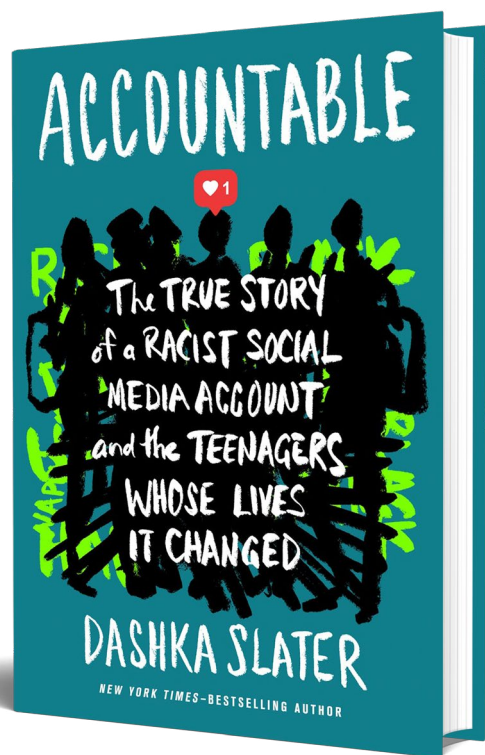


ACCOUNTABLE

DISCUSSION GUIDE



About the Book

Not funny. When a high-school student started a private Instagram account that used racist and sexist memes to make his friends laugh, he thought of it as “edgy” humor. Over time, the edge got sharper. Then a few other kids found out about the account. Pretty soon, everyone knew.

No one in the small town of Albany, California, was safe from the repercussions of the account’s discovery. Not the girls targeted by the posts. Not the boy who created the account. Not the group of kids who followed it. Not the adults whose attempts to fix things too often made them worse. In the end, no one was laughing. And everyone was left asking: Where does accountability end for online speech that harms? And what does accountability even mean?

About the Author

Dashka Slater is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *The 57 Bus*, which won the Stonewall Book Award and was a YALSA nonfiction finalist. Her fiction includes *The Book of Fatal Errors*, which was an Amazon Best Book of the Month; the picture book *Escargot*, which won the Wanda Gág Book Award; *Baby Shoes*; *The Antlered Ship*, which was a Junior Library Guild selection and received four starred reviews; and *Dangerously Ever After*. She is also an award-winning journalist whose articles have appeared in *Newsweek*, *Salon*, *The New York Times Magazine*, and *Mother Jones*. She lives in California. dashkaslater.com



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever heard of anything like the events described in *Accountable* happening in your school or community? If so, what points of connection do you see between the situation in the book and what occurred in your area?
2. Why do you think that Dashka Slater chose to present the points-of-view of both the victims of the Instagram account as well as the creator and followers of the account? For you, what was the impact of hearing both sides of the story?
3. The first epigram in the book quotes a poem by Tracy K. Smith in which she talks about a “Dictionary of Shame.” How does the theme of shame unfold in the book? Who feels shame and why? Do you think there’s a difference between shame and guilt?
4. The racist social media account was discovered in 2017, just after the election of Donald Trump. In what ways, if any, do you think the tense social landscape of that year played a role in the creation of the social media account as well as the response to it.
5. In the second epigram, bell hooks asks: “How do we hold people accountable for wrongdoing and yet at the same time remain in touch with their humanity enough to believe in their capacity to be transformed?” How would you answer this question? Do you believe that people who have committed harm have that capacity?
6. What is your response to the way the school administrators responded to the discovery of the social media account, and the events that followed? In what ways, if any, do you think those who worked for the school could have responded differently?
7. Do you think there are varying degrees of responsibility among the person who created the account, the people who followed it but did not interact with it, and those who interacted with it? Why or why not?
8. All the account creators and followers were minors at the time this happened. Do you think that their age makes a difference in how they should have been treated and held accountable? Do you think minors who commit crimes should be treated differently than adults? Why or why not?
9. The poem on page 147 describes four kinds of justice. Which kind of justice do you think played out in Albany after the discovery of the Instagram account? What kind of justice do you think should have been used? Have you seen examples of the other kinds of justice in your school or community?
10. Does your school have any programs that are dedicated to providing resources and support surrounding racism, bullying, etc.? Do you think these types of programs are effective? Why or why not?
11. What are your thoughts on the parents’ reactions? Did any of the parents make choices with which you agreed or did not agree?
12. What do you think should have been done by the school, parents, friends, and community at large, as well as the account followers, to have helped the victims of the account feel whole again?
13. What did you find most surprising about the events chronicled in this book? Did reading it prompt you to question how you might have acted in the place of any of the teenagers who were involved?
14. Do you think the creator of the social media account, or any of those who followed it, were truly held accountable for the harm they caused? If not, what would true accountability have looked like, in your opinion? Do you agree with Aishatu Yusuf’s statement that there’s a difference between punishment and accountability?
15. “Hate speech,” even shockingly racist speech, is generally protected from criminal prosecution or government censorship under the First Amendment to the Constitution, so long as it is not actually inciting violence. Do you think that should be the case? Why or why not? Who do you think should have the power to decide which speech is protected and which isn’t?
16. After reading this book, do you think your online behavior will change? Why or why not?