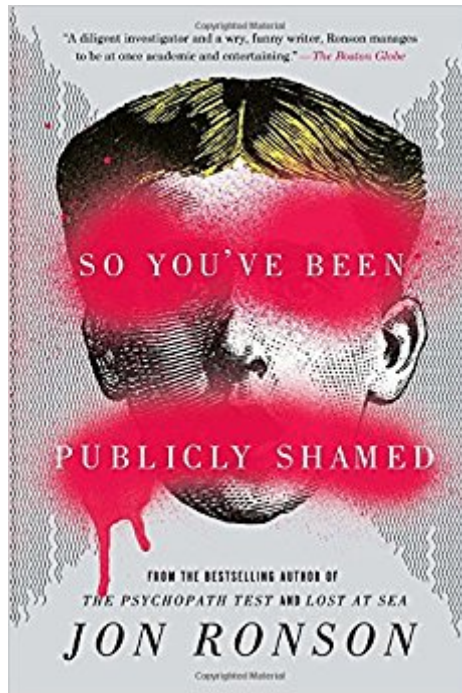




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# So You've Been Publicly Shamed



## Synopsis

Now a *New York Times* bestseller and from the 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

An Best Book of April 2015: Author Jon Ronson knows a thing or two about public shaming. When a trio of "academics" hijacked his persona for an infomorph – basically an automated Twitter feed that spewed inane comments about food in his name – he took the fight to the internet,

where the virtual, virulent hordes soon compelled the spambot authors to cease and desist. The experience hatched a thought: Once upon a time, if you wanted to participate in a good, old-fashioned public humiliation, you actually had to show up. But as with most everything else, the internet has made condemnation an exercise in crowdsourcing, with today's angry mobs trading stockades and scarlet As for social media and its inherent anonymity. So You've Been Publicly Shamed is Ronson's tour through a not-necessarily-brave new world where faceless commenters wield the power to destroy lives and careers, where the punishments often outweigh the crimes, and where there is no self-control and (ironically) no consequences. On one hand, part of what makes this book (again, ironically) so fun to read is a certain schadenfreude; it's fun to read about others' misfortunes, especially if we think they "had it coming." Jonah Lehrer, whose admitted plagiarism and falsifications probably earned him his fall, stalks these pages. But so does Justine Sacco, whose ill-conceived tweet probably didn't merit hers; as it turns out, the internet doesn't always differentiate the misdemeanors from the felonies. But the best reason to read this is Ronson's style, which is funny and brisk, yet informative and never condescending. So You've Been Publicly Shamed is not a scholarly book, nor is it a workbook about navigating ignominy. It's an entertaining investigation into a growing--and often disturbing--demimonde of uncharitable impulses run amok. --Jon Foro --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

“Gutsy and smart. Without losing any of the clever agility that makes his books so winning, he has taken on truly consequential material and risen to the challenge of fascinating, shocking Mr. Ronson's gift for detail-picking is, as ever, a treat. • The New York Times “A sharp-eyed and often hilarious book Jon Ronson has written a fresh, big-hearted take on an important and timely topic. He has nothing to be ashamed of. • NPR.org “A diligent investigator and a wry, funny writer, Ronson manages to be at once academic and entertaining. • The Boston Globe “This is a wonderful book. • Jon Stewart “This book really needed to be written. • Salon.com “Required reading for the internet age. • Entertainment Weekly “With an introspective and often funny lens, [Ronson] tracks down those whose blunders have exploded in the public eye So You've Been Publicly Shamed is an insightful, well-researched, and important text about how we react to others' poor decisions. • The Huffington Post “Personable and empathetic, Ronson

is an entertaining guide to the odd corners of the shame-o-sphere. [The Minneapolis Star Tribune](#) "It's sharply observed, amusingly told, and, while its conclusions may stop just short of profound, the true pleasure of the book lies in arriving at those conclusions. [The Onion](#) "Like all of Ronson's books, this one is hard to put down, but you will absolutely do so at some point to Google yourself. [The Millions.com](#) "An irresistibly gossipy cocktail with a chaser of guilt. [Newsday](#) "With So You've Been Publicly Shamed Ronson has written a timely, interesting and titillating read for any Internet drama junkie. [PopMatters.com](#) "[A] simultaneously lightweight and necessary book. [Esquire](#) "A work of original, inspired journalism, it considers the complex dynamics between those who shame and those who are shamed, both of whom can become the focus of social media's grotesque, disproportionate judgments." [The Financial Times](#) "[So You've Been Publicly Shamed] is both entertaining and fair -- a balance we could use a lot more of, online and off." [Vulture](#) "Ronson is an entertaining and provocative writer, with a broad reach [So You've Been Publicly Shamed] is a well-reported, entertainingly written account of an important subject. [The Oregonian](#) "Ronson is a fun writer to read...fascinating." [Fast Company](#) "I was mesmerized. And I was also disturbed." [Forbes](#) "[So You've Been Publicly Shamed] promises to be the most relevant book of the year." [FlavorWire](#) "I was sickly fascinated by the book. I think it's Ronson's best book." [Mark Frauenfelder for BoingBoing](#) "With confidence, verve, and empathy, Ronson skillfully informs and engages the reader without excusing those caught up in the shame game. As he stresses, we are the ones wielding this incredible power over others' lives, often with no regard for the lasting consequences of our actions." [Starred Booklist Review](#) "Clever and thought-provoking, this book has the potential to open an important dialogue about faux moral posturing online and its potentially disastrous consequences." [Publishers Weekly](#) "Relentlessly entertaining and thought-provoking." [The Guardian](#) "Certainly, no reader could finish it without feeling a need to be gentler online, to defer judgment, not to press the retweet button, to resist that primal impulse to stoke the fires of shame. [The Times](#) "Excruciating, un-put-downable [So You've Been Publicly Shamed] is a gripping read, packed with humor and compassion and Ronson's characteristic linguistic juggling of the poignant and the absurd." [Chapter16.org](#) "A powerful and rewarding read, a book utterly of the moment." [The Hamilton](#)

Spectator "Ronson is a lovely, fluid writer, and he has a keen eye for painful, telling details." • The Bloomberg View "Fascinating and trenchant." • The Denver Post "[Ronson] is one of our most important modern day thinkers" [So You've Been Publicly Shamed] is one of the most therapeutic books imaginable. • US News & World Report "Personable and empathetic, Ronson is an entertaining guide to the odd corners of the shame-o-sphere." • The Houston Chronicle "[A] satirical Malcolm Gladwell" | an accessible, fun read. • Everyday Ebook "We love Jon Ronson. He's thoughtful and very funny. [So You've Been Publicly Shamed] is a great book about the way the internet can gang up on people and shame them, when they deserve it, when they don't deserve it and it's great." • Judd Apatow "Jon Ronson is unreal. So You've Been Publicly Shamed everyone should read that book. He's one of my favorite human beings." • Bill Hader "[A] brilliant, thought-provoking book" • a fascinating examination of citizen justice, which has enjoyed a great renaissance since the advent of the internet." • Tatler "A terrifying and keen insight into a new form of misguided mass hysteria." • Jesse Eisenberg "A fascinating exploration of modern media and public shaming" | It's a great conversation starter. Is Twitter the new Salem Witch trials?" • Reese Witherspoon • From the Hardcover edition.

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. Imagine cracking a joke that you know that some folks might consider off color to a buddy sitting next to you at a conference presentation -- then having the woman in front of you turn around, snap your picture, smile at you -- and tweet about how offensive your comments were to women, already a minority and arguably struggling to find a way to feel comfortable in Silicon Valley's "bro culture". That's "D\*\*\*legate", and it's one of the case studies that Ronson looks at to explore how the Internet has transformed public shaming from one form of potentially violent public pillorying and whipping to a non-violent but far longer lasting and even more damaging variant. Since Ronson's focus is on the post-Twitter era, you won't find much here about folks like Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky, although Ronson explores an argument that suggests sexual misdeeds are viewed with more tolerance by potential shamers than other transgressions (in contrast to the past, when swingers "outed" by the News of the World committed suicide). But whether the name is a familiar one -- Jonah Lehrer, popular science writer pilloried for inventing quotes and for recycling his own content -- or someone unknown, such as the teenager turned into a pariah for mocking what she saw as a self-evident and superfluous sign at Arlington national cemetery requesting silence and respect -- he does a good job of exploring different examples of shame and reasons for shaming, as well as the societal and historical context. Ronson does occasionally fall into the trap of what I refer to as "stunt" anecdotes: going off to explore things as a participant and taking notes because he knows it will make a good part of the copy to be a fly on the wall. So, the workshop on how to manage and address shame in which he participates becomes a gratuitous anecdote, and some other similar segments felt like overkill. My five-star rating is as much for the timeliness of the topic as for the book's style and structure, which are really more average than the rating would suggest. It's an OK book, on a standalone basis, but it's the first to really assemble in a coherent fashion all the individual anecdotes and events around this particular theme. It certainly made me think. I've long been aware of the dangers of having a personal "brand", and been vigilant about what I say on social media and my privacy settings on Facebook, for instance. In the social media universe, there simply is no privacy -- or at least, none that you can count on -- and few of those "shame victims" that Ronson profiles in these pages are evil or malicious. Stupid, foolish, careless -- yes. Thoughtless, absolutely. But the shaming, the "mass online destruction" in which people seem to take such delight, seems so disproportionate. "We are defining the boundaries of normality by tearing apart the people outside of it." This is a great starting point for dialog and discussion, and for that reason alone merits the full five stars.

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? In this digital age, when we're all trying to express ourselves in 140 characters or less, it's far easier for that message to reach an audience we didn't intend it to reach. This book's strength is that it humanizes the people on the receiving end of Internet justice and makes you ponder whether the scorched earth campaign waged against people like Justine Sacco is justified. At the end of the day, her life has not only been damaged, but destroyed, and it may remain that way forever, thanks to Google taking and storing everything anyone has ever said online. Does that punishment really fit the crime? You'll feel uncomfortable when you read this book, and you should. I know I did. I squirmed as I thought of the times when I jumped on the outrage bandwagon and then moved on with my life without really stopping to wonder what had become of the people on the other end of the outrage. People should be called out for their bad behavior, but do they deserve to have their lives decimated? Do they deserve for their family and friends to have to worry about being associated with them, for fear that their names might be tainted as well? Do they deserve threats of violence? As Ronson points out, there's a reason why the stocks and pillories were phased out of our system of justice. We ought to be alarmed that they're reappearing because, digital or no, the

effects they have are real and lasting.

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