



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Episode #17: Unshamable

Please note: This is an unedited transcript, provided as a courtesy, and reflects the actual conversation as closely as possible. Please forgive any typographical or grammatical errors.

- Martha Beck: [Intro Music] Welcome to Bewildered. I'm Martha Beck, here with Rowan Mangan. At this crazy moment in history a lot of people are feelings bewildered, but that actually may be a sign we're on track. Human culture teaches us to come to consensus, but nature — our own true nature — helps us come to our senses. Rowan and I believe that the best way to figure it all out is by going through bewilderment into be-wild-erment. That's why we're here. [Music fades]
- Martha Beck: Hi, this is Marty.
- Rowan Mangan: And I'm Ro. And here we are at another episode of Bewildered, the podcast for people trying to figure it out. I myself have been trying to figure it out of late by reading tea leaves, and Marty was drinking some sparkling water yesterday and she sort of gazed deep into the bubbles and suddenly just had it all figured out.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. Yeah. Because see, the problem is people try to read solid matter like tea leaves or coffee grounds, or I don't know, tarot cards. "Ha. Ha," I say. It's all about gas, Rowan.
- Rowan Mangan: It's gas.
- Martha Beck: Yes, the bubbles will tell you everything is made of gas. Everything if it heats up enough becomes gas. We are gas to gas. Forget ashes to ashes, dust to dust, we're all made of gas. That's literally true. If you heat something up enough, it all becomes gas. Ro's giving me that look.
- Rowan Mangan: Because you were being so funny and then you just couldn't help just nerding it up.
- Martha Beck: I couldn't. I was like, "No, it's literally true. I'm afraid they won't believe me."
- Rowan Mangan: She's so funny. She does this all the time. She will be like, "Da, da, da. That's literally true by the way. Shakespeare did say that. Shakespeare's wife was that way."
- Martha Beck: My children want to kill me when I do this. Okay, the point is, I am going to dedicate myself to being a more gassy person.



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Rowan Mangan: I don't know how that could be possible. Rude.

Martha Beck: Yeah, well, brace yourself.

Rowan Mangan: Sorry.

Martha Beck: Because that's what it's all about.

Rowan Mangan: What is it all about?

Martha Beck: The bubbles, the gasses. Okay.

Rowan Mangan: Okay.

Martha Beck: So what are you trying to figure out? But for reals.

Rowan Mangan: For realsies. Okay, so I'm going to go deep this episode.

Martha Beck: Okay, okay, wait, let me take a breath. All right.

Rowan Mangan: Go, you're releasing some gas.

Martha Beck: That's what I always do. Move on.

Rowan Mangan: All right. So, I'm trying to figure out the whole conundrum of convenience culture in middle class America, in late capitalism. I went out this morning to take Lila to the park, and there at the side of my stroller is a cup holder, because when you're walking with a stroller, you need somewhere to put your coffee.

Martha Beck: Well, obviously.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. And later I went to the supermarket and there's a cup holder in the cart at the supermarket, which was like, because God forbid while you're pushing your cart through the supermarket, you don't have anywhere to put your cup. Clearly we're expected to have coffee at all times.

Martha Beck: At all times.



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- Rowan Mangan: Anyway, so as a true suburban 21st century American mom, after the supermarket, I went to Starbucks drive-through where I sat in the car using a very special setting that our car has, which is designed for drive-throughs. It's literally what it says in instructions. And what it does is it keeps you from the inconvenience of having to put your foot on the brake while waiting in line at the drive-through. So, you press this button, it's called auto vehicle hold or something like that. And then you can just sit there and take your foot off the brake because it's so inconvenient to have to have your foot on break in the line at the drive-through to get your coffee, which you will never be left without a holder for.
- Martha Beck: Isn't there a cup holder by the door? On the door?
- Rowan Mangan: Our car has 17 cup holders.
- Martha Beck: Wait what?
- Rowan Mangan: I'm not making that up. Yeah. Our new car-
- Martha Beck: What?
- Rowan Mangan: ... because I'm a nerd and I looked at the YouTube videos, it has 17 cup holders. I don't know why.
- Martha Beck: Where are they, in the trunk? How do you fit that many cup holders?
- Rowan Mangan: I don't know. We could work through it if we went through it, but they really were very keen on us knowing this.
- Martha Beck: Okay, the car only seats how many people?
- Rowan Mangan: I think it's six. You can seat six people in it.
- Martha Beck: And it has 17 cup holders?
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Well, yeah.
- Martha Beck: So, each of us is expected to have a minimum two cups of coffee with us at all times.
- Rowan Mangan: I guess so.
- Martha Beck: Sounds right.



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- Rowan Mangan: Including the baby.
- Martha Beck: Sounds right. Well, and she's got one on her stroller too.
- Rowan Mangan: She's got two on her car seat. I swear to God, you guys. I'm not kidding. On each side of her car seat is a cup holder.
- Martha Beck: What?
- Rowan Mangan: There are two cup holders on her car seat.
- Martha Beck: What?
- Rowan Mangan: Have you seen them?
- Martha Beck: I hadn't noticed. Are you kidding me?
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, no, I'm not kidding. So, we actually have 19 cup holders. So, there I am in the Starbucks drive-through not having to have the inconvenience of putting my foot on the brake between edgings forward because there's a lot of other SUVs in the line at the drive-through from people who would never be without a holder for their cup no matter what they do or where they go. Anyway, so I get to the window, I order three coffees because-
- Martha Beck: That's what you needed minimum.
- Rowan Mangan: Well, just to justify all the holders. And anyway, so I said, "Can I have three coffees?" And seriously, honestly, the guy said to me, "Would you like a cup holder for those?" And I just had a moment of I was looking into this man's friendly face with his little visor and his little Starbucks uniform, and I was just looking into the abyss at the end of the world. The total flash before everything dies. When the end comes, you will know it from its excessive number of cup holders.
- Martha Beck: Okay, I have two things to say. The first thing is, I have been coaching people for 30 years and asking them what they need in their lives. And never once has someone asked for or dreamt of a car with 19 cup holders in it.
- Rowan Mangan: So, what's a car? It's like a tiny room that you go sit in and then get somewhere else. When did it become a really important part of that was a receptacle for beverages?
- Martha Beck: Maybe we're supposed to be drinking a lot more. Like drinking a lot more. Maybe it's for hard liquor. Have you ever considered that?



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- Rowan Mangan: No, I haven't, but I really am now.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, you need your hard liquor, two glasses of hard liquor apiece and then coffee. The baby gets one glass of hard liquor, then one coffee in the car seat there.
- Rowan Mangan: It should just all the Irish coffees. It's just more economical.
- Martha Beck: There you go.
- Rowan Mangan: Put your liquor in your coffee, fools.
- Martha Beck: 19 Irish coffees please, and it's for me. No, the other thing I have to say is, when you do look into the abyss, the one thing that can comfort you is it would hold this immense cup.
- Rowan Mangan: The abyss is like a cup holder, ready to take the burden of all my angst.
- Martha Beck: Actually, maybe that's what all those cup holders are for, American angst. "Could I get a cup of angst, please?"
- Rowan Mangan: "Decaf. Decaf angst, please."
- Martha Beck: Wow. I do not know how to figure this out. Perhaps one of our listeners will send in something that will enlighten us as to why we need 19 cup holders in our car.
- Rowan Mangan: I sure hope so. I do. Marty, what are you trying to figure out?
- Martha Beck: Oh, mine is so much more primitive. This is the thing. All of yours are advanced and knowledgeable, and all of mine are about poo or something.
- Rowan Mangan: Is this related to heat everything up and it becomes gas? Because that is literally true.
- Martha Beck: That is literally true, yeah. Okay, so here's the thing. I can't believe ... I thought this was something only very few people in the world would ever know, and now everybody out there is going to know, and here it is. I have a tail and I can't figure out what to do about it. It's not a huge tail.
- Rowan Mangan: Just wag it.



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- Martha Beck: It doesn't wag, it's ossified. Yeah, my little tailbone. We all have a tailbone. We have a tailbone. We have vestigial tails and some babies are born with a little triangular tail, like a hippopotamus, but I'm not one of those.
- Rowan Mangan: This is literally true.
- Martha Beck: I'm a grown up. No, but look it up, Google it, but there are just all kinds of ... I bet there's a whole porn fetish site for people who are born with tails. Anyway. My tailbone sticks out more than most people's, but it's covered by skin. You wouldn't know. And pants, usually. There's skin and pants, but underneath all of that-
- Rowan Mangan: No flesh though, folks. That's the problem. She's a slim little thing, my wife.
- Martha Beck: My spine kind of sticks out like a Stegosaurus. It's not a pretty picture back there. But I never thought any of it would be a problem.
- Rowan Mangan: Stegosaurus. Sweetie, it doesn't.
- Martha Beck: But I never thought it would be a big deal-
- Rowan Mangan: To have a tail.
- Martha Beck: ... to have a tail. This particular kind of tail.
- Rowan Mangan: Really? You never thought it would be a big deal to have a tail?
- Martha Beck: Until we decided that what with my foot surgery and the pandemic and everything, we were going to get really ambitious about fitness and get someone, a friend who knows Pilates brilliantly, to come put us through Pilates workouts. Yeah. And so we got Ray, the most generous and flexible and admirably six packed man in existence. Really wonderful person. And so he comes over and Karen and Ro and I, we all get out our little mats and he starts with sub beginning Pilates. Like see if you can lift one arm sort of Pilates. We're like-
- Rowan Mangan: And he's so sweet. He's like, "You're doing great. See if you can lift it a little higher."
- Martha Beck: "Just a little higher."
- Rowan Mangan: Right. "See if you can get the whole thing off the mat."
- Martha Beck: "No, straighten your wrist." I can only do the hand, Ray.



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- Rowan Mangan: "Well, that's great. You're doing great."
- Martha Beck: So, he was so kind and it turned out I actually ... I don't know what it is, I took martial arts for a long time, I do a lot of sit ups, but I actually could do most of the sub beginning parts.
- Rowan Mangan: She's obnoxiously good at Pilates.
- Martha Beck: At sub beginning Pilates. So I was thrilled with myself. I was doing the hundreds and I was doing ... I don't even know what that is. I was doing grab your heel, or ... I don't even know. There are different [crosstalk 00:12:06].
- Rowan Mangan: Come on mate. Don't grab Ray's heel.
- Martha Beck: That has nothing to do with Pilates and is also totally obscene. That's just bad.
- Rowan Mangan: "Okay, boys. Now we're going to play grab your heel."
- Martha Beck: What have I done? What have I done? I have to tell you that in martial arts, we would learn these moves that were like returning viper, where you kick someone in the face. But then you kick them in the face again, returning viper. And I made up one called slapping panda. I will roll down a hill in a very adorable fashion and slap the hell out of you. Anyway, so we were not doing grab your heel. What is wrong with me?
- Rowan Mangan: You have a tail.
- Martha Beck: I don't know the names of the things, but I was doing them. And there was one called the crab as well. God, now it's associated with grab you heel that is legitimately called the crab. That's literally true. Then there's a very basic move where you just put your legs up in the air and then you put your body up in the air and you balance on your butt. And Karen and Ro are like, "Done and done." And I tried to do this and I began to roll uncontrollably. I rolled backwards, I rolled sideways, I rolled either way. I rolled front ways and Ray was going, "What exactly is hard about this for you?" And I'm like-
- Rowan Mangan: It's a triumph for those of us who actually have butts.
- Martha Beck: I couldn't do it. I was rolling like some sort of weird weeble that wobbles, but it don't fall down.
- Rowan Mangan: It was hilarious.



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- Martha Beck: It was so humiliating. And I was like, "Why can I not do this?" And then I felt the part of myself that was on the mat. And it's like a damn-
- Rowan Mangan: Babe, did you grab your heel?
- Martha Beck: That's what-
- Rowan Mangan: I mean tail.
- Martha Beck: I became a lesbian to avoid this kind of discussion. No, it's like a golf ball. My tailbone sticks out like a little golf ball. And they're trying to get me to balance on this completely round, very small thing. Try to balance on a golf ball under your pelvis and see how that goes for you.
- Rowan Mangan: She was like a little spinning top. You could have just come up at the point where she was actually balanced for a millisecond and just spin her around. She would have just ...
- Martha Beck: Yeah, I'd get the position and then just start to spin and roll uncontrollably. I'm thinking of making a little stand for my tail.
- Rowan Mangan: Like a little hemorrhoid cushion, but teeny.
- Martha Beck: It's not in the hemorrhoid position. It's a tail. How would our dogs feel if you just said, "Don't wag your hemorrhoids." Those aren't hemorrhoids, Ro. Those are tails.
- Rowan Mangan: I'm just thinking of the donut shape would be useful. Your tail could go in the middle.
- Martha Beck: Actually, that's very kind of you. And it would probably work. Anyway, I was so embarrassed and I was like, "Ray, I'm not going to let you feel my tail because I think that would make us both feel really weird. But I'm going to have Ro touch it and tell you about it."
- Rowan Mangan: So, we're basically the same as all those clients.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, exactly the same. So we started joking and Ray said, "Oh, I'm sorry. I don't mean to be offensive." And I said, "Look, I have a tail. I can't take offense. What right do I have to take offense at anything?" And he said, "I'm exactly the same way." And I was so overjoyed. I was like, "You also have a tail?" And he was like, "No, I-"
- Rowan Mangan: "Oh my God, no."



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- Martha Beck: "Oh my God." You could see him throwing up in his mouth. He was like, "No, I just I'm hard to offend." He's such a lovely man.
- Rowan Mangan: He's the funniest. He [crosstalk 00:16:09] like, "You have a tail?"
- Martha Beck: I was like, "If he's doing it with a tail, I can do anything." I was like, "There's somebody like me." So, I haven't figured it out at all. But the hemorrhoid cushion thing is a really good lead. So, thank you.
- Rowan Mangan: It's an image that will stay with us all probably.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. Okay.
- Rowan Mangan: Okay. Well, as you know, in this podcast, we help people from bewilderment to beWILDerment, their wild true nature. And what we want to talk about this episode is a bit different from what we usually do, because usually we're talking about areas of life in which we need to move away from culture and towards our nature. That's right, right?
- Martha Beck: Good. Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: And then ... But today we want to talk about the strategy that culture tends to use to try and keep us in its little box. So, we've called this episode Unshameable because we're talking about when you get shamed. So, not shame itself as such, but to be shamed and then to be unshameable. How do we make ourselves unshameable by the forces of the culture, be they your mother-in-law or your garbage man person?
- Martha Beck: So, now we know who yours are.
- Rowan Mangan: I'm so ashamed that I let that slip. Anyway, so how we can be shamed and then what it takes to be unshameable by the culture.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. And to start that off, I think we have to define a little bit what we mean by shame because it's such a huge topic. It really has all kinds of arms and legs.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: But basically it's the way people give each other an energetic shove in the direction of doing what's expected or what that person expects. I just am reading a book that said narcissists have no shame but they shame everyone else all the time and they control everyone with shame because other people would be ashamed to be so shaming, but narcissists aren't. So, shame is an incredibly powerful tool for socialization.



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Rowan Mangan: I'm sorry, but I just can't let that go by without saying, what else do narcissists do, Marty? Come on.

Martha Beck: They make other people watch videos on YouTube.

Rowan Mangan: Bad animals, cute animal friends. Don't they?

Martha Beck: It didn't say that in the book, just any video from YouTube.

Rowan Mangan: It was implied that it was about cute animal friends.

Martha Beck: And I vowed to stop making people watch YouTube videos. Oh my God, ask my children, they're ready to shoot me. And then when Ro came in to make this podcast, I was like-

Rowan Mangan: We had a fight.

Martha Beck: ... "This will get us in the mood. Show you a video." I am literally still reading this book that says that is a narcissistic behavior.

Rowan Mangan: Oh dear.

Martha Beck: Between that and my tail, I'm amazed they let me run around loose.

Rowan Mangan: I'm so sorry that I interrupted your really good, serious sociological point about narcissism to talk about animal videos.

Martha Beck: But you did not do it in a way that was very shaming.

Rowan Mangan: Thank you.

Martha Beck: It was like a suggestion. And we all know what it feels like when somebody shames us and it can be something as simple as a sneaker or a snare when we say something that's really from our heart and somebody else goes, "Right." That is enough. We're so delicately attuned to fitting in that being deliberately shamed can control us to an incredible degree without any violence, without any legal recourse, it's just other people pushing shame at us.

Rowan Mangan: I just got the image in my head of one Kelpie shaped, I don't know what you call it, or a Border Collie, say dog herding sheep and just running around and keeping them in this clump.

Martha Beck: Yeah.



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- Rowan Mangan: You only just need to run a little bit like this and get into that sheep's vision, and they'll back into the herd.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. Yeah. I used to teach Sociology 101 and I would send my students out. I'd say, "Break a law that doesn't hurt anybody and then do something that somebody disapproves of and see which one gets you the most behavioral change." So, they would go out and they would go through a stop light without stop, or a stop sign at night without stopping. And they'd say, "Fine." But then they'd do something that was considered shameful, like wearing pants that were too short for the fashion. And they would be emotionally devastated. And like, "I'm never wearing pants like that again." And it's a very, very powerful tool. So yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. So, it's actually kind of the opposite of what we are trying to do in this podcast where we're trying to nudge you a little bit away from the culture and into what feels true for you. This process of being shamed by others who are the voice of the culture in that instance is what we're talking about today.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. And you really can't talk about shame these days without referring to kind of the goddess of shame. And I mean that with all respect and admiration, Brené Brown.
- Rowan Mangan: Brené owns shame.
- Martha Beck: She does.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: She has a patent on it.
- Rowan Mangan: She gets a royalty every time someone feels shame.
- Martha Beck: No, she's a wonderful person. And she's a researcher at the University of Houston and she put out a definition of shame that we thought was a good one.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. So, she talks about shame as, and this is the quote, "An intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging." Which I think it's worth just reflecting on because I think we have a general understanding of the feeling of shame and kind of what it is. But I certainly, before I read Brené's work, I'd never put together that that's exactly what's going on, is that you're flawed and it makes you unworthy of love and belonging.



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Martha Beck: Belonging, yeah that's the key. And we are willing to abandon ourselves to belong, which is ironic, because then we've abandoned ourselves and our true selves feel abandoned, not belonging. But I was recently lucky enough to have a conversation with a guy named Gavin de Becker who wrote a book called *The Gift of Fear*. He's a brilliant, brilliant expert on fear and violence. And we got talking about how public speaking, this is in his book *The Gift of Fear*, public speaking is much more frightening to human beings than death, guns, sharks, knives.

Anything dangerous that we're afraid of, we are less afraid of than getting up on a stage in front of people and talking for a while. And the reason is that if those people don't like what we say, we experience it as being cast out from the group. We're already singled at. Now, if they look at us with disapproval or we don't satisfy them, we're out, and that is emotional and often physical death, especially for a small child.

So, children are really shameable, shame vulnerable. We remain vulnerable unless we do something about it, which is what we're going to talk about today. But yeah, it's a survival need and it is more fearful than being attacked or any other. It's the number one fear we have.

Rowan Mangan: So, we can be shamed by the people in our lives. That's where we're vulnerable and it can happen in real time. Right?

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: And when we were talking about this, I said, "It's like the Greek chorus in those sort of ancient Greek plays where you ..." I don't know if you guys know this, but there's this sort of strange phenomenon in the theater which was that there would be, on stage, there's the characters who are in the scene and then there's the chorus, which is just a group of people, I don't know how many people it would be, like five or something.

Martha Beck: Didn't they wear masks or something?

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, yeah. And these collection of people would all speak in unison, I think. And they have their own lines, but it's just the voice of the chorus, and they represent society. So, they represent the people at large and how they're responding to these events.

Martha Beck: That's so interesting.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, right.



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- Martha Beck: I thought they were the gods, but the gods are the ones that come down from the machine at the end and save the character so that the writer doesn't have to come up with a good plot resolution.
- Rowan Mangan: So easy back then.
- Martha Beck: I know. But it's so interesting that they'd get this group of people. It's a strange device. And they would all chant things in unison. It's been a long time since I read Oedipus Rex. But I remember them chanting things like, "Don't kill that dude. He's your father."
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, that's exactly what it was. I know we've canceled Woody Allen, but Woody Allen pre-cancellation had a movie called Mighty Aphrodite and the movie had a chorus. And I do remember, and this was very prophetic, that the chorus in that movie at one point went, "Woody, don't be a schmuck." But did he listen to the chorus?
- Martha Beck: They never did. Did they?
- Rowan Mangan: No, they never do.
- Martha Beck: No, the tragic heroes never listen to the damn chorus.
- Rowan Mangan: But I hasten to add, nor should you.
- Martha Beck: Nor should you. Not if it's the Greek chorus of shame in your head.
- Rowan Mangan: Yes.
- Martha Beck: And what happens? It's so interesting. I think there were six people in the chorus, which would be fascinating because psychologists tell us that in our head are spaces for about six people, like a maximum of six people called the generalized other. And every time you pick out a pair of shoes or a bar of soap for that matter, your generalized other is approving or disapproving, and you will alter your behavior based on having the internalized voice of the shaming others.
- Rowan Mangan: Because in the past, you've literally been shamed by them.
- Martha Beck: Exactly.
- Rowan Mangan: Okay.



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- Martha Beck: This is not just a spoken behavior. It's not the talking that is the most shaming thing, it's the tone and the energy of it because people who study baboon troops have seen that they have the same issues.
- Rowan Mangan: Wow.
- Martha Beck: And so it's not linguistic. It goes right to the amygdala, which is a very primitive fight or flight turn on switch in this case. And it creates so much fear just with one experience that you will never go against that unless you deliberately decide to undo that particular wiring in your brain.
- Rowan Mangan: Wow. It's powerful shit.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, try growing up Mormon.
- Rowan Mangan: Thanks, I'll pass.
- Martha Beck: The first time I tasted champagne, I was 31. It was my first alcoholic beverage ever. They gave it to me. The no alcohol thing, I literally thought the plane would crash because I had tasted champagne. That's how strong the shaming was. I thought God is going to punish me. And at this point, I was like an atheist. I was like, it's not like I believed in it any more. It was my amygdala.
- Rowan Mangan: Wow, yeah.
- Martha Beck: Going, "The wrath of God is coming down on you."
- Rowan Mangan: It lays a really deep track, doesn't it?
- Martha Beck: So deep.
- Rowan Mangan: The past shamings, yeah.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: Fascinating.
- Martha Beck: Yikes. And we all, I think, have individual variety of things where we were actively shamed that are so painful. And it's a big problem. So, when we talk about being shamed, just to give you some references, it's like when somebody looks at you and goes, "Oh, so that's what you're wearing?"



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- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, exactly. Or, "You don't still listen to house music, do you? Oh my gosh."
- Martha Beck: Like, "Really? That's seriously on your playlist? Okay."
- Rowan Mangan: But they don't have to do all that much.
- Martha Beck: No.
- Rowan Mangan: They don't even have to elaborate on it, right?
- Martha Beck: A simple eye roll will do fine, yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, exactly. So, I think the thing is that we all have areas where we're very vulnerable to being shamed, like areas of secret shame or where we secretly, to go to Brené's definition where we suspect we might have a flaw or where we don't belong. And by the same token, it's funny that we also, as Marty and I were talking about this, we realized there's also areas where you can't be shamed. Where everyone has certain areas and they won't be the same. So for me one of the areas where I can be very deeply shamed is about being a good greeny, not creating extra waste and all those sort of environmental credentials which is very important to me.
- Martha Beck: Oh my gosh. If this woman touches a paper towel, it is just like sack cloth and ashes.
- Rowan Mangan: It's not strictly true, and that's part of why I'm deeply in shame all the time.
- Martha Beck: Deeply ashamed.
- Rowan Mangan: But I can't be shamed around like, "Oh, you're stupid." School wasn't a problem for me. And it was for so many people. That sort of idea I know is very hard for some people because you have that suspicion, and I have it in all kinds of places, honestly. But yeah. So, school or being smart enough or whatever wasn't an area where I could be shamed.
- Martha Beck: Isn't that funny that we have, both you and I have this very narrow band of places where it's really easy for us to learn? And that happened to coincide with our culture's educational system. So we're like, "Yeah, we're fine."
- Rowan Mangan: "No worries."



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Martha Beck: And all the people out there who have a slightly different neurology or dyslexia or something, were in hell of shame all the way through school. And we ended up unshameable because we got lucky in that area. Interesting.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. It's like, it's not smart, it's called good at school.

Martha Beck: Yeah, good at one thing, school. Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: So, what about you? Where can you be shamed or not be shamed?

Martha Beck: Well, the one place I can be badly shamed and this actually did happen at school because in my family, we were all encouraged to be very smart-alecky. So, I got very much shamed for being too obvious about being smart, for being arrogant, for being a show off. I had teachers take me out in the hall and go, "All right, I know you're smart. You don't have to try to prove it." And I literally didn't know what they were talking about, but damn was I ever shamed.

Rowan Mangan: It's interesting because that's like there's a school culture and a home culture. And when you're a kid and you're so ... It's all so foundational when you're trying to learn rules and it's like, "Wait, but I was obeying the rules of home culture."

Martha Beck: Exactly.

Rowan Mangan: But breaking the rules of school culture. And that's the complexity of culture, is they all have different rules and you go to different places and have to be different people if you're going to be a cultural being.

Martha Beck: And it's really like you're being stabbed in different ways for doing different things, like there are different consequences for different actions in any different social setting.

Rowan Mangan: Different consequences for the same actions.

Martha Beck: For the same action. That's what's so confusing about it. Yeah. It's horrifying. On the other hand, for some reason, I am completely unshameable about never getting out of my pajamas and bathrobe ever, even when the bathrobe becomes so spattered with oil paint and maybe other things I don't know. But when it's oil paint, I'm literally proud to be in this incredibly disgusting valor bathroom covered with paint. People come to the door and I'm like, "Yeah, what are you looking at? I'm cool."



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- Rowan Mangan: Gosh, if you were shameable about that, you would just be a puddle of shameful time because-
- Martha Beck: I'd have to get out of my down pajamas.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Maybe you would.
- Martha Beck: That ain't going to happen.
- Rowan Mangan: Nah.
- Martha Beck: Because I'm unshameable around that.
- Rowan Mangan: Unshameable. Yeah.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: All right. Okay. So let's talk a little bit about our experiences being ashamed.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. We thought we'd give you a couple of real life experiences because you may really identify with this. What was yours?
- Rowan Mangan: I had a friend at a certain time in my life who, I don't know, I think that she sort of sensed that one area where I'm very shame-able is that because I had a sort of unusual kind of upbringing, I felt like I didn't really always get the rules of society at large. I didn't get how normal people were and I've always had this suspicion that everyone else understands the rules and I don't know. And maybe everyone has that in fairness, but-
- Martha Beck: No, I think probably only children like you have it more.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Yeah. And so I would be hanging out with this friend. She would be able to cut me down very easily by saying, "You don't do that," whatever it was that I was proposing to do. And later on, as I got older, I was like, "Hang on. Plenty of people do that."
- Martha Beck: Well, what did she say you don't do?
- Rowan Mangan: I don't want to-
- Martha Beck: Okay. I get it. Yeah. I totally get that.
- Rowan Mangan: I don't want to get into it.
- Martha Beck: We shall not speak of it.



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Rowan Mangan: But you can imagine there's sort of the rules of society say that if you are at someone else's house, you don't do something or if you ...

Martha Beck: But the things you were doing were not bad, she decided to shame you because it was the thing she did.

Rowan Mangan: And I'll just say that since, she's not in my life anymore. And I realize that the only child, highly sensitive person kind of stuff is also something that I can now claim a lot of the time and revel in, if anything.

Martha Beck: Absolutely.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Love it.

Martha Beck: Because the fact is by trying so hard to read the rules of every rule room, you're better at reading the room than almost anyone I know.

Rowan Mangan: And I'm better at being able to reject it these days as well, reject the rules like, "I'm all right."

Martha Beck: So I chose an experience that was actually a turning point for me in terms of shame, because I was always trying to be ... I have this very like grovelly lapdog personality. So I was always trying to fit in and achieve and be like, do it right, be at the top of whatever. And it wasn't that I was trying to be better than other people, I just thought I had to do that to deserve to live. And then when I was 25, I got pregnant and it turned out mid way through and I was at Harvard, you may have read the book, and the baby was diagnosed with down syndrome.

And I thought, "Okay, knowledge is power." I was devastated. But I went out and I got books on raising children with down syndrome. And I remember at the Harvard bookstore, there was this massive section of books on how to make your baby smarter. And one book on how to raise a child with a developmental disability. And it had two kids playing leapfrog. They had down syndrome, they were playing leapfrog in this grainy, nasty black and white photograph on the cover of this book.

And I took it home and I started to read it to try to prepare myself. And it said things like, "In potty training, your child getting praised from friends and relatives is a big part of the normal child's development. But since your child will not be able to get praise from relatives or friends and will have no friends, you will have to be it. You're going to have to use other methods."



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Rowan Mangan: The book was shaming you.

Martha Beck: Yeah. And it was like an institutional book for people who were in asylums or something, and then it said, "You should learn to get familiar with the feeling of being ashamed everywhere you go with your child." And when I read that, something snapped inside me and I took that book and I threw it across the room so hard that when it hit the wall, it literally exploded. And just hundreds of pages of crap went floating to the ground. And I was like, "F that, that is not happening."

And I decided I will not be ashamed of my child. And then I kind of went, "Holy shit. I will not, I can make a choice about this. I have the right to be." I missed one math question in second grade and literally went and sat in the snow waiting to die because I thought that I should freeze to death because I messed up.

Martha Beck: That's how ingrained I was into the school culture. And yet here was this kid who wouldn't be good at that. And I was able to stop being ashamed of it right there.

Rowan Mangan: What's interesting to me is that, and as someone who's relatively recently become a mother myself, I feel like it's easier as a parent to make that switch consciously to being unshameable when it's on behalf of your child. And you can actually decide to do it and consciously say, "Okay, now I'm going to be unshameable." But I think it's much harder to go through the same process on your own account, because somehow we can see in our child that they're not flawed, that they do belong, all those things, but we have so much more conflict around accepting those ideas in ourselves. And I just wonder maybe that's what we can get at today in this episode is how can we treat ourselves with the same sort of certainty of perfection and entitlement of love and on belonging and all of that sort of thing as we can for our children.

Martha Beck: Well, I think, yeah, if you look at it even in terms of harsh Darwinian logic or harsh Richard Dawkins logic, the one thing that our genes would program us for even harder than saving ourselves is saving our children. So the instinct that arises is one of protection. And to be able to say, "I will access that instinct for myself," I actually think it's the best gift we could give our own children and anyone we know, because when we choose to be unshameable in a way that liberates us to be our best selves, the example we set helps everyone. It sets everybody free to be themselves a little bit.



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- Rowan Mangan: I completely agree with that. So let's figure out how to do it. So what it seems like to me is that there's space between the attempted shaming that someone else does at us, like they get their little laser gun of shame and shoot it. And there's a moment where the laser is still traveling. Let's call it like a crossroads to mix metaphors, like a shame crossroads. So in the moment, when someone attempts to shame you, you reach that crossroads or choice point. And if you can slow down those moments enough and be conscious enough about what's happening in that interchange, you can find that it doesn't feel like there's any moment there. It feels like ... you've immediately been wounded, but if you can slow it down, there is a moment between the shaming and the shame.
- Martha Beck: So, the thing coming at you and the way you internalize it. And maybe even if you just got it close to that in proximity, like you feel a bolt of shame, then you go, "I know this feeling. I know this game."
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, sure. And that's the more realistic thing.
- Martha Beck: And then you can like ...
- Martha Beck: You get shame but then you just unshame yourself.
- Rowan Mangan: And you get your shield. And then the shame bounces off your shield and hits them back in their own little shame gland.
- Martha Beck: Shameless, the superhero.
- Rowan Mangan: Unshame-
- Martha Beck: Okay. So when we reach crossroads, it's any place where we're being pushed to abandon ourselves. So if somebody says to you, "Eat with a fork, not a spoon," and you're not ashamed of it. It's like, "Fine. I'm happy with a fork, not a spoon."
- Rowan Mangan: Or, "Today I'll eat with a spoon."
- Martha Beck: It's fine. But if it's something like hide your child inside, never let him see the light of day. It's like, "Well, no."
- Rowan Mangan: "Or you're not going to wear that outside the house. Are you?"



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Martha Beck: "Damn right, I am. I have landscapes to paint and I need to be warm." Yeah. So, you can decide at that moment at the crossroads where you can feel the pressure to abandon yourself. And it's that horrible pain of feeling like you don't belong. But if we can get a bit of fight in there with the flight and say, "Wait, I'm not sure that this is worth taking on."

Rowan Mangan: And I think that's what Eleanor Roosevelt was saying when she said, "No one can make you feel inferior without your permission." That there is actually something that you have to sign up for even though it doesn't feel like that initially. It reminds me of, God, I don't know. I think I saw this on some sort of British comedy special or panel show or something where someone made some very cheap joke and said to the other person, "No pun intended." And the first guy goes, "None received." And sort of like that thing where this shame is being intended at you, but you don't have to pick it up. They can't shame you ultimately without your permission.

Martha Beck: Without you receiving it.

Rowan Mangan: Without you receiving it.

Martha Beck: So shame intended, none received.

Rowan Mangan: Boom.

Martha Beck: Boo ya. But this is obviously a really hard thing to do. It's hard to stand up to the Greek chorus. Oh my God. Yeah. However, both of us, as we talked about this, we've done it in places in our lives. And we came up with a kind of some ideas that might help you guys too.

Rowan Mangan: Because what better than to walk through our own lives being unshameable? Wouldn't that just be the most amazing feeling? So, here are our ideas. Here are some of them. I think that first you have to let in the truth of the situation. So is there something that needs to be owned by you? Because shame and I want to say like denial or pushing away the truth can sort of have that same knee jerk feeling, I think. So, take a breath and go, "Is there something that I need to own here? Did I do something that they're saying or implying that I did?"



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- Martha Beck: So yeah. You have to actually take it on board. My first week in graduate school, I just saw a picture of this professor online. He was a very, very famous sociologist and I had never even had a sociology class and he had us write a prediction about the future. He was a futurologist. And so, I wrote this prediction about the future and he took me apart in front of all the other graduate students. He went through the paper line by line and just blasted it. And after class, my classmates gathered around me and they were like, "Are you okay? Are you still alive?" And I was like, "No, he was right. He was right on every single point and I can deal with that."
- Rowan Mangan: Right. And so, he may have been attempting to shame you, but he didn't know that he was in one of your areas of-
- Martha Beck: Unshameability.
- Rowan Mangan: ... unshameability.
- Martha Beck: "Couldn't do. I don't go there, sir."
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. But no, that's right.
- Martha Beck: But I did what he said and I agreed with him when I thought about it. So that's actually part of the unshameable is being able to own something that, "Oh, okay. Yes. I made a mistake. I'm not going to beat myself up about it, but I did do it." So, the key thing then is if you did it, you have to judge it by your real values, by your wild nature values instead of by any of the zillion cultural entities that could be pressuring you. So I was like, "Oh, okay. I really messed up on that paper, but why? Did I do any wrong according to my own values or my own knowledge? I was doing the best I could. I just didn't know anything about sociology. I choose not to be ashamed because I didn't do it on purpose. And it was a learning experience." It was not in violation of my own value system.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Yeah. And it's good to take that moment to actually define what your values are as well. That's always a useful little exercise, right?
- Martha Beck: Oh yeah. Read my last book, *The Way of Integrity*. There's a whole exercise about how to do it.



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- Rowan Mangan: There you go. And so, if you find that you ask yourself that question, "Yeah. Actually, according to my own values, I have contravened my values in some way, there is something bad I think in what I did according to my values," then it's actually a fairly straightforward situation where there might be an apology to be made and a behavior change to kind of log in yourself so that you are in integrity with your values, you are in accordance with your own values.
- Martha Beck: Cool. Yeah. I had a cartoonist friend. He was a political cartoonist and one day he was getting a ton of hate mail. And I said, "Dang, that is gnarly." And he said, "Oh no, I deserve it. It was a really spiteful over the top cartoon. I should never have published it." I was just amazed by the way he was like, "No, I'm good with it," because he needed that in his position. He had to ride that line. So he would just go, "You make a solid point." And I found that to be a great thing to say to people who are trying to shame you if you actually agree with them, "You make a solid point."
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. In Australia, we say, "Fair cop."
- Martha Beck: Fair cop. Fair game to you. That's Irish. Right? Fair play to you.
- Rowan Mangan: Bless your heart.
- Martha Beck: I'm so ashamed. I got my Irish wrong. "Fair play to you, Matey." No, that's pirate.
- Rowan Mangan: So, easy to confuse those.
- Martha Beck: So, if you realize that what you did, what you did do it, but it wasn't against your value system. In fact, it may have been something you did that was very courageous to defend your value system, like standing up against oppression or something, you have to detach from the value system that's shaming you, which is probably easier said than done. You have to stop believing in the culture at least a little bit, because you're only shameable if you believe that what you've done was wrong even though in your own value system, it isn't. But because the culture says it is, you believe them just that little bit and it's enough to get you all turned around.
- Rowan Mangan: Right. Right. And so to detach from the belief system of the Greek chorus, let's just say, that it is a choice, but it's not easy because, and it comes into this area of the work that Martha does and teaches in her life coach training and everything, which is about a learning to not necessarily believe your own thoughts, which is a whole huge area with lots-



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Martha Beck: Many.

Rowan Mangan: ... that we couldn't even begin to ... but the Byron Katie work is one way to do that.

Martha Beck: Steven Hayes, *The Liberated Mind* is a great book on it. All behavioral cognitive therapy does this.

Rowan Mangan: That's right. Thought work is like a really mega simplified version of sort of how to do thought work is you define what's going on. "Okay. It seems like there's a Greek chorus saying I shouldn't go outside of the house in this outfit." So then the question you ask yourself in that moment to do, this is in the shortcut, is, am I sure that I shouldn't leave the house in this outfit? And that's-

Martha Beck: Is that literally true that I shouldn't? Is it?

Rowan Mangan: And that's literally true.

Martha Beck: Well, it's literally true. Yeah. And if it's like, "No, there's nothing morally wrong with going outside in this bathrobe," then be proud, own it, go out there. It's fabulous. I know it is. I do it every day. But as you're talking, I have just been reading about the difference between the way the cortex experiences trauma and the way amygdala does. So the cortex is the verbal. So the things we've just talked about, reading a book, going to training or therapy or whatever, it goes through the cortex of the brain, but it doesn't necessarily get to that deep animal pain that we feel if we fear being ousted.

And to do that, you actually need to connect. Either sit and really feel your way through the issue and get really solid that you are serving what is true for you, or get someone to literally be a social support. You kind of need a different Greek chorus. And I got most of mine from books. So you don't necessarily have to have people around you. But a 12 step group that you can go to online, a therapist, friends you know are going to be on your side. And if you can, be with somebody who can sit with you and look in your eyes and potentially give you a hug, because these are the animal experiences that de-program the amygdala so that you don't have to obey the shaming culture.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. And it makes me think that what the hug can do is, so if you, "Are you leaving the house in that outfit? Am I sure that it's wrong to leave the house in that outfit?" Okay. Deal with the cortex and then to come back again to Brene Brown's definition, am I sure that leaving the house in this outfit will lead to me not belonging?



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- Martha Beck: And what's-
- Rowan Mangan: Is a flaw and not belonging means I'll never get a hug again? And so the amygdala itself can't really continue to believe that that idea, however its programming is if you're getting a hug because clearly you're still belonging.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. And it's primal and it's sensory. And even if you've had all the talk therapy on earth, there's nothing like looking into the eyes and feeling the embrace of someone who says you're okay the way you are.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Okay. We're nearly done folks, but I-
- Martha Beck: I love this idea you had though Ro and I'd love you to tell them something that changed me when you said it.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Well, I had the thought that, okay, so we are shameable in some areas, we're not shameable in others. Like maybe the fact that when we notice, "Oh, that's funny, I'm shameable in this area," that's a little bit of self-knowledge that we've got about maybe somewhere where we've still got work to do on ourselves because that vulnerability points to a belief that there's a flaw.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. The way you put it to me was, use the moment of the shame as a signal to work on the areas where you're still shameable. And if you do that and you start undoing the shame with this simple method, am I sure? Is it true? What do I really believe? Can I get a hug? Can I get a hug from a bear? I'm sorry. That just came into my head. I'm also not that shameable around my ADD and my obsession with animals. That's just who I am. But here's the thing. If you use that over and over, it becomes a process that itself is deeply ingrained and becomes an automatic reflexive response. And if you can fully be in your own belief instead of being a slave to the shaming culture, you really are free. It's like the Buddha said, "Enlightenment tastes of freedom." That's moving toward enlightenment.
- Rowan Mangan: Amen. One final note that I want to make sure that we bring up is just the recognition that it's only when we have shame inside us that we shame other people. And so if you're being shamed to be aware that that's coming from someone with shame and that the work we do on undoing our own shame and our own shameability is worked in the larger sense as well.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. Because we don't want to be anyone's shaming Greek chorus. We want everyone to live by their true nature, especially you.



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Rowan Mangan: Absolutely. So stay wild.

Martha Beck: Stay wild.

Rowan Mangan: We hope you're enjoying Bewildered. If you're in the USA and want to be notified when a new episode comes out, text the word 'WILD' to 570-873-0144. For more of us, Martha's on Instagram, [themarhabeck](#). She's on Facebook, [The Martha Beck](#), and she's on Twitter, [marthabeck](#). Her website is, [MarthaBeck.com](#). And me, I too am on Instagram, [Rowan_Mangan](#). I'm on Facebook as [Rowan Mangan](#). And I'm on Twitter as [RowanMangan](#). Bewildered is produced by Scott Forster with support from the brilliant team at MBI.