



Shame: The Exposed Self

By Michael Lewis

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Shame, the quintessential human emotion, received little attention during the years in which the central forces believed to be motivating us were identified as primitive instincts like sex and aggression. Now, redressing the balance, there is an explosion of interest in the self-conscious emotion. Much of our psychic lives involve the negotiation of shame, asserts Michael Lewis, internationally known developmental and clinical psychologist. Shame is normal, not pathological, though opposite reactions to shame underlie many conflicts among individuals and groups, and some styles of handling shame are clearly maladaptive. Illustrating his argument with examples from everyday life, Lewis draws on his own pathbreaking studies and the theory and research of many others to construct the first comprehensive and empirically based account of emotional development focused on shame. In this paperback edition, Michael Lewis adds a compelling new chapter on stigma in which he details the process in which stigmatization produces shame.

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Shame: The Exposed Self By Michael Lewis Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #770284 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Free Press
- Published on: 1995-08-08
- Released on: 1995-08-08
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.25" h x .80" w x 6.12" l, 1.01 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 304 pages

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Editorial Review

From Kirkus Reviews

To understand shame is to understand human nature, according to Lewis (Pediatrics, Psychiatry, Psychology/Robert Wood Johnson Medical School), who here presents his theories about this normal, universal emotion. In Lewis's view, to feel shame requires being able to compare one's self with one's standards or beliefs. When failure to meet a standard is seen as "global" (a failure of the whole self, i.e., "I am bad"), shame results, but when failure is seen as "specific" (i.e., "that action of mine was bad"), guilt results. The self must be exposed to itself, in Lewis's terminology, in order for shame to be felt; thus very young children do not experience it. He traces the developmental processes that allow for the emergence of shame, analyzes how it differs from related feelings, examines ways of coping with it, and looks at how the sexes differ in their experience of it. Females, he says, experience more shame than males, and when the emotion is prolonged, females are more likely to respond with depression and males with rage. In fact, Lewis links the violence in our society to an out-of-control shame/rage spiral. In extreme cases, prolonged shame may even produce narcissistic and multiple-personality disorders, both of which the author sees as on the increase. Although primarily concerned with shame in contemporary Western society, Lewis also looks briefly at other cultures. Throughout, he conscientiously provides as a framework for his own ideas the views of other psychologists, psychiatrists, scientists, and philosophers. Numerous anecdotes, written in a loose, conversational style that contrasts sharply with the rather textbookish tone of the main text, illustrate his ideas. Sensible scholarly analysis of an emotion that has an enormous impact on how individuals relate to each other and to society. (B&w drawings--not seen.) -- Copyright ©1991, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Review

Contemporary Psychology I heartily recommend [*Shame*] to scientists and practitioners alike, for I think with time it will become acknowledged as a pivotal text for how emotion, the self-system, and interpersonal relations are inextricably linked in human development.

Joseph J. Campos, Ph.D. Director of the Institute of Human Development, University of California, Berkeley ...a major contribution to the study of emotional development by one of the most creative figures in contemporary psychology...Dr. Lewis sheds light in an engaging and provocative manner on what shame is, how it develops, and why it is so significant for personality development.

Paul Ekman, Ph.D. Author of *Telling Lies* and *Why Kids Lie* Lewis brilliantly illuminates the nature of shame and its impact in our daily life, uniquely combining scholarly research, stories from everyday life, and clinical cases from his own practice. Lucid and insightful, it is must reading for scholars and laymen, researchers in emotion and development, and clinical practitioners.

From the Back Cover

Shame, in some sense the quintessential human emotion, received little attention during the years in which the central forces believed to be motivating us were identified as primitive instincts like sex and aggression. Now redressing the balance, there is an explosion of interest in the self-conscious emotion. Much of our psychic lives involves the negotiation of shame, asserts Michael Lewis, internationally known developmental and clinical psychologist. Shame is normal, not pathological, though opposite reactions to shame underlie many conflicts among individuals and groups, and some styles of handling shame are clearly maladaptive. Illustrating his argument with examples from everyday life, Lewis draws on his own pathbreaking studies and the theory and research of many others to construct the first comprehensive and empirically based

account of emotional development focused on shame. He traces the precursors of a sense of self in infancy and early childhood, and describes the consequences of shame which goes unacknowledged, such as sadness, rage, or depression. Lewis also explores the many ways in which shame is induced and expressed, reflecting on the broader implications of these differences--for instance, the divergence, early in life, of men's and women's experiences of and responses to shame; he finds that women are more ashamed, more of the time. Cultures, Lewis argues, are shaped by the ways in which children are taught to deal with shame. What many have seen as a rise in narcissism in contemporary America, following years of emphasis on self-actualization and personal freedom as opposed to commitment and community is associated with an increase in shame. Narcissism is in some sense the ultimate attempt to avoid shame, albeit a doomed one. Lewis shows how approaches to shame differ not only among cultures, but religions as well. Judaism and Christianity for instance, hold different approaches to shame. He explores the major tenets of each belief including mainstream Protestantism, Catholicism, and fundamentalist Christianity and discusses the relative degree of orientation of each toward shame or guilt. Understanding shame is the first step toward coping with it effectively. This book offers a new way of understanding fights between husband and wife, parent and child, nation and nation, and it will be, for many a crucial impetus to take or to help others take that first step.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Carolyn Baird:

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Sandra Conaway:

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