*Public Shaming*

A journey toward understanding public shaming through groups of people and time periods.

Heather Waldo

This course is required for Communication Studies majors but is also available to students outside of the major. Public Shaming is also an introductory level course and should be taken within a student’s first year at college. It is available in both the fall and spring semester, but it is recommended a student take it during their fall semester. This course provides a student with an overall better understanding of the concept of ‘public shaming’ as it is analyzed and explored in seven different units. Being able to understand concepts like ‘public shaming’ is key for anyone in Communications Studies to be better able to examine and make correlations in their everyday lives and in their work.

Course Description

Throughout the duration of this course, a student will realize how public shaming isn’t limited to one group of people or culture. Events and occurrences of public shaming take place for all types of people throughout time. The specific time period and type of individual will influence how they are publicly shamed but will still experience some form of shaming. No matter what a person identifies as or what time period they live in, they cannot escape the ghost of public shaming.

# Course Schedule

## Unit 1: *Early forms of public shaming (colonial times)*

|  |
| --- |
| **BIG Question:** How was public shaming used during colonial times and what were the different techniques? |
| **Argument of the Unit:** The techniques of public shaming during colonial times were based off of an act against morality, ethical values, or religion and used a variety of techniques ranging from using a pillory to branding. |
| **Key Words:** “Pillory”, “Ducking stool”, “Brank”, “Branding”, “Magistrates”, “Sabbath” |
| **Link to Reading:** [Link to ‘Bilboes, Brands, and Branks’](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1n0CkI1WZBel67zQoQVgrGmvSefvCG4Sc/view?usp=sharing) By James A. Cox |
| **Annotation of Reading:** The reading linked above provides information on how and why public shaming techniques were used during colonial times. By obtaining this knowledge, one will be informed on the original techniques and uses of public shaming. Cox provides many examples of different techniques of public shaming. Some are branding, whippings, hangings, ducking stool, and pillory, just to name a few. Cox also mentions the whole purpose of public shaming. According to Cox, “Punishments were almost always public, for the aim was to humiliate the wayward sheep and teach him a lesson so that he would repent and be eager to find his way back to the flock”. This quote provides the reasoning behind public shaming, which is pretty much to embarrass someone so harshly, they become afraid to commit the same act twice. Some public shaming’s didn’t give the individual a second chance, like hangings, and some people would die from the ducking stool or the pillory. This source provides sufficient information on the original use of public shaming. This is important to understand so one can have some background information on public shaming and be able to put more current techniques of shaming into context. |

**Unit 2: *African Americans (1830’s)***

|  |
| --- |
| **BIG Question:** How were African Americans treated during slavery times and how, if at all, were they publicly shamed? |
| **Argument of the Unit:** The treatment and displays of public shaming African American slaves experienced varied from slaveholder to slaveholder, but all slaves most likely experienced whippings, beatings, and other forms of mistreatment. |
| **Key Words:** “Slaveholders”, “Distinguished”, “Cruelty”, “Whipping”, “Wretched” |
| **Link to Reading:** [Link to chapters 9 and 10 of ‘Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass’ By: Frederick Douglass](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Nuz8Dx-29H1oRd3zIW8puTMyK_6Ui4zm/view?usp=sharing) |
| **Annotation of Reading:** In Frederick Douglass’s ‘Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass’, he provides an insight on the horrors of slavery. During these chapters of Douglass’s book, he is sixteen years old and describes his experience being a slave. Douglass mentions how his owner (Thomas Auld) was a very mean, selfish, spirited person. Early in chapter nine, Douglass mentions how Auld would not give the slaves enough food and they would experience starvation. In these chapters, it is also stated that Auld would frequently whip Douglass, sometimes for no good reason. Then when Douglass was sent to live with Edward Covey, to “break him”, he also experienced forms of public shaming from Covey. One example of shaming by Covey was when Douglass made a mistake and ended up wasting Covey’s time and money. For doing so, Covey beat and whipped Douglass on the spot in front of all of the other slaves. He most likely did this to use Douglass as an example for the other slaves. Meaning, Covey purposely beat and whipped Douglass in front of other slaves to scare them from making Douglass’s same mistake and to also publicly humiliate Douglass. By reading these chapters, the student will get a better understanding of how slaves were treated and in turn were publicly shamed. |

## Unit 3: *Jewish (Holocaust)*

|  |
| --- |
| **BIG Question:** What is one example of Jewish people being publicly shamed during the Holocaust? What was the ultimate goal of said shaming? |
| **Argument of the Unit:** The Jewish badge was another way to dehumanize and isolate the Jewish community from other groups of people, like the Germans. |
| **Key Words:** “Jews”, “Holocaust”, “Star of David”, “Nazis”, “Polish” |
| **Link to Reading:** [Link to Jewish Badge reading](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1g3JRgl3t3T_Gb3zlSOhyMtCiqFIIaXTO/view?usp=sharing)  |
| **Annotation of Reading:** This reading done by the ‘Shoah Resource Center’ provides one example of shaming during the Holocaust. As many people know, the Holocaust is an event in history when many Jewish people died from being in concentration camps. Jewish people died from starvation, disease, being burned, buried alive and even put into gas chambers. However, this article provides a different example of Jewish people being publicly shamed. As mentioned in the article, Germans would force Jewish people to wear a badge, often with a yellow star of David on it. The whole purpose of this badge was to further isolate and shame Jewish people. Wearing this badge was also mandatory. If they were caught not wearing it, they could be fined, imprisoned or even shot. By Jewish people being forced to wear this badge, they wore it out of fear, fear from getting punished. The badge served as another way for Jewish people to be further isolated and deemed as out casts. By the student reading this article, one will be better able to understand how the public shaming of the Jewish community involved such simple but powerful applications, like wearing a badge and in turn, dehumanizing a group of people based on their way of life. |

## Unit 4: *Shaming Through Social Media (present)*

|  |
| --- |
| **BIG Question:** How has social media changed the way people are publicly shamed in todays society? |
| **Argument of the Unit:** The use of social media has drastically changed how and why people are publicly shamed and has morphed previous ways of shaming into new ideologies.  |
| **Key Words:** “Avowal”, “Panopticon”, “Exagoreusis”, “Exomologesis”, “Schadenfreude”, “Sousveillance” |
| **Link to Reading:** [Link to “Avowal is Not Enough: Foucault and Public Shaming in a Socially Mediated World By: Alane Presswood](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1IktqK5mcng8JUBsxG2QFstFZc1PGZOKg/view?usp=sharing) |
| **Annotation of Reading:** This reading provides an interesting viewpoint of the public shaming culture. Presswood discusses the more recent forms of public shaming, through social media, but also relates it to the past techniques and theories of shaming. Within the article, Presswood actually compares older techniques of public shaming (like stoning and stocks) to social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook. Explaining how they are similar to each other in how shameful the victim feels. With that being said, this article provides more recent examples of public shaming through different social media platforms and also explains how these platforms have changed the way people receive shaming and shame one another. Presswood also mentions theories from Foucault involving his definition of Panopticon and avowal. The article provides a brief history lesson on public shaming and mentions some older shaming ideologies are still seen today, just in a different form due to social media. While understanding the definition of avowal, one will be able to see how social media has changed society’s outlook of avowal and makes obtaining forgiveness for one’s actions that much harder. |

**Unit 5: *Women (mid 2000’s)***

|  |
| --- |
| **BIG Question:** How were women publicly shamed in the mid 2000’s? Does this differentiate from the display of shaming of men or women in different time periods? |
| **Argument of the Unit:** Women are more harshly publicly shamed then men and experience different forms of public shaming.  |
| **Key Words:** “Twitter”, “Publicly Shamed”, “Spambot”, “Algorithms”, “Google” |
| **Link to Reading:** [Link to a summary of Jon Ronson’s ‘So You’ve Been Publicly Shamed’**.**](https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/what-summary-youve-been-publicly-shamed-1417652) Since this is a hard copy book, you gave me permission in class to link a summary of the book for this field. |
| **Annotation of Reading:** In Jon Ronson’s ‘So You’ve Been Publicly Shamed’, the argument Ronson is trying to make is that all people will receive some form of public shaming. This particular book is also fairly subjective, meaning one could take away different arguments and themes while reading it. However, for the purposes of this class, we will be focusing on how Ronson portrays women being more severely publicly shamed then men. Ronson provides many examples on how women are more harshly shamed then men. For example, in chapter eleven, when the shaming of Lindsay Stone takes place. Stone made one offensive tweet that ended up going viral and she lost her job, credibility, and sense of trust from others. Another example Ronson provided about the shaming of women was in chapter four regarding Justine Sacco. Sacco also made an offensive tweet and her whole life was changed in a negative way. Both Stone and Sacco were so severely publicly shamed on the internet by complete strangers, their credibility and dignity became lost in all of the overwhelming amount of hate comments.  |

## Unit 6: *Transgender (2017-present)*

|  |
| --- |
| **BIG Question:** How and why are transgender people being publicly shamed in Indonesia? |
| **Argument of the Unit:** Public shaming is not limited to a certain type of person or a specific place. Shaming of transgender people in Indonesia is still happening today. |
| **Key Words:** “Transgender”, “Detained”, “Islamic law”, “Homosexual”, “Hostility” |
| **Link to Reading:** [Link to “Rights groups decry public shaming of transgender people in Indonesia By: Reuters](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1F-N4KWCoYyiPOApFFngc7pzxz7IDWINQ/view?usp=sharing) |
| **Annotation of Reading:** On November 27th, 2018, twelve transgender people were restricted and then publicly shamed in Indonesia. According to Reuters, only a certain part of Indonesia still enforces the traditional Islamic law and outlaw’s homosexuality. This region of land is called “Aceh” in northern Sumatra. The article states that police raided and detained twelve transgender people in hair salons in Aceh. These people were also forced to cut their hair to appear more masculine and had forced them to dress like men. This article also provides another example of shaming from last year, saying two men were charged of engaging in gay sex and then publicly caned. This article provides the student context for public shaming in todays culture. It shows real life examples that public shaming based on one’s sexuality is still happening in other parts of the world. By gaining this knowledge, one will be better able to understand shame culture in their country by being familiar with it in another part of the world. |

## Unit 7: *College Students (present)*

|  |
| --- |
| **BIG Question:** What is the definition of hazing and what are some examples of it? Where do these occurrences take place? |
| **Argument of the Unit:** The definition of hazing is “…any activity expected of someone joining a group…that humiliates, degrades or risks emotional and/or physical harm,”. The acts of hazing are widespread and can take place at institutions like college campuses. |
| **Key Words:** “Hazing”, “Humiliates”, “Pledge”, “Harassment”, “Isolation”, “Assault” |
| **Link to Reading:** [Link to hazing reading](https://drive.google.com/file/d/11OjKm9DCi-XbWcKEsXVZtAFqJE90oBoh/view?usp=sharing) |
| **Annotation of Reading:** Most people are somewhat familiar with the definition and techniques of hazing. However, if a student isn’t too familiar with hazing, this article provides two definitions of hazing, a more generalized one as well as one that is specifically for the Greek life organization mentioned, as well as multiple examples of hazing. This document is also written from a particular Greek life organization (Phi Gamma Delta) and provides a realistic and reliable informational approach to the culture of hazing in colleges. Since this is a college level course, I thought discussing the topic of hazing would better help the student make a correlation with public shaming and see how it is taking place in their own environment. I also chose this specific document because it provides many different examples of hazing like: making pledges wear embarrassing attire, forced consumption of alcohol or drugs, beating, branding, physically restraining pledges, along with many other examples. This document will provide the student with a better understanding of how public shaming is used during events of hazing. Hazing and public shaming are very similar concepts and the student will be better able to make this connection after reading this document.  |