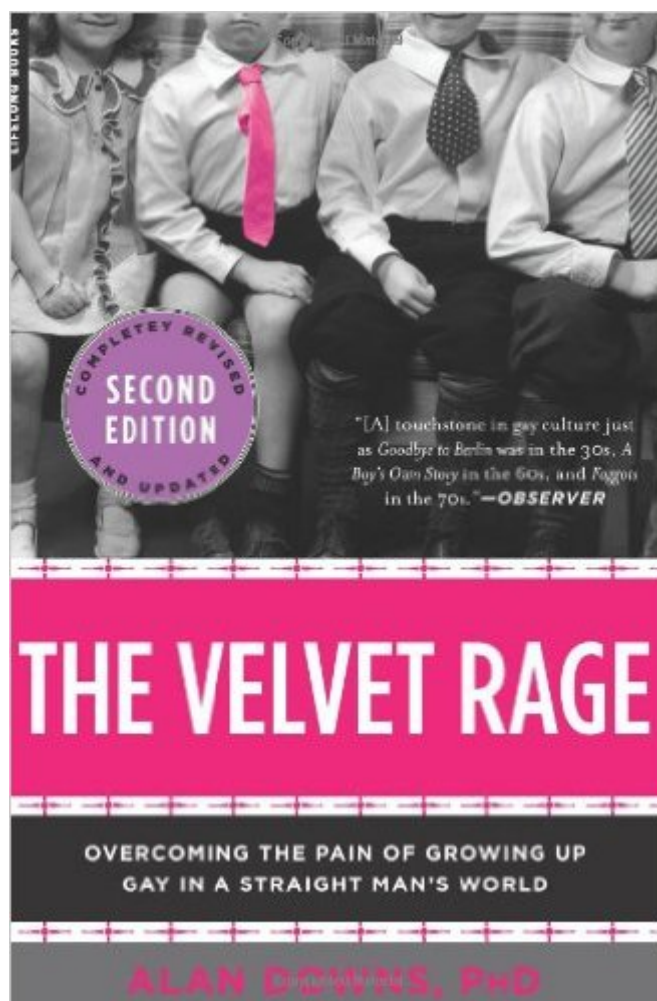


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# The Velvet Rage: Overcoming The Pain Of Growing Up Gay In A Straight Man's World, Second Edition



## Synopsis

Today's gay man enjoys unprecedented, hard-won social acceptance. Despite this victory, however, serious problems still exist. Substance abuse, depression, suicide, and sex addiction among gay men are at an all-time high, causing many to ask, "Are we really better off?" Drawing on contemporary research, psychologist Alan Downs's own struggle with shame and anger, and stories from his patients, *The Velvet Rage* passionately describes the stages of a gay man's journey out of shame and offers practical and inspired strategies to stop the cycle of avoidance and self-defeating behavior. Updated to reflect the effects of the many recent social, cultural, and political changes, *The Velvet Rage* is an empowering book that has already changed the public discourse on gay culture and helped shape the identity of an entire generation of gay men.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book, particularly the first third (as other reviewers have noted) and the lengthy second edition add-on (Chapter 14) is a good starting point in understanding the origins and life-long impact of gay shame and how to overcome it. The author's three stage model for how gay men experience/deal with shame (overwhelm, compensation, authenticity) is useful and occasionally eye-opening as are his observations of how shame at each stage can be "foreclosed" on (ignored, buried, etc.) or healthfully resolved. The solid practical advice offered in the aforementioned Chapter 14 ("Skills for Living an Authentic Life), while being tailored to the gay male experience, could be of benefit to a

much wider audience. The main flaw with "The Velvet Rage" -- and it's a stunner -- is that it focuses almost exclusively on only one type of gay man, i.e. the urban, successful, materialistic, attractive, sexually promiscuous, well-traveled, fabulous "powergay". Life examples from the less-than-fabulous, i.e. rural/suburban gay men, unsuccessful or non-materialistic gay men, poor and middle-class gay men, ordinary-looking gay men, gay homebodies, senior gay men, disabled gay men, gay men of color, and many others are almost nowhere to be found, likely because these people appear largely absent from the author's social and professional circles (which he talks about a great deal, almost to the point of bragging at times). Though surely unintentional, this is a terrible oversight for a book that seeks to provide psychological support to a marginalized minority, and I suspect a fair number of gay men reading this book will feel further alienated in some way as a result.

This is kind of at the intersection of 2 genres I seldom read: non-fiction about LGBT issues, and popular psychology. The former genre is something I've just never paid much attention to, the latter is something I've actively ignored from my own snobby contempt (I still remember rolling my eyes every afternoon as a kid when my mom would put on Oprah). Anyway, the basic underlying assumption of this book-- that gay men specifically have a spate of psychological issues which follow them throughout the full duration of their lives, not from being gay, but from everything around being gay, i.e. hiding a part of yourself, the sense of woundedness and insecurity and shame and confusion and really, just intense anger which that hiding brings on, is NOT addressed or remedied or really in anyway even sincerely acknowledged even after most gay men come out of the closet. What Downs is pointing to in this book is the numerous ways that those dark, deeply embedded emotions can well up throughout a gay man's life (even in the lives of guys who have been out for decades and who have very seemingly happy, successful lives) in ways which are destructive both to himself and to those around him. To be sure, this is a hopelessly essentialist view of gay life (more on that in a bit), yet, speaking as a gay man, I found that the early parts of the book, which describe some of the major emotional swings which young gay men move through, to be frighteningly and I mean FRIGHTENINGLY accurate, especially describing what it's like emotionally for most males up to the time when they completely realize they are gay. There were moments when reading this I physically shuddered being reminded of what it's like to be deeply in denial and profoundly closeted, as much to yourself as to the world around you.

Psychologist Alan Downs' guide to authentic living for the gay male, *The Velvet Rage*, is a

valuable self-help tool for gay men struggling to break free from a life of insecurity, self-loathing, and most of all, shame. Downs` central thesis, one he presents convincingly, is that gay men start off life far more emotionally crippled than most other people. Downs makes the argument that we gay men suffer the effects of a toxic self-image, one that stems from a pit of shame embedded deep inside. He argues we must systematically and assiduously destroy this cancer if we ever entertain the notion of maturing into emotionally healthy adults. This deep-seated and long-enduring sense of shame inhibits us from showing our most genuine feelings and from being our most authentic selves. As a result, we develop a set of theatrical tricks to hide our true selves, to shield us from any chance of honest emotional disclosure. In short, we become master dissemblers, actors, actresses adept at the art of giving others what they want to see and hear from us. All this comes at a horrible cost. Downs states, "we must hide, presenting to the world a fabricated version of ourselves until the day that we are free to express our sexuality and step out of the closet of shame." Downs explains in great detail how we "compensate for" rather than "confront" our shame. We become obsessed with out-performing others in our chosen professions, obsessed with physical beauty above all, and perhaps most dangerously, become obsessed with the thrill of seemingly endless sexual conquest. Our "velvet rage" comes out when these compensating strategies begin to weaken and crack, leaking out ferocious and foul bouts of poisonous rage, often directed at innocents.

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