't matter. And this internalised narrative can result in resentment, guilt, and low self-esteem.





**Sahaj Kohli**  @SahajKohli · Nov 26, 2020

...

An expectation of gratitude may feed a sense of obligation to do, be, or act in certain ways that are not authentic to how we really feel or what we really need right now.

 1

 1

 11



Practicing gratitude is one of the most beneficial things we can do for our mental health and relationships, but the idea that gratitude means you can't hurt or suffer is toxic.

Humans are complex beings who are capable of holding contradicting feelings at the same time. I can feel homesick for friends and family while also feeling grateful to be privileged enough to have an overseas experience.

I can feel hopeful for the next few months while also feeling fed up at the thought of the 'hamster wheel' existence of the weeks ahead. I can feel empathy for those who have suffered the loss of family and friends due to the pandemic this year, and also acknowledged that this year has been challenging for me too. And it's important to be compassionate with ourselves about these feelings because they're entirely normal.

### **So why is all of this important? And why are we talking to you about this today?**

The risk of not validating your feelings is that you don't reach out for help when you need it. That you try and 'deal' with everything on your own. That you bottle things up and 'get on with it' because someone else is more worthy of the support and you don't want to stop them from getting it, or you're embarrassed to share what you might feel is trivial.

### **So, here are 5 things we want you to remember and focus on when you feel yourself start to slip down this rabbit hole.**

## **Your sharing helps**

Your sharing helps others to share. We all need validation sometimes, even if it's just to hear, "wow, that's really tough".



## Relativity is key

Everything is relative and all feelings are relevant. Two people who have the exact same experiences would feel differently about the experience. This is why we should never compare our pain with someone else's.

## Early support

Don't let your feelings spiral out of control, getting support early on can really help.

## You matter

You matter and building self-worth is important. If you feel that you need support can you challenge yourself to reach out?

## No problem is too small

Everyone is going through battles, everyone gets affected in different ways. Sometimes it's the small things that can really tip the balance, so who is to say what the small and big things are in life?

### TalkCampus

TalkCampus is a free to download app where you can talk with other students from around the world about the ups and downs of life. Your student email address will give you free access, just download TalkCampus from the app stores.