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# So You've Been Publicly Shamed



## Synopsis

From the Sunday Times top ten bestselling author of *The Psychopath Test*, a captivating and brilliant exploration of one of our world's most underappreciated forces: shame. 'It's about the terror, isn't it?' 'The terror of what?' I said. 'The terror of being found out.' For the past three years, Jon Ronson has travelled the world meeting recipients of high-profile public shamings. The shamed are people like us - people who, say, made a joke on social media that came out badly, or made a mistake at work. Once their transgression is revealed, collective outrage circles with the force of a hurricane and the next thing they know they're being torn apart by an angry mob, jeered at, demonized, sometimes even fired from their job. A great renaissance of public shaming is sweeping our land. Justice has been democratized. The silent majority are getting a voice. But what are we doing with our voice? We are mercilessly finding people's faults. We are defining the boundaries of normality by ruining the lives of those outside it. We are using shame as a form of social control. Simultaneously powerful and hilarious in the way only Jon Ronson can be, *So You've Been Publicly Shamed* is a deeply honest book about modern life, full of eye-opening truths about the escalating war on human flaws - and the very scary part we all play in it. Jon Ronson is an award-winning writer and documentary maker. He is the author of two bestsellers, *Them: Adventures with Extremists* and *The Men Who Stare at Goats*, and two collections, *Out of the Ordinary: True Tales of Everyday Crazy* and *What I Do: More True Tales of Everyday Crazy*. He lives in London.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

If you're at all involved with social media, I'm willing to bet that if you stop and think for even a few seconds, you can come up with an example of someone -- famous or previously anonymous -- who has been publicly shamed. A car wash worker just lost his job for making disgusting, racist comments about President Obama's daughter -- the ensuing kerfuffle probably ended up winning a larger audience for those comments than he would have had in the first place, ironically enough. There was the tennis championship commenter who asked a female contestant to "give us a twirl" as she went out onto the court for her match (to show off her garb and legs), and more recently, the obituary writer who chose to comment, unflatteringly, on author Colleen McCullough's looks as if they were as important as her achievements. All have been named and shamed online. And that's just off the top of my head, in the last week or two. The tool of shaming someone publicly for breaking the law or violating the social contract in some other way is as old as time. But with the advent of the Internet, and specifically, the rise of tools like Twitter, shaming can go viral instantly. Instead of your immediate community knowing what you did wrong -- and deciding whether and when to forgive you, because they may have a sense of the broader context and of who you are as a person beyond that misstep -- the entire world now becomes aware, instantly, without any of that context. And the results, as Ronson shows, can be horrifying and potentially disproportionate.

Ronson starts his book off by recounting a personal story. A group of men who made highfalutin' claims to conducting some sort of social experiment set up a Twitter account using Ronson's name, though they claim they weren't trying to pretend to be him. This account began sending out Tweets that made Ronson fear that his friends and family would mistake them for some alternate universe of himself. He confronted the men on camera, the video was uploaded to YouTube, and commenters promptly began to wage a shame war on the perpetrators that ultimately ended with their taking down the fake Twitter account. Ah, sweet justice. Or was it? Ronson began to wonder what happens to the people on the receiving end of an Internet mob's rage. Through digging into the stories of and conducting interviews with well-known people like disgraced author and journalist Jonah Lehrer and ordinary, previously unknown people like Justine Sacco, Ronson provides a vivid and disturbing picture of what happens to the people on the receiving end of vigilante-style justice and raises interesting philosophical questions about what this means for our larger culture. This book in no way defends the actions of the people it depicts, though Ronson does have sympathy for his subjects. Instead, he poses a very thought-provoking question: are you so sure this can't happen to you? While it's one thing for the Internet to bring real criminal actions to light and ensure they don't go unpunished, it's another thing for someone who does something stupid or ill-conceived to be

subjected to the same scrutiny. After all, how many of us can say we've never made a tasteless joke or said something others might construe as offensive because we thought it was "safe" to do so?

I found this book to be just fascinating. The title is certainly intriguing, but it was also a rare book that actually made me change my opinions on an issue. And THAT doesn't happen very often. I also think in the research and writing of this book, author Jon Ronson had a similar experience. One of his first quick examples involves an LA Fitness that was shamed on social media because they wouldn't cancel the membership of a couple who had lost their jobs and couldn't afford the fees. The result of that was that LA Fitness backed down - a story that makes one believe in the "power of the people". "Something of real consequence was happening. We were at the start of a great renaissance of public shaming. After a lull of almost 180 years (public punishments were phased out in 1837 in the United Kingdom and in 1839 in the United States), it was back in a big way. When we deployed shame, we were utilizing an immensely powerful tool. It was coercive, borderless, and increasing in speed and influence. Hierarchies were being leveled out. The silenced were getting a voice. It was like the democratization of justice." He may have started this project with that feeling, I don't think he believed this at the end. One famous (infamous) example of modern day public shaming was the story of Justine Sacco - a woman who had made a VERY ill-thought out tweet at the beginning of a plane flight to Africa - and whose life was ruined by the time she landed. (To confirm how long public shaming can stay with you - I just typed "Justine S" into a search engine - her name was the first result and this happened in 2013.

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