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The Psychopath Test: A Journey Through The Madness Industry



Synopsis

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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Ronson is at it again - annoying a substantial segment of our population with his deep research and witty insights. This time, it is the medical/insurance/psychiatric world. As usual, Ronson is full of tales about his topic and provides significant facts about how the world really works. The Psychopath Test (yes it is in the book) is interesting in itself. But the illustration of how poor a job

psychiatrists actually do is worth the read alone. This is not to say that some people are not legitimately afflicted with scores of mental issues - they are and this is a sad act. But some of the insights are simply amazing. For example, the psychiatrist world is pressing "abnormal" closer and closer to "normal". The devastating impact is that more and more people, especially children, are being wrongly labelled with some sort of "disease" when really, all they are is just a little bit different. I remember when some kid in the class would develop an affinity for eating paste. Just an odd thing really. But in today's truly crazy world, that kid would have a team of health professionals diagnosing and labelling her. And when a kid is a problem - hey why not? The medical profession wins with more patients. The pharmaceutical companies win with new drugs. The insurance companies win. And best of all, the parents win. "Yes, our little Jesse cannot read and he has behavioral issues. But it is not HIS fault and not OUR fault. He has a disease." Lazy parenting, the urge to not take responsibility - it works well for everybody. Well, not for the child who is never disciplined, never fails and never learns. This book should be a MUST read for any parent who wonders if his child really has manic depressive disorder, autism, or any one of a number of wrongly diagnosed conditions. Oh, and wondering if the MMR vaccine is behind the rising number of cases of autism? Think again. The people who profit from this business simply changed the definition so that number of cases of these conditions increased by an order of magnitude. No change in the population. No change in the real number of patients. Just a change in a book. Oh yeah, and an increase in the number of deaths of innocent children, killed by their parents who allow them to die from preventable disease in a wave of misplaced hysteria.

Ranking a book is not unlike critiquing art. Sometimes you like it but you can't really say why, it just resonates with you. While this book has all the correct qualities, i.e., well-written, reader-friendly approach to a complex topic, often humorous, author-empathetic style, these are just mechanics that exemplify the skill of a seasoned writer. If I must ferret out the primary "why" I enjoyed this book, I'd have to say, it has to do with the pure journalism involved. Jon Ronson clearly is a true journalist, a breed nearing extinction. He sets about to investigate with an open mind. He seeks the truth in the topic and tests fixed assumptions along the way against revelations dug up instead of searching for isolated bits to prove his own personal bias. I miss this in modern journalism; this, even more than good writing, is a dying art. Most particularly I appreciated his exposure of the deep dark agendas of the pharmaceuticals and the complicity of some in the mental health industry. Though it was something of an afterthought, an unexpected uncovering toward the end, I think it could be another book, if he dares to go there.

Though I enjoyed this book immensely, I do get a feel that the book suffers a bit from its age, a matter John seems to admit in its forward. The book was originally published in 2002 and largely written in early 2001. That was the year of course when everything changed and thus the conspiracy groups at the time considered Waco to be the most sinister thing that "they" had ever done I'm sure a revisit to the groups would show things in a different light

Books that both educate and amuse are what I consider truly entertaining and this one fits the bill. I listened to the audio edition, which was read by the author, and I'm glad I did because hearing him narrate it made me feel like a friend of mine was telling me a story. I really liked the way Jon Ronson injected his own quirky personality into the narrative, and as with his other books, discussed a subject that really merits some reflection. Lack of empathy may be condemned in some contexts, but it's clearly rewarded in others and that should really give one pause. I applaud the author for once again having written a book that will make a reader both use her head and shake it.

Intriguing read. I agree with some of the other reviewers that a couple of the chapters didn't seem to belong or go along with the overall theme of the book, but I enjoyed it regardless. I read and reread the chapters regarding the disturbing and incredibly sad Ruby Ridge debacle. I was totally unaware of a lot of the details of the siege and the attempted government cover up. I remembered only what the media presented at the time - a lot of it false and misleading. Like the majority of Americans these days, we tend to grasp only what we are fed through the media and quickly move on to the next story. A terrible injustice to those involved directly. I have read most of Jon Ronson's books and look forward to more.

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