

Psychological analysis of the virgin suicides

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Novels have more to them than meet the eye. Past the cover and the first read, there is yet an extra element involved in superb books. Jeffery Eugenides clearly had an understanding of this. Written in 1991, *The Virgin Suicides* is not just a story. "Bizarre, abnormal, and tragic" is how Jeruen Dery describes the book in his review of it. As more than pages in a cover, *The Virgin Suicides* has some magic to uncover. To fully understand a novel, one must recognize a precritical response to key element that amount to a written work of art. The setting of the novel is one that is familiar to many Americans.

In essence, it is a modern suburbia, complete with youth, adults, and the elderly, along with the old, and the new. This directly contributes to the plot, which involves a man versus society struggle with more than one set of characters. Two main sets of characters are prevalent and neither group show purely protagonist or antagonist characteristics. Both the Lisbon girls and the neighborhood boys share the two roles throughout the duration of the novel. When reacting to the structure of the novel, one notices the straightforwardness of the piece.

After a glance at the end events, the rest of the book goes through the progression of a year in chronological order while also following a typical rising action-climax-falling action format. The style of the book keeps a continuous flow throughout the piece. The words are sophisticated, as well as the general structure of the sentences and the way they flow together. The words and sentence structure contribute to the atmosphere of the work as a whole. In his review of the piece, Dery says, "Every aspect of the novel is just dark, and contributes to the overall macabre mood of the piece. The

general theme of the novel seems to be how suicide doesn't only affect those who are directly involved, such as family, teachers, and close friends. It shows how suicide affects the entire community. While reading the novel, a particular set of characters caught my eye. The narrators have what would be a textbook definition of obsession with the Lisbon girls. They are more than just teenage boys being obsessed with teenage girls. In their case, this is not just a normal obsession like society thinks of today, but something much more psychological than that. This obsession is more of a disorder.

By the words of Alex Lickerman obsession is “ a giant tidal wave that crashes through our minds and washes away all other concerns. ” In an article from Psych Central symptoms of an obsession disorder include preoccupations with organization, lists, or rules, unable to discard old or worn out items, and has a consciousness of specific details. The neighborhood boys display all of these things. Their preoccupations with organization are clear throughout the novel when looking at how they kept track of the girls' things through a numbering system similar to that of police evidence.

They are also seemingly unable to discard the things they collected from the girls. A third symptom appears through the entire work as a whole, because the boys are speaking as though all of these events took place many years ago, yet they seem to remember almost every detail of the year of the suicides. Just through these symptoms, it is clear that the boys have an obsession with the Lisbon girls, even into their adulthoods. The American Psychiatric Association characterizes obsessions as, “ irrational thoughts which keep reoccurring. In the conclusion of the book, the boys are going over a summary of the year and they admit to this kind of behavior. They

even kind of blame the behavior on the girls by saying, “ They made us participate in their own madness, because we couldn’t help but retrace their steps, rethink their thoughts, and see that none of them lead to us,” (Eugenides 248). This statement shows an obvious obsession with the Lisbon girls. Therefore, one can see that the neighborhood boys have an obsession that goes further than just a stereotypical teenage obsession. The other set of characters also have a psychological disorder of sorts.

With the exception of Cecilia, the other four Lisbon girls appear to have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). People acquire PTSD by living through a traumatic event in their life. In the case of Lux, Mary, Bonnie, and Therese, the event that sparked the disorder was not a single event, but two with one common source. The first being Cecilia’s wrist cutting and hospital stay. The second is the actual event of her death. Characteristics of PTSD include staying away from places and things that remind one of what happened, feeling alone, and outbursts of acts which are normally out of character.

The girls all displayed these in the time between Cecilia’s death and theirs. The narrators have told us through a number of different ways that the girls felt alone as a group. They are pictured as being alone together, meaning that the four of them feel as though they are the only ones that understand themselves. The girls also engage in activities that seem out of character compared to who the rest of the community thought they were. In Lux’s case this is the high amount of sexual activity. For the group as a whole, it is clinging together, not having other friends, and staying in the house and complying with their parents.

For the most part the girls seem so uninterested in the activities of their peers it seems as though they died with Cecilia. Another characteristic of PTSD is having suicidal tendencies according to the National Center for PTSD. In conclusion, one can see how the Lisbon girls developed Post Traumatic Stress Disorder after the death of Cecilia. When looking at the evidence presented, it is clear that the two main groups of characters have psychological disorders. In the case of the neighborhood boys, their obsession with the Lisbon girls goes further than just being interested.

This becomes apparent when one compares the boys with textbook symptoms of obsession disorders. Lux, Mary, Bonnie, and Therese also have a psychological disorder. In their case it is PTSD. This can be proven when examining the year leading up to their death under a lens filtered with the characteristics of PTSD. Because of these facts we are able to see how *The Virgin Suicides* is more than just a story about five girls' deaths told by the boys they grew up with. As one can see, the novel is more than meets the eye.

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