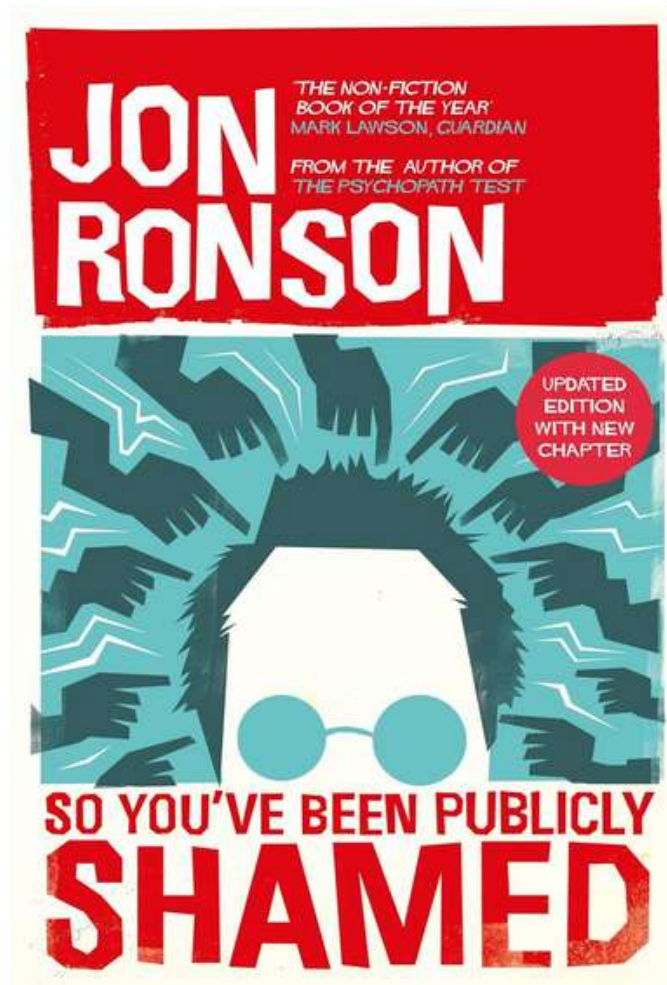


So You've Been Publicly Shamed by Jon Ronson (2015)

Highlighted Extracts by S.K.



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Chapter 1: BRAVEHEART

I won. Within days the academics took down @jon_ronson. They had been shamed into acquiescence. Their public shaming had been like the button that restores factory settings. Something was out of kilter. The community rallied. The balance was redressed. The academics made a very big meal of eradicating the spambot. They wrote a Guardian column explaining that their wider aim was to highlight the tyranny of Wall Street algorithms. 'It's not just Ronson who has bots manipulating his life. It's all of us,' they wrote. I still didn't understand why pretending I eat wasabi dumplings might draw the public's attention to the scourge of Wall Street algorithms.

I was happy to be victorious. It felt wonderful. The wonderful feeling overwhelmed me like a sedative. Strangers all over the world had united to tell me I was right. It was the perfect ending. Now I thought back on the other recent social media shamings I'd enjoyed and felt proud of.

We were not going to tolerate a resurgence of old-time bigotry, and as a result of our collective fury Marks & Spencer and Nestle demanded their advertising be removed from the Daily Mail's website. These were great times. We hurt the Mail with a weapon they didn't understand - a social media shaming.

After that, when the powerful transgressed, we were there. [...] We were at the start of a great renaissance of public shaming. After a lull of 180 years (public punishments were phased out in 1837 in the United Kingdom and 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 levelled out. The silenced were getting a voice. It was like the democratization of justice.

Chapter 3: THE WILDERNESS

'You turn around and you suddenly realize you're the head of a pitchfork mob,' Michael said. 'And it's, "What are these people fucking doing here? Why are they acting like heathens? I don't want to be associated with this at all. I want to get out of here."' 'It was horrible,' I said. 'All this time I'd been thinking we were in the middle of some kind of idealistic reimagining of the justice system. But those people were so cold.' The response to Jonah's apology had been brutal and confusing to me. It felt like the people on Twitter had been invited

to be characters in a courtroom drama, and had been allowed to choose their roles, and had all gone for the part of the hanging judge. Or it was even worse than that. They had all gone for the part of the people in the lithographs being ribald at whippings. 'I'm watching people stabbing and stabbing and stabbing Jonah,' Michael said, 'and I'm, "HE'S DEAD."'

Given how vicious the resurgence of public shaming had suddenly turned, I wondered why that type of punishment had been phased out in the nineteenth century. I had assumed - as most people do, I think - that their demise was due to migration from the villages to the cities. Shame became ineffectual because a pilloried person could just lose themselves in the anonymous crowd as soon as the chastisement was over. Shame had lost its power to shame. That was my assumption. Was it right?

[...] a transcript of a sermon that offered a clue as to why she might have pleaded for a private whipping. The sermon, by the Rev. Nathan Strong of Hartford, Connecticut, was an entreaty to people to be less exuberant at executions: 'Do not go to that place of horror with elevated spirits, and gay hearts, for death is there! Justice and judgment are there! The power of government, displayed in its most awful form, is there ... The person who can go and look on death merely to gratify an idle humour is destitute both of humanity and piety.'

I remembered something Jonah had emailed me before I flew to Los Angeles: 'The shaming process is fucking brutal.' I thought about the phrase: 'shaming process'. It was probably reassuring for a shamee to envisage their punishment as a process rather than a free-for-all. If you're being destroyed you want to feel that the people tearing you apart at least know what they're doing. Well, maybe less delicate shamees wouldn't care how orderly their shaming was, but Jonah struck me as someone for whom structure was important and who had only ever wanted to impress people and fit in. It turned out that public shaming had once been a process. A book of Delawarean law I discovered at the Massachusetts Historical Society revealed that if Jonah had been found guilty of 'lying or publishing false news' in the 1800s, he would have been 'fined, placed in the stocks for a period not exceeding four hours, or publicly whipped with not more than forty stripes'. If the judge had chosen a whipping, local newspapers would have published a digest detailing the amount of squirming that had occurred. 'Rash and Hayden squirmed considerably during the performance, and their backs were well-scarred,' wrote The Delawarean of an 1876 whipping. If Jonah's whipper had been deemed not to have whipped hard enough, the reviews would have been scathing. 'Suppressed remarks were expressed by large numbers. Many were heard to say that the punishment was a

farce. Drunken fights and rows followed in rapid succession,' reported Delaware's Wilmington Daily Commercial after a disappointing 1873 whipping. The common assumption is that public punishments died out in the new great metropolises because they'd been judged useless. Everyone was too busy being industrious to bother to trail a transgressor through the city crowds. But according to the documents I found that wasn't it at all. They didn't fizzle out because they were ineffective. They were stopped because they were far too brutal. The movement against public shamings was already in full flow in March 1787 when Benjamin Rush, a United States founding father, wrote a paper calling for them to be outlawed - the stocks, the pillory, the whippingpost, the lot: ignominy [being] universally acknowledged to be a worse punishment than death. It would seem strange that ignominy should ever have been adopted as a milder punishment than death, did we not know that the human mind seldom arrives at truth upon any subject till it has first reached the extremity of error. [p36]

As Jonah Lehrer stood in front of that giant-screen Twitter feed on 12 February 2013 he experienced something that had been widely considered appalling in the eighteenth century. I left the Massachusetts Historical Society, took out my phone, and asked Twitter, 'Has Twitter become a kangaroo court?' 'Not a kangaroo court,' someone replied quite tersely. 'Twitter still can't impose real sentences. Just commentary. Only unlike you, Jon, we aren't paid for it.' Was he right? It felt like a question that really needed to be answered because it didn't seem to be crossing any of our minds to wonder whether whichever person we had just shamed was OK or in ruins. I suppose that when shamings are delivered like remotely administered drone strikes nobody needs to think about how ferocious our collective power might be. The snowflake never needs to feel responsible for the avalanche.

Chapter 4: GOD THAT WAS AWESOME

During the months that followed it became routine. Everyday people, some with young children, were getting annihilated for tweeting some badly worded joke to their hundred-or-so followers. I'd meet them in restaurants and airport cafes - spectral figures wandering the earth like the living dead in the businesswear of their former lives. It was happening with such regularity it didn't even seem coincidental that one of them, Justine Sacco, had been working in the same office building as Michael Moynihan until three weeks earlier, when, passing through Heathrow airport, she wrote a tweet that came out badly.

I once asked a car crash victim what it had felt like to be in a smash-up. She said her eeriest memory was how one second the car was her friend, working

for her, its contours designed to fit her body perfectly, everything was smooth and sleek and luxurious, and then a blink of an eye later it had become a jagged weapon of torture - like she was inside an iron maiden. Her friend had become her worst enemy. Over the years I've sat across tables from a lot of people whose lives had been destroyed. Usually the people who did the destroying were the government, or the military, or Big Business, or, as with Jonah Lehrer, basically themselves (at least at first with Jonah - we took over as he tried to apologize). Justine Sacco felt like the first person I had ever interviewed who had been destroyed by us.

But it suddenly felt like that Russian roulette scene in *The Deer Hunter* when Christopher Walken puts the gun to his head and lets out a scream and pulls the trigger and the gun doesn't go off. It was to a large extent Justine's own fault that so many people thought she was a racist. Her self-reflexive sarcasm had been badly worded, her wider Twitter persona quite brittle. But I hadn't needed to think about her tweet for more than a few seconds before I understood what she'd been trying to say. There must have been amongst her shamers a lot of people who chose to wilfully misunderstand it, for some reason. 'I can't fully grasp the misconception that's happening around the world,' Justine said. 'They've taken my name and my picture and have created this Justine Sacco that's not me and have labelled this person a racist. I have this fear that if I were in a car accident tomorrow and lost my memory and came back and googled myself, that would be my new reality.' I suddenly remembered how weirdly tarnished I felt when the spambot men created their fake Jon Ronson, getting my character traits all wrong, turning me into some horrific garrulous foodie, and strangers believed it was me, and there was nothing I could do. That's what was happening to Justine, although instead of a foodie she was a racist and instead of fifty people it was 1,220,000. **Journalists** are supposed to be intrepid. We're supposed to stand tall in the face of injustice and not fear crazy mobs. But neither Justine nor I saw much fearlessness in how her story was reported.

Andrew Wallenstein was braver than most. But still: it read like the old media saying to social media, 'Don't hurt me.'

'Sometimes things needs to reach a brutal nadir before people see sense,' I said. 'So maybe you're our brutal nadir.' 'Wow,' Justine said. She dried her eyes. 'Of all the things I could have been in society's collective consciousness, it never struck me that I'd end up a brutal nadir.'

'Oh, you think I'm going to be grateful for this?' Justine replied. 'Yes, you will,' the woman said. 'Every step prepares you for the next, especially when you don't think so. I know you can't see that right now.'

Her destruction was justified, Sam Biddle was saying, because Justine was a racist, and because attacking her was punching up. They were cutting down a member of the media elite, continuing the civil rights tradition that started with Rosa Parks, the hitherto silenced underdogs shaming into submission the powerful racist. But I didn't think any of those things was true. If punching Justine Sacco was ever punching up - and it didn't seem so to me, given that she was an unknown PR woman with 170 Twitter followers - the punching only intensified as she plummeted to the ground. Punching Jonah Lehrer wasn't punching up either - not when he was begging for forgiveness in front of that giant-screen Twitter feed. A life had been ruined. What was it for: just some social media drama? I think our natural disposition as humans is to plod along until we get old and stop. But with social media we've created a stage for constant artificial high dramas. Every day a new person emerges as a magnificent hero or a sickening villain. It's all very sweeping, and not the way we actually are as people. What rush was overpowering us at times like this? What were we getting out of it? I could tell Sam Biddle was finding it startling too - like when you shoot a gun and the power of it sends you recoiling violently backwards. He said he was 'surprised' to see how quickly Justine was destroyed: 'I never wake up and hope I get to fire someone that day - and certainly never hope to ruin anyone's life.' Still, his email ended, he had a feeling she'd be 'fine eventually, if not already. Everyone's attention span is so short. They'll be mad about something new today.'

[...] what Sam Biddle had said - about how she was probably fine now. I was sure he wasn't being deliberately glib. He was just like everyone who participates in mass online destruction. Who would want to know? Whatever that pleasurable rush that overwhelms us is - group madness or whatever - nobody wants to ruin it by facing the fact that it comes with a cost. 'Well, I'm not fine,' Justine said. 'I'm really suffering. I had a great career and I loved my job and it was taken away from me and there was a lot of glory in that. Everybody else was very happy about that. I cried out my bodyweight in the first twenty-four hours. It was incredibly traumatic. You don't sleep. You wake up in the middle of the night forgetting where you are. All of a sudden you don't know what you're supposed to do. You've got no schedule. You've got no ...' she paused, '... purpose. I'm thirty years old. I had a great career. If I don't have a plan, if I don't start making steps to reclaim my identity and remind myself of who I am on a daily basis, then I might lose myself. I'm single. So it's not like I can date, because we google everyone we might date. So that's been

taken away from me too. How am I going to meet new people? What are they going to think of me?'

People really were very keen to imagine Jonah as shameless, as lacking in that quality, as if he were something not quite human that had adopted human form. I suppose it's no surprise that we feel the need to dehumanize the people we hurt - before, during, or after the hurting occurs. But it always comes as a surprise. In psychology it's known as cognitive dissonance. It's the idea that it feels stressful and painful for us to hold two contradictory ideas at the same time (like the idea that we're kind people and the idea that we've just destroyed someone). And so to ease the pain we create illusory ways to justify our contradictory behaviour. It's like when I used to smoke and I'd hope the tobacconist would hand me the pack that read 'Smoking Causes Ageing Of The Skin' instead of the pack that read 'Smoking Kills', because ageing of the skin? I didn't mind that.

The day after my lunch with Justine I caught the train to Washington DC to meet someone I had prejudged as a frightening man: a fearsome American narcissist - Judge Ted Poe. For twenty years in Houston, Texas, Poe's nationally famous trademark was to publicly shame defendants in the showiest ways he could dream up, 'using citizens as virtual props in his personal theatre of the absurd', as the legal writer Jonathan Turley once put it. Given society's intensifying eagerness to publicly shame people, I wanted to meet someone who had been doing it professionally for decades. What would today's citizen shamers think of Ted Poe - his personality and his motivations - now they were basically becoming him? What impact had his shaming frenzy had on the world around him - on the wrongdoers and the bystanders and himself?

Judge Ted Poe's critics - like the civil rights group the ACLU - argued to him the dangers of these ostentatious punishments, especially those that were carried out in public. They said it was no coincidence that public shaming had enjoyed such a renaissance in Mao's China and Hitler's Germany and the Ku Klux Klan's America: it destroys souls, brutalizing everyone, the onlookers included, dehumanizing them as much as the person who was being shamed. How could Poe take someone with such low self-esteem that they needed to, say, rob a store, and then hold them up to officially sanctioned public ridicule? But Poe brushed the criticisms off. Criminals didn't have low self-esteem, he argued. It was quite the opposite. 'The people I see have too good a self-esteem,' he told the Boston Globe in 1997. 'Some folks say everyone should have high self-esteem, but sometimes people should feel bad.'

'It was the theatre of the different,' he said.

'But aren't you turning the criminal justice system into entertainment?' I said. 'Ask the guy out there,' Ted Poe replied. 'He doesn't think he's entertaining anybody.' 'I don't mean him,' I said. 'I mean the effect it has on the people watching.' 'The public liked it.' Poe nodded. 'People stopped and talked to him about his conduct. [...]

'I have put my share of folks in the penitentiary. 66 per cent of them go back to prison. 85 per cent of those people we publicly shamed we never saw again. It was too embarrassing for them the first time. It wasn't the theatre of the absurd. It was the theatre of the effective. It worked.' Poe was being annoyingly convincing, even though his recidivism argument was a misleading one. He was far more likely to sentence a first-time offender to a shaming - someone who was already feeling scared and remorseful and determined to change. But, even so, I was learning something about public shaming today that I hadn't anticipated at all.

My trip to Washington DC wasn't turning out how I'd hoped. I'd assumed that Judge Ted Poe would be such a terrible person and negative role model that the social media shamers would realize with horror that this was what they were becoming and vow to change their ways. But Mike Hubacek thought his shaming was the best thing that had ever happened to him. This was especially true, he told me, because the onlookers had been so nice. He'd feared abuse and ridicule. But no. '90 per cent of the responses on the street were "God bless you," and "Things will be OK,"' he said. Their kindness meant everything, he said. It made it all right. It set him on his path to salvation. 'Social media shamings are worse than your shamings,' I suddenly said to Ted Poe. He looked taken aback. 'They are worse,' he replied. 'They're anonymous.' 'Or even if they're not anonymous it's such a pile-on they may as well be,' I said. 'They're brutal,' he said. I suddenly became aware that throughout our conversation I'd been using the word 'they'. And each time I did it felt like I was being spineless. The fact was, they weren't brutal. We were brutal. In the early days of Twitter there had been no shamings. We were Eve in the Garden of Eden. We chatted away unselfconsciously. As somebody wrote back then, 'Facebook is where you lie to your friends, Twitter is where you tell the truth to strangers.' Having funny and honest conversations with like-minded people I didn't know got me through hard times that were unfolding in my actual house. Then came the Jan Moir and the LA Fitness shamings - shamings to be proud of - and I remembered how exciting it felt when hitherto remote billionaires like Rupert Murdoch and Donald Trump created their own Twitter accounts. For the first time in history we sort-of had direct access to ivory-tower oligarchs like them. We became keenly watchful for transgressions. After a while it wasn't just

transgressions we were keenly watchful for. It was misspeakings. Fury at the terribleness of other people had started to consume us a lot. And the rage that swirled around seemed increasingly in disproportion to whatever stupid thing some celebrity had said. It felt different to satire or journalism or criticism. It felt like punishment. In fact it felt weird and empty when there wasn't anyone to be furious about. The days between shamings felt like days picking fingernails, treading water. I'd been dismayed by the cruelty of the people who tore Jonah apart as he tried to apologize. But they weren't the mob. We were the mob. I'd been blithely doing the same thing for a year or more. I had drifted into a new way of being. Who were the victims of my shamings? I could barely remember. I had only the vaguest recollection of who I'd piled onto and what terrible thing they'd done to deserve it.

But it wasn't just the fault of my lousy memory. It was the sheer volume of transgressors I'd chastised. How could I commit to memory that many people? Well, there were the spambot men. For a second in Poe's office I reminisced fondly on the moment someone suggested we gas the cunts. That had given me such a good feeling it felt a shame to interrogate it - to question why it had beguiled me so. 'The justice system in the West has a lot of problems,' Poe said, 'but at least there are rules. You have basic rights as the accused. You have your day in court. You don't have any rights when you're accused on the Internet. And the consequences are worse. It's worldwide forever.' It felt good to see the balance of power shift so that someone like him was nervous of people like us. But he wouldn't sentence a person to hold a placard for something they hadn't been convicted of. He wouldn't sentence someone for telling a joke that came out badly. The people we were destroying were no longer just people like Jonah: public figures who had committed actual transgressions. They were private individuals who really hadn't done anything much wrong. Ordinary humans were being forced to learn damage control, like corporations that had committed PR disasters. It was very stressful. 'We are more frightening than you,' I said to Poe, feeling quite awed. Poe sat back in his chair, satisfied. 'You are much more frightening,' he said. 'You are much more frightening.' We were much more frightening than Judge Ted Poe. The powerful, crazy, cruel people I usually write about tend to be in far-off places. The powerful, crazy, cruel people were now us. It felt like we were soldiers in a war on other people's flaws, and there had suddenly been an escalation in hostilities.

Chapter 5: MAN DESCENDS SEVERAL RUNGS IN THE LADDER OF CIVILIZATION

Group madness. Was that the explanation for our shaming frenzy, our escalating war on flaws? It's an idea that gets invoked by social scientists whenever a crowd becomes frightening. Take the London riots of August 2011.

The violence had begun with police shooting to death a Tottenham man, Mark Duggan. A protest followed, which turned into five days of rioting and looting. The rioters were in Camden Town, a mile from my house, smashing up kebab shops and JB Sports and Dixons and Vodafone stores. Then they were in Kentish Town, half a mile down the hill from us. We frantically locked our doors and stared in horror at the TV news. The crowd had become 'contaminated' - according to Dr Gary Slutkin of the World Health Organization, quoted in the Observer - by 'a virus that infects the mind and causes a collective communal group-think-motivated violence'. It sounded like a zombie film. In the Guardian, Jack Levin - a professor of sociology and criminology at Northeastern University in Boston - called the riots 'the violent version of the Mexican wave ... People are infected with emotional contagion. It is a feature of every riot ... People get together in a group and commit acts of violence that they would never dream of committing individually.'

It turns out that the concept of group madness was the creation of a nineteenth-century French doctor called Gustave Le Bon. His idea was that humans totally lose control of their behaviour in a crowd. Our free will evaporates. A contagious madness takes over, a complete lack of restraint. We can't stop ourselves. So we riot, or we jubilantly tear down Justine Sacco.

Every metaphor Le Bon used to describe an individual in a crowd highlighted his or her mindlessness. In a crowd we are 'microbes' infecting everyone around us, a 'grain of sand amid other grains of sand, which the wind stirs up at will'. We are impulsive, irritable, irrational: 'characteristics which are almost always observed in beings belonging to inferior forms of evolution - in women, savages, and children, for instance'.

But *The Crowd* was more than a polemic. Like Jonah Lehrer, Le Bon knew that a popular science book needed a self-improvement message to become successful. And Le Bon had two. His first was that we really didn't need to worry ourselves about whether mass revolutionary movements like communism and feminism had a moral reason for existing. They didn't. They were just madness. So it was fine for us to stop worrying about that. And his second message was that a smart orator could, if he knew the tricks, hypnotize the crowd into acquiescence or whip it up to do his bidding. Le Bon listed the tricks: 'A crowd is only impressed by excessive sentiments. Exaggerate, affirm, resort to repetition, and never attempt to prove anything by reasoning.' *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* was, on publication, a runaway success. It was translated into twenty-six languages [...]

All over the world famous people began declaring themselves Le Bon fans. Like Mussolini: 'I have read all the work of Gustave Le Bon and I don't know how many times I have reread *The Crowd*. It is a capital work to which, to this day, I frequently refer.' And Goebbels: 'Goebbels thinks that no one since the Frenchman Le Bon has understood the mind of the masses as well as he,' wrote Goebbels' aide Rudolf Semmler in his wartime diary. Given all of this, **you'd think Le Bon's work might have at some point stopped being influential. But it never did. I suppose one reason for his enduring success is that we tend to love nothing more than to declare other people insane.** And there's another explanation. One psychology experiment more than any other has kept his idea alive. It's the one created in a basement at Stanford University in 1971 by the psychologist Philip Zimbardo.

Crowd theory - or 'deindividuation' as it was by then known - preoccupied Zimbardo so deeply that in 1969 he wrote a kind of prose poem to it: 'The ageless life force, the cycle of nature, the blood ties, the tribe, the female principle, the irrational, the impulsive, the anonymous chorus, the vengeful furies.'

'What we saw was frightening,' Zimbardo told the congressional hearing two months later. 'In less than a week human values were suspended and the ugliest, most base, pathological side of human nature surfaced. We were horrified because we saw boys treat other boys as if they were despicable animals, taking pleasure in cruelty.'

As Zimbardo told the BBC in 2002, 'We put good people in an evil place and we saw who won.'

'The really interesting line,' Haslam wrote, 'is I thought I was doing something good at the time. The phrase doing something good is quite critical.' Doing something good. This was the opposite of Le Bon and Zimbardo's conclusions. An evil environment hadn't turned Dave evil. Those 100,000 people who piled in on Justine Sacco hadn't been infected with evil. 'The irony of those people who use contagion as an explanation,' Steve Reicher emailed, 'is that they saw the TV pictures of the London riots but they didn't go out and riot themselves. It is never true that everyone helplessly joins in with others in a crowd. The riot police don't join in with a rioting crowd. Contagion, it appears, is a problem for others.'

Now on the surface, perhaps, one might talk of contagion. But actually there is a far more interesting story about the limits of influence coinciding with the boundaries between groups, about class and power ... Something contagion

hides rather than elucidates. Even the most violent crowds are never simply an inchoate explosion. There are always patterns, and those patterns always reflect wider belief systems. So the question we have to ask - which "contagion" can't answer - is how come people can come together, often spontaneously, often without leadership, and act together in ideologically intelligible ways. If you can answer that, you get a long way towards understanding human sociality. That is why, instead of being an aberration, crowds are so important and so fascinating.'

Zimbardo emailed me back later that evening. 'Please suspend your naivete briefly,' he wrote. 'Eshelman has publicly said he decided to be "the most cruel, abusive guard imaginable" in videotaped interviews, that the prisoners were his "puppets", that he decided to push them as far as he could until they rebelled. They never did and he never let up. In fact, his degrading abuses escalated every night ... Trying to be helpful? He created the evil environment that crushed innocent students and prisoners!' Was Zimbardo right - and I was being naive? Was Dave soft-soaping his brutality all these years later? I did more research and discovered that I wasn't the first person to have found the Zimbardo experiment a bit contrived. The Boston College psychologist Peter Gray - author of the widely used teaching aid *Psychology* - published an essay in *Psychology Today* titled 'Why Zimbardo's Prison Experiment Isn't in My Textbook': Twenty-one boys (OK, young men) [there were actually twenty-four] are asked to play a game of prisoners and guards. It's 1971. There have recently been many news reports about prison riots and the brutality of guards. So, in this game, what are these young men supposed to do? Are they supposed to sit around talking pleasantly with one another about girlfriends, movies, and such? No, of course not. This is a study of prisoners and guards, so their job clearly is to act like prisoners and guards - or, more accurately, to act out their stereotyped views of what prisoners and guards do. Surely, Professor Zimbardo, who is right there watching them (as the Prison Superintendent) would be disappointed if, instead, they had just sat around chatting pleasantly and having tea. Much research has shown that participants in psychological experiments are highly motivated to do what they believe the researchers want them to do. - Peter Gray, 'Why Zimbardo's Prison Experiment Isn't in My Textbook', *Psychology Today*, 19October 2013.

Gray felt Zimbardo's critical error was awarding himself the role of superintendent, instead of being some remote observer. And he was no aloof superintendent. Before the experiment began he gave his guards a pep talk, as he later recounted in his own book *The Lucifer Effect*: 'We cannot physically abuse or torture them,' I said. 'We can create boredom. We can create a sense of frustration. We can create fear in them, to some degree. We can create a

notion of the arbitrariness that governs their lives, which are totally controlled by us, by the system, by you, me, [Warden] Jaffe. They'll have no privacy at all, there will be constant surveillance - nothing they do will go unobserved. They will have no freedom of action. They will be able to do nothing and say nothing that we don't permit. We're going to take away their individuality in various ways. They're going to be wearing uniforms, and at no time will anybody call them by name; they will have numbers and be called only by their numbers. In general, what all this should create in them is a sense of powerlessness. We have total power in the situation. They have none.'

For Gustave Le Bon a crowd was just a great ideology-free explosion of madness - a single blob of violent colour without variation. But that wasn't Twitter. Twitter did not speak with one voice. Within Justine Sacco's pile-on there had been misogynists: 'Somebody (HIV+) must rape this bitch and we'll see if her skin colour protects her from AIDS'. There had been humanitarians: 'If @JustineSacco's unfortunate words about AIDS bother you, join me in supporting @CARE's work in Africa'. There had been corporations promoting products, like the aeroplane Wi-Fi providers Gogo: 'Next time you plan to tweet something stupid before you take off, make sure you are getting on a @Gogo flight! CC: @JustineSacco'. All these people had, just as Steve Reicher said, come together spontaneously, without leadership. I wasn't one of them. But I'd piled in on plenty of people like Justine. I'd been beguiled by the new technology - a toddler crawling towards a gun. Just as with Dave Eshelman, it was the desire to do something good that had propelled me on. Which was definitely a better thing to be propelled on by than group madness. But my desire had taken a lot of scalps - I'd torn apart a LOT of people I couldn't now remember - which made me suspect that it was coming from some very weird dark well, some place I really didn't want to think about. Which was why I had to think about it.

Chapter 6: DOING SOMETHING GOOD

Accountability was important. These guys sitting right behind me felt safe in the crowd. I got that and realized that being anonymous was fueling their behavior. This is known as Deindividuation. Theories of deindividuation propose that it is a psychological state of decreased self-evaluation causing antinormative and disinhibited behavior. Deindividuation theory seeks to provide an explanation for a variety of antinormative collective behavior, such as violent crowds, lynch mobs, etc ...

[...] Deindividuation. Here were Gustave Le Bon and Philip Zimbardo springing into life once again, this time within Adria's blog."

'Danger,' she said. 'Clearly my body was telling me, "You are unsafe."' Which was why, she said, she 'slowly stood up, rotated from my hips, and took three photos.' She tweeted one, 'with a very brief summary of what they said. Then I sent another tweet describing my location. Right? And then the third tweet was the [conference's] code of conduct.' 'You talked about danger,' I said. 'What were you imagining might ... ?' 'Have you ever heard that thing, men are afraid that women will laugh at them and women are afraid that men will kill them?' she said. "

I asked Mercedes what sorts of people gathered on 4chan. 'A lot of them are bored, under-stimulated, over-persecuted powerless kids,' she replied. 'They know they can't be anything they want. So they went to the Internet. On the Internet we have power in situations where we would otherwise be powerless.'

Stop and frisk continued through the 2000s and into the 2010s and one by-product of it was that some repeatedly frisked young people sought revenge in online activism - by joining 4chan. It wasn't only Mercedes who told me this.

'The police are saying, "Look at what we can do to you on your own turf,"' Mercedes continued. "'This is not your space. It's our space, and we're letting you exist here.'" People socialize on Facebook because where do you go to loiter in New York any more? The Internet is our space and they're trying to take it, and it's not going to happen because it's the Internet.' 'And you know more about how it works than they do?' I asked her. 'Fuck them,' she said. 'They're idiots. If you understood medicine in Massachusetts at a certain time, you were a witch and they would burn you. There aren't a lot of people these days who can get past Facebook. So explain to them how a router works and you're a magician. You're a dark wizard. "We need to lock them away forever because we don't understand how else to stop them." Part of the reason all these kids have become experts on the Internet is because they don't have power anywhere else. Skilled trade is shrinking. That's why they went there. And then, holy shit, it blew up.' I asked Mercedes about the attack on Justine. She said, 'Sacco? The one that got those guys fired for joking about dongles?' 'That was Adria Richards,' I said. 'Justine Sacco was the AIDS tweet woman.' 'Well, that was Twitter,' she said. 'Twitter is a different beast to 4chan. It has more regular morals and values than 4chan. Adria Richards got attacked because she got a guy fired for making a dongle joke that wasn't directed at anyone. He wasn't hurting anyone. She was impeding his freedom of speech and the Internet spanked her for it.' 'And Justine Sacco?' I said. 'There's a fair understanding on the Internet of what it means to be the little guy,' Mercedes said, 'the guy rich white assholes make jokes about. And so the issue with Justine Sacco is that she's a rich white person who made a joke about black sick

people who will die soon. So for a few hours Justine Sacco got to find out what it feels like to be the little guy everyone makes fun of. Dragging down Justine Sacco felt like dragging down every rich white person who's ever gotten away with making a racist joke because they could. She thought her black AIDS joke was funny because she doesn't know what it's like to be a disadvantaged black person or be diagnosed with AIDS.' She paused. 'Some sorts of crimes can only be handled by public consensus and shaming. It's a different kind of court. A different kind of jury.' I asked Mercedes to explain to me one of the great mysteries of modern shamings - why they were so breathtakingly misogynistic. Nobody had used the language of sexual violence against Jonah, but when Justine and Adria stepped out of line the rape threats were instant. And the 4chan people were about the most unpleasant. 'Yeah, it's a bit extreme,' Mercedes replied. '4chan takes the worst thing it can imagine that person going through, and shouts for that to happen. I don't think it was a threat that anyone intended to carry through. And I think a lot of its use really did mean "destroy" rather than sexually assault.' She paused. 'But 4chan aims to degrade the target, right? And one of the highest degradations for women in our culture is rape. We don't talk about rape of men, so I think it doesn't occur to most people as a male degradation. With men they talk about getting them fired. In our society men are supposed to be employed. If they're fired they lose masculinity points. With Donglegate she pointlessly robbed that man of his employment. She degraded his masculinity. And so the community responded by degrading her femininity.' The death threats and rape threats against Adria continued even after she was fired. 'Things got very bad for her,' Hank told me. 'She had to disappear for six months. Her entire life was being evaluated by the Internet. It was not a good situation for her at all.'

Ten months had passed since that day. Hank had had ten months to allow his feelings about her to settle into something coherent, so I asked him what he thought of her now. 'I think that nobody deserves what she went through,' he replied.

I had shamed a lot of people. A lot of people had revealed their true selves for a moment and I had shrewdly noticed their masks slipping and quick-wittedly alerted others. But I couldn't remember any of them now. So many forgotten outrages.

I'd been about the first person to alert social media. This is because AAGill always gives my television documentaries very bad reviews and so I tend to keep a vigilant eye on things he can be got for. And within minutes it was everywhere.

It seemed to me that everybody involved in the Hank and Adria story thought they were doing something good. But really they only revealed that our imagination is so limited, our arsenal of potential responses so narrow, the only thing anyone can think to do with an inappropriate shamer like Adria is punish her with a shaming. All of the shamers had themselves come from a place of shame and it really felt parochial and self-defeating to just instinctively slap shame onto shame like a clumsy builder covering cracks. I remembered something that Jonah Lehrer had said to me back in Runyon Canyon. He'd said, 'I look forward to reading your book so I can learn how people find a way out of shame.' I hadn't thought about writing some sort of a public shaming recovery guide. But what he'd said stayed with me.

Chapter 8: THE SHAME ERADICATION WORKSHOP

Almost none of the murderous fantasies were dreamed up in response to actual danger - stalker ex-boyfriends, etc. They were all about the horror of humiliation. Brad Blanton was right. Shame internalized can lead to agony. It can lead to Jonah Lehrer. Whereas shame let out can lead to freedom, or at least to a funny story, which is a sort of freedom too.

Chapter 9: A TOWN A BUZZ OVER PROSTITUTION AND A CLIENT LIST

This was a unique event in the public shaming world. Mass disgrace scenarios like this never happen. Given that my job had become to try and match personality nuances with public shaming survival levels, it was a dream come true for me. When do you get a sample size like that? Surely amongst the people on the list there'd be those so eager to please they'd allow strangers' negative opinions of them to meld with their own, creating some corrosive amalgamate. There'd be those so desperate not to lose their status it would need to be prised from their clenched fingers. There'd be serious people like Jonah, hitherto smart-alecky people like Justine. And there'd be Max Mosleys. Kennebunk was like a well-stocked laboratory for me. Who would incur the crowd's wrath, who its mercy? Who'd be shattered? Who'd emerge unscathed? I drove up there. Inside Court One of the Biddeford District Courthouse half a dozen of the men from the Zumba list sat on the benches, staring grimly ahead while news crews pointed their cameras at them. We in the press area were allowed to stare at them and they weren't able to look away. It reminded me of how Nathaniel Hawthorne had described the pillory in *The Scarlet Letter*: 'an instrument of discipline so fashioned as to confine the human head in its tight grasp, and thus hold it up to public gaze. The very ideal of ignominy was embodied and made manifest in this contrivance of wood and iron. There can be no outrage, methinks ... more flagrant than to forbid the culprit to hide his face for shame.' Everyone was silent and a little awkward, as if we were all

standing around in some strange pre-consensus limbo. This story was new. There hadn't been time for Kennebunk society to start shunning the men.

As it happens, Max and Andrew's sins would in Puritan times have been judged graver than Jonah's. Jonah, 'guilty of lying or publishing false news', would have been fined, placed in the stocks 'for a period not exceeding four hours, or publicly whipped with not more than forty stripes', according to Delaware law. Whereas Max and Andrew, having 'defiled the marriage bed', would have been publicly whipped (no maximum number of lashes was specified), imprisoned with hard labour for at least a year, and, on a second offence, imprisoned for life. But the shifting sands of shamefulness had shifted away from sex scandals - if you're a man - to work improprieties and perceived white privilege, and I suddenly understood the real reason why Max had survived his shaming. Nobody cared. Max survived his shaming because he was a man in a consensual sex shaming - which meant there had been no shaming. I emailed Max to tell him. 'Nobody cared!' I wrote. 'Of all the public scandals, being a man in a consensual sex scandal is probably the one to hope for.' Max was the target of no one - not liberals like me, not the online misogynists who tear apart women who step out of line. Max suffered nothing.

It wasn't that nobody cared. Max's wife cared. And someone else did: Paul Dacre, the editor of the Daily Mail. In a 2008 speech to the Society of Editors, Paul Dacre called Max's orgy 'perverted, depraved, the very abrogation of civilized behaviour'. It was a rueful speech lamenting the Death of Shame.

Ever since I started telling people I was writing a book about shame, lots of people from the Paul Dacre-type world - successful older men high up in British society - have congratulated me, presumptuously, for telling it how it is about how young people don't feel shame any more. I met a famous architect at a party who said just that. And a religious broadcaster bemoaned to me how the loosening of religious morality has created a shameless society. I can understand why someone might believe that, given that we're living in an age where a Church of the Nazarene pastor can visit a prostitute and nobody cares. I think Andrew and Max have women like Princess Donna to thank for their non-disgrace. Donna has worked assiduously for years to demystify strange sex, which is why men like them are able to emerge from their scandals unscathed. But shame hasn't died. Shame has just moved elsewhere, gathering tremendous strength along the way. The fact was, speeches like Paul Dacre's didn't matter any more. The people who mattered didn't care what Dacre thought. The people who mattered were the people on Twitter. On Twitter we make our own decisions about who deserves obliteration. We form our own consensus, and we aren't being influenced by the criminal justice system or by

the media. This makes us formidable. My journey to find a shame-free paradise - somewhere we can be safe from the likes of us - had been a failure. Radical Honesty felt to me like people just yelling at each other.

Chapter 10: THE NEAR DROWNING OF MIKE DAISEY

'It feels like they want an apology, but it's a lie.' Mike Daisey and I were sitting in a Brooklyn restaurant. [...] 'It's a lie because they don't want an apology,' he said. 'An apology is supposed to be a communion - a coming together. For someone to make an apology someone has to be listening. They listen and you speak and there's an exchange. That's why we have a thing about accepting apologies. There's a power exchange that happens. But they don't want an apology.' He looked at me. 'What they want is my destruction. What they want is for me to die. They will never say this because it's too histrionic. But they never want to hear from me again for the rest of my life, and while they're never hearing from me they have the right to use me as a cultural reference point whenever it services their ends. That's how it would work out best for them. They would like me to never speak again.' He paused. 'I'd never had the opportunity to be the object of hate before. The hard part isn't the hate. It's the object.'

He felt proud to have recovered the way he did. 'I've been obsessed with investigating literary scandals,' he told me. 'Nobody ever comes back from those things. At the scale and intensity of what I experienced? Nobody comes out intact.' 'I know!' I said. 'Did you know from the start you'd survive?' 'Oh no,' Mike said. 'Oh no. I thought about killing myself.' I looked at him. 'Really?' I said. 'Everything was on the table,' he said. 'I actively talked about killing myself.'

'The very worst part of the scandal was before anyone knew of the scandal,' he said. 'There was a week between my interview with Ira and the show airing. During that week I began to disassociate on stage. I was falling apart. I would freeze as I was doing the show. I would feel my mind take itself apart. That was the worst part. It was fucking terrible, the fear, and the feeling that you will dissolve.' 'What were you most scared of?' 'I was terrified that I would no longer be able to tell the narrative of my life,' Mike said, 'that every time I performed on stage his judgement of me would echo forever, deciding who and what I was.'

But I did notice one positive change in her. The first time we'd met she'd seemed ashamed - weighed down by the guilt that she'd 'tarnished' her family by pressing Send on that stupid tweet. I think she still felt ashamed, but maybe not quite so much. Instead, she said, she felt humiliated. The week I had lunch

with Justine the European Court delivered an unexpected judgment - the Right to be Forgotten ruling. If an article or blog about a person was 'inadequate, irrelevant or no longer relevant' – whatever those vague words meant - Google must if requested deindex it from their European sites (although not from Google.com). [...] Articles and websites sprang upacross the Internet attacking the ruling and outing the forgotten [...]

Justine, following the news from New York, had 'conflicting feelings immediately', she told me. It seemed like censorship to her. And it also seemed appealing. But she knew invoking it would be a disaster for her. If the world found out - imagine the frenzy. No. **The Right to be Forgotten would improve the life of some actual transgressor - some barely shamed niche European former fraudster who slipped through the outers' net, for instance - far more than it would improve the life of the super-shamed Justine Sacco. And so the worst thing, Justine said, the thing that made her feel most helpless, was her lack of control over the Google search results. They were just there, eternal, crushing. 'It's going to take a very long time for those Google search results to change for me,' she said.**

Chapter 11: THE MAN WHO CAN CHANGE THE GOOGLE SEARCH RESULTS

I understood that Michael was offering some kind of stealthier version of the European Court of Justice's Right to be Forgotten ruling. Plus, unlike the ruling, Michael had a worldwide reach, and not just a European one. As it happened the judgment wasn't working out well for a lot of its applicants. They were finding themselves less forgotten than ever, given that so many **journalists and bloggers had dedicated themselves to outing them.** But nobody was scrutinizing the client lists of the online reputation-management companies. Only a few very unlucky people, like Phineas Upham, had been exposed that way.

Michael had accused me of 'prurient curiosity of the type you condemn in your book' when I'd asked him about the early paedophile sign-ups he'd thwarted. And now the accusation put me in a panic. I didn't want to write a book that advocated for a less curious world. Prurient curiosity may not be great. But curiosity is. **People's flaws need to be written about. The flaws of some people lead to horrors inflicted on others. And then there are the more human flaws that, when you shine a light on them, de-demonize people who might otherwise be seen as ogres.**

And what was the worst thing I had ever done to someone? It was a terrible thing. It was devastating for them. It wasn't against the law. Clive's point was that the criminal justice system is supposed to repair harm, but most prisoners

- young, black - have been incarcerated for acts far less emotionally damaging than the injuries we non-criminals perpetrate upon each other all the time [...] I thought about Justine Sacco. How many of the people piling in on her had been emotionally damaged by what they had read? As far as I could tell, only one person was damaged in that pile-on. 'I'm writing a book about public shaming,' I told Clive. 'With citizen justice we're bringing public shame back in a big way. You've spent your life in actual courts. Is it the same there? Is shaming utilized as a kind of default position in real courtrooms too?' 'Oh yes!' he replied, quite happily. 'I do it all the time. I've humiliated a lot of people. Especially experts.' 'What's your method?' I asked him. 'Oh, it's a very simple game,' he said. 'You need to figure out something that's so esoteric the expert can't possibly know about it. Maybe it's something that's not relevant to the case, but it has to be something they cannot know the answer to. They'll be incapable of saying they don't know. So they'll gradually walk down the garden to the place where they look really stupid.' 'Why are they incapable of saying they don't know?' 'It's their entire profession,' Clive said. 'It's respect. It's a big deal being an expert. Imagine the things you can discuss at dinner parties as opposed to the other boring people at the table. You're the witness who put Ted Bundy away. They'll do anything to not look stupid. That's the key thing. And if you can make them look stupid, everything else falls by the wayside.' Clive made it sound like shaming was as natural as breathing in the court world, and had been forever. And of course I understood that witnesses needed to be grilled, their honesty tested. But it's odd that so many of us see shaming the way free-market libertarians see capitalism, as a beautiful beast that must be allowed to run free. Those of us on social media were just starting out on our shaming crusade. In the real courts, according to Clive, it was venerated as a first-line tactic. I wondered - when shaming takes on a disproportionate significance within an august institution, when it entrenches itself over generations, what are the consequences? What does it do to the participants?

Chapter 12: THE TERROR

I was curious to know if shaming was a significant enough part of the court milieu to merit a mention in a courtroom familiarization course. It merited a mention straight away. There was a white-board. Our trainer for the day, John, stood next to it. 'You,' he told us, by way of introduction, 'are a bone being dragged over by two dogs that want to win. And if you get between the lawyer and his goal, you're going to get hurt.' He surveyed the room. 'Appreciate what the lawyer is trying to do. The lawyer hopes to drag you down. He'll call you incompetent, inexperienced. You might start to feel angry, upset. He will try and drag you outside your area of expertise, your circle of facts. How? How will he try to do this?' There was a silence. Then it dawned on the rookie experts that this wasn't a rhetorical question. 'Facial expression?' the marine

metallurgist said. 'What do you mean?' said John. 'Smiling or not smiling,' the metallurgist said. 'Looking unmoved. Lulling us into a false sense of security and then pouncing. Looking bored?' John wrote the suggestions down on the whiteboard. 'Unnerve us with a disbelieving, patronizing or sarcastic voice?' asked a social worker. 'Might they snigger?' the lab technician asked. 'No, that would sound unprofessional,' said John. 'But they might go for incredulity. They might say, "Really?"' 'What would happen if I nervously laugh?' the lab technician said. 'Sometimes when I'm under pressure I nervously laugh.' 'Don't,' John warned. 'If you do they'll say, "Are you finding it funny? My client isn't."' 'Are we allowed to ask them to stop if it gets too much for us?' the marine metallurgist said. 'No,' said John. 'You aren't allowed to ask them to stop. Any other guesses?' 'Pretend to mispronounce your name?' someone said. 'Silence?' someone else said. Everyone cringed at the thought of silence. 'Should we be concerned about the colour of our clothes?' asked a care worker. 'I hear someone wearing brown is considered less believable.' 'That's too deep for me,' said John. I assumed that by lunchtime John would move away from shaming familiarization to other types of courtroom familiarization. But, really, that never happened. It turned out that shaming was such an integral part of the judicial process the day was pretty much all about it. In the afternoon the experts were taught shame-avoidance techniques. When they first entered the dock, John told them, they should ask the court usher to bring them a glass of water. That would give them a moment to settle their nerves. They mustn't pour the water themselves, but instead ask the court usher to. When the lawyer asks them a question, they should swivel on their hips and deliver their answer to the judge. 'They'll have a much harder time breaking you down that way,' John said. 'Oddly enough we like to look at our tormentors. Maybe it's linked into the Stockholm Syndrome.'

Matthew's role-play lasted fifteen minutes. His face turned as crimson as a rusted cargo container as he mumbled about corroded coils. His mouth was dry, his voice trembling. He was a wreck. 'He's weak,' I heard myself think. 'He's just so weak.' Then I caught myself. Judging a person on how flustered they appear in the face of a shaming is a truly strange and arbitrary way of forming an opinion on someone.

A shaming can be like a distorting mirror at a funfair, taking human nature and making it look monstrous. Of course it was tactics like John Carruthers' that compelled us to believe we could do justice better on social media. But still: knee-jerk shaming is knee-jerk shaming and I wondered what would happen if we made a point of eschewing the shaming completely - if we refused to shame anyone. Could there be a corner of the justice system trying out an idea like that?

Chapter 13: RAQUEL IN A POST-SHAMING WORLD

So they grew up and - 'all violence being a person's attempt to replace shame with self-esteem' - they murdered people. One inmate told him, "'You wouldn't believe how much respect you get when you have a gun pointed at some dude's face.'" For men who have lived for a lifetime on a diet of contempt and disdain, the temptation to gain instant respect in this way can be worth far more than the cost of going to prison or even of dying.' And after they were jailed things only got worse. At Walpole - Massachusetts' most riot-prone prison during the 1970s - officers intentionally flooded the cells and put insects in the prisoners' food. They forced inmates to lie face down before they were allowed meals. Sometimes officers would tell prisoners they had a visitor. Prisoners almost never had visitors, so it was exciting to hear. Then the officer would say he didn't really have a visitor and he was just kidding. And so on. 'They thought these things would be how to get them to obey,' Gilligan told me. 'But it did the exact opposite. It stimulated violence.' 'Literally every killer told you this?' I asked. 'That the feeling of shame was what led them to do it?' 'It amazed me how universal it was,' Gilligan replied. 'Over decades.' 'What about that pimp from Boston?' I said. 'What was his story?' 'His mother had thought he was possessed by the Devil,' Gilligan said, 'so she did voodoo ceremonies and exorcisms in this totally black basement and he was scared to death. He'd shit his pants. He certainly was not loved in any normal sense. His mother had given him this negative identity - that Satan was inside him - so he behaved accordingly.' Gilligan paused. 'It took some of them a while to confess it to me. It's shameful to have to admit you feel ashamed. By the way, we're saying the word "feeling". The "feeling" of shame. I think "feeling" is the wrong word.'

"It may be somewhat paradoxical to refer to shame as a 'feeling', for while shame is initially painful, constant shaming leads to a deadening of feeling. Shame, like cold, is, in essence, the absence of warmth. And when it reaches overwhelming intensity, shame is experienced, like cold, as a feeling of numbness and deadness. [In Dante's Inferno] the lowest circle of hell was a region not of flames, but of ice - absolute coldness." -James Gilligan, *Violence: Reflections on our Deadliest Epidemic*, 1999

'And finally it struck me,' Gilligan said to me. 'Our language tells us this. One of the words we use for overwhelming shame is mortification. "I'm mortified."

There was a time when he might have totally changed the way the United States treated its transgressors. But it didn't happen. This is the reason why. Throughout the 1980s Gilligan ran experimental therapeutic communities inside Massachusetts' prisons. They weren't especially radical. They were just about 'treating the prisoners with respect', Gilligan told me, 'giving people a chance to express their grievances and hopes and wishes and fears'. The point

was to create an ambience that eradicated shame entirely. 'We had one psychiatrist who referred to the inmates as scum. I told him I never wanted to see his face again. It was not only anti-therapeutic for the patients, it was dangerous for us.' At first the prison officers had been suspicious, 'but eventually some of them began to envy the prisoners', Gilligan said. 'Many of them also needed some psychiatric help. These were poorly paid guys, poorly educated. We arranged to get some of them into psychiatric treatment. So they became less insulting and domineering. And violence dropped astoundingly.' Even apparently hopeless cases were transformed, Gilligan said. [...] In 1991 Gilligan began to co-opt Harvard lecturers to donate their time for free to teach classes inside his prisons. What could be more de-shaming than an educational programme? His plan coincided with the election of a new governor, William Weld. Weld was asked about Gilligan's initiative in one of his first press conferences. 'He said, "We have to stop this idea of giving free college education to inmates,"' Gilligan told me, "'otherwise people who are too poor to go to college are going to start committing crimes so they can get sent to prison for a free education.'" And so that was the end of the education programme. 'He literally decimated it,' Gilligan said. 'He stripped it. I didn't want to preside over a sham.' And so Gilligan quit.

Some of the guards down here reportedly called the detainees 'animals', and laughed at them, and subjected them to unnecessary strip-searches. The report added: 'Many immigrants also noted that corrections officers appeared to bring their personal problems to work, taking their frustration and anger out on them.' [...] We kept walking - past inmates just sitting there, looking at walls. 'Normal prison is punishment in the worst sense,' Jim told me. 'It's like a soul-bleeding. Day in, day out, people find themselves doing virtually nothing in a very negative environment.' I thought of Lindsey Stone, just sitting at her kitchen table for almost a year, staring at the online shamings of people just like her. 'People move away from themselves,' Jim said. 'Inmates tell me time and again that they feel themselves shutting down, building a wall.'

The first time I'd met Jim - when he'd yelled 'STUDY HARD AT MATH!' at a startled stranger child - I'd found him a bit nuts. But somewhere along the line he'd become heroic to me. I'd been thinking about a message that had appeared on the giant Twitter feed behind Jonah's head: He is tainted as a writer forever. And a tweet directed at Justine Sacco: Your tweet lives on forever. The word forever had been coming up a lot during my two years amongst the publicly shamed. Jonah and Justine and people like them were being told, 'No. There is no door. There is no way back in. We don't offer any forgiveness.' But we know that people are complicated and have a mixture of flaws and talents and sins. So why do we pretend that we don't?

Chapter 14: CATS AND ICE CREAM AND MUSIC

This was why Farukh needed to create LinkedIn and Tumblr and Twitter pages for Lindsey. They come with a built-in high PageRank. The Google algorithm prejudices them as well liked. But for Michael the problem with Google is that it is forever evolving - adjusting its algorithm in ways it keeps secret. 'Google is a tricky beast and a moving target,' Michael told me. 'And so we try to decipher it, to reverse-engineer it.' This was what Michael knew right now: 'Google tends to like stuff that's old. It seems to think old stuff has a certain authority. And Google tends to like stuff that's new. With the intervening stuff, week six, week twelve, there's a dip.' Which was why Michael's people predicted that Lindsey's love of cats or whatever would achieve 'initial strong impact', followed by 'fluctuation'. And after fluctuation: 'reversion'. Michael's clients dread reversion. There's nothing more dispiriting than seeing the nice new judgements disappear down to page two and the horrific old judgements bubble back up again. But reversion is actually their friend, Jered Higgins told me. Reversion is when you think Glenn Close is dead but she suddenly leaps up in the bath, apparently filled with a new violent fervour, but really she's muddled and wounded and vulnerable. 'Reversion shows that the algorithm is uncertain,' Jered said. 'It's the algorithm shifting things around and wondering what, from a mathematical standpoint, is the story that needs to be told about this person.' And during this uncertainty, Jered said, 'We go in and blast it.' The blasting - the bombardment of the algorithm with Tumblr pages about Lindsey's trips to the beach, the Shock and Awe of these pleasant banalities - has to be choreographed just right. Google knows if it's being manipulated. Alarm bells go off. 'So we have a strategic schedule for content creation and publication,' Jered said. 'We create a natural-looking activity online. That's a lot of accumulated intelligence.' * Michael Fertik took me for dinner and talked to me about the criticism people often level at him, that 'any change of search results is manipulating truth and chilling free speech'. He drank some wine. 'But there is a chilling of behaviour that goes along with a virtual lynching. There is a life modification.' 'I know,' I said. 'For a year Lindsey Stone had felt too plagued to even go to karaoke.' And karaoke is something you do alone in a room with your friends. 'And that's not an unusual reaction,' Michael said. 'People change their phone numbers. They don't leave the house. They go into therapy. They have signs of PTSD. It's like the Stasi. We're creating a culture where people feel constantly surveilled, where people are afraid to be themselves.' 'Like the NSA,' I said. 'This is more frightening than the NSA,' said Michael. 'The NSA is looking for terrorists. They're not getting psychosexual pleasure out of their schadenfreude about you.' I wondered what to make of Michael's Stasi analogy. There's an old Internet adage that as soon as you compare something to the Nazis you lose the argument. Maybe the same could be said about the Stasi - the East Germans' secret police force during the Cold

War. They would, after all, creep into the homes of suspected enemies of the state and spray radiation onto them as they slept, their idea being to use the radiation as a tracking device. Stasi agents would follow them through crowds, pointing Geiger counters at them. A lot of suspected enemies of the state died of unusual cancers during the Stasi's reign. But the Stasi weren't just about inflicting physical horror. Their main endeavour was to create the most elaborate surveillance network in world history. It didn't seem unreasonable to scrutinize this aspect of them in the hope it might teach us something about our own social media surveillance network.

Anna Funder wrote *Stasiland* back in 2003 - fourteen years after the fall of the Stasi and three years before the invention of Twitter. Of course no prurient or censorious bureaucrat had intercepted Justine Sacco's private thoughts. Justine had tweeted them herself, labouring under the misapprehension - the same one I laboured under for a while - that Twitter was a safe place to tell the truth about yourself to strangers. That truth-telling had really proven to be an idealistic experiment gone wrong. Anna Funder visited a Stasi officer whose job had been to co-opt informants. She wanted to know how - given that informant pay was terrible, and the workload was ever burgeoning, with more and more behaviours being redefined as enemy activities - he manage to persuade people to get on board. 'Mostly people just said yes,' he told her. 'Why?' she asked him. 'Some of them were convinced of the cause,' he said. 'But I think mainly because informers felt they were somebody, you know? Someone was listening to them for a couple of hours every week, taking notes. They felt they had it over other people.' That struck me as a condescending thing for the Stasi man to say about his informants. And it would be a condescending thing to say about Twitter users too. Social media gives a voice to voiceless people - its egalitarianism is its greatest quality. But I was struck by a report Anna Funder discovered that had been written by a Stasi psychologist tasked with trying to understand why they were attracting so many willing informants. His conclusion: 'It was an impulse to make sure your neighbour was doing the right thing.'

Chapter 15: YOUR SPEED

We have always had some influence over the justice system, but for the first time in 180 years - since the stocks and the pillory were outlawed - we have the power to determine the severity of some punishments. And so we have to think about what level of mercilessness we feel comfortable with. I, personally, no longer take part in the ecstatic public condemnation of anybody, unless they've committed a transgression that has an actual victim, and even then not as much as I probably should. I miss the fun a little. But it feels like when I became a vegetarian. I missed the steak, although not as much as I'd

anticipated, but I could no longer ignore the slaughterhouse. I kept remembering something Michael Fertik had said to me at the Village Pub in Woodside. 'The biggest lie,' he said, 'is "The Internet is about you." We like to think of ourselves as people who have choice and taste and personalized content. But the Internet isn't about us. It's about the companies that dominate the data flows of the Internet.'

From the beginning I'd been trying to understand why - once you discount Gustave Le Bon and Philip Zimbardo's theories of viruses and contagion and evil - online shaming is so pitiless. And now I think I have the answer. I found it in, of all places, an article about a radical traffic-calming scheme tested in California in the early 2000s. The story - by the journalist Thomas Goetz - is a fantastically esoteric one. Goetz writes about how in the school zones of Garden Grove, California, cars were ignoring speed signs and hitting 'bicyclists and pedestrians with depressing regularity'. And so they tried something experimental. They tried Your Speed signs.

'What made you think they'd work?' I asked him. 'There was nothing about them to suggest they'd work.' 'Right,' said Scott. 'And that's where it gets interesting.' They really, logically, shouldn't have worked. As Thomas Goetz wrote,

The signs were curious in a few ways. They didn't tell drivers anything they didn't already know - there is, after all, a speedometer in every car. If a motorist wanted to know their speed, a glance at the dashboard would do it ... And the Your Speed signs came with no punitive follow-up - no police officer standing by ready to write a ticket. This defied decades of law-enforcement dogma, which held that most people obey speed limits only if they face some clear negative consequence for exceeding them. In other words, officials in Garden Grove were betting that giving speeders redundant information with no consequence would somehow compel them to do something few of us are inclined to do: slow down.

[...] In test after test the results came back the same. People did slow down - by an average of 14 per cent. And they stayed slowed down for miles down the road. 'So why do they work?' I asked Scott. His reply surprised me. 'I don't know,' he said. 'I really don't know. I ... Yeah. I don't know.'

[...] during the past decade the mystery has galvanized social psychologists. And their conclusion: feedback loops. Feedback loops. You exhibit some type of behaviour (you drive at 27 mph in a 25 mph zone). You get instant realtime feedback for it (the sign tells you you're driving at 27 mph). You decide whether or not to change your behaviour as a result of the feedback (you lower your speed to 25 mph). You get instant feedback for that decision too (the sign tells you you're driving at 25 mph now. Some signs flash up a smiley-face emoticon to congratulate you). And it all happens in a flash of an eye - in the

few moments it takes you to drive past the Your Speed sign. In Goetz's Wired magazine story - 'Harnessing the Power of Feedback Loops' - he calls them 'a profoundly effective tool for changing behaviour'. And I'm all for people slowing down in school zones. But maybe in other ways feedback loops are leading to a world we only think we want. Maybe - as my friend the documentary maker Adam Curtis emailed me - they're turning social media into 'a giant echo chamber where what we believe is constantly reinforced by people who believe the same thing'. We express our opinion that Justine Sacco is a monster. We are instantly congratulated for this - for basically being Rosa Parks. We make the on-the-spot decision to carry on believing it. 'The tech-utopians like the people in Wired present this as a new kind of democracy,' Adam's email continued. 'It isn't. It's the opposite. It locks people off in the world they started with and prevents them from finding out anything different. They got trapped in the system of feedback reinforcement. The idea that there is another world of other people who have other ideas is marginalized in our lives.' I was becoming one of those other people with other ideas. I was expressing the unpopular belief that Justine Sacco isn't a monster. I wonder if I will receive a tidal wave of negative feedback for this and, if so, will it frighten me back again, to a place where I'm congratulated and welcomed? 'Feedback is an engineering principle,' Adam's email to me ended. 'And all engineering is devoted to trying to keep the thing you are building stable.' Soon after Justine Sacco's shaming I was talking with a friend, a journalist, who told me he had so many jokes, little observations, potentially risqué thoughts, that he wouldn't dare to post online any more. 'I suddenly feel with social media like I'm tiptoeing around an unpredictable, angry, unbalanced parent who might strike out at any moment,' he said. 'It's horrible.' He didn't want me to name him, he said, in case it sparked something off. We see ourselves as nonconformist, but I think all of this is creating a more conformist, conservative age. 'Look!' we're saying. 'WE'RE normal! THIS is the average!' We are defining the boundaries of normality by tearing apart the people outside of it.

Bibliography and Acknowledgements

A note about the title. For a while it was going to be called, simply, Shame. Or Tarred and Feathered. There was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing. It was a surprisingly hard book to find a title for and I think I know why. It was something that one of my interviewees said to me: 'Shame is an incredibly inarticulate emotion. It's something you bathe in, it's not something you wax eloquent about. It's such a deep, dark, ugly thing there are very few words for it.'

[Greg] helped me remember how Twitter mutated from a place of unselfconscious honesty into somewhere more anxiety-inducing. Greg is not

on Twitter any more. His final tweet, posted on 10 May 2012, read: 'Twitter is no place for a human being.'

