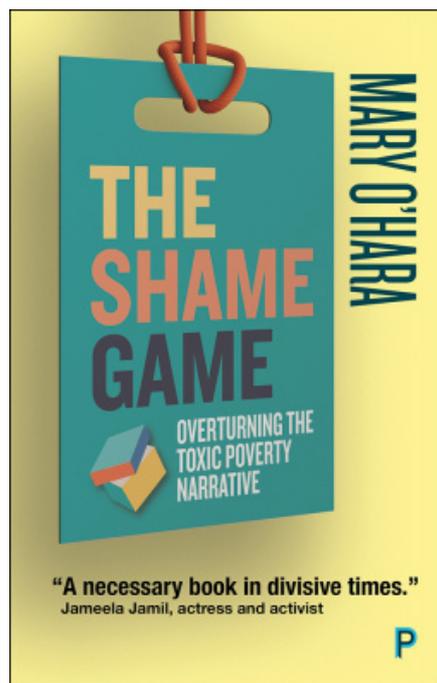


Dorling, D. (2020) Foreword, in O'Hara, M. (ed.) *The Shame Game: Overturning the Toxic Poverty Narrative*, pp.xiii-xvi, Bristol: Policy Press, 27 February, 978-1447349266.

Foreword

(to **The Shame Game**)
Overturning the Toxic Poverty Narrative

Danny Dorling – (Final Draft 3 October 2019)



Shame is how they get away with it. Shame is the weapon they use. Shame is the weapon you use on yourself that makes you feel so useless. And those who are shamed most often and most deeply, made to feel ashamed for so much of their life, are the poorest among us.

When others say that they are disappointed in you, they are trying to inflict shame on you. They are attempting to make you contrite and silent. To force shame upon you. The poor are the most common targets of shaming because the rich are not ashamed of how they became rich and use shame as a weapon to control those they most harm.

Shame beats you down. Shame is an ancient form of control. Shame is the mechanism used to control behaviour. Most of us are capable of feeling shame for our own actions without anyone else having to shame us. However, those who play the specific and cruel 'shame game' outlined in this book - a public and prolific shaming that targets the poorest among us and a mechanism that has been used with incredible effectiveness to 'keep the poor in their place' - are rarely ever ashamed of themselves .

In this book, Mary O'Hara shows how the 'shame game' being played out against poorer people in the US and UK is so destructive and effective. She dissects how it works to help keep the poor, poor – though blaming and shaming. She outlines why, for people who have lived in poverty, the impact of being shamed can be devastating and how those who do the shaming, do so by turning a blind eye to the experiences and the voices of the poor.

For the players of the shame game - the rich and the powerful who consolidate their power and vast wealth at the expense of others - shaming people is a way of affirming how great they are. And, they constantly need to feed that affirmation. They tell us they are 'wealth creators' while ignoring the role of inherited fortunes or that it is in fact workers, often paid a pittance, who generate wealth. They claim they are successful because of their own talents and efforts, rather than having benefited from ever-growing social and economic inequities – divisions they created.

Poverty is inflicted on millions in the US and the UK, especially on the young, on women, people who are differently abled or labelled as from a lower race or class. But to inflict poverty on huge numbers of people in an affluent nation state is far from easy, it takes hard work. Those who play the shame game have to work tirelessly to maintain their fabricated mantra that the poor are feckless and idle, stupid and undeserving because, as this book demonstrates, it is essential that they poor feel ashamed if the rich are to keep getting richer at the expense of others.

Those with the most power use the fear of being cast outside to incite people who could and should know better into joining in the shaming of those just beneath them on the social scale. Their most open message is to 'join us' (the majority, they claim) in condemning the behaviour of the poor that has made them poor. Their implicit message is that there will always be wide divisions. Their core message is that you may never be as rich as us, but by joining in our bullying, you can insure yourself against falling into poverty, for how can you be part of a group you too so despise?

As a result of taking part in the shame game the majority of people are taking up an offer, a misguided hope of a salvation, if only the majority play along with the fear tactics orchestrated by the most rich and power. Work hard they say, as hard as you possibly can, and one day you, or one of your children or grandchildren, could join us at the very top. They call this equality of opportunity.

Those who believe in inequality, who as an act of faith think that only a few should ever have most of what we all could have, use powerful messages and mechanisms – including the media - to spread their lies. However, this is not a debate. It is not a reasoned argument. It is abuse. The rich are trying to use your pride and your fear to control you. They are telling you that you are better than the people with just a little less than you, but simultaneously that they are much better than you, because they have so much more money than you. They are wrong.

As this book so clearly shows, the USA and UK are the most economically unequal states of all the large rich nations because the shamers have, for now, won, while those who endure poverty every day are shamed into silence. These two states made up of many nations are

outliers, unusual, odd, disappointing. They are examples of what happens when inequality and poverty are entrenched and when a false narrative about the causes of poverty prevails.

It has not always been this way. And, as this book argues with facts and the insights of people who have actually been on the receiving end of the shame game, it doesn't have to continue.

Do what has worked in the past and what works in the majority of nations today, where both poverty and inequality is falling. Help those who might succumb to playing the shame game to see how they are being used. Respect those who are the victims of the gamesters. Whenever you hear the words skiver, and shirker, feckless and burden, sponger or taker applied to people who have the least – think. Think, just for a minute, about how in the most unequal of rich states the powerful are trying to take you for a ride.

Think about who actually avoids the hardest, least-rewarded work, who shirks their responsibilities to others, who is dismissive of the lives of others, who are the real burdens on us all, who sponge off the vast majority to grow their riches - and who take the most. Expose them. Call them out for their role in creating poverty and staggering levels of inequality we live with today. Shine a light on the absurdity of their claims to 'deserve' their vast fortunes while others work for poverty wages and struggle to feed their kids.

This book will show you the true scale of poverty and deprivation in today's America and Britain. Children are growing up stunted in the US and UK today. More babies died in 2018 than in the previous year, and the year before, and the year before that. More poor parents did not get to hold that first birthday party in 2018, than in 2017, or 2016, or 2015. More children and adults are going hungry amid the riches. More and more are forced to beg for food at soup kitchens and food banks. More are forced to take yet longer and longer hours of lowly paid insecure work from a series of jobs while the shamers have the gall to cry out how low unemployment now is. Growing millions are forced to sleep outside on the street or live in constant fear of eviction from their homes. Many people living on the street have jobs.

More elderly people are dying earlier. Life expectancy has peaked in both the UK and USA (in 2014 in both cases). It is now falling. Nowhere else in the rich world is suffering such absolute immiseration because nowhere else have the greedy been allowed the shame game to be played so effectively. Shame on us.

So, stand up, stand proud and don't play their game anymore. Read this book to educate yourself. Read this book to hear from the people who are being shamed, whose voices are rarely heard, and who aren't standing for it any more. Call out the shame game whenever and wherever you see it. Don't be ashamed. When they can no longer shame you, they lose.