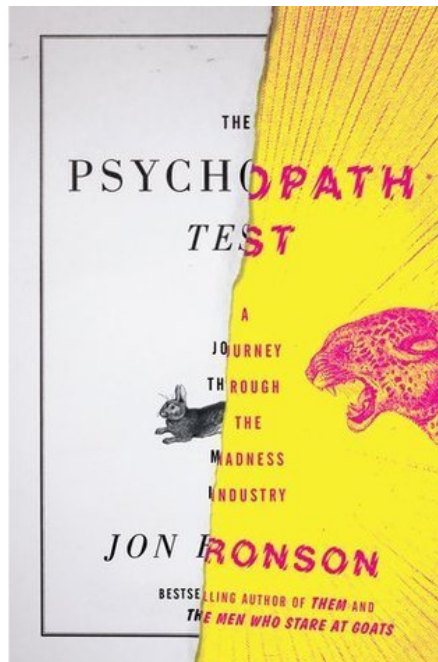




The Psychopath Test: A Journey Through the Madness Industry

Jon Ronson

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In this madcap journey, a bestselling journalist investigates psychopaths and the industry of doctors, scientists, and everyone else who studies them.

The Psychopath Test is a fascinating journey through the minds of madness. Jon Ronson's exploration of a potential hoax being played on the world's top neurologists takes him, unexpectedly, into the heart of the madness industry. An influential psychologist who is convinced that many important CEOs and politicians are, in fact, psychopaths teaches Ronson how to spot these high-flying individuals by looking out for little telltale verbal and nonverbal clues. And so Ronson, armed with his new psychopath-spotting abilities, enters the corridors of power. He spends time with a death-squad leader institutionalized for mortgage fraud in Cocksackie, New York; a legendary CEO whose psychopathy has been speculated about in the press; and a patient in an asylum for the criminally insane who insists he's sane and certainly not a psychopath.

Ronson not only solves the mystery of the hoax but also discovers, disturbingly, that sometimes the personalities at the helm of the madness industry are, with their drives and obsessions, as mad in their own way as those they study. And that relatively ordinary people are, more and more, defined by their maddest edges.

The Psychopath Test: A Journey Through the Madness Industry Details

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From Reader Review The Psychopath Test: A Journey Through the Madness Industry for online ebook

Mike (the Paladin) says

This is what I might call "an oddly interesting book". I say that because in retrospect I'm a bit surprised that it holds the interest so well. Mr. Ronson begins with a strange little mystery concerning running down the source/writer of an (to use the same word) odd book that has been mailed to certain people. From this the book springboards into a look at Psychopathy, its diagnosis and by extension the way in which psychiatric disorders are not only diagnosed but agreed on (that is agreed to exist as disorders).

Rambling a bit and full of introspective thoughts by the author (most of which are interesting and entertaining if not always germane) we go through a series of interviews that range from "Tony" to Bob Hare who basically formulated the most used Psychopath test. Tony was a young man who has been in Broadmoor for years, sent there after a relatively minor offense. The author was brought there by representatives of the church of Scientology in an attempt to discredit psychiatry in general. Other interviews included Emmanuel Constant, a former Haitian death-squad leader. He also interviewed a corporate hatchet man type exec. who was known for blithely firing people and joyously shutting down plants.

There is a lot that's interesting here and the book will (I believe) keep you involved. After looking into how disorders get into (and are pulled out of) DSM-IV-TR, considering the implications of Hare's list (and how it effected the author as he found himself setting out to find and identify "free range psychopaths) and the attitudes around these he came to an interesting conclusion. That they may be dangerous tools leading to over diagnosis.

I suggest you take a look at this, especially if you (like me) have been "concerned" about statements like "1% to 10% of the population may be psychopaths". While this book may be a bit more disjointed than some of the author's other works...it's well done and interesting.

Nancy says

It is self explanatory that this review will make me enemies. Fortunately, those who know me are really the only ones at risk.

Like many people, I took my first psychology class in high school and my interest was piqued. My second psychology class was during college, as was my third and fourth. I then diverged into the world of sociology which fascinated me and graduated from Utah State University with a bachelor's degree in sociology. Yay for me! Like the hundreds of psychology graduates, I was now qualified to do one of three things 1) move onto graduate school, 2) sell clothes at a department store or 3) get married and forget all about my career aspirations. Naturally, I sold clothes at JCPenney for one full year before I wanted to slit my wrists - not for suicidal ideation but simply to break up the monotony of my incredibly meaningless life. The following school year, I was admitted to a graduate program in psychology at Brigham Young University.

The following two years were full-time classes, year round then two practicums and, at last, an internship with a couple of classes in the evening. It was intense, enjoyable, and I graduated with a career plan and, frankly, a head far too big to fit through the doors. I had textbook answers and an excellent mentor who had been a pioneer in educational psychology with 30 years of private practice, running troubled youth homes, and teaching at various universities. Most people called him Dr. LaPray. I called him "Daddy." May I also

mention how grateful I am to the certified borderline personalities who required long-term care. You are directly responsible for my dad being able to pay my tuition.

The best two classes I took during graduate school was how to administer and read the MMPI and the study of the diagnostic bible, the DSM III-R. I studiously purchased the very expensive book in the bookstore, took it home and read it cover to cover. By the end of the weekend, I had self-diagnosed myself with 19 serious disorders. Fortunately, class began the following Monday and the professor put the diagnoses into perspective. I have also married a social worker since then and he repeats this mantra: Many of us exhibit some of the characteristics found in the DSM. The concern is when the behavior become extreme and dictates our lives, sabotaging our ability to work or interact with others.

Unfortunately, 22 years later, I am still convinced of my own neurosis and anxiety. Ah, well. It's nice to know and embrace the real me.

So what does this have to do with Jon Ronson? Jon and I really do share a debilitating bout of anxiety. My method of understanding it was to study the crap out of it then dedicate the past 21 years to pursuing a career in helping. Also, Jon is brilliantly hilarious. Like me. If I were to be clinical, I'd guess that Mr. Ronson is overcompensating for his anxiety disorder by being brilliantly hilarious. Like me. But then maybe I am simply projecting.

Seriously, though, Mr. Ronson took a circuitous route to rooting out the therapeutic approaches in the 60's and 70's which were completely true and bizarre then went to interview a man who had created a psychopath test named Dr. Hare who empowered all who took his workshop by providing a checklist for spotting a psychopath. He met with murderers in prison wards, cold-hearted CEO's and power-controlling concierge. All psychopaths, of course. Until a friend pointed out that he was using it as a weapon rather than a diagnostic tool. This was a circular story as it led us back to a patient held at Broadmoor, a high security insane asylum for the incurable where one patient pretended to be a psychopath in order to avoid prison. Now he can't get out.

Speaking of diagnostic checklists, Mr. Ronson then explores the etiology of the DSM. My testimony of the DSM is now shaken and I'm starting to rethink my habit of taking the pocket size with me to church so I can secretly diagnose congregation members. I understood the reciprocal relationship DSM has with not only insurance companies but also drug companies. Also, every revision adds more disorders that circle closer and closer to normal behavior. The explosion of autistic diagnoses has a lot more to do with including aspergers on the spectrum than the MMR vaccination and has solidified my belief the one truism -

Normal is a setting on your washing machine.

Completely fascinating read and surprisingly funny. My husband kept asking me what I was laughing about. The joke and delivery was so complicated (but easy to spot and understand), it would have been impossible to explain. I just gave him the book when I was finished. Really enjoyable read.

The Serendipity Aegis ~ ?Misericordia? ?????? ✿*♥? says

Q:

he DSM-IV-TR is a 943-page textbook published by the American Psychiatric Association that sells for \$99...There are currently 374 mental disorders. I bought the book...and leafed through it...I closed the manual. "I wonder if I've got any of the 374 mental disorders," I thought. I opened the manual again. And

instantly diagnosed myself with twelve different ones. (c)

Q:

We journalists love writing about eccentrics. We hate writing about impenetrable, boring people. It makes us look bad: the duller the interviewee, the duller the prose. If you want to get away with wielding true, malevolent power, be boring. (c)

Q:

When I asked Robert Spitzer about the possibility that he'd inadvertently created a world in which ordinary behaviours were being labelled mental disorders, he fell silent. I waited for him to answer. But the silence lasted three minutes. Finally he said, 'I don't know. (c)

Q:

I supposed there was no reason why psychopaths shouldn't have unrelated hobbies. (c)

Q:

People who are normal (i.e., sane, sensible) don't try to open lines of communication with total strangers by writing them a series of disjointed, weird, cryptic messages. (c) Seriously? No shit.

Q:

Practically every prime-time program is populated by people who are just the right sort of mad, and I now knew what the formula was. The right sort of mad are people who are a bit madder than we fear we're becoming, and in a recognizable way. (c)

Q:

He did another experiment, the Startle Reflex Test, in which psychopaths and non-psychopaths were invited to look at grotesque images, like crime-scene photographs of blown-apart faces, and then when they least expected it, Bob would let off an incredibly loud noise in their ear. The non-psychopaths would leap with astonishment. The psychopaths would remain comparatively serene. (c)

Q:

the American physician Samuel Cartwright identifying in 1851 a mental disorder, drapetomania, evident only in slaves. The sole symptom was "the desire to run away from slavery" and the cure was to "whip the devil out of them" (c)

Q:

... if you're beginning to feel worried that you may be a psychopath, if you recognize some of those traits in yourself, if you're feeling a creeping anxiety about it, that means you are not one. (c)

Courtney Lindwall says

I read this in about a 4 hour span, from 12 am - 4 am. It freaked me out and I slept with the lights on. But on with the review.

So I've read things about psychopaths previously. How their brains are actually wired differently and they are unable to feel empathy, etcetc. Psychopathy is incurable. Psychopathy, in its violent and sexual strands, is outright fucking terrifying.

But Ronson's book talks more about the frequent misdiagnosis of psychopathy. And the misdiagnosis of many other "mental illnesses" that may in fact just be trying to label and profit off of various human eccentricities. I thought it was interesting. Especially the inmate Tony who scammed his way into the Mental Hospital hoping for nicer amenities and found himself unable to convince the doctors of his sanity for another 20 years (13 years after his prison sentence was originally intended to be over).

That's some real life One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest stuff. When the majority decides that the only thing needed to stamp a lifelong label of "psychopath" is a score over 30 on a 20 point behavioral checklist, an incredible danger arises. Misuse and misguided priorities in diagnosis can ruin lives, create madness instead

of protect against it.

As relatively new fields, I think psychotherapy and the psychiatric world at large are bound to make huge changes in their approach as they learn more and more about the human brain and its relation to behavior. A lot of the disorders seem, to me, very subjective in their conditions. (e.g. one of the characteristics for psychopathy is an 'inflated sense of self worth'....uhm? that's pretty subjective and would probably include the vast majority of my professors) The human brain itself is just such an incredible unknown that I think there needs to be a certain level of trepidation in creating absolutes. For Tony, the "absolute" definition of psychopathic tendencies lost him the best 20 years of his life surrounded by rapists and serial killers in a maximum security Hospital.

Of course, at the same time, there are definitely strands of human beings who objectively act differently and need to be addressed by society. They respond differently. They do not have the same emotional capacity as the other 99% of the human race. There is some definitive consistency in the way their minds work. There need to be tactics for identification, for prevention against their possible havoc.

So basically Ronson's conclusion is that, like with every other thing in this world, there needs to be a balance in the approach. There can't be a mass frenzy to diagnose and label every little idiosyncrasy of human behavior, turning the world into a medicated homogenization scared of every feeling outside of complacent and numb. But at the same time, we can't ignore extreme human behavior, the kind that is debilitating and sometimes even dangerous.

Oh wait, back to my review of the actual book. It was decent. Who isn't intrigued by the minds of psychopaths (and the minds of those who study the minds of psychopaths)? I thought his different chapters and stories were a little too disjointed and he trailed off topic a little toward the end. The book didn't have as great of a flow or dynamic as it could've. But overall, pretty interesting and worth a read.

Diane says

I'm a fan of pop-psych books, so I was primed to enjoy this one.

Journalist Jon Ronson was asked to investigate a mysterious, anonymous book that had been sent to numerous academics around the world. As he was following up on leads, he developed a theory that whoever sent it was somehow mentally ill — a *crackpot*, to use his term.

During his investigation, Ronson heard the term psychopath and learned about a test designed by Robert Hare to rate someone's level of psychopathy. Hare described psychopaths as "predators who use charm, manipulation, intimidation, sex and violence to control others and to satisfy their own selfish needs. Lacking in conscience and empathy, they take what they want and do as they please, violating social norms and expectations without guilt or remorse. What is missing, in other words, are the very qualities that allow a human being to live in social harmony."

Hare's test assesses a person on 20 different personality traits, including their superficial charm, grandiose sense of self-worth, need for stimulation, pathological lying, lack of remorse, lack of empathy, parasitic lifestyle, early behavior problems, etc. Ronson became obsessed by this psychopath checklist and decided to interview some criminals, taking inventory of their antisocial behaviors.

As the subtitle says, Ronson took quite a journey through the madness industry, interviewing a variety of psychologists, psychiatrists, researchers and even conspiracy theorists. He also talked to Scientologists, who

are famously anti-psychiatry. The book is filled with interesting anecdotes and stories, and I was fascinated by all of it.

I especially liked the discussions about the damage that psychopaths can do, both in prisons and in society. Researchers have noted that about 1 percent of the non-prison population would be classified as psychopaths, but a higher percentage of them are business and political leaders — industries that have a lot of power. In prison, about 25 percent of the inmates are psychopaths, but they have been found to cause more than 60 percent of the violent crime there.

Readers who want a straightforward book on the history of psychopathy will be disappointed; instead, the story meanders, based on whoever Ronson was interviewing that day. Ronson is witty and clever and has a pleasant writing style. I picked up this book after seeing him interviewed on several talk shows, and I am curious to look up his other works. I would recommend this to anyone interested in psychology.

Favorite Quotes

"I remembered those psychologists who said psychopaths made the world go around. They meant it: society was, they claimed, an expression of that particular sort of madness. Suddenly, madness was everywhere, and I was determined to learn about the impact it had on the way society evolves. I've always believed society to be a fundamentally rational thing, but what if it isn't? What if it is built on insanity?"

[Robert Hare said he was interested in researching the levels of psychopathy not just in prisons, but also in the finance industry] "Serial killers ruin families ... Corporate and political and religious psychopaths ruin economies. They ruin societies."

"Psychopaths don't change ... They don't learn from punishment. The best you can hope for is that they'll eventually get too old and lazy to be bothered to offend. And they can seem impressive. Charismatic. People are dazzled. So, yeah, the real trouble starts when one makes it big in mainstream society."

Bill Kerwin says

A breezy, entertaining journey through the public effects of madness, with particular attention to the impact of the psychopath on society.

Ronson is an excellent writer with a fine sense of humor who knows how to tell a good story in plain language. That he is able to do this while making subtle observations about our society shows what a really good writer he is.

Stephanie *Very Stable Genius* says

"There is no evidence that we've been placed on this planet to be especially happy or especially normal. And in fact our unhappiness and our strangeness, our anxieties and compulsions, those least fashionable aspects of our personalities, are quite often what lead us to do rather interesting things."

Jon Ronson, in preparation of writing this book took a course from a top psychologist on how to spot a Psychopath. Below is a list of traits from the first factor called "Aggressive Narcissism". The statistics show that 1% of the population is psychopathic....gulp. One person out of one hundred.

Come along with me and play 'spot the psychopath'....shall we?

- #1. Glibness/superficial charm
- #2. Grandiose sense of self-worth
- #3. Pathological lying
- #4. Cunning/manipulative
- #5. Lack of remorse or guilt
- #6. Shallow affect (genuine emotion is short-lived and egocentric)
- #7. Callousness; lack of empathy
- #8. Failure to accept responsibility for his or her own actions

Sarah Palin

- #1. Everything she has ever said is Glib.
- #2. Truly believed she could be vice president...NO, PRESIDENT!
- #3. "What newspapers do you read (Sarah)?"..."Ah, you know, all of 'em." LIAR! "I can see Russia from my house"....sure.
- #4. She got herself nominated for the vice presidency didn't she?
- #5. Enjoys shooting wolves from a helicopter without a care in the world.
- #6. Duh....check.
- #7. Does not ~~give a fuck~~ have empathy for the poor and the sick.
- #8. Has not accepted the responsibility for destroying the Republican party....or maybe that falls on McCain.

Dick Cheney

- #1. Glibness? sure. Charm? Well you can't win them all.
- #2. Made himself president.
- #3. Weapons of mass destruction? Anyone?
- #4. Again, made himself president.
- #5. Shot his friend in the face. He not only wasn't sorry, he made the friend apologize for getting his face in the way.
- #6. Do cyborgs have emotions?
- #7. Does not give a fuck about anyone, for any reason.
- #8. Started an unnecessary war that has killed thousands for personal profit and has never "I'm sorry" once.

Alex

Start reading at comment #49. Okay a personal joke.....I kid, Alex. Sort of.

This could go on and on, so I'll stop here.

"Suddenly, madness was everywhere, and I was determined to learn about the impact it had on the way society evolves. I've always believed society to be a fundamentally rational thing, but what if it isn't? What if it is built on insanity?"

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. Jon makes us look twice at the world around us and how we are all defined by our 'maddest edges'...all of our edges are a bit mad. He shows us a look at the 'madness industry' and how one Doctor took the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) from 40ish pages into the

800s. Being normal is a disorder these days.

Here is Jon's TED talk on this book

If you are worried about the above traits, well....

“At the end of our conversation she (Martha Stout) turned to address you, the reader. She said if you're beginning to feel worried that you may be a psychopath, if you recognize some of those traits in yourself, if you're feeling a creeping anxiety about it, that means you are not one.”

Lynn Weber says

If you're interested in this topic, I'd recommend starting with Martha Stout's *The Sociopath Next Door* rather than this book. The problem with this one is that it's more "Follow me as I delve into this crazy world and have surreal experiences" than it is a study of sociopathy. And that ultimately makes it less gripping. I remember clearly the first section of Stout's book, as it took the reader on a tour of one man's mind as he faced a simple but telling moment of moral decision-making. It was so suspenseful and kind of harrowing. This is much less profound.

Nonetheless, it's a genial read and certainly a good book.

Greta says

Yesterday I saw a talk show on TV in which a Belgian politician said that the stock market is no gauge for happiness. This is so true. It reminded me of this book, in which the author, in his quest to uncover psychopaths, visits Al Dunlap. This was a man who actually enjoyed closing down plants and firing people (Scott, Sunbeam). The fact that the share price skyrocketed while he was CEO and fired huge numbers of employees, is really unsettling.

Ronson's book is filled with stories about people he meets in the madness industry. He encounters some experts in the field, some scientologists, a criminal labeled as a psychopath, a death squad leader... These encounters were interesting enough to me to enjoy reading this book. I especially liked his encounter with Robert Spitzer, who worked for six years on the DSM III edition (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders).

However, it's a lightweight read and not everything he writes in his book fits the title. The author is not an expert, and he makes himself too central to the narrative, which is really sad because I thought he was a bit lame.

Not mind-blowing, but a worthwhile read.

7/10

Dan says

An entertaining romp and with a fair bit of food for thought. I liked this book, while at the same time being disappointed with it.

My main problem with the work was that I had heard that this book dealt extensively with the idea of psychopaths as possessing traits that tended to land them in positions of power. This is a fascinating topic, is of personal interest to me, and is a concept well-worth a full-length journalistic book. Unfortunately, this is not that book. A clever agent is selling this book as an investigation into this topic, but Ronson does little more than flirt with this idea in a couple of places throughout the work. In fact, the writing style is often jumpy enough that it could be argued that it is difficult to pin down exactly what the book was about. But my synopsis would be that the work is 'a philosophical approach on the nature of human personality and its' tendency to lie along maddeningly-difficult-to-classify continuums.'

Of course, my synopsis would sell many less books.

That said, the book is entertaining and engaging. Like "Being or Nothingness", or the "DSM-IV" (both heavily featured in this book), it leads the reader towards Narcissistic thoughts on how much of various psychotic/abnormal character traits they possess. (Or how much said characteristics apply to co-workers and in-laws.) It does challenge the reader to think about where they draw their own lines of inclusiveness and exclusiveness with regard to understanding/sympathizing with alternative personality traits and tastes.

I still couldn't shake a feeling that the book was a little hollow. The characters that Ronson was interviewing seemed to do the real 'work' in the book. I was often far more engaged when hearing directly about Tony, the psychiatric patient, or the powerful CEO with the predator statue collection than I was when left to hear Ronson's meta-analysis of their interaction. The 'filler' material occasionally seemed too unfocused or vague - possibly because Ronson decided to pull an interesting, although unconventional, two-timing trick halfway through the book: suddenly changing sides in the discussion.

Jason says

I thought this would be a great tool for self-diagnosis, but actually Ronson skitters from one case to another without really making any definitive point. But maybe that's the point. Psychopathy is probably not an absolute for most people, as there are many among us who exist in some sort of sociopathic gray area (myself included). Me, I scored a 10, so I'm a partial psychopath. (Surprise, surprise!) My downfall? Apparently, I don't really care too much about other people.

Here, take the test!

Maxwell says

This was a bit of a disappointment. I found the first 50% of the book to be a bit forgettable. It was hard for me to see where Ronson was going with each chapter. Though I found the examination of mental illness, especially the stigmas around it and the potential harms of labeling to be really fascinating, the book as a whole lacked direction. When I read So You've Been Publicly Shamed, I felt like each chapter really compounded on one another to create a vivid and interesting picture of shame through the lens of an

empathetic viewer. While Ronson maintained that empathy in *The Psychopath Test*, I felt a bit less invested in the stories he shared and found it harder to connect with his points. However, the last few chapters were awesome. I'm not bummed I listened to this one because Ronson is a wonderful narrator and has a unique perspective in almost everything he does, but it didn't live up to what I'd expected. If you're curious about this topic, I'd recommend listening to this episode of the Criminal Podcast where he talks about psychopathy and even some of the subjects he handles in this book.

Emily (Books with Emily Fox) says

(3.5)

I'm not sure how much I learned about Psychopaths but I learned I like the author a lot. He's awkward and anxious in the most relatable way!

If you're going to read this book, do yourself a favour and get the audiobook!

Ariel says

My first read of the year and it isn't what I was hoping for 3 I decided to jump on this because of my crazy love for Jon Ronson's newest book, *So You've Been Publicly Shamed*, but I realize now that I underestimated just how much the subject matter of that book contributed to my enjoyment of it. The Psychopath Test has Ronson's humour, similar style, empathetic point of view, and personal life injected into the story, but this research felt meandering. I thought it'd be clearer, earlier in the novel, how dangerous it can be to misdiagnose people, and how truly nuanced, complicated, and personal each diagnosis should be, but I felt it took too long to get to that angle of this story. A lot of it also didn't feel like a story, it felt like a collection of similar case studies, but honestly a bunch of them could have been cut out and I wouldn't have noticed.

Overall this has cemented that I like Ronson's writing and his journalistic storytelling methods, but that this topic, and the scattered structure, wasn't for me. (This is more like a 2.5 stars for me.)

Simeon says

[Her mother tells her to "bend over and take it like a woman" moments after the man's sadistic promise to beat her "into fucking submission", to teach her obedience, hitting her while she begs from a corner of the room so all the camera can catch are her screams.

If only someone could walk into the scene and drag that man a
