



How to feel like you have the right to exist.

MAN'S GUIDE TO SHAME

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How to feel like you have the right to exist.

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This book is dedicated to any man who's shameless enough
to think this book should be dedicated to him.

“The Pharaohs had it wrong. You don’t enslave men.
That’s too much work, and men will fight back.
Instead, tell men they’re no good—they will enslave themselves.
You won’t need a whip—they’ll bring it to you and ask to be whipped.”
– Ellsworth Toohey

Introduction

Man's Guide to Shame was originally my master's thesis on the treatment of shame using cognitive behavioral therapy. It was brimming with information, but too academic, which is another way of saying it wasn't useful.

In fact, every book on shame, as psychology has understood it for the past 40 years, has sacrificed practicality in order to maintain an academic front.

Therefore, I took the next step in the discussion on shame and created a concrete guide for you to confront and overcome your shame. The seven shame-reducing steps laid out in this book are the distillation of the abstract theories.

This book will make overcoming shame seem simple, and it is simple. It's almost as if we're built to live without shame.

That said, *Man's Guide to Shame* will teach you about psychology, and it will teach you about shame, but that's not my primary intention.

When reading this book, think of yourself as an Olympic sprinter in training. There's plenty of information out there about how muscles, tendons, and the cardiovascular system work. But you, the sprinter, don't need to know anything about that. All you need to do is strengthen your muscles and condition your cardiovascular system. Sprinters have little use for a textbook on human anatomy. They need a workout regimen.

If you're so inclined, you can read through the reference list at the end of the book. But this will do little to overcome your shame in the same way knowing everything about muscle fibers won't make you a faster sprinter.

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What Shame Is

Shame is the feeling something is wrong with you. This contrasts guilt, which is the feeling you did something wrong.

We feel shame as the result of being wrong, and we feel guilt as the result of doing wrong.

Every shameful thought, emotion, and action is supported by at least one of these three beliefs:

1. I am worthless.
2. I am unlovable.
3. I am defective.

Let's say you steal a loaf of bread. A shame response would be to feel defective because of what you did. A guilt response would be to feel like you did something defective, but that has no reflection on who you are.

The implication of guilt is you can do something to fix the problem. The implication of shame, however, is nothing can be done to fix the problem.

This book isn't about overcoming guilt. Guilt is a proper response to doing something you don't think you should do. This book is about understanding, confronting, and overcoming shame, and achieving the irreplaceable feeling you receive as a result—the feeling that you have the right to exist.

Why Shame

Shame is at the root of every depressive and anxiety disorder. It is the cause of racism, hostility, passivity, shyness, approval-seeking, and narcissism. Behind every maladaptive pattern of behavior and thought, we see shame there, avoiding eye contact and fidgeting with the buttons on his shirt.

The most pervasive manifestation of shame is self-sabotage. Colloquially, this is known as getting in your own way. When men don't believe they're good enough to achieve what they want to achieve, they act in a way that ensures failure.

Asking for a promotion at work? Shame tells you to stumble over your words and lose composure because, don't forget, you're still the guy who pissed his pants in the fourth grade.

Choosing a career? Shame tells you to doubt yourself, eventually relying on the advice of others. A patchwork life is good enough for you because it's only you.

Talking to a girl? Shame tells you she'd probably be better off with someone else. You better put your hands in your pockets and come up with a good reason not to ask for her phone number.

We only blame our failures on something or someone else because looking at ourselves as the problem is too scary.

In short, if I could invent a pill that reduced shame significantly in patients, I would win the Nobel Prize in Medicine. I'd probably win the Peace Prize, too. I would be psychology's equivalent to Leonardo da Vinci. For hundreds of years after my death, tourists would visit my laboratory and view my manuscripts through three inches of bomb-proof glass.

This pill may be a reality some day. But until then, *Man's Guide to Shame* is the next best thing.

The Pareto Principle

This book operates on the Pareto Principle, also known as the 80/20 rule.

In the early 20th Century, the economist Vilfredo Pareto noticed 80 percent of the peas in his garden were produced by 20 percent of the pods. Then he noticed 80 percent of the land in Italy was owned by 20 percent of the people.

The Pareto Principle, therefore, says this: 80 percent of what you accomplish will be the result of 20 percent of what you do.

In *Man's Guide to Shame*, I am giving you the 20 percent of what to do to eliminate 80 percent of your shame. Removing that last 20 percent of shame could take a lifetime anyway.

Besides, everyone experiences some shame, so don't feel bad when you do. And we need a little bit of it to be part of society. Too much shame will make you a husk of a man. But shame also keeps you from pissing in a potted plant during a business meeting and smelling the ass of your boss's teenage daughter as she walks by. Most importantly, shame keeps you from wearing cargo shorts.

In other words, shame exists to make you part of society, not subservient to it.

Turn the Rocks Over

How exactly are the seven following steps going to force you to confront, understand, and then overcome your shame? Let me use a metaphor to explain.

In the backyard of my childhood home, several large rocks and railroad ties lined the far edge. These rocks and ties made the yard look more presentable, but when you turned them over, you were hit with a face full of bugs and mold. “Yikes,” you thought. “Better leave these rocks the way they were.”

The following seven steps naturally turn over the rocks of your psychology to see what’s really there; the steps put you in situations in which you’re forced to see yourself for what you are. At first, it may be gross to look at yourself, but after a while, you’ll accept it, and you’ll be a more complete person. When your rocks are turned over, you eventually develop an implicit belief running throughout your psyche that you’re okay, that you have the right to exist.

You could talk or journal your way into turning the rocks over, but that’s like imagining what it’s like to jump off a cliff instead of just jumping off the cliff yourself. The only reason you’re avoiding the leap is because you’re afraid of it.

And eventually, as you keep the rocks turned over, the mold and bugs will clear up.

Let’s begin with the first step to help you turn the rocks over of your psychology.

1. Anal Phase

Imagine you have to go poop. You're also out in public. First you have to find a toilet seat that won't give you crabs. Then you have to pray to the gods of privacy nobody else is in the bathroom, because otherwise, somebody might hear you poop.

But why don't you want anyone else to hear you poop? Everybody poops, and everybody makes the same trumpet sound when they do.

According to Freud, if a child failed to become comfortable with his buttock and all that it does, then the child would grow up to have an anal-retentive personality. This is now known as a shame-based personality.

Thankfully, it's never too late to come to terms with your buttock. And thankfully, it's simple. All you have to do is to poop loudly when in a public bathroom. Or poop loudly when other people, like your roommate or girlfriend, are within ear shot of your poop sounds. You have a buttock and it poops. Buttocks are supposed to make that sound. To be ashamed of that sound is to be ashamed of yourself.

It may seem doubtful that pooping loudly is related to your ability to be okay with yourself. But the two are connected by a similar emotion. The same anxiety that comes up when you poop loudly is the same anxiety that comes up when other, less-favorable aspects of yourself bubble to the surface. Freud understood this. Therefore, when you become comfortable with one instance of the anxiety, you will become comfortable with all other instances of the anxiety.

An example from my life:

In addition to pooping louder than a freight train, I have a step stool in my bathroom next to the toilet. You put your feet on it when you're pooping, which makes for better poops (it's science, look it up). When I have a guest over for the first time, and they need to use the bathroom, I tell them what the step stool is for in an open, matter-of-fact manner. Not only does this help me and my company confront our shameful buttocks, but this also sets up my eventual step stool joke.

It's a good thing you don't have to be clever to overcome shame.

Since I began dealing with guests in this fashion, I've had several of them tell me they never used to feel comfortable pooping at their friends' apartments, but with me they can. What compliment is better than that? Because I was comfortable with my pooping, I made it natural for those around me to be more comfortable with their pooping. And with themselves.

Conclusion

When you poop loudly, you're teaching yourself that you and every part of yourself—even the smelly parts—has a right to exist.

2. Sexuality

Sexual shame is the belief there is something inherently wrong with sex. Yet no one is such a liar that they believe sex to be unimportant. This makes sex worse than an evil—it makes it a necessary evil. We need sex but we think we're wrong for needing sex. Such an internal struggle is shame fertilizer.

Common instances of sexual shame in men include:

- Feeling like women don't want to have sex, at least not with you.
- Feeling like you need to somehow trick a woman into having sex with you. Because if she wasn't manipulated in some way, why else would she want to?
- Viewing sex as unessential in developing connections with women.
- Feeling like you need money, good looks, or fame to be attractive and have sex.
- Feeling like you must be impressive in any material or superficial way to get a woman to like you.
- Viewing virgins as pure, as if sex is something that hurts or tarnishes women.
- Viewing sex as something that comes after courtship, not as a part of courtship.
- In general, feeling unworthy of or disconnected from sex for whatever reason your shame can come up with.

As a result, we hull around the latent belief our penis is a harpoon as opposed to a love plug. In such a world, it's only the bad guys who are able to create strong relationships with women and have the best sex. In such a world, it's no wonder even the best of men find themselves lying, manipulating, and trying to impress girls. In fact, it's because "good" men see themselves as good, and so subconsciously separate from sex, they find themselves acting in unnatural ways to get it.

The missing piece, therefore, is to see sex as your birthright, rather than something that must be won like a trophy, or pleaded for like a forgiveness. Understanding this is easy; believing it is difficult. Especially since you've been preened in a society of abstinence-only education and Hollywood films in which even self-confident, handsome men must lay their life on the line to get a whiff of Reese Witherspoon's hair.

Accepting sex into your life after a certain age is like trying to learn a new language in your 20s. It's possible, but it will be difficult, and you'll always have accents of shame in your thought and behavior.

You can read books about the true nature of human sexuality, and this will help you come to terms with the fact that the female body is built to have sex for eight hours per day, but that can only do so much. It's difficult to reason with programming.

But remember, we're only removing 80 percent of the shame, anyway. So let's instead look at the 20 percent of our actions that can do that.

So every day for the next 30 days, walk up to three random girls who you think are beautiful and say, "hi, I thought you were beautiful, so I wanted to talk to you."

This must be done during the day in an asexual setting in which sexual expressions like this aren't usually made.

The asexual context is an essential element for this to be effective. Don't do this in a bar. Girls expect this in a bar. Do not do this to strippers at a strip club. Strippers expect this when their boobs are in your face. Do not do this when you're on a date. A girl expects this when she's on a date. And don't do this to the girl you've been studying with for the past six months in hopes that something will just happen. She already knows you think she's beautiful and, spoiler alert, nothing is ever going to happen between you two.

The idea here is to take an asexual setting—the bus stop, for instance—and make it sexual. The discomfort targeted with this simple statement is going to be the same discomfort that arises whenever your sexual shame issues arise. Maybe when it's time to kiss a girl. Or when you ask the stock boy at the grocery store where they keep the condoms. Or when you feel the urge to “get” a girl as opposed to being your genuine self.

As you become more comfortable with talking to random girls in a sexual manner, stay and talk to the girls for longer periods of time. You'll be surprised how quickly you will become comfortable with this. After all, it's your psychological inheritance to be comfortable with this.

You can also increase the difficulty of the challenge. For example, make your compliment more sexual. Tell girls they have a great body. Say this in front of the girl's friends. Say this on a crowded train so other people can hear you. You'll be surprised what girls are comfortable with as long as you're comfortable.

The purpose of this exercise isn't to get laid. It's not to game girls, or be charming or fun or attractive. The purpose is to simply express your sexuality, and then notice it's no big deal when you do. Here you are, letting your sexuality be known to the object of your sexuality, and lo and behold, everything is okay.

Conclusion

Some girls may even like it, but that's not the point. We're teaching ourselves a simple truth about our sexuality: it has the right to exist.

On masturbation

There's nothing inherently wrong with masturbation. But it's not without its downside. Problems arise when you (1) masturbate too much or (2) masturbate to porn.

Masturbating too much disconnects your sexuality from real girls, and porn convinces you sex with girls is a fantasy. As a result, sex will inevitably feel more shameful because you slowly convince yourself you don't deserve it.

Additionally, when you achieve the majority of your orgasms by looking at porn, then it becomes the case that you'd rather stay home and masturbate than go out and meet girls. Fewer interactions with girls equals more shame.

Many men fall victim to these habits without being aware of it. As a precaution, therefore, I recommend you take 90 days off of porn and masturbation. After 90 days, you can slowly reintroduce these things into your life if you so choose. By this time, though, if you're talking to three girls every day, you'll probably have three girlfriends. Besides, when you watch porn after taking a 90-day break, it will seem weird to you, which makes sense. Sex is no fantasy; girls are no fantasy. Sex is the reality of being a human.

On learning "game"

Game is the ability to interact with women in a way that leads to sex faster and with less effort. Game is important, but it only teaches men to act like they're comfortable with their sexuality when they're not. It's a band-aid, which may help the wound heal, but it's no solution. So learn and practice as much game as you want. That's not my area of expertise. But keep in mind that game is a path, not a destination. The destination is being comfortable with what you are, and being comfortable with women being comfortable with what you are.

3. Work

Men inevitably feel shame when they stop working on things that are important to them. This is true no matter the culture, nationality, race, ethnicity, or religion of the man. It's as if there's a work gland in our bodies, and when the gland atrophies from lack of use, it begins to produce shame as a desperate call for attention.

An injured fisherman in Thailand will feel the same shame as a retired soccer player in Spain, and for the same reason—they don't feel useful anymore.

So the point here is to always be doing something. Thankfully, you don't have to do that much to keep your head above the abyss of shame. You just have to constantly work on something you think is important. It doesn't even have to be useful—as long as you think it's useful. We're self-absorbed like that.

Yes, this is a constant process to keep out of shame, which may seem exhausting. But think about it this way: Bathing is a constant process, too—as you need to take showers consistently to stay physically clean, so too must you do something useful consistently to stay psychologically clean.

If you have a job, this may mean doing something at your job to be more useful. If you're in a dead-end job, this may mean finding a new job.

You don't have to work on it every day, but set up a general plan in which you are working on something consistently.

Maybe you want to be a computer programmer. Then consistently do the next thing, whatever it is, that takes you in that direction. Enroll in a math class. Find a mentor. Read a book on how to nail a job interview. Start dating an Asian girl. Buy a "Programmers Do It Basic" t-shirt.

When it comes to keeping your head out of the waters of shame, doing something, no matter how small, is infinitely better than doing nothing.

An example from my life

When working on this book, I would write and edit it on Monday and Tuesday, and then Thursday and Friday. On Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday I would think about the book while going for a walk. I'd keep a pen and paper with me for when I thought of an idea. Nothing serious going on here—simply setting up a process and sticking to it.

Conclusion

You're not going for *Time* Man of the Year. You're just going for feeling like your work, and by extension your life, has the right to exist.

4. Honesty

We spend the first two years of our lives telling the truth; it's the natural state. But we learn through scolding from parents that the truth can be rude, so we begin to tell lies to protect others' feelings. Eventually we learn to lie to ourselves, to protect our own feelings.

When we learn to navigate the world by lying, we are subconsciously telling ourselves we are unable to deal with the world as we truly are. That we are incapable of truly deserving things, because we have always deformed ourselves, if even a little bit, to get money, a career, women, and to get along with people in general.

We cannot feel like we have the right to exist if we have only made ourselves appear as someone who has the right to exist.

Lying, no matter how small, reinforces your beliefs that you're wrong—it reinforces your shame. The dishonesty tunnels into your psyche, to the base layer of shame we all have, shines a light on it and exclaims, "hey look everybody! Look at how important and meaningful this stuff is!"

The problem with telling the truth all the time is, as mentioned, it can be rude. But that doesn't mean you have to tell the truth in a rude way.

Let's remember, children aren't scolded for telling the truth—they're scolded for being rude. You cannot teach children to tell the truth in a polite way because children are stupid, so you need to stop them from being rude by telling them to not tell the truth. Our lies, therefore, are no more than an atavistic organ that was only useful because, at one point, we were much stupider than we are now.

But you're not a child anymore, so you can be honest while being a stand-up guy. In fact, being honest is what makes you a stand-up guy.

Conclusion

Even if your honesty does make you seem like an asshole, it's okay. This book is about overcoming shame, not about being smooth or well-liked. These trappings of niceness are only essential for people who don't feel like they have the right to exist. And as long as you're telling the truth, you will feel like you have the right to exist.

5. Support Groups

You probably don't have a full-blown addiction or a personality disorder to warrant joining a support group. But chances are there is an area of your life that is outside of your control. For instance, you're probably not an alcoholic, but every so often you may lose control of your drinking. You've had a bad week at work, or you hear bad news (or good news for those men who hate being happy) and this demon comes up for you and takes control over your thought and behavior.

These uncontrollable areas are the fertile crescent of shame. You will not feel like you have the right to exist if you are not in control over that existence.

Drinking is one example, but there are countless examples of this happening. Maybe it's procrastination, overspending, or maybe you cannot control yourself whenever you're with an attractive women. You don't want this beautiful creature to overtake your life, but it inevitably happens. You cannot set boundaries like you would with someone else, and as a result, you are no longer yourself. It drains your energy and all you're left with is a tank full of shame.

So what is it about your life that's out of control? Be honest about this, and attend a support group for it. There are support groups for people who are grieving over the loss of a pet, so I'm sure there's a group at least close to whatever you're dealing with.

If there isn't a support group for you, then I recommend joining a support group for depression or anxiety. These groups are good enough for most men—they're not a perfect fit, but they get the job done.

Support groups are good for dealing with these uncontrollable, shameful areas because they get you to talk about them. This transforms your maladaptive shame into its adaptive form, guilt.

Shame needs silence to persist. Shame cannot be managed; guilt can be managed. So when you hide your weakness, you're telling yourself it cannot be changed, and so shame necessarily takes root.

Whatever your vice is, you don't need to overcome it to remove the shame. You simply need to talk about it.

Conclusion

You probably feel like you're above joining a support group. But these groups do get you talking. And as long as you're talking, you may not feel good about yourself, but you will feel like you have the right to exist.

6. Competition

I once had a roommate who would walk around the apartment naked. He would come out of his bedroom to go to the kitchen to get coffee, and his hairy dick and ass would be everywhere. And it's not like he had a dick or ass to write home about.

We would yell at him to put his clothes on, and he'd look down and be just as surprised as we were. He was so comfortable with himself that it didn't matter to him whether he was wearing clothes.

This roommate also threw the discus in college. He didn't compete for a major division I program, and I don't think he was even good. But he was entrenched in serious, athletic competition for the majority of his life. And competition exposes you much more than being naked in front of your roommates.

This is the value of competition. It makes everyone better—even the people who lose—because it reveals us to ourselves and others in ways nothing else could. Competition teaches you how to lose; it teaches you how to be naked.

Competition takes those dark parts of us, those parts we don't want to acknowledge, and it projects them up on the scoreboard for everyone to see. Competition reveals truth. There is no hiding.

As discussed in the last chapter, silence is the breeding ground for shame. And competition is the opposite of silence.

Sure, you feel better if you win and your true nature is exposed as talented or tough, but that doesn't make you feel like you have any more right to exist.

To reap the full reward of competition, however, it's imperative you actually try to win. When you don't try, you may think you're being cool, like you're above the need for competition, but really what you're doing is protecting yourself.

An example from my life

I wrestled in high school. I was pretty good in the beginning, but after a while I stopped trying. Specifically, I would lie on the weigh-in sheet before practice every day. I would give myself an extra 10 to 15 pounds so the coach believed I was cutting that much weight every week. In reality, I was going home and stuffing my face with Chex Mix. I thought I was being clever. But looking back, if I'm to be honest with myself, I was afraid of the competition.

Wrestling attracts the most alpha kind of males in the school, even more than football, and that's intimidating. Now, when I lost, I didn't have to look at myself for who I was, because I always had this excuse in the back of my mind that involved me being clever about not cutting weight. I always had the crutch of telling myself the other wrestlers in

my weight class were 15 pounds heavier than I was. Protection achieved, shame concealed.

Competitive sports aren't necessary. You're probably too old and rickety to take competitive sports seriously, anyway. So get competitive about something else, preferably your work. All that matters is you become competitive about something you will take personally if you lose. Get in shouting matches. Out-work the other guy. Make your project better than it was before. Tell somebody their work is crap. Encourage, rally, motivate your team.

Conclusion

When you compete, you may lose badly, look like an idiot, and feel bad about yourself, but you'll at least feel like you have the right to exist.

7. Social Pressure

Most men do not like being the center of attention. When there are more than three sets of eyes on them, they become self-conscious, nervous, and so they are unable to be themselves. They regress into their childhood selves who hide behind mommy's leg when company is over. And all it takes is six eyes looking at them.

The self-conscious brush this off by saying they're the quiet type, and being the center of attention is too narcissistic for them. Wrong-o: I'm not saying you need to be the kind of man who seeks out attention, but if you're uncomfortable when the attention does happen upon you, then that's a problem. And the major cause of this problem is shame.

When you feel eyes on you and feel discomfort as a result, that's your subconscious communicating to you, through nervous, apologetic behavior, that you don't deserve to have eyes on you. You believe there's no reason for anybody to look at you. You may feel like you have the right to exist when looking at someone else, but not when other people are looking at you.

Your palms sweat and you fiddle with your wristwatch because a part of you feels like you are not the man in the group who deserves the attention.

The one thing you can do to deal with these uncomfortable emotions, and so to deal with your shame issues, is to get good at public speaking. Take a speech workshop, go to your town's comedy club on open mic night, and give presentations at work. Or, if you're a fag, go to a poetry reading. Anything you can do to get yourself to confront the tension of your anxiety that tells you "I don't deserve this" or "I'm not good enough" when all eyes are on you.

Get up in front of a room of people over and over again. Record yourself and keep practicing until you like how you come across. As you slowly become a man who can command a presence, you'll begin to see yourself as someone who has the right to be the center of attention.

Most men can be comfortable being the center of attention when talking about a subject they know a lot about. An engineer will have less of a problem with social pressure if he's giving a lecture on engineering. But that doesn't expose his shame. The difference is this: The engineer can talk about engineering because he sees himself as okay in the context of engineering. But that doesn't mean he sees himself as okay in the context of being himself apart from engineering.

If you're an engineer, it's necessary to be just as comfortable telling stories about your family's vacation, a random thought, or a joke you think is funny.

Conclusion

When you can be the center of attention, feel the pressure that comes with it, and then continue to be yourself, you will feel like you have the right to exist in front of other people.

The Final Word

If you've ever met a 12-year-old boy who's had a good upbringing, you've been around somebody with an appropriate amount of shame. He's had no reason to distrust anyone or to feel bad about himself in any serious way, and it's going to be a couple months before he hits puberty and all its awkwardness.

This 12-year-old boy is who we're striving to be. He's as close to a picture of healthy shamelessness we see today (probably why *South Park* is hilarious).

Of course he'll let his poop trumpet naturally and loudly. Poop sounds are funny if nothing else.

To him, beautiful women aren't something to be feared. Rather, they provoke his curiosity.

He goes out of his way to compete, he talks to people without hesitation, he performs at his talent show even if he has no talent, and he has no reason to be dishonest, except maybe to get out of trouble.

Therefore, overcoming shame isn't a process of learning, but rather unlearning. You've accumulated a veneer of "maybe I'm not okay" from mimicking a world of people who don't think they're okay. The point isn't to figure out a way to act like the veneer isn't there, but to strip the veneer away. Removing your shame doesn't make you different—it makes you who you are.

Only then will you feel like you have the right to exist.

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