

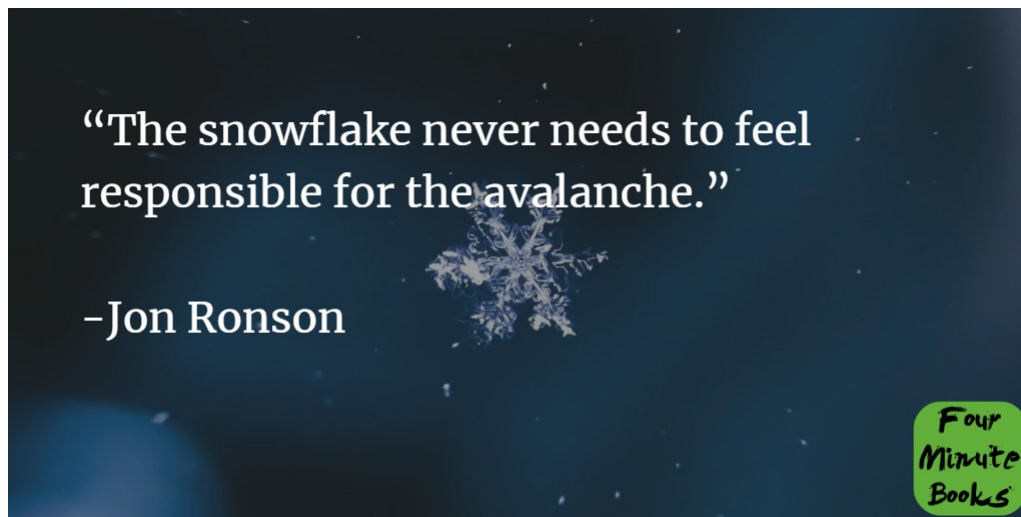
So You've Been Publicly Shamed Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *So You've Been Publicly Shamed* explains how public shaming online is a powerful weapon of control that can bring down websites, close businesses, and destroy careers.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



What comes to mind when you hear the phrase “public shaming?” I think about that practice, common during the middle ages, using the device called a pillory, or stocks. You know, that hinged, wooden framework where the victim has their head and hands secured while on public display?

Placed in the town square, the contraption could showcase the target of scorn publicly. In movies and cartoons, this allows the townspeople to throw rotten vegetables and trash in the face of the helpless soul.

With the rise of online communities and social media, you have to wonder if that ancient form of dishonor was actually kinder than the public shaming of today. In Jon Ronson’s So You’ve Been Publicly Shamed, you’ll find out how far this humiliating practice can really go.

Today, we can be the victim of shame due to relatively small infractions. And what about the injustices that we feel powerless against, like the mega-corporation that exploits their employees? Can public shaming be an effective means to oppose such an outrage?

Here are 3 lessons for us to ponder:

1. Much of the shaming that we see today stems from the feeling that the public space is

- being taken away from us and is a means of regaining control.
2. As individuals, we behave much differently in crowds than we do on our own.
 3. Public shaming is an effective deterrent to crime.

What causes shame, and does it have some benefits? Let's see if we can figure this out!

Lesson 1: Many people feel that others are taking their public space, and they are getting pushed out of areas they once occupied.

Gentrification is making some people feel forced out of areas where they used to spend quality time. Online public humiliation is an effort to reclaim some control. It's a weapon of collective power.

There's a policy in New York city called "Stop and Frisk." This is a practice where police officers randomly stop and search as many as 1,800 people every day. While intended to minimize petty crimes such as graffiti and illegal drug use, an estimated 90 percent of the individuals frisked are innocent. Many find this treatment degrading and humiliating.

Authorities admittedly claim the use of such tactics as a way to assert ownership of public space. They also see it as a way to secure the property for the "privileged" few, even at the expense of the majority.

Another example is the online message board known as 4chan. **A popular meeting place for online trolls, 4chan users make it their business to participate in public online shaming initiatives.** When asked about their motivation for these actions, many report that feelings of total disempowerment helped in fueling the behavior.

Lesson 2: In a crowd, even the most reserved and rational people can become impulsive and disorderly with little prompting.

Have you ever considered how a riot or mob action is born? How can a handful of agitated people infect the entire mass with their passion? Curiously, once this spark of anger grows into a flame, it results in a fever pitch then escalates into a full-blown riot.

Nineteenth-century French physician Gustave Le Bon, who studied the social mechanisms of crowd activity, uses the metaphor of "contagion" to describe the collective public outrage. His word choice implies that rioting occurs unintentionally as individuals go with the flow of the group dynamic.

There appear to be clear patterns that drive crowd behavior. Without them, we'd be incapable of acting spontaneously together or even without a leader. It's similar to the way a catchy chant-like, "Hell no, we won't go!" might begin. A few people start out and then more chime in as well. Before you know it, you feel compelled to join in yourself.

Of course, not all group activity is like this chant. **Often, people engage in group behavior because of their moral convictions.** An example is someone who joins in the public shaming of a homophobe. Usually, it's because they believe that homophobia is wrong, not because of the spellbinding force of the group dynamics.

Lesson 3: We can use public shaming to our advantage to deter crime.

There's a case involving a young shoplifter who received an unusual but effective sentence for his crimes. He was to parade through the store he shoplifted from while wearing a sign that read, "I STOLE FROM THIS STORE. DON'T BE A THIEF OR THIS COULD BE YOU."

This humiliating experience helped to transform the young man. He went on to earn a degree and later founded his own company. He never committed another crime again. So, can we conclude that public shaming is an effective deterrent to crime?

If you ask Texas Judge Ted Poe, he will say that absolutely shaming is an effective strategy. Judge Poe works to restore order in Houston using public shaming of defendants convicted in his court. **Only 15 percent of those who break the law and receive shaming go on to continue their life of crime.** Compare this to the average 66 percent of those who are only incarcerated that later commit another offense, and you can see how effective shaming is.

But we shouldn't get too excited about shaming as a crime-fix solution. According to psychiatric expert James Gilligan, violence is often linked directly to shame. If we experience enough shame, we may eventually become violent.

Acting out in violence is usually an attempt to restore damaged self-esteem from being shamed, even going back to childhood. People tend to feel that if they victimize others, they are no longer powerless victims themselves.

So You've Been Publicly Shamed Review

I found *So You've Been Publicly Shamed* weirdly entertaining, in a satirical kind of way. At the same time, it's unsettling that a simple tweet, Facebook post, or misdirected comment can be cause for instant ridicule. As a writer, I find this particularly bothersome. I never want to be the target of public shaming. My skin is thin enough as it is.

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Who would I recommend So You've Been Publicly Shamed summary to?

The 17-year-old high school senior who likes to troll on social media for attention, the 35-year-old flight attendant who takes inappropriate photos with statues from cities around the world, and anyone else thinking they are so creative with their mobile device.