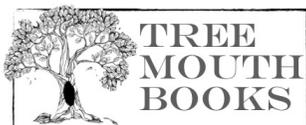


a  
**SOCIAL ILLUSION**

by  
Jason T. Shapiro

© 2022 Tree Mouth Books

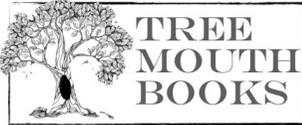
All Rights Reserved



Copyright© 2022 by Jason T. Shapiro

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be translated, reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without express written permission from the author.

Published by **TREE MOUTH Books**, an imprint of:



Peter Weisz Publishing, LLC  
7143 Winding Bay Lane  
West Palm Beach, FL 33412 USA  
peter@peterweisz.com

Shapiro, Jason T., June, 2022

A Social Illusion / Jason T. Shapiro

Fiction — Biography — Nostalgia — Self-Help — Personal Improvement

ISBN: 9 781387 872008

Printed in the United States of America by Lulu.com.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

*Other books by Jason Shapiro:*

The Magic of Mayfair

Brian, My Pet Lion

The Magnificent Mind of Ostaf

Lunch with Larry

## A Social Illusion

# Dedication

*To my beautiful wife, Andrea:  
I strive to make you proud.*

*To Alyssa and Ryan:  
Thank you for being my toughest writing  
critics. You make me a better author.*

## A Social Illusion

# Contents

Author’s Preface .....	1
Foreword .....	3
Chapter One: Fakebook .....	5
Chapter Two: Behind the Filter .....	13
Chapter Three: Surf and Turf .....	21
Chapter Four: A Promotional Fantasy .....	25
Chapter Five: Family Heirlooms .....	31
Chapter Six: Blind Envy .....	37
Chapter Seven: Paid in Full .....	41
Chapter Eight: Brotherly Love .....	49
Chapter Nine: “Put Down Your Phone!” .....	55
Chapter Ten: A Blast From the Past .....	59
Chapter Eleven: Mall Therapy .....	71
Chapter Twelve: Turning the Corner .....	79
Chapter Thirteen: REDEMPTION .....	81
Chapter Fourteen: Diamonds Are Forever .....	89
Chapter Fifteen: Swoosh! .....	95
Chapter Sixteen: Date Night .....	99
Chapter Seventeen: Awakening .....	105
Chapter Eighteen: A Social Reality .....	111
Epilogue .....	117
Acknowledgements .....	121
Special Thanks .....	123
About the Author .....	124

A Social Illusion

## Author's Preface

**F**rom a distance, social media connects us in ways we never imagined. It offers us instant visibility to sentimental photographs and videos that often tug on our heartstrings. We're able to interact and build relationships without leaving our couch. We can instantly share the highlights of our lives and the moments we treasure.

I have become interested in the intricacies of social media. It's fascinating when you take the time to peek behind the curtain. An ecosystem exists that many are not aware of—a world that presents itself as euphoric and inviting, a place where we can escape and unwind.

But what lurks behind all the smiles and laughter...the joy and celebrations? Are things always as they seem? This question has intrigued me for years.

I wrote this book because I believe this story can benefit others. As social media continues to dominate our lives, it's crucial that we become mindful of how this powerful entity can impact our mental health.

When we are conscious of the reality we live in, we can take the necessary steps to improve our futures.

## A Social Illusion

# Foreword

by Eric Kussin

Founder and CEO of #SameHere—  
The Global Mental Health Movement

**T**oo often we go through life comparing ourselves—to others, to some artificial timeline we have made up that measures our “success,” and to social norms. In this book, Jason Shapiro shines a light on the reality that we can only become our best selves, and feel grounded, when we stop comparing and start living life to the fullest, focusing on what makes us feel good, and not what makes us look good or helps us keep up with certain expectations that truly don’t matter.

As someone who “found himself” as a writer only after he’d already established himself in another long and successful career, the theme of this book mirrors perfectly how Jason’s life has played out. He’s found purpose and meaning in the things that he’s discovered matter most to him: helping others, being generous with his time, and using his literary talents to share themes that open up society to the realization that while we all struggle, there is beauty even in the struggle. When we are real about our hurdles, we can best heal, rise above the challenges we face, and be a beacon of hope to others.

Jason provides readers with a character facing a common dilemma so many of us face, and one that extends to many age groups: how we appear to others on social media and how often it becomes an unrealistic measure of our worth, especially as we

try to project something we are not. This is a topic that hasn't been discussed nearly enough, given how recently and quickly technology has advanced.

Jason grew up in an era when sharing our lives was done through printed photos from trips, VHS tapes, and even slide shows. Now, seeing how much immediate and continuous digital comparisons have become a part of our lives, at such a rapid pace and with such ease, he was the perfect person, with the perfect perspective, to address this topic. He created characters that expose the challenges posed by modern society, and is himself a grounded enough individual to show through the power of storytelling how we can take back control over digital comparisons in our own lives. It's not often a book can be both entertaining and educational, and this one accomplishes both.

Chapter One

## Fakebook

“Hello, Sir! Welcome to Dean De Carlo Mercedes-Benz. What may I help you with today?” The receptionist greets Trevor at the front desk. She leans forward and runs her fingers through her hair.

Trevor glances at her name badge and looks into her piercing blue eyes. “Hey, Sydnee. Is there someone in sales who can help me? I’m looking to buy a new car today.” Trevor rocks back and forth on his heels and eyes the showroom inventory.

“Absolutely! Let me go grab Donnie. He’ll take good care of you. Just so you’re aware, our Winter Enchantment Promotion started this week.” Sydnee points to the enormous banner that hangs from the showroom’s open-ceiling rafters. “Donnie can tell you all about it. Oh, before I forget, can I have your name, please?”

“Sure. My name is Trevor Huxley.”

Sydnee types his name into the guest log. “Huxley...Huxley... that name sounds familiar.”

“Well, I went to West Mountain High and graduated in ’94. My brother, Jordan, was class of ’96.” Trevor tries to recall if there’s any other prior connection to the attractive receptionist.

Sydnee snaps her fingers and points into the air. “That’s it! I knew your brother. I also went to West Mountain through my junior year. Then my parents divorced and I finished at Oak Park. I moved in with my dad my senior year. It’s a long story. I won’t bore you with the details.”

“No problem. What a small world. I’ll tell my brother I ran into you. What’s your last name? I’ll friend you on Facebook.” Trevor is eager for a response.

Sydnee admits, “I’m actually not on social media.” She smirks. “I know, I know, it’s hard to believe. Last year I deleted all my accounts. I just couldn’t take it anymore. I was so tired of seeing everyone’s posts about how great their life was, when mine was such a train wreck.”

“Wow! You deleted *all* your accounts? I don’t think I could live without social media. I have hundreds of friends on there. Get this, last week I hit five hundred followers.” Trevor pauses. “It’s crazy to think that many people are interested in my life.” He takes a deep inhale. “You know what, I posted about a new watch I bought yesterday and it got over *55 likes* in less than three hours. I think I’m up to at least 20 comments. It’s crazy. I can’t even keep up with my replies.”

Impressed, Sydnee doesn’t hide her admiration. “That’s amazing. You must have a great life. I would post about my photography, or volunteering at the animal shelter, and would get nothing—crickets. No one cared. I’d be lucky to get 10 likes. It was depressing, so I just stopped posting. Then I deleted every-single-social-media-app, one-by-one. I have to tell you: I feel so much better now. I stopped comparing my life to other people’s. It was invigorating: like a re-birth or a cleanse.”

Trevor cringes at that thought. “I give you credit. I couldn’t do it. Actually, I think people would miss seeing my posts, to be honest. I can’t disappoint my followers. You know what I’m saying?”

“I hear you. Listen, everyone has to do what’s best for them. Anyway, you’ve listened to me ramble on long enough. Let me get the ball rolling here. Give me one second.” Sydnee picks up the phone and uses her softest voice over the speaker system: “Donnie to the front desk. Donnie to the front desk. Customer is waiting.” She hangs up the receiver and looks at Trevor. “Donnie should be with you shortly. You’re welcome to grab a soda, coffee, or bottled water in our customer lounge. We just renovated it. Wait until you see the leather massage chairs. They’re incredible. There’s also a full-service café for all our customers. When you buy a car from Dean De Carlo’s, you’re issued a café card that gets you unlimited food and snacks.”

Trevor’s eyes widen. “That’s insane! I don’t believe it. I’d probably stop in every day just to put air in my tires.”

“If you think that’s cool, we also have a mini-gym in the back with a few treadmills and a couple of Peloton bikes. You can work out while your car is being serviced.” Sydnee smiles in anticipation of Trevor’s reaction.

“That’s it! Where’s Donnie? I’m buying a car sight unseen. Just give me access to the café and gym.” Trevor chuckles at his own humor. “Anyway, it was great meeting you. Take care.” He dashes away and then turns around. “Hey, Sydnee. You should reconsider getting back on social media. You’re missing out.”

Sydnee smiles. “I’m good, but I appreciate it.” She waves goodbye.

Trevor enters the service lounge. His jaw drops open and he mumbles, “Oh my God. This place is surreal.” He eases himself into

the massage chair and gets comfortable. Trevor pulls out his cell phone and snaps a selfie of himself reclined, flashing a peace sign with his fingers. He gets up and walks into the gym.

A man enters the room wearing a pique-knit polo tucked into his dress slacks, and he's holding a clipboard with a stack of forms. He extends his hand. "Trevor?"

"Yeah, that's me." Trevor is sitting on the Peloton bike, pretending he's racing. "This has to be the coolest dealership I have ever seen." He shakes the man's hand.

The man clicks the end of his pen and checks a box on his new client form. "Well, looks like I can sign off that you know all about the café and gym. I'm Donnie. Let's find a car and get a deal done today. How does that sound?"

Trevor snaps a selfie of himself sitting on the Peloton bike. "Sounds great. Let's do it!" Trevor hops off the bike and follows Donnie in the direction of the showroom. "I know *exactly* which car I want."

"Well, the good news is with the Winter Enchantment promotion, every one of my clients has been approved for financing. Welcome to your new home, my friend." Donnie leads Trevor to the showroom to look at floor models.

### **The Next Day:**

#### **Town Walking Track – "The Oval"**

"I can't believe it, man! The sales guy told me out of all his customers I'm the only one who didn't get approved for financing. I swear, I have the worst luck." Trevor kicks a pinecone into the street. "I don't know what I'm gonna do. My car is on its last leg,

not to mention I look freakin' homeless driving around in that jalopy. Do you know how embarrassing it is to drop the kids off at school in a 15-year-old minivan?"

"It happens...don't sweat it. Try to enjoy this amazing weather. How often is the temperature in the 60s at the end of November?" Paul puts his arm around Trevor's shoulders. "Hey, look on the bright side: at least you have a car."

It's me, Trevor. I'm the guy in this story. And that's my best friend, Paul Mintz. We go for walks whenever we can. I know it sounds like a simple outing, but it's helped me deal with all the stress and turmoil in my life. There is something cathartic about being outside with a friend and discussing daily challenges.

Paul is a psychologist, so I guess you could say, at least recently, these walks have become my unofficial therapy sessions.

"Stop being so positive, Paul. It drives me nuts. Thankfully, I was able to snap a couple of photos of me in the lounge and gym. You wouldn't believe how fancy they were." Trevor pulls out his phone and swipes through those pictures.

Paul slides his sunglasses down the bridge of his nose and squints. "Wow. That's amazing. Is that a Peloton?"

Trevor can't contain himself. "Yes! It was unbelievable. They had treadmills, some dumbbells—and the best part, if you buy a car from this dealership, you get a café card. Unlimited snacks and soda. Check out this photo of the cars." Trevor touches the screen to

magnify the image. “That’s the model I was going to get. I narrowed the color down to the red or black. I have a picture of me sitting in each car,” Trevor says, unable to hide his disappointment.

“Oh, boy. I know that look. Please, don’t do it. I’m begging you.” Paul slides his sunglasses back up.

Trevor chuckles. “What? These pictures are incredible Facebook material. I can’t waste them. I have the entire post mapped out in my mind. It’s going to be epic. Hear me out on this one.” The men stop walking. Trevor’s exaggerated hand gestures add to the suspense. “I’m going to keep the post simple. It’s going to be titled, *Saturday Shenanigans*. I’ll write: ‘Was bored, so I decided to go car shopping. The Black Beauty or the Red Robin?’ Then I’ll post a picture of me sitting in each car. What do you think? How awesome is that?”

“I think it’s ridiculous. What the hell are you going to say when people see you driving the same minivan around town?” Paul shakes his head in disbelief of the juvenile idea.

Trevor is one step ahead. “Dude, I knew you were going to bring that up. I have the perfect alibi. It’s simple. Because of the pandemic, my new car is on backorder. The car industry has been slammed by supply-chain delays. I’m not making that up. It’s being discussed all over the news.”

“What am I gonna do with you, Trev? Just don’t post the cheesy picture of you sitting in the massage chair. You look like you’re taking a dump. Let’s hurry up and finish our walk. I gotta drop the kids off at karate.” Paul nudges Trevor to get moving.

Trevor flicks Paul’s earlobe. “Fine. I won’t post the one of me sitting in the massage chair, but I can’t waste the photo of me chill-

in' on the Peloton. Those bikes are super popular right now. Most people can't afford one. I'll bet that picture is good for at least 60 likes, easy."

Paul shakes his head and responds with his usual subtle sarcasm. "You and your likes. I'm sure Stacey and the kids love hearing you talk about that stuff."

"Aw, they just don't understand the whole concept of social media. Not many people do." Trevor takes out his phone again and catches Paul off guard. "Hey, smile!" Trevor snaps a candid photo of himself and Paul standing next to each other.

Paul always gives me a hard time about my social media accounts. He thinks I post way too much, but he misses the point of why I do it. It's my opportunity to build my personal brand. I think of every post like a press release. Sure, sometimes, I may *tweak* certain events in my day, but hey, doesn't everyone? In my opinion, there's nothing better than creating content and seeing those likes and comments roll in. It's my chance to escape all the stress and trauma in my life and create my own reality.