



[(Shame the Exposed Self)] [Author: Michael Lewis] published on (August, 1995)

By Michael Lewis



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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 includ

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