

**I Love
Myself**

I Love Myself

Nurturing the Most Important Relationship in Life

Shivani



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To the women who have had their self-esteem
knocked out of them and who have restored their
esteem with the choice to contribute to others.

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INTRODUCTION

As a woman, I have struggled with the concepts of self-esteem and self-love throughout my life. I have been through many moments where I felt low self-confidence and where I didn't think that I was valuable—to myself or to other people. As I have worked on the special relationship with myself, I have learned many things about what it means to love you—and how to achieve it. With it has come the dream to help other women do the same.

This book has been written for every woman. Not just the women who are aware of their issues and who struggle to become better people. Not just the women who are hurt and scared and don't know why. Not just the women who seem to have it all together. This book has been written for every woman, because every woman has been in a place where she has needed help with her self-esteem, whether it was in her personal or professional life. Every woman can drastically improve her self-esteem, and every woman can develop a far deeper love for herself.

I want to be clear that this book is definitely not anti-men; it is a pro-women homage. The reality is that, for centuries, men have been the ones running the show. For the vast majority of history, men have been in control when it came to life direction, financial management, politics, and leadership positions. And men (it seems) may have it “together” in the area of self-esteem, although I am sure it’s not entirely true. In the last one hundred years, this concept of power has started to change, although it has a long way to go to get to equality. But this is recent, this is new, and our psyches have yet to catch up fully. Women, as a whole, have yet to fully understand and accept what they are capable of—the truth of which is anything that they wish.

I wrote this book based on the first forty years of my life after working with literally thousands of women on their personal issues related to confidence, sense of self, and self-esteem. Since I also work with corporations (men and women), it was evident to me that I must put my experiences into a book and share with the intent of helping others.

Throughout my many experiences, I have witnessed that women, on a general note, are still not earning equal wages to most males, they are still doing the majority of the work and chores around the house and home, and they are the primary caregivers to children and ageing or ailing parents. I have also discovered that this is happening so often because women are simply not asking for what they are really worth—whether they are at work in professional environments or they are at home with their spouses and families. I can only conclude from this that women don’t

believe in themselves as much as they could or should in order to have more fulfilling lives in which they feel truly deserving of what their hearts desire. They don't love themselves.

If we loved ourselves more, we would ask for better salaries whenever we took a new job in a new workplace, and we'd have no fear of asking for a promotion or raise when appropriate. We would minimize our interactions with negative people who criticize us, doubt us, and pull us down—regardless of whether these people are co-workers, friends, or even family members (yes, it happens more frequently than we think). We would have no fear of passing out, or off, the housework and chores; instead, we would hold the expectations that our spouses and children will also do their fair share in maintaining and creating a home. We wouldn't be martyrs, putting our own personal needs and wants on hold, doing it all “for them”—simply because we think we should. If we truly believed in ourselves, we would make more choices based on putting *ourselves* first. We would go after our dreams, persisting even when it challenged the people around us, and we would share our gifts with the world—receiving the rewards that come with it at the same time. This mode of action—to put ourselves first—is not selfish, but it is not selfless either. This way of behaving is an assertive medium between selfishness and selflessness, and embracing this change is the only way women can find the self-love.

In my extensive studies on this topic, whether it was looking at global trends or my own survey of more than 500 women conducted specifically as research for this book, it was clear that self-esteem and a lack of love for

oneself creates a great deal of the issues that women deal with on a day-to-day basis. Not loving one's self creates ripples of issues in many facets of our lives—from our social lives to our physical bodies.

This book is about acknowledging what has happened to us up until this moment right here and right now—no matter what path you have walked or what background you have—before honouring the past, and then moving beyond that into the future. Now is the time to focus on what we can do in the present moment to change low or non-existent self-esteem in women and young girls.

In order to fully illustrate how women are feeling based on my research, I often refer to the survey that went into the ideas in this book. I will occasionally include survey breakdowns, explanations, and quotes from the women who took part in the survey. The purpose of this is to help express specifically how women have described their own personal feelings about the most relevant issues. For your reference, the full survey and my notes can be found at the end of this book.

In the first chapter, I dive into why we stopped loving ourselves in the first place. It's time to delve into the root cause of the issue. As Charles Kettering once said, "A problem well stated is a problem half solved." By understanding where it all began—where we began to doubt ourselves, question our worth, and give up instead of taking a stand for ourselves—we can begin to see what we need to do to change it. And not just change it, but make a change that is long-lasting. It's time for you to claim your self-worth, to appreciate who you are as a woman, and above all, love yourself.

CHAPTER 1

WHEN DID I START TO STOP LOVING MY SELF?

No one else can take risks for us, or face our losses on our behalf, or give us self-esteem. No one can spare us from life's slings and arrows, and when death comes, we meet it alone.

—Martha Beck

Whether you realize it or not, you started to develop your current level of self-esteem (whatever it may be right now) at a very early age. You have been on a lifelong journey that has moulded, shaped, and impacted the depth of your love for yourself. Your relationship with yourself has been influenced by numerous components throughout your life. Let's take a trip right back to where it all began—your childhood.

Our parents, or our primary caregivers (who may or may not have been immediate family), were the very first influences on our lives. Therefore, they were the first people who influenced us when it came to understanding and loving ourselves. Most of the people who took care of us when we were children probably did so with good intentions—they had our best interests at heart, and at the very least, they cared about us. Most parents and caregivers want their children to grow up with a strong, healthy sense of self-love. Parents generally do love their children, and they want them to succeed and to live fulfilling lives. Most parents do the very best they can with what they have. They use their resources, beliefs, and opportunities, regardless of how much or how little that may be.

The reality is that, just like you, our parents were caught up in patterns that were connected to their own upbringings. Our parents were influenced by things they were unaware of and elements and situations that they likely couldn't control. They did what they knew, and they did the best with what they had at the time.

Now, most parents don't hold the intention of wanting to lower the self-esteem of their children—even if that is the end result of their actions. The realities of life might have made it so your parents couldn't offer you all the things you wanted, deserved, or needed to develop a full sense of self-esteem. Your parents might have struggled with their own issues while they were raising you. These may have been problems with work, money, raising other siblings, managing their own emotions and feelings, or even dealing with external family pressures. All these things impact the quality of life in ways that we can't

completely comprehend as children. All these factors affect how our parents interact with us, which contributes to how we develop self-esteem as we grow into adults. In our perception, through our child eyes, we don't think about what our parents might be dealing with elsewhere in their lives. We only see the result of it, which comes through in the kind of relationship they have with us while they are raising us.

Think about a small child who is dancing around, wanting to show her mummy how well she can twirl—because she loves to dance! But Mum, who is completely exhausted from a long, tiring day of work, responds with a flat and distracted, “Great.” No matter how old the child is, she can tell that Mummy really isn't interested in her dancing at that moment. For children, this can be a painful and damaging experience. In that child's eyes, unconditional love did not pour out of Mum. This can lead to the child starting to wonder if she is really worthy of what is perhaps the most important thing of all in life—love. A query like this is the very start of the self-worth journey, if you want to call it that. It is the introspective journey where the child questions who she is and whether she is valued. A situation like this can hurt even more since the child feels rejected by someone who is all important—her mother.

Take another situation. Imagine a moment of stress and frustration where a father shouts at his child and tells him to shut up. That child might have thought he had something important to say. By being harshly silenced like this, his self-esteem takes a painful hit. In such cases, children start to think that their own voices aren't

important, and thus begin what could be a lifetime of suppressing their true selves, hiding their true feelings, and avoiding taking a stand when needed. These seemingly insignificant occurrences can have long and deep effects in life. For the parent, these instances are forgotten in a few moments, but for a child who is just starting to develop a sense of self, they can last a lifetime. The parent isn't to blame; this is part of life. But understanding this process can help women uncover their pain points, or places of wounding from childhood, in order to take back their self-esteem.

I remember as a little girl feeling that I was sometimes good and at other times bad. Why? I remember being told I was one or the other by my parents and other family members. I also remember that when I did something *they* wanted me to do, I was labelled as "good." On the flip side, when I didn't do as I was asked or as I had been told, I was labelled "bad." Being told I was bad also prompted other things, such as yelling, stern gestures, or raised fingers. The expressions of their disappointment told me I was wrong.

The harsh reality we need to face is that, for many children, these are examples of the good or better days. The truth is that many children experience a childhood filled with events that are much more severe than being told to be quiet when they want to say something. Too many children experience physical, emotional, or even sexual abuse as a part of their day-to-day lives. They have been put through events and experiences that would be difficult for any adult to handle, let alone a child who isn't anywhere near finished with his or her mental or physical

development. The emotional scars to the psyche that are incurred from these environments are much deeper than physical scars. One challenging, adverse experience like this can completely obliterate any shred of self-esteem and send self-love plummeting through the floor. It's important to note that girls are more likely to suffer this type of abuse.

Add to this mixture siblings who might have attempted to use their developing sense of authority over us; teachers who had powerful influences on our thoughts and beliefs about life; the peer groups who helped us shape our ideas about the world; and the pressing, greater societal expectations about who we are supposed to be as women, and it is no surprise that women have issues with developing and maintaining self-love and self-esteem. It's not always easy to be yourself in a world where there are so many outer influences pulling in so many different directions simultaneously—let alone to love who you are on a very deep level.

I am here to tell you that it doesn't matter what your early childhood was like or which walk of life you have come from as a woman. The point is that those early years were simply where you started to develop your belief system about whether you were good, loveable, and worthy. During those formative years, you made the crucial decision about whether you would dislike, like, or love yourself.

In my research for this book and through my business, I discovered some common themes about self-esteem and early development. Women hold the messages received in early development and replay them over and over again

through the years. We didn't know that our mothers may have actually been feeling physically ill when they snapped at us and told us not to jump on the couch. We didn't know that Dad lost his job the day that he told us to shut up and be quiet. All we know is the residue of that experience; with time, we give that residue its own story and its own meaning. Perhaps we need to look at these situations from a different perspective to see all sides, to see the truth, and to liberate ourselves to create new relationships with ourselves as women.

As we grow up and advance through life, we take instances from childhood and create a record that plays over and over again throughout a variety of circumstances. We take the messages that we received from our childhood experiences and begin to overlay them onto situations that are completely unrelated to the original interaction. We create a whole reality of value from something that we can't completely understand. The original intention of the words we heard is long gone, but our psyches have crafted a story to show us exactly why we are unworthy. We repeat it to ourselves over and over again—until a key event comes in to change it or we decide that we no longer wish it to be that way. It's my intention that this book be that event for you. Do you think that now is the time to raise your level of self-esteem and self-love so you can live a more fulfilling life? If so, then this is the book for you.

A personal leader working in one organization, Jane who is rated very highly in the area of intelligence said that she often used her intelligence to get around dealing with emotional issues. However, studies are beginning

to reveal that, in fact, excellent leaders tend to have a combination of emotional and intellectual intelligence. Both are useful and powerful tools when it comes to achieving results and achieving a great life. Team members and other people tend to appreciate a blend of feelings and strong, structured leadership. It makes the leader real to all those who they are influencing. If women overcompensate for the fact that they make mistakes, is this holding them back from positions of power?

Here are some of the common themes I discovered while working with women in one-on-one personal and professional coaching:

- “My mum was always working and didn’t make time for me. She didn’t really love me. I am not loveable.”
- “The bully at school teased me by saying I was fat and ugly. I hate my body.”
- “My teacher told me I was stupid and couldn’t learn a thing. She saw at an early age that I’m not very smart.”
- “My childhood best friend said that I wasn’t a very good friend. I guess that is because I am introverted.”
- “My parents weren’t able to give me the things that I really needed in life. I think it is because I’m not really worth it.”

We end up feeding and allowing messages from childhood to grow—and even get completely out of control. These messages end up getting bigger and bigger

and louder and louder until they infiltrate all the way into our psyches where we start to think that they are truth . . . ouch! They end up holding a large power that looms in adulthood—and often we aren't even aware that it is happening. We end up living under the assumption that these false stories are the truth of reality—and that these false ideals we have been fed over time are the truth. However, the truth is what we make it. It's up to you to decide what the truth is—and to decide how you would love your reality to be.

The *truth* is that, by adulthood, these stories have taken on lives of their own. The truth is that these instances have been swallowed and taken down into the psyche because we were too young, too emotionally naive, and often too undeveloped to truly understand what was happening in the moment. The truth is that these stories are not the truth.

As women, it's not often that we are actually taught how to test the thinking or validity of the messages and stories we carry around with us. We have not been taught how to discover the true meaning behind what other people say or do—or to think about ourselves or the circumstances of our lives in more powerful ways. Other people gave us labels to wear, and in our inexperience, we picked up these labels, put them on our hearts, and started wearing them around, as if they were the reality . . . and as if the label was truly who we are. But what you need to understand is that you can take off these labels whenever you want to—purely on your own will—because they aren't you. The truth of you is far greater than this. Your authentic self cannot be labelled because the true you is

infinite, powerful, beautiful, and made of unconditional love. The only label or badge we want to wear in our lives, no matter what we do, is one that says “I love myself.”

You have the power in your own hands right now. You can take the steps to recognize what happened in the past, honour the past for all that it was and was not, and make a conscious decision to not let the past determine who you are—or who you can become in the future. Do not let your past define or limit you from achieving or doing what you would most love to do. Step into the present moment with your head held high and love yourself enough to move on. You can take the right steps to stop those tapes and old messages from playing out in your life—over and over again like a broken record that no one wants to listen to anyway, especially not you. You can change the messages for yourself, and you can find a clear and easy path to growing your love for yourself.

When you make the conscious decision to take off these false labels and eliminate these false beliefs, you will discover that your true reality can be anything you most want it to be. When you remove the filters that have been placed on you, you will better be able to discern what the original situation really was about. You’ll see it from a 360-degree perspective instead of seeing it in a limited awareness. This will empower you and help you stop the cycle of negative emotions; you will stop looking backward in your life, contemplating the past, and wasting your precious time wondering why this happened to you.

This is true even in the cases of extreme cases of violence—including sexual and domestic. Often women

will assume that they were perpetrated against because something is wrong with them, they were asking for it, or they deserved it. When women experience some form of violence, they often take on the pain of the attack—and the responsibility and the guilt that they somehow did something “wrong” that caused the attack to occur in the first place. Messages like: “He raped me because he hates me” and “She only beat me because I annoy her” are common themes for women who have undergone or endured any kind of serious violence.

These negative messages may have been what you believed at the time, or even still believe, but they are not true. This may have been what you were told by the other person. These messages may have been what your attacker wants you to believe—but they are nothing but lies. Hear that—they are lies. They are not the truth. People say and do these things to us because they don’t love themselves. When they don’t love themselves, they don’t know how to love anyone else fully or wholly. And so the cycle of violence continues to occur over and throughout time.

Think back to when you were a young child in school. Were there moments when you did something that put yourself in centre stage—like performing or doing well academically—and brought a lot of attention to yourself? Were you ever harshly told, “Oh, you love yourself, do you?” by someone who was trying to put you in your place? These types of questions often cause embarrassment and a deflation of self. It makes you think it was wrong to go after your dream or to stand out from the crowd. These moments of deflation only serve to reinforce that we shouldn’t love ourselves, and that we shouldn’t be

proud of what we can offer to the world, ourselves, and the people around us.

There is no doubt that similar questions asked of to you more than once, often in front of small groups of people, causing a level of humiliation. What's sad to me is that we have been taught by society, families, and schools that we should not answer these questions with a solid, clear, and confident, "Why yes, I do love myself!"

We have been trained to believe that to love ourselves means being stuck up, cocky, or arrogant. We have been fooled into believing that self-love is bad, wrong, and should never be admitted to in mixed company. We have been taught that good girls don't allow themselves to be egotistical, and self-love is nothing but that. The truth is that there is no shame in loving yourself or who you are. In fact, it is necessary, and the people who have criticized you the most for loving yourself are often the people who most want to love themselves, but they either don't know how, or they have been led to believe that it is far from okay to love who they are.

For a moment take a look around at the people in your life. You are not the only one living in this negative pattern of absent self-love. You are not the only one who is listening to false messages and wearing old labels that were imposed years or even decades ago. Most likely, your parents are feeling the same, your siblings are feeling the same, your colleagues and your boss are feeling the same, and many of your friends are feeling the same. It might not appear that way because we can become so focused on creating an outer persona to hide how we really feel inside. When you get behind the scenes with people, it is

almost always a different story than what it seems to be on the outside. No matter how successful people are, it's still possible for them to doubt themselves on the inside; sometimes they may have become successful in an attempt to compensate for lack of self-love. Their results and outer appearances have become an attempt within themselves to finally appreciate themselves for who they are.

We have not been taught to put ourselves first. We have not been taught how to love ourselves. We have been taught that putting yourself first means you are selfish—and you should feel guilty about it. I am here to tell you that what you have been taught, what you have been led to believe, about self-love is wrong. You can love yourself. In fact, you need to love yourself; unless you learn to love yourself, you truly cannot love another person to the fullest capacity. Everything in your life starts with nurturing the relationship with yourself to love more. Loving more means you can do more, be more, have more, and experience more in life. You deserve this . . . just as the women and people around you also deserve to do this. We are here for a great life, and it's up to you to create it. Start by improving your self-love.