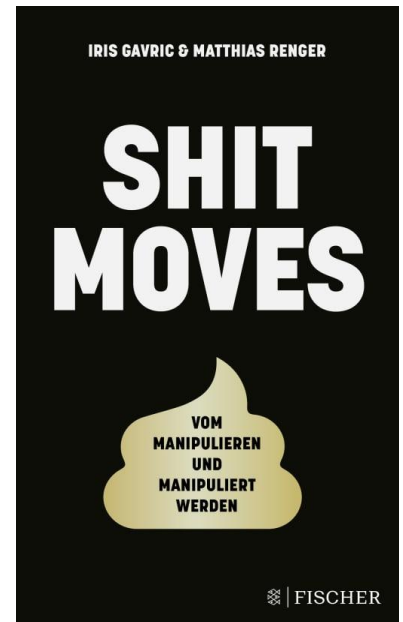


**Iris Gavric & Matthias Renger**

# **Shitmoves**

On manipulating and being manipulated

**September 2023 . 272 Pages**



## **Chapter 1:**

# **Why Shitmoves?**

SHITMOVES

[ʃɪtmu:vz]

*(Subst.) Manipulative techniques used in conversation instead of factual arguments, with a single purpose: winning at any cost.*

### **1. What is a shitmove anyway?**

Actually, you already know the answer. You've probably pulled off one or two shitmoves yourself. Even if you organize peace demonstrations or teach non-violent communication in your spare time - in this case probably even more so. Come on, admit it, nobody is perfect.

Well, does that feel slightly manipulative? It is. You know that uncomfortable feeling of shitmoves if you've ever been involved in an argument or even a slightly more lively discussion. When you suddenly find yourself having to justify something you didn't say or mean. When your arguments, which should be totally convincing in their clarity, apparently fizzle out without effect. When it becomes more and more difficult to stay on topic because old conflicts are being reheated. When you can't yet pinpoint and name everything that feels unfair, but you can already smell it. Because it smells like shitmoves. So what exactly is that now?

A shitmove is a rhetorical trick. A verbal foul play. Like in football, the aim is to prevent the opponent from scoring a goal. Without getting caught. Or to accuse

the opponent of a foul by taking a dive in order to be able to score more easily. So it's always about scoring, about winning. Shitmoves come into play when we want to win the wrong thing. Namely the conflict, not the person. And it is precisely this realization that provides us with a kind of compass for manipulating and being manipulated. A guiding principle that we can use as an orientation for dealing with shitmoves in any situation: **The goal is always to win the person, rather than just the argument.**

So if you are wondering at one point or another where we stand, because some shitmoves certainly impress or excite us, you can always remind yourself of this basic idea. It is the common thread that runs through this book, to which we bring a lot of private and professional shitmove expertise. For us, everything revolves around communication: Iris has years of experience in advertising, which, as we all know, relies heavily on manipulation. And Matthias has spent the same time as an actor exploring the fine nuances of rhetoric in theory and practice - also a world full of the dark side of humanity, because without conflict there's no tension. Even romantic moments for us have always had to do with our shared fascination for the audacious. One of our first dates, for example, was a criminal case against an IS terrorist. Later, we founded a creative agency called Arouse and started a weekly comedy podcast called "Couple Of", in which we also like to focus on outrageousness of all kinds. In short, our CV practically demands a book about shitmoves from us.

And as private individuals? Are we powerful shitmovers ourselves? We would like to vehemently deny that, but the worst shitmover would do the same. So, let's put it this way: at the time we are writing this, we have been together for over seven years. Yet we don't always agree on everything. We argue. Sometimes even - less and less often - heatedly. And it's impossible to argue heatedly without using shitmoves! So far, that's normal in relationships. But since we've both been dealing with communication 24/7 for years, arguing is starting to feel like levels in a video game to us. It's getting harder and harder to get away with the common

shitmoves because we're debunking them in real time with each other. This doesn't necessarily make arguing more pleasant. More abstruse. But definitely something we grow from. Maybe this book will help you to move up a level here and there in other relationships, in talk shows or even in online discussions dominated by shitmoves. Hopefully.

Almost all the problems in the world arise from communication and can be solved through communication. We would like to offer nothing less. Of course, we would be naive to believe that a book can save the world. In the history of mankind so far, such a claim has backfired not only badly but even violently every single time. On the other hand, it would be cynical not to hope for improvement at all. But this is neither a book about hope nor about fatalism, but about sincerity. Not as a pious pose, but as a confident response to shitty communication. We see it as much more than just sweet rhetoric tips. For us, shitmoves play such a central role in life that this book marks a turning point, because today we find words for our respective experiences and their common denominators.

## **2. The King's Gambit**

The very worst sentence Iris ever said to a person was, "Excuse me, do you know where the frozen pizzas are?" The man in the shop she asked this to yelled at her so violently for minutes in return that Iris was in tears and never dared go into that shop again for fear that the man would be there again. What had she done wrong? The secret lies in the German appellation. Iris had used the more familiar form instead of the more polite form. Thank heavens English doesn't have this distinction.

Because we would like to go on this book journey with you in a very easy going way. We're going to be amused, amazed and outraged together for hours now. Together with you, we will sit down in a rollercoaster of emotions. As Iris and

Matthias, we tell you everything in a common voice - only now, in the following part, we start by asking each other how the shitmoves actually came into our lives. Here we go.

Matthias, after an argument you think about the discussion for weeks. You go through it word by word, look for hidden shitmoves and think afterwards about which answer would have been better. Sometimes I watch you obsessively dissect what was said in your mind, and how the emotions boil up inside you once again. You might think I'm only talking about arguments with me or other people close to you. But often it's just some ticket inspector who you feel has treated you unfairly. "ONLY SOME TICKET INSPECTOR?" you would say now. Because what he triggers in you is like those scenes from *The Queen's Gambit* when Beth lies wide awake in bed all night, staring deliriously at the ceiling where she sees a gigantic chessboard on which she plays a thousand variations endlessly. That's exactly how you lie in bed at night, staring at the ceiling, projecting this ticket inspector there and pushing words back and forth like chess pieces until at some point you have defeated him rhetorically. Then I lie next to you, stare at you and ask myself: why the hell are you like this?

JUST SOME TICKET INSPECTOR? Iris, I would cast him in a film as a Stasi jobsworth! The fact that you bring him up here as an example at all is a shitmove in and of itself, now I have to justify myself: I once spontaneously took the tram for two stops in Berlin. I could have walked, but it was freezing cold and the tram stopped right next to me. Even though it was such a super-short trip, I got a short-distance ticket from the ticket machine in the tram. As soon as I got it, I had to get off again. Just one step further, a bin was waiting, into which I threw the ticket I had just bought. And what do I notice after two seconds in the cold? That I had forgotten my gloves on the ticket machine in the tram! I had taken them off briefly to operate the display and pay. The tram is still there, so I jump in again, push past the

passengers, grab my gloves and try to get out again, but the doors close in front of me and the tram starts to move. I shake the door in frustration, press the stop button a couple of times like a slot machine addict in Las Vegas, and am shocked to hear the miserable "Good afternoon, tickets please!". I immediately want to go back to the machine, but the damned ticket inspector has long had his eye on me and clearly interprets my behavior as an escape attempt.

I find that completely understandable, by the way, when I review my behavior of the last ten seconds through his eyes. So I simply go straight to him and explain the situation in a friendly and sincere way. I hold out my gloves to him as if they are proof. It occurs to me that other passengers must have seen me pay at the machine and actually get off the train. "Ask them, that's what really happened," I ask him, but I can tell by the look on his face that he already knows how he wants to deal with the matter.

And here comes the reason why the injustice of this story still bothered me later. You would think that after my explanation he would be faced with the simple choice of either believing me and letting me go, or not buying it. But this gentleman answers: "I totally believe you! But we don't have a ticket now, do we? So ID please." That's a butmove! And I have to pay a 60 euro fine for a stupid accident that could happen to anyone! What can I say if he already believes me? Isn't it quite normal to be annoyed about it even later? If you were right that I react too obsessively to such experiences, my emotions about them would still be boiling up today.

Oh shit, they do! You're right, checkmate.

I'll look into my childhood for the answer to your question about why I'm like this. When I think of my father, I remember a few typical exclamations from him. Just as Homer Simpson yells "D'OH!" and says to Bart "Well wait, you ..." before choking him, my father also had catchphrases. His were, "Because I said so. Basta" and "Drrrt! Don't talk back!", with an extra stern rolled R and menacingly widened

eyes. This was his attempt to explain to me why I must not do this and must do that.

My mother was the complete opposite. She justified everything by explaining. I can't think of a single educational statement or action of hers whose explanation couldn't fill its own chapter in a book.

And since I was allowed to feel this contrast even before I could think, I had a highly effective package of positive and negative reinforcement that together aimed in the same direction: **Arguments = great! Shitmoves = shit!**

When something is thoughtfully and cleverly argued, it feels good and right to act according to those arguments. Then it's basically no longer a given rule, but at least partly my own will. In any case, the discussion then takes place at eye level.

On the other hand, unfounded claims to authority always make me reliably angry. In principle, shitmoves are nothing else. They don't always have to sound as transparent as "Because I say so. Basta". That's number 10, by the way, the source shitmove. But basically they all want the same thing: to compensate for a lack of arguments. And because it's often not easy to see through that and resist it, I lie awake at night thinking again about past battles.

But there is still one important turning point missing in this story. And that's you, Iris. Because if I'm honest, up until now I've mostly thought about past battles in order to be able to win better next time. Now here we are writing this book together and explaining that it shouldn't really be about winning the argument, but about winning the other person. I only came to this realization through you. With you, arguing was suddenly something else. Afterwards, we always stand in front of each other and both say the same sentence: **"I now understand what was going on inside you!"**

Who won or lost when we both understand what was going on inside each other? I think every person knows this desperate attempt to point out recurring shitmoves

in an argument with their family or their partner in order to fight back: "There you go again! You do it every time! It's such a pain in the ass!" With you, at a time like that, I can say, "Hey, this is the very thing you were so understanding about last time. Let's try to reach a good solution this time as well."

And so I turn the question back to you in conclusion: You brought this turning point into my life because your empathy is greater than your ego - how did you become this person?

Through beatings. It's 1990, and Another Day in Paradise by Phil Collins is at the top of the charts. I'm standing in front of my mother in her kiosk with a bloody leg, the song playing in the background. She is completely horrified and asks, "What happened? Why are you here?" I am still completely out of breath and on the verge of tears. At this point I am four years old and have just run away from the Catholic kindergarten of - let's call her - Sister Violenta. I didn't finish a jigsaw puzzle properly and as a result felt the hand of God in all its severity. This happens often, and I am not the only child in the kindergarten to whom this happens. Only this time it was different, the beatings were more brutal and I was thrown against a post, whereupon I ran away.

Only now, standing in front of my mother, do I realize that my leg is bleeding. I see her lips tremble with anger. Without thinking, she locks the kiosk and rushes straight to Sister Violenta.

Arriving at the kindergarten, my mother confronts her, "What have you done to my daughter?"

Sister Violenta is nervous and mumbles improvised excuses: "Iris fell down and just ran away!"

My mother sees through her instantly and grabs Sister by her robe, drags her across the table, looks her firmly in the eye and threatens, "You will never be as close to God as you are now!"



Sister Violenta never hit another child after that, and the kindergarten had to close down a few months later because more complaints had been made about cases of child abuse.

Admittedly, this is not a successful example of dealing with shitmoves in a confident manner, as there was not even an exchange of arguments here. But I was familiar with this "something is wrong here" feeling from an early age. When you're a kid and you get beat up "in the name of God". When someone like Sister Violenta allows herself the most obvious injustice, but doesn't want to take responsibility for it. And when you feel that this happens to you because you are an easy victim. As a child anyway, but in my case it was compounded by the fact that my mother worked in the kiosk and my father had recently died.

In the kiosk, by the way, I find more answers to your question about what has most influenced my present behavior in discussions. The shop was open 365 days a year, and the entire life of our tiny family, consisting of my mother, my older brother and me, took place between snack bags, cigarette packets and ice cream confectionery. And by never being able to go on holiday, we were a constant in the lives of some people from our town for decades. People came from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., sometimes several times a day, to buy something or other and to have someone to talk to. The kiosk was more than just a collecting point for the unhealthiest goods that could legally be bought, it was a meeting place.

Every day, people from the most diverse milieus turned up and discussed the latest tabloid headline. Of course, these discussions were not as intellectual as in a political talk show - as I said, it was also about the tabloid headlines. But often something happened that still has a profound effect on me today: In the end, there was something like consensus. It was as if, between magazines, plums and chewing gum, everyone discarded their social status. In the kiosk, one's own experience counted as arguments for different standpoints. My mother taught me early on how important it is to understand others and that cohesion in a society

only works if we talk openly with each other. In TV talk shows I watched people trying to win; in the kiosk, on the other hand, I watched my mother winning people over.

To this day, I don't focus on people's status, but on how they treat others, especially those who are supposedly beneath them. And that then brings me to why I want to write this book with you: I think that if we see each other, and understand why we are all shitmovers sometimes - and especially how we can stop it - then it upgrades our society. Because then we will no longer feel like defenseless victims, but will recognise ourselves in the other and take interpersonal bonds to completely different levels.

Only through you did I understand that shitmoves exist. Before that, I only ever experienced the problem as an "uneasy feeling" with certain people. Even though I could reflect and name what was bothering me, my focus was only on the personality of the other person. My view was coarser. You then explained concrete techniques and bogus arguments to me and sometimes even demonstrated this in arguments between the two of us. I will never forget how you told me during a bad fight, "Don't cite any imaginary witnesses to support your argument now!". I thought you were taking the piss completely. What imaginary witnesses? I was right after all! But you can be right and still use shitmoves, they are not mutually exclusive. And that's exactly what I have to admit in retrospect for this one case. At the time, I used what we now call a team shitmove, and you saw through it.

This look at discussion techniques has revealed a new world to me. I now pay attention not only to what someone says, but also to the wording, the timing and especially the hidden intention behind it.

### 3. Who is this book for?

For people who die with toys. That sounds bizarre, but here comes the explanation: Every year a list of the 400 richest people in the USA is published. Malcolm Forbes inherited the magazine of the same name from his father and introduced the famous Forbes list in 1982. And to this man, Malcolm Forbes, is attributed a quote that perfectly fits this mentality needed for a ranking of super wealth. It goes, "He who dies with the most toys wins." Looking at the Forbes list, this may be understood materially at first, but let's read this saying as a metaphor for power and strife: Whoever asserts himself most dominantly in life wins.

If this worldview makes you discreetly nauseous, you may be glad to know that you are in good company. For even the original quote apparently stank too much of shitmoves to many people with a finer compass of values, and it was modified into: "He who dies with the most toys still dies." Or related to power and strife: He who asserts himself most dominantly in life dies just like everyone else.

A rather existential answer to the innocuous question of who this book is for. But this sentence in its two variations sums it up so aptly. You can engage with shitmoves from two different perspectives: **He who dies with the most toys wins.**

If you like this version, you can get fresh inspiration here! If you like working with shitmoves yourself, this book is your dojo. We give our own, observed and fictional examples, look for tried and tested, widespread, impressive and surprising shitmoves that promise even clearly inferior positions a chance of a supposed draw or even triumph. Above all, they promise fun: if we were to draw a comic character called "The Shitmover", it would surely get a mean grin. There is always at least a hint of schadenfreude in baseness - otherwise we could just be great with each other, which would be a sign of weakness for a fan of this version of the quote: **He who dies with the most toys still dies.**

If you prefer this version of the quote, this book can help you recognise and defend against your opponent's shitmoves. The rule of thumb for defending against shitmoves is: Name it and tame it: If you name a lousy tactic, you have a better chance of invalidating it, so that you can then demand that your opponent defend their own point of view with sincere arguments. Theoretically. In practice, it is usually not quite so simple. In the following, we will try to find suitable counter-strategies beyond this rule of thumb for each individual shitmove and formulate them in a practical, applicable way.

## Chapter 2:

# Rhetorical Shitmoves

Let's start with a rhetorical question: Do we agree that it is to everyone's advantage to communicate fairly and sincerely? We optimistically assume that almost every person is likely to answer yes to this. Maybe even someone like Donald Trump, who complains at every opportunity that there is a lack of fairness in the reporting of his shitmoves.

His example shows that a strong motivation for the opposite of fair and honest communication can simply be entertainment. In order not to ruminate again on the low blows that this flesh-and-blood shitmover constantly uses, with the successful calculation that he can provoke the entire media world non-stop and thus strain our attention, we would rather look at a platform that had temporarily banned him for this: Twitter. Things were no fairer there even without Trump. At all times, one of the most important success criteria for tweets, and for online commentary in general, is to be as witty as possible. Those who deliver a perhaps thoroughly justified criticism honestly and in an appropriately detailed thread are usually not celebrated for it nearly as much as someone who formulates the same criticism in an abbreviated and pointed manner, but at the expense of fairness.

### **Entertaining shitmoves are rewarded.**

So basically the motivation is vanity. It flatters our ego when thousands find our vulgarities amusing. But even without an audience, it is our ego that tempts us to make shitmoves. Triumph is simply a good feeling. And even if we suspect that it probably won't be a smooth victory, our ego at least wants to be saved from the opposite of the nice feeling. From complete defeat. Because that doesn't just hurt a little. At this point we have to feel with shitmovers: The fear of defeat in discourse is existential.

## **Because many people confuse themselves with their opinions.**

We can't let that which gives us our identity be destroyed! So sometimes we resort to shitmoves out of existential fear, as it were. This probably happens more often unconsciously and reflexively than consciously with Machiavellian intelligence and strategy. In short, these three egoistic motivations are behind our shitmoves:

- 1. Entertainment**
- 2. Triumph**
- 3. Fear of defeat**

So, does it help to identify these motivations? Can we do anything with that?

Of course we can! Naming shitmoves and thereby debunking them is a matter of technique and practice. But recognising why our opponent uses them brings us a fundamental step further: as long as we see the opponent's intention only as an attack against ourselves, we are drawn into the shitmove compulsion. Then we also have to hurl faeces and try to look clean at the same time. So exhausting!

Actually, the shitmover's polemic doesn't really have anything to do with us. The other person is only concerned with themselves. Recognising this and making it the basis of one's own reaction is the prerequisite for true authority. In the process, we also casually resolve the drama of the three motivations. For those who are confident can entertain everyone, not just their own camp, and need neither triumph nor avoid defeat. These categories are down there somewhere. Let's rise above it.

All right, but is it easy? If it were simple, there wouldn't now follow dozens of pages of shitmoves, the purpose of which is mostly to knock us down again in our self-assuredness. No one is invulnerable or indestructible. Even if you learn the whole book by heart - which, by the way, is not the goal anyway. It's all about fun and epiphanies. So, let's dig through the common shitmoves together.

# #1

## SICK SHITMOVE

The psychopathological attack

Iris: "Do you think I'm insane when I'm on my period?"

Matthias: "No! Absolutely not."

Iris: "But would you pretend for a moment?"

Matthias: "Why?"

Iris: "Well, to perform a sick shitmove."

Matthias: "No, I don't even say things like that to you in jest!"

Iris: "Not even when I ask for it?"

Matthias: "No, you're way too sensitive, you can't take it."

Imagine you live in the 1960s and work in an advertising agency in New York. And even though it's the weekend, everyone is in the office because there's a pitch on Monday. The creative director invites you to his office to discuss your ideas. To lighten the mood, he offers you a gin. You sip your glass carefully, as you haven't eaten anything yet. While you are presenting your ideas, he suddenly touches your hand and looks deeply into your eyes. He is completely drunk. You know this already and just want to get the conversation over with quickly, as there is still a lot of work ahead of you.

"I'll rewrite the headlines again," he says and thanks you for the ideas. "Your concepts are really good and creative, but the copywriting will have to be done by a man."

At this, he leans back in his chair contentedly and registers your disappointed face.

"Don't take it personally, it's not you as a person that you can't copywrite. A woman's brain is built completely differently. Women are simply more suited to visual tasks. It's lucky you're an art director!"

To counteract your sheer horror, he adds with seemingly genuine warmth: "Thank you for at least trying, I really appreciate that about you!"

Those who are now trying to remember which season of Mad Men this scene is from can give up. The sexism in this series is more subtly and originally portrayed throughout. No, Iris experienced this scene some 50 years later in an advertising agency and still regrets her reaction to it.

She seriously considered at the time that her supervisor might be right when he insisted, with his pseudo-biology of the maleness of creativity, that Iris wasn't built for the job. Briefly, she was almost relieved at this release from responsibility. But the feeling quickly gave way to a burdening uncertainty. Should women really be naturally worse copywriters? In any case, this world view was shared by many other colleagues in the agency. And they all referred to the creative director in question, who had once studied biology. So he was an expert after all! And a creative genius to boot. Who could question him?

Iris, of course! She resolved to do so. But not through exhausting discussions, but by proving him wrong. During the day, she did her "woman's work" as art director - visual concepts, layouts, graphics. In the evenings and on weekends, she worked on so-called gold ideas. These are particularly creative ideas that are usually conceived specifically for competitions so that the agency hopefully wins prizes. With the gold ideas, she proved her conceptual skills, and also her ability as a copywriter.

Much to the delight of her superiors, because Iris' ideas were good just like her voluntary workload of 12 to 15 hours a day. But did she succeed in proving the opposite? Did the creative director or anyone else correct their view of the world? Of course not! The cliché of the naturally visually gifted and verbally unqualified woman persisted. How could this be? Because there was a pattern behind it!



## WHAT MAKES THE SICK SHITMOVE SO SICK?

The fact that it is full of treacherous traps. You're not being dissed, you're being diagnosed. It is not your fault that you have a wrong viewpoint, that you are weak, inferior or inadequate, because there is a "disease" behind it. Not necessarily a disease in the literal sense of the word, mostly it's about a characteristic or identity that is interpreted to your disadvantage.

"You're too young to understand it all yet", "You're too old to keep up here", "You're a man, you can't multitask", or, as Iris was allowed to experience: "You're a woman, you can't copywrite". The perfidious thing is that you are invited to adopt this attitude. You get to think together with the sick shitmover about possible reasons for your alleged mistakes. You work with each other against you if you go along with it.

Oh well, you may think to yourself, as if you would ever fall for something like that. You'd freak out, and the sick shitmover would have another thing coming! Ha! The next trap is already waiting for you, the so-called Kafka trapping. Don't worry, you won't turn into a bug. The term comes from Kafka's novel *The Trial*, in which bank employee Josef K. has to defend himself in court against an incomprehensibly bureaucratic charge. And the more vehemently he proclaims his innocence, the more guilty he appears.

Exactly that is the greatest danger in an angry reaction to the sick shitmove! Because accurate diagnoses are sometimes hard to accept, aren't they? If you have been diagnosed as being of an unsuitable age, your indignation can come across as adolescent posturing or age stubbornness. If your gender is the problem, then your anger is toxic masculinity or female hysteria. Precisely because the sick shitmove involves the offer of an explanation, emotional responses come across as involuntary confirmation.

But that's not all! If you don't fall into the Kafka trap, the real disease process only begins. The central symptom: insecurity. Depending on the type, the epistemic or the emotional variant predominates. The latter is self-explanatory: we all know emotional insecurity and how stressed, anxious and nervous we feel when we doubt ourselves. Even more so when we are deliberately made emotionally insecure by being given seemingly good reasons for our self-doubt. But what is epistemic uncertainty?

The Greek word ἐπιστήμη means knowledge or knowing. So it's about the uncertainty of what we can know in the first place. If a boss who once studied biology tells Iris about the knowledge he supposedly gathered there, she is unlikely to reply, "You're wrong. Believe me, I had really bad marks in biology!" Where would she get the assurance that she knew better? Should she have recited a list of successful female authors to him, including their most important works? Of course, one doesn't have that at hand in such a situation. And even if he did, there is no guarantee that he would accept a few thousand exceptions as a refutation of his (alleged) science. One of these exceptions is a scientist herself and has written a book about this very question, called *Why trust science?* In it, the author Naomi Oreskes recommends combating epistemic uncertainty by asking experts questions. But what if the expert himself triggers the uncertainty? I guess the lady didn't think about that! She should have left the writing to a man! See what this does?

So, in short, the sick shitmove undermines your self-image or your worldview. Or both. And that makes it an indispensable tool of perhaps the most perfidious of all manipulation techniques in relationships. We are talking about so-called gaslighting. A term, by the way, that was again coined by an author, namely by the psychiatrist Joan Lachkar in the 1960s. She was inspired to use the metaphor from the play *Gas Light*, in which the protagonist Bella is deliberately driven mad by her husband because he constantly calls her reality imaginary. Among other things, her perception that the gas lamps in the house often go out -

which he himself causes, but then aggressively persuades her that these observations come from her sick imagination.

Today, the term gaslighting is widely used to describe precisely this manipulation of the view of the self and the world in interpersonal relationships or even in public communication. It is a form of psychological violence that is even more complex and consequential than a single sick shitmove. The victim is supposed to accept his weakness or inferiority because he is supposedly sick in a biological or figurative sense.

### **SO WHAT IS THE CURE?**

Contra-Excremental forte. Now in your pharmacy!

It would be nice if it were that simple ... Unfortunately, there are also shitmoves that require much more than a handy counter-tactic. And the sick shitmove is one of them. Because it is not nearly as confrontational as the dissmove, for example. And it is certainly not a one-off slip of the tongue, but, as already mentioned, it follows a perfidious pattern. When Iris wanted to prove the opposite in her job through diligence and skill, she only did her boss a big favour, but did not achieve a change of opinion either with him or with the other colleagues. The only change of viewpoint took place within herself in the long term. And that is the only sensible answer to the question of the remedy.

If someone wants to make you feel insecure, a stable self-confidence will help you. Unfortunately, you really can't get that in your pharmacy. And this shitmoves comes in sheeps clothing: It's not necessarily delivered in an aggressive tone, but often in a soberly explanatory or even warmly affectionate tone. And not just in an individual case, but again and again, because it is a question of attitude.

And not only towards you, but also towards the people around you who adopt the sick shitmove as their worldview and sort you into it accordingly.

The whole thing even goes far beyond your workplace or circle of acquaintances and infects a large part of our culture: bestsellers that explain to you why men can do this and women can't do that are made into films, other books label whole generations as stupid or greedy, comedians set audience records with sick shitmoves ... You want to build your confidence in such a social climate? Good luck to you.

Before people start throwing studies at us like gauntlets: of course it is possible to research real tendencies, whether certain characteristics are statistically more or less common in certain groups. But anyone who infers from this that the counterpart must be inherently incompetent in some area is simply using a sick shitmove.

In 2017, such a case was made at tech company Google because a developer named James Damore positioned himself against the idea of hiring more women at the company. In an internal memo of over ten pages, he described the psychological differences between men and women and their biological causes. His example sums up the sick shitmove exactly: he was fired not because of the partly undisputed statistics he cited, but explicitly because he concluded that women were not suited for stressful jobs in the IT industry because of their "higher level of neuroticism". The sick shitmove does not necessarily consist of false information, but of false conclusions. Just recognising this difference can help combat epistemic insecurity.

Against the emotional insecurity, at least we have an exercise to recommend. Because self-confidence is a question of training. Those who are not used to this feeling at all often initially confuse it with arrogance. Those who rarely dare to disagree often initially confuse assertiveness with aggression. Those who are not used to prioritizing their own needs often confuse it with selfishness. In fact,

assertiveness is the feeling of not even having to defend or assert yourself. Here's the exercise for that:

Imagine someone said to you, "Your pink pupils are so incredibly ugly!" Would that bother you? We assume that no one can have pink pupils. If you do have them, firstly, what the hell?!, secondly, pick another absurdity that doesn't apply to you. And then, every day when you brush your teeth, subject yourself to the most violent attacks because of this absurdity that doesn't apply to you. In your imagination. The feeling you get from this, this complete indifference to attacks that cannot hit you, is exactly what you need. And then think of sick shitmoves with pink pupils, three mouths on the forehead or square ears made of quicksand ... So what?

Well, a stable self-confidence is one thing, and that requires long-term personality development. This approach is, so to speak, the vaccination against the sick shitmove, and of course it also involves building up an immune system consisting of allies who can alleviate your insecurity. But is there really no antidote at all that works in direct confrontation in the immediate situation? Here's what we think is worth trying: the last thing a sick shitmover should expect is an invitation to tell you more. You want to know more. Remember the fine distinction that it's not the information that has to be wrong, but the conclusions. What does your counterpart conclude about a world view in which people like you absolutely cannot do something?

A shitmover who wants to explain the world to you is usually won over by his vanity. So first show curiosity about his worldview and ask engaging questions until you have the impression that he likes to mirror your interested attitude. And then consistently withdraw your attention and be mildly disappointed: "All right, a pity. But okay, thanks." Whether he admits it or not, he will be very interested in what the pity is. After all, anyone who thinks he is superior can ill-afford to be seen as a disappointment by others. Especially not by the very people who, from his point of view, are inferior and yet should look up to him. But then consistently keep

the reason for your disappointment to yourself, it is not about a counterattack, but about a reversal of insecurity. And full of warmth you can inwardly think something along the lines of: "It's a pity that you use your intellect for sick shitmoves. I would rather have learned something useful from you."

Granted, this whole maneuver is itself quite manipulative. But the sick shitmove also just works on people who gain their great self-assurance from manipulating others by explaining the world to them in terms of how some people are supposedly sick. Maybe someone who uses shitmoves like that deserves a little bit to be insecure about their vanity. And maybe in the long run you will even cause the other person to rethink without you becoming enemies.

## **ABRIDGED VERSION**

### **#1 SICK SHITMOVE - The Psychopathological Attack**

#### **Aim of the Sick Shitmove**

- The other person believes in their own inferiority.

#### **Preparation**

- Which characteristics or identity parts can best be used against the other person?

#### **Execution**

- Explain invitingly why your counterpart is "sick".
- The other person unfortunately has no reliable perception of the world, and therefore no integrity.
- Work together with your counterpart against the other person.

#### **Conclusion**

- You don't mean any harm, show compassion.
- If necessary, Kafka-trapping: every counterattack proves your thesis.

#### **Reply**

- Avoid the two traps that are inherent in the sick shitmove: Don't let yourself be drawn into emotional counter-defence, nor let yourself be unsettled.
- Don't believe worldviews that describe you as inadequate.
- Grab the sick shitmover by his vanity: first you want to know more and then you are mildly disappointed.