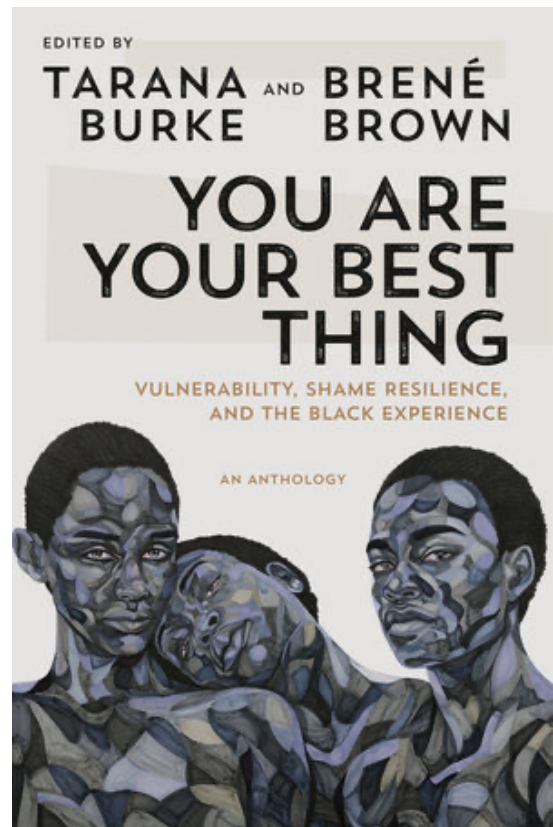


You Are Your Best Thing

Vulnerability, Shame Resilience,
and the Black Experience

An Anthology

Edited by Tarana Burke
and Brené Brown



Content Warning: This book contains detailed firsthand accounts of abuse, trauma, and violence that may be distressing. We encourage you to utilize the resources listed at the end of this document which includes the Colorado College Counseling Center for students and the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for employees.

Guided Reading and Discussion Questions

Before Reading

1. What is your personal definition of shame? How have you previously moved through experiences of feeling shame? What practices, affirmations, or reminders can help you move through feelings of shame?
2. How can you care for yourself as you read about other peoples' experiences of shame, vulnerability, and trauma? What resources or people in your life can provide support as you reflect on your own experiences with shame and vulnerability?

Introduction

3. Why did Tarana Burke approach Brené Brown to co-edit this anthology? How did they honor and value both their lived and academic experiences? How did they co-create the book together?
4. What are some of the ways that people carry trauma? How can a shared community help us find similarities in our experiences? How can a shared community help us understand the many different paths that contribute to trauma?

“Between Us: A Reckoning with My Mother” by Jason Reynolds

5. What did Jason Reynolds share about his childhood journeys to the South with his mother? How did he later react to his mother’s cancer diagnosis? How did the diagnosis impact the choices he made in his early adulthood?
6. Why did Reynolds only briefly visit his mother before she went into surgery? How did this decision lead to feelings of shame? How did his mother react when he shared the experience of not being able to forgive himself? What does forgiveness mean to you?

“This Joy I Have” by Austin Channing Brown

7. What is “foreboding joy”? Have you ever held back from people or experiences that bring you pleasure because you fear disappointment? Why or why not? Why is it sometimes difficult to soften “into the vulnerability that joy makes us feel”?
8. How is systemic racism connected to foreboding joy? Is foreboding inhibiting your own joy? How might you do as Brown advises, and set your heart at ease?

“Dirty Business: The Messy Affair of Rejecting Shame” by Tanya Denise Fields

9. How does Tanya Denise Fields describe her relationship with shame? What happened when she publicly disclosed her relationship with shame and abuse? What are some of the different ways that shame can be confronted? How can verbalizing and confronting shame promote healing? How do you confront your own feelings of shame?
10. How did Fields embrace joy as her birthright? Why is it important to normalize joy, especially for Black women, femmes, and girls? How has your own identity impacted the ways that you access and experience joy? How can you cultivate more joy for yourself and for others?

“My Head is a Part of My Body and Other Notes on Crazy” by Kiese Makeba Laymon

11. How does Kiese Makeba Laymon use the word “crazy” throughout his essay? What was Laymon’s experience learning about and caring for his mental health? What has been your own journey with understanding and caring for your mental health?
12. What prompted Laymon to begin writing odes and apologies to his body? What did he learn about himself from this experience? What odes and apologies would you like to offer to your own body? How can you practice being radical and tender towards your body and towards your heart?

“The Wisdom of Process” by Prentis Hemphill

13. How did Prentis Hemphill describe their experiences as a young person growing up in a violent household? What did they experience going to a predominantly white school? How did this experience impact their relationship with shame? Did you experience shame growing up, either at home or at school?
14. How did Hemphill commit to healing as an ongoing practice? How are healing and politics connected? How can healing lead to a restored and deeper sense of belonging?

“Love Lifted Me: Subverting Shame Narratives and Legitimizing Vulnerability as a Mechanism for Healing Women in the Black Church” by Tracey Michael Lewis-Giggetts

15. What are the shame narratives Tracey Michael Lewis-Giggetts describes that exist within the Black church? Why is the language of certainties and binaries problematic? How do patriarchy and white supremacy influence the Black church today?
16. How is suffering glorified in faith communities? What are some of the shame narratives within the Black church and how do they impact women and girls? How can nurturing love be used to counter shame?

“Never Too Much” by Mark Lamont Hill

17. Why was Mark Lamont Hill told that he was too sensitive when he was a boy? What messages did he receive about how a Black boy, and later a Black man, should act? What was he taught about how masculinity should be performed? What messages about masculinity were you taught when you were a child?
18. When did Hill first learn to decenter male perspectives? How did this unsettle him, and what did it teach him about his body? How can we unlearn messages and patterns related to unhealthy masculinity and traditional gender roles? How is this unlearning connected

to embracing vulnerability? How does emotional vulnerability help us build more authentic human relationships?

“We Are Human Too: On Blackness, Vulnerability, Disability, and the Work Ahead” by Keah Brown

19. How does Keah Brown describe her relationship with writing? Why is self-expression imperative to her survival? What are some of the ways that you express yourself?
20. How did Brown shift her internal narrative from one of shame to one of self-love? How did the realization that shame will come and go impact her emotional vulnerability? How can crying be an act of resistance?

“What's In a Name?” by Luvvie Ajayi Jones

21. What did Luvvie Ajayi Jones experience when she moved from Nigeria to the U.S. at the age of nine? Why did she introduce herself to the class as Lovette and not with her given name, Ifeoluwa? What is your personal relationship with your own name and nicknames? Have your feelings about your name changed over time?
22. Why was Jones reluctant to call herself a writer? Have you ever experienced imposter syndrome? How are the names and the titles we give ourselves connected to our culture, lineage, and traditions? How can a name serve as a teacher and a guide? What stories does your own name hold?

“The Blues of Vulnerability: Love and Healing Black Youth” by Shawn A. Ginwright

23. How does Shawn A. Ginwright describe the blues? How do the blues connect to the experiences of Black young people in America? What have you previously experienced when you listened to the blues? Spend an hour listening to the blues—Ginwright names Muddy Waters, BB King, and Etta James as a few of the greats. What vulnerability do you hear when you listen to this music?
24. Why is vulnerability an important pathway to well-being for young people? Why does Ginwright assert that the only way to form true transformative relationships is to lean into our own vulnerability? How can connecting to a shared racial and ethnic identity support healing and well-being?

“Filling Every Page with Joy: Rewriting Trauma and Shame” by Kaia Naadira

25. What did Kaia Naadira share about their experience as a survivor? Why was becoming a sex worker the best decision that Naadira ever made? How did dancing lead to a sense of

empowerment and self-love? What practices help you cultivate and sustain feelings of empowerment, strength, and worthiness?

- 26.** How did Naadira’s experience as a survivor impact their experience in new relationships? How can practices of consent, active listening, and nonviolent communication support survivors? How can you actively utilize these practices within your community? How can chosen family help us find and nurture self-love and healthy relationships? Who is a part of your chosen family?

“Honoring Our Stories, Transforming Our Pain” by Deran Young

- 27.** Why did Deran Young’s son come home from kindergarten crying? How did Young provide him with emotional support? How would you respond to a young person upset about being bullied at school for their identity?
- 28.** What is shame resilience? Why does Young mean when she writes that we are all hurting in America because of our history? How can vulnerability promote individual and collective healing?

“Running Out of Gas” by Sonya Renee Taylor

- 29.** How does Sonya Renee Taylor describe her relationship with her mother? When her mother died, how did Taylor cope with her grief? Why did Taylor drive around for an hour hoping to run into her ex? What was she hoping to hear or receive from him? Have you ever experienced a similar feeling of running out of gas?
- 30.** What prompted Taylor to go to therapy? What support did she receive and how did her relationship with Dr. Byron develop? How did she learn to embrace a sense of wholeness?

“My Journey: Vulnerability, Rage, and Being Black in the Art World” by Irene Antonia Diane Reece

- 31.** How does Irene Antonia Diane Reece explore her Black identity through her artistic process? How does she explore healing through her family archives? How did this help her process grief? How were you taught to experience or move through grief?
- 32.** What did Reece experience when she was diagnosed with a tumor at the age of 20? How did her artistic process help her to heal? Have you ever had an experience where you were not believed or told you were seeking attention? How can you support your own healing through artistic expression?

“Unlearning Shame and Remembering Love” by Yolo Akili Robinson

- 33.** What did Yolo Akili Robinson experience when they sat down to write this essay? What internal shame narratives confronted them? How did they move through this experience of overwhelming shame?
- 34.** As a young person, why did Robinson’s grandfather discourage them from spending time with the women in their family? How did this lead to feelings of shame? How are shame, masculinity, and white supremacy connected? How can shame be rejected and transformed?

“Hurt People Hurt People” Laverne Cox

- 35.** Why does Laverne Cox need to wear figurative armor when leaving the house? Why does Cox assert that we can’t have effective conversations about racial, gender, or class justice without also talking about shame and trauma?
- 36.** What trauma did Cox’s grandfather experience? How was this trauma passed down to Cox’s grandmother, mother, and to her? How are pain and hurt intergenerational and collective?

“Black Surrender Within the Ivory Tower” by Jessica J. Williams

- 37.** How does Jessica J. Williams use her writing process to access vulnerability and surrender? When did she experience imposter syndrome within academia? Have you experienced feelings of self-doubt or shame during your experience within higher education?
- 38.** What did Williams experience as a Black woman in predominantly white spaces? How do environmental factors influence us, as they do with ripening grapes? What do you need to unlearn, relearn, or redefine in order to heal and find balance in your life? What communities and environments do you need to cultivate to support your healing and growth?

“Steps to Being Whole, On Your Terms” by Aiko D. Bethea

- 39.** Why did Aiko D. Bethea experience shame while attending a gifted program at a predominantly white school? What are some examples of forms of armor that are used to protect against shame imposed by white supremacy? Have you ever used any of these forms of armor to shield yourself?
- 40.** What tools for shame resilience does Bethea share? Why is it powerful to be vulnerable in places and spaces where vulnerability is not usually shared?

“To You: Vulnerable Mother: A Choreo-Essay” by Imani Perry

- 41.** What stories of Black motherhood and vulnerability does Imani Perry share? How is empathy often shaped by white supremacy? What are some of the ways that Black people in the U.S. are increasingly vulnerable?
- 42.** What critique of sociologists and social critics does Perry provide? Why is it important to interrupt narratives of vulnerability with no context? What does “worrying the line” mean? How does this concept relate to vulnerability?

“Where the Truth Rests” by Tarana Burke

- 43.** Why did Tarana Burke write this essay to her future self? Have you ever written a letter to your past self? What would you choose to say to your future self?
- 44.** What physical consequences did Burke experience from suppressing her emotions? How did stress and anxiety lead to the need to create a drastic change in her life? How do stress and anxiety manifest in your physical body? How do you manage your stress and anxiety?

After Reading

- 45.** What messages about vulnerability and resilience resonated most with you? Which essays connect to your own personal experiences? Do you have any new insights about how your identity impacts your relationship with shame?
- 46.** How can you support the people in your life as they move through past and present experiences of shame? What essay might you choose to share with them?

Explore and follow the contributors on social media and on their websites (included on the *You Are Your Best Thing* page of Brené Brown’s website: www.brenebrown.com/you-are-your-best-thing.

Resources at Colorado College

Colorado College Counseling Center

819 North Tejon Street, Colorado Springs, Colorado, 80903

To make an appointment or ask a question call: 719-389-6093

Email: CounselingCenter@coloradocollege.edu

Bill Dove, Ph.D., Clinical Psychologist: wdove@coloradocollege.edu

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

Member Services: 800-272-7255

www.guidanceresources.com

Organization Web ID: COM589

Sexual Assault Response Coordinator

sarc@coloradocollege.edu

719-227-8101

Crisis line: 719-602-0960

Resources from Colorado College's Wellness Resource Center

[The Art & Science of Resiliency](#) (pdf)

[Journaling for Healing](#) (pdf)

[Understanding Trauma & Trauma-Informed Communities](#) (pdf)

Love with Accountability: Digging Up the Roots of Child Sexual Abuse edited by Aishah Shahidah Simmons (book). Copies available in WRC's lending library.

Additional Resources

[National Sexual Assault Hotline: 800-656-4673](#)

[Healing Toolkits & Information](#) (website). Tools created for survivors by advocates, organizers, wellness circle facilitators, and journalists from the #metoo movement.

About this Guide's Writer

Rachael Zafer is the author of nearly two dozen discussion guides for texts like *How to Be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi, *Caste* by Isabel Wilkerson, and *We Do This 'Til We Free Us* by Mariame Kaba. You can view her guides at www.rachaelzafer.com/curriculum.