

Not That Kind of Girl Study Guide

Not That Kind of Girl by Lena Dunham

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Summary

“Not That Kind of Girl” by Lena Dunham is a memoir about Lena’s life thus far; she is only 28 and has many years to go and other memoirs to write. Her book is her life up to date. Lena ultimately became an accomplished writer, actress and director. She is the creator of the highly acclaimed HBO series, “Girls.” Lena Dunham is the first female to win the Directors Guild of America award for highest achievement by a director in comedy. She won Golden Globes, one for best actress in a comedy. She’s been nominated for eight Emmys.

The acclaim and praise that Lena earned is at the end of this book. Lena tells the story of the circuitous route of the life that lead up to all that success and achievement. Being a comedy writer, it is not surprising that Lena tells her story with a great deal of self-deprecating, introspective and biting humor. Lena struggled with a lack of self-esteem most of her life – she still deals with remnants of it. She was born and raised in SoHo and her parents were both artists. Lena was introduced to the world of art at a young age. The family spent many hours at the museums around New York City.

From a young age Lena felt different, that she didn’t belong and that no one liked her. Lena was right; she was very different. Like many gifted children Lena found it difficult to fit in. A teacher sensed what she was going through and encouraged her to follow her natural talents. In the fifth grade she was already a good writer. He told her not to worry about the other kids. The teacher had a good influence on her until he made sexual advances toward her which turned out to be a microcosm of her adult experiences to come.

Lena hated school until she was enrolled in a progressive school that focused on creativity. She felt she belonged there but it didn’t prepare her for the real world which she was to experience first at Oberlin College. Lena didn’t apply herself in college and was combative with the creative writing teachers who were not impressed with her talents. She later regretted that she hadn’t taken advantage of her college years and actually learned something. She came back later to lecture as a celebrated writer and felt real regret when she walked around campus recalling some of her most humiliating moments.

Lena did not feel especially attractive or appealing to the opposite sex because her experiences had taught her that. She started gaining weight after junior high and struggled with it ever since. Lena also dealt with a lack of self-esteem that led her to seek love with all the wrong guys – she called them “jerks.” She equated sex with love, believing that having sex with someone she barely knew would lead to true love. Lena had many relationships with men who used and exploited her; she wore her vulnerability on her sleeve.

But Lena survived them all and achieved a level of success that most people can only dream of – including the “jerks” who hurt her, used her and cast her aside.



Section I: Love & Sex, Part 1

Summary

When she was nine, Lena vowed she would stay a virgin until she graduated from high school. Fortunately or unfortunately, the matter never presented itself in high school. She had a near miss in her first year of college at New School with a stocky, aspiring pilot that was never consummated. He feared she would think it was a commitment since she was a virgin. She transferred to Oberlin College in Ohio for her sophomore year. Sex was surprisingly free there. Lena felt she was the oldest virgin in town. The pickings were slim if one was over bi-sexuals. Half the straight men were Dungeon & Dragon nerds. Another 25% were slobs. The cutest guy was named Priven who wore a white skirt.

Lena never enjoyed sex and it gave her insomnia. In junior year, she began to practice platonic bed sharing. No sex – just cuddling and giggling. Lena was able to show off her nightclothes. She experienced joy the next day of having been wanted. She knew that her bed was a rest spot for the lonely and she was the spinster innkeeper.

At home she had shared her bed with her little sister, Grace who was afraid to sleep by herself. Lena always pretended to hate it but she was glad for the company. She had literally given her parents nightmares between 1986 and 1998. She never wanted to sleep. She equated it with death.

Jared Krauter was the first thing Lena had noticed during New School orientation. She knew him from the neighborhood. He invited her to come listen to his band. He had been in her bunk pressed up against her for months but nothing ever happened. Jared was a virgin, too. Next she bed-shared with Dev Coughlin who was a piano student. He stayed with her two weeks; they kissed twice. Jerry Barrow was a physics major from Baltimore. They bed-shared for a week. He left for good when she invited his best friend, Josh Berenson, to sleep on the other side of her.

Word got around about her bed-sharing. Guys who visited figured they'd just stay all night. She did refuse some guys. Nikolai, a Russian guy, Jason a psych major and Patrick who was sweet and small. When she graduated and moved back home the bed-sharing continued. Her mother was dismayed that she had interest in such lowlifes as Bo, Kevin and Norris. Her parents thought her platonic sleeping was strange.

Lena had been in a short-term relationship with a former TV personality. The guy looked a little like the TV personality she'd seen on TV as a young girl. Kissing was as far as that went even when she begged for more which she did on Valentine's Day. He was apparently scarred from a previous relationship, a dead dog and the Iraq War – not that he fought in it. She left him after he fell asleep on her on Valentine's Day. She pretty much ended her bed-sharing days with the end of that relationship.



In ninth grade, Juliana was a new girl. She was the type who was popular all her life. She was a punk with a pierced nose and spiked hair and a beautiful face. Lena was envious when Juliana told her she had sex with a 20-year-old guy in an alley. Juliana showed Lena a photo of Shane, a band boy she had a crush on. Lena met Igor on-line through Juliana. They instant messaged for three months. They talk about everything. Lena loved everything he said. She loved the computer, too.

No one at school liked Lena. Some ignored her; others were cruel to her. She sent Igor a photo. He thought she looked like Christina Aguilera. He didn't send her a photo because of his pimples. She even kept in touch with him on family vacations using the hotel computer. She gave him her phone number but he never called. She figured he was self-conscious about his accent – he was from Russia. They agreed to meet on a Saturday. She was excited and arrived 20-minutes early, but Igor never showed up. He sent a message later that he was grounded. Igor stopped initiating messages. He only responded to Lena's. She got a message from Juliana that summer that Igor was dead. He had overdosed on methadone and choked on his own tongue. Lena asked if he told Shane that he stopped liking her.

Lena had to change her screen name because she was threatened by a boy who sent her a message that he was going to rape her and cover her in barbecue sauce. Her father involved the police who warned her against being too nice to a guy like this. She saw Igor's user name one day. She searched for an obituary or some evidence that he ever existed. She used his name in a television show years later.

Analysis

From the time she was a young girl, Lena had a fascination with sex, probably even before she knew exactly what it was. Despite her obsession with sex, she remained a virgin until she went away to college. Perhaps she had repressed her sexual drives and that repression manifested itself into an obsession. She had idealized what sex was. She apparently thought it was the silver bullet that made a relationship loving and lasting.

However, once she had sex, she didn't like it. She had built it up in her mind and set herself up for disappointment because it didn't live up to what she had imagined. She also equated sex with love. She felt that she would find true love through sex, even sex with someone she didn't know that well. She had conflated love with sex. The expectation that she had for sex was romantic love which she thought was the same as sex.

On top of being disappointed in sex, Lena did not consider herself physically appealing. She was a little over weight and wasn't a "hot" girl. She took a different approach in finding a real boyfriend and a loving relationship. But it was a circuitous route and an awkward attempt that undoubtedly confused her potential paramours. She established a new way of becoming intimate with a boy. She called it bed-sharing – sleeping together without sex. That didn't work out well either.



Lena was obviously starving for a close relationship – one that was close in every way including emotionally, physically and mentally. She was lost and confused and just didn't know how to attain what she wanted.

Vocabulary

celibacy, copulate, consummated, polyamorous, eschewed, vegan, genteel, apocalypse, catatonic, voluptuous, aficionado, platonic, writhe, eradicated, nihilistic, litany, transfixed, sinister



Section I: Love & Sex, Part 2

Summary

Lena's worst email ever was a series of apologies (with footnotes) that she wrote to boyfriends, unnamed in this book. In one message, she wrote that the last six times they spoke, she talked followed by his long silences. She wrote that she liked him a lot, not in a scary obsessive way but was willing to go out of her way to make him a part of her life. Lena said it would be poetic justice if he didn't answer her email. She apologized for the email not being funny.

Lena had always been attracted to jerks. At 25, she was involved with a nice guy and considered herself in "jerk recovery." Lena's father proved the conventional wisdom that if a girl had a good father, she'd choose a good man. She chose jerks. Her father was good natured and always her safe haven and her rescuer. Lena's theory was that having a kind father made a girl seek the opposite. Feminism was always part of Lena's life as far back as she can remember. She listened to her mother and her friends discuss the challenges of living in a male-dominated art world. The private school she went to espoused gender inequality as a subject on par with algebra. Her father always supported Lena and her sister no matter what they did.

Lena felt cool twice in her life. The first time she transferred from a Quaker school in Manhattan to an arts school in Brooklyn. He had highlighted hair and wore platform shoes. People loved her poetry. The novelty soon faded and she sunk to her natural B- or C- level. She also felt cool when she first transferred to Oberlin. She got attention at first because of her blonde hair and green-and-white striped peacoat. She joined the staff of the alternative newspaper called "The Grape." She wrote porn reviews and scathing critiques of the Facebook culture. She became friendly with the Grape editor, Mike. Lena went home for a month that winter with a bad case of mono. Mike checked on her the entire time she was gone.

Mike graduated and his friend, Barry, was the only one of his buddies to be left behind. He was creepy. He worked in the library generally putting books on the wrong shelves. He was reportedly abusive to his girlfriend and was a Republican. He was lost without his friends. She ran into him a party one night. Barry came to her apartment that night. She was drunk and had sex in a blur. She felt she was being raped. Ultimately, she threw him out. He was cursing at her from outside. She was afraid.

Lena vowed not to have sex against until she was in love. Six months later she had her first serious boyfriend. TV writers base many of their stories on their experiences. She pitched a version of Barry's story. But no one found being raped funny on any level. She broke down and told the story to Jack who told her that it wasn't her fault. She thought there were fifty ways it was her fault. Deep down she really knows that she didn't say yes. It has kept her from sinking down further. Jack was in Brussels and she was in LA. Jack told her it didn't stop him from wanting to have sex with her.



Lena had only told four men that she loved them. The first was her college boyfriend, but he didn't reciprocate her sentiments. The second time was to Ben when she was on the rebound from the first boy. Lena's third "I love you" was said to Devon during the shoot of the first season of "Girls." She had several crushes during that first season. Devon appeared on set when she was directing the final episode for the season. When he ignored her and questioned her authority, she knew he was her type. She had been in an emotional breakdown. They got together after the wrap party. They went to his house. Their first kiss was dizzying. They spent the next week together. He was odd. He kept his shower cap on the ceiling on a pulley so he could lower it when he needed it.

After that first week, she had to travel to Los Angeles for work. Their relationship lasted five months. He turned out to be critical and controlling. He did not take to her family. She tried hard to make him part of her life. When she told him that she loved him he said he knew she did. She decided to spend the next eight years getting to know herself. Lena decided she hadn't loved any of her old boyfriends. But then she met the fourth man she said those words to. She doesn't mention his name.

Analysis

Lena had a penchant for "jerks" as she referred to the bad boys that she was attracted to. Even though she was aware of this weakness, she did nothing to combat it. She went for the same type of boy in relationship after relationship. She had been very unhappy as a young girl. She hated school and had no friends. She was very gifted and oftentimes the very gifted are perceived as different and not accepted by the other kids. This could have been part of her problem. She went after boys who she knew would hurt her and mistreat her. Did she feel she needed to be punished? Perhaps.

There is an old adage that girls seek a romantic interest who is like their father. Lena's father was a kind man who always defended her. So it wasn't a father thing... it was something within Lena that made her seek out someone who she knew would hurt her. There is a self-destructive strain deep within Lena. Putting herself in one bad relationship after another was not healthy. Paraphrasing Einstein, doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results is insanity. Lena wasn't insane but she did suffer from depression and was diagnosed with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder which could at least partially explain her obsession with sex.

Vocabulary

dysfunctional, screed, cajoling, sociopathic, acolyte, benevolent, integral, indoctrination, flaccid, intricacy, monogamy, pulverized, raucous, incorrigible, cathartic, misogynistic, misanthropic



Section II: Body

Summary

As a young girl, she had a fear of becoming anorexic. She had read articles and seen photos of emaciated girls. She imagined looking in a mirror at your 80 pound frame thinking you were fat. Lena was born fat – eleven pounds with three chins. She didn't crawl; she rolled. The fat was gone by the time she went to kindergarten. She was a confident eight-year old on a beach in Mexico wearing a bikini. She gained weight after eighth grade when she started her period. A senior in high school told her she looked like a bowling ball with a hat. Her mother said it was hormonal. She became a vegan that ultimately morphed into an eating disorder. She savored “Cathy” comics that her grandmother clipped and sent to her.

By the time she was in high school, she stopped reading “Cathy” but started acting like her. Cathy liked cats and eating. Being in college only exacerbated her eating problems. She was in denial about her weight problem. She was surprised that she weight 160 at the doctor's office. She told them their scale was broken. Lena went to Vinnie, her mother's nutritionist. He told her that her weight gain was from eating too much sugar which created unusable calories. She began keeping track of what she ate. She lost twenty pounds in a few months followed by a year of yo-yo dieting. She tried bulimia but she'd usually forget to vomit after overeating. Her most humiliating document are entries made to her journal about her struggles to lose weight.

Lena's mother chronicled her early years as a young woman in New York City with her Nikon camera. She was the inventor of the early selfie. Many of the photos were art – nude and semi-nude shots of herself. She convinced her younger sister to post nude, too. There were photos of her father, too, when he came along. Lena gets naked on TV. She cast herself as a person who embodied sexual despair. She felt her body was just a storytelling tool. Exhibitionism was in the family. In 2010, she had the opportunity to create a TV show. The producers wanted a show about her age group and their concerns and they wanted it to be graphic. She took them at their word. The way sex was portrayed in movies she'd seen made it seem creepy. The images were gross and potentially destructive. The message was loud and clear that everyone was doing it all wrong.

Everyone is curious about how it feels to be in a room full of strangers simulating sex with someone you barely know. She has to be honest – it's weird! And then to think it was all going to be seen by millions. Some days under the scrutiny of the camera are better than others. Comments that she is brave are thinly disguised opinions that she's too fat to show her body.

Lena always sensed that there was something wrong with her uterus. She even complained to her mother about a stinging feeling “down there.” Her mother put Vaseline on it and told her to wipe good. Just before ninth grade, she had plans with a



friend named Sophie. Lena had started her period and told Sophie she couldn't go because she had her period. Sophie enlightened her that she needed to do whatever she did before – when she didn't have a period. But Lena felt really bad. Could this happen every month, she lamented. At 16 she had her first gynecologist visit. He prescribed birth control pills to keep her periods regular. They did nothing for her dark mood a few days before onset – her PMS. She was filled with doom and gloom and paranoia. Menstruating was the only thing that Lena didn't like about being a girl. In her late 20s, she began feeling a stinging in her vaginal area that was almost unbearable. Lena read “The Camera My Mother Gave Me” by Susanna Kaysen which was about her struggle with vaginismus, a pain that was unexplained yet impossible to ignore. Lena associated the vagina with weakness and sadness. Kaysen eased her pain by ending bad relationships.

Lena's pain continued and worsened. An ultrasound revealed that her uterus had shifted to the right. Lena was suffering from endometriosis. The condition would make it hard for her to get pregnant and would make her feel fatigued much of the time. Lena had always wanted to be a mother. Her aunt, who was a doctor, talked with her about her diagnosis. Her advice was to get started if she wanted to have children.

Analysis

Perhaps it was Lena's OCD that played a role in her struggle with eating and weight gain. Ironically, as a child she feared becoming anorexic. She tried bulimia but usually forgot to throw up after she ate. She went from that extreme to lying on the couch for months after graduation and overeating. It seems that her self-destructive bent had more than one tentacle. She already suffered from a lack of self-esteem and hadn't liked her body since before starting high school. Piling on more weight would only bring her down further. She would rally for a short period and lose 20 pounds and then something would cause her to over indulge again and she was back in the same place.

Lena is a talented, gifted writer, actress and director. She is a creative force and a comic genius. She knows that she's very talented. Yet she has a difficult time just liking herself. She engages in self-destructive behavior and seems to accept being humiliated and embarrassed as part of her life. It is a way to get attention although not good attention.

Understanding Lena's lack of self-worth and her lack of confidence in her body, it is stunning that she eagerly stripped completely naked for her hit TV series, “Girls.” She had an uncanny ability to detach herself from being filmed in the nude and simulating sex with actors she didn't know. That behavior was completely at odds with Lena's private behavior and persona. She comments that she felt she was just a tool to tell the story on the TV series and it didn't matter what her body looked like. It may have been a revealing remark. Lena had been a “tool” for many years in her sexual escapades with a number of “jerks.”

Vocabulary

anorexic, emaciated, hormonal, holistic, judiciously, uterus, volatility, commiserate, endometriosis, laparoscopic

Section III: Friendship

Summary

Lena had one serious girl crush. She doesn't like the term especially since she has a gay sister. Lena had a "crush" on An Chu in the third grade. Looking back on it, An Chu may have been gay. They never spoke but Lena never took her eyes off An when she was around. The intimacy that Lena fantasized about with An was sharing secrets with each other.

Lena never wanted to be with women; she wanted to be them. She admired the career and sophistication of other women. Two types of women inspire envy in Lena: the ebullient woman, happy from morning until night and the other is the beautiful depressive, gorgeous but oh-so-sad. She is also envious of men who so easily assume their professional pursuits – no apologies or twisting themselves into pretzels.

In eighth grade, Lena's class took a field trip to Washington, D.C. On the second night of the trip, every girl in her suite – even one's with boyfriends – decided to be bi-sexual. It started with light kissing and progressed from there. Lena sort-of wanted to join in but feared she'd like it. She curled up on the couch and pretended to be asleep.

Lena heard of a young British playwright named Nellie. She couldn't find much out about her on the Internet. A few months later Nellie appeared at a talk Lena was doing for the New Yorker. Lena went to London a short time later and decided to look Nellie up. They meet for a drink and traverse the West End. Nellie ordered for them at a fancy fish restaurant. They went to Nellie's house after dinner. Nellie's house was a large mansion filled with numerous roommates all in the arts.

Lena drank too much and threw up on the living room floor when Lena, Nellie and all the roommates were gathered together. No one was upset except for Lena. Nellie patted her back and told her she had a beautiful face and marveled at how fit she was. She felt that Nellie wanted to kiss her. Lena clutched the piece of paper with Nellie's phone number on it in the cab on the way back to her hotel. Lena kissed three girls in college – all at once. They were three straight girls who wanted to experiment with universal love.

Lena told her boyfriend that it wasn't working out. He led her back to his apartment like she was a child in trouble. He told her that she was the only person who ever mattered to him. But she stopped answering the phone when he called or responding to his messages. He disappeared from her life. A bicoastal relationship was difficult. He called her every morning on his way to surf while she watched the snow fall outside her window. She showed up at his birthday party. He didn't imagine that she'd come. They had an uncomfortable day trip the next day. She was pretty sure he had thought he was "deep" because he was dating a fat girl. He told her he loved her but had to go his own way. She was catatonic when her mother found her. Her mother told her that there was a grace to having a broken heart.



Lena was an only child until she was eight and Grace was born. She had wanted a sibling, but after Grace was born she changed her mind. She was an intruder who should be returned. She felt betrayed. Grace didn't cry like most babies and wasn't particularly cuddly. Lena developed a desire for Grace to need her. Her father told her she was trying too hard. Grace was smart and impressed adults. Lena discovered Grace liked girls by accidentally looking at an email message. Alarmed, she told her mother and Grace didn't speak to her for days.

In college, Lena's roommate, Jessica, began dating a girl. Grace came to visit when she was 15. At a party with a bunch of girls, Jessica noticed right away that Grace was gay, which enraged Lena who denied it. Grace came out to Lena when she was 17. It just kind of spilled out of Grace and Lena sobbed – not because Grace was gay, but because Lena realized how little she knew about her sister and her dreams and pain. The family had known but stuffed it for years. Lena felt compelled to tell their tearful mother who was convinced that Grace had a secret and the secret was she was having an affair with her Latin teacher. Lena told her what the secret was, and her mother cried harder.

Grace has matured well after leaving home for college. She has a great sense of self which Lena envies.

Analysis

Lena writes about girl crushes. She's never had a lesbian relationship. However, she is a plain, heavy-set girl who looks a little boyish. She's probably been accused of being gay or suspected of it. When she found out that her younger sister was gay, she totally overreacted and as she said "panicked." It seems that "panic" was an inappropriate response given how people in her age group generally have no problem with homosexuality.

Lena may have had a fear of being gay. She had many fears during her life which at least partially drove her parents to put her in therapy. She was afraid of kidnapping and Reyes disease and sleep and milk. It seems logical that she may have been afraid she was gay. Her over-reaction to her sister's homosexuality could have been her own deep-seated fear about being gay herself emerging.

Lena wrote about other girls who seemed to be attracted to her. She recalls an all-girl party where the girls, who were not gay, decided to act gay. Lena wanted no part of it even in jest. She was the only one who left the party. Lena may have included these anecdotes about not being gay to clear the air.

Vocabulary

existential, ebullient, debauchery, prodigious, androgynous, grandeur, catatonic, ornithology, rhetoric

Section IV: Work

Summary

In the spring of third grade, Lena's class took a three-day field trip to a camp called Nature's Classroom to learn about nature, teamwork and New York State history. Lena had no friends and didn't want to go but had no choice. They spent three days going from one activity to another. There was one activity that no one believed. To demonstrate what the slaves had gone through on the Underground Railway, they shackled the kids together with jump ropes and then released them into the woods to understand the freedom they felt. They were told to hide from a bounty hunter that was following them on horseback.

Nathan was the fifth grade teacher. When she was in fourth grade he came to the rescue when the runt of the hamster litter that the fourth grade class had needed a little surgery. The next year when she was in his class he recognized her love of reading and ability to write. He also sensed that she didn't fit in and felt uncomfortable with the other kids. Surprisingly, he talked to her about his private life. His first wife died after their daughter was born. He married again but didn't like the second wife as much. For the first time she looked forward to going to school.

Nathan called her "My Lena" which morphed into "Malena." He'd rub her neck while he talked to the class. In a checklist on the board he put hearts by her name and just checkmarks by the names of the other kids. One kid pointed out that Nathan never made Lena do her homework. He told Lena to catch everything up by the next day. After making a sexual pass at her, it was obvious that he was a pervert. She told her parents and the next day they pulled her out of the school.

Lena was enrolled in a liberal art institute where she wrote poetry and put on plays with her classmates. There was open debate and no one had to be perfect. The experience didn't prepare her for college life at Oberlin. She was accepted into the Creative Writing program but became angered by their dismissive treatment and begged to get out of the program. Although Lena had periods of being a "good" student they didn't last. Her mind was on her future, post-college.

Lena returned in the winter to give a convocation speech. It was hard for her to believe that she'd graduated six years before. Walking around campus brought back so many memories – many of them embarrassing. Had she been able to do it over again, she would have made her college experience better... she thinks. When she was there she couldn't wait for it to be over. College had been a big disappointment.

Just after graduating from college, Lena thought of jobs that appealed to her: private eye assistant, baker, preschool art teacher. She reconnected with old friends, Isabel and Joana, who got her a job at Peach and Babke, an exclusive baby clothes store. She made \$100 a day, cash and paid lunch. She had the purpose she was looking for. Her



days acquired a kind of rhythm. Phoebe was the store owner and ran daily operations. Her mother lived in Pennsylvania but stayed in the apartment above the store when in town. Linda designed some of the clothing. They often fought.

The job allowed Lena, Isabel and Joana a lot of free time to socialize. They went to art openings for free wine and Christmas parties for free food. They smoked pot and watched Seinfeld reruns at Isabel's apartment. Everything was exciting and fun. The job was easy and stress free. They reveled in their status as shop girls. Eventually, Lena missed being creative. It occurred to Lena to make a webseries about her and her friends. Isabel and Joana were all for it and began writing outlines and locations. They called their series, "Delusional Downtown Divas." A lot of people liked it. The girls presented the videos in a small gallery in Soho. On opening night Lena was stunned to see the studio filled. The job at the baby store lost its luster after that.

In September 2009, the Delusional Downtown Divas were offered a hosting gig at Guggenheim's First Annual Art Awards. They rented an office space as their headquarters and worked for months preparing for the event. The ceremony itself was like a blur. Afterwards, Lena went to Los Angeles to work and Isabel and Joana went back to school.

Lena looks forward to being eighty so she can write about how women are treated like secondary citizens in Hollywood. Men made advances towards her with hints that things could go better for her or that she should be more grateful. Lena stood up to all the pressure and never had sex with any of them. She can't wait to write about them and name names.

Analysis

Lena had a strange relationship with her fifth grade teacher. Nathan called her by a pet name, massaged her shoulders in front of the rest of the class and kept her in from recess so they could talk. What they talked about was even more bizarre. He lost his first wife and remarried, but he didn't like his second wife as much as his first wife. His behavior and his conversations with a 10-year-old were completely inappropriate. He drew her in by telling her what a great writer she was and telling her to ignore the other kids who ostracized her.

Nathan had observed that Lena was a misfit and not accepted by the other kids. He figured she was vulnerable and finally made a sexual advance towards her. She told her parents and they pulled her out of the school. Nathan was one of the first "jerks" that Lena had to deal with. She had to feel some confusion and loss over the incident. In her 10-year-old mind, he was a friend, in fact the only friend she had at school and he encouraged her in her writing. That was all stripped away. It was the right thing to do, but it was a complicated situation that probably confounded her at some level.

Finally, Lena is forced into a corner. She has a mundane job that would never go anywhere. She finally figures out what she wanted and needed and it wasn't sex. She

needed to be creative, be in the arts. She and her friends developed a webseries which she looked at as one step forward – one step toward the ultimate success that she achieved with “Girls.”

Vocabulary

sartorial, combative, convocation, inchoate, nostalgic, palpable, ambivalence, academia, predilections, enigmatic, protégé



Section V: Big Picture

Summary

At eight years of age, Lena was afraid of everything. Many of her worries were about bad food and illness although rape, kidnapping and lack of sleep were on the list, too. She often imagined that other people were ill and contagious or that she had a fatal disease. Lena was sent to several therapists but didn't click with them. Her parents finally found one she could work with. Her name was Robyn and Lena liked her.

Lena's obsession with germs morphed into hypochondria. Over time they discussed everything from crushes to sex to her fears about disease and the unknown. Three times a week wasn't enough to eradicate the fear that was always with Lena. She was suffering from obsessive-compulsive disorder. She ran into Robyn's daughter, Audrey, at the office. Audrey got a note to Lena about getting together. Lena told Robyn about it who agreed with Lena that a friendship between them wouldn't be appropriate. She stopped working with Robyn when she was fifteen although she stayed on her medication. Her OCD was greatly improved by then. She knew how to deal with it.

Lena's parents felt she needed more help because she was skipping school and not doing her assignments. She saw Margaret who was a learning and organization specialist and a psychiatrist. Ironically, Audrey and Lena wound up at the same college together and bonded immediately. She sometimes saw a flash of Robyn in her. Margaret was on vacation when Lena and her mother had a horrible fight. Margaret referred her to Dr. Linda Jordan while she was out of town. Lena called Dr. Jordan but she was on a vacation. Dr. Jordan called her back and smoothed things out – Lena wasn't terrible and mother-daughter relationship were always difficult. Lena was willing to make up but her mother wasn't ready.

Lena kept in phone contact with Dr. Jordan as she traveled all over the world. Lena told Dr. Jordan about moving in with her current boyfriend and picking out furniture with him. She wondered if she had passed a test, conveyed the security of a romantic relationship. Had she advanced to a club of stable women?

Lena often thought about dying. The concept of death hits some people when it's too late. She didn't want to be one of those people. She recalled when her grandmother died. It was the first time she'd seen her father cry. Later she asked her father how anyone was supposed to live knowing that everyone dies. Her grandmother's death made Lena to want to "get cracking."

Lena saw a number of her parents' gay friends die of AIDS. In her sophomore year of college she was convinced that she would die of AIDS. She had had sex with a bisexual man who had had sex with a guy he met in a gay bar. That whole summer she imagined she was dying of AIDS. Her mother believed in reincarnation but Lena wasn't sure about the wait time. If she lives long enough to read this book when she's old she'll



probably be appalled at herself. She eventually told her father that she was no longer afraid of death. He told that would change as she grew older.

Lena spent three summers at Fernwood Cove Camp for Girls. Her first summer was when she was thirteen. She had a successful seventh grade having had two popular boys for boyfriends and gotten her hair streaked. She had ups and downs during his first encampment. She'd be having a great time one minute then become incredibly homesick. She loved her new friend Katie one minutes then thought she had the IQ of a lima bean the next. She presented a play she wrote and starred in one her counselor wrote. The cabin she stayed in with crammed with ten girls. They were all in various stages of puberty. BO was reeking all about. They had a mixer with a boys' camp. A cute boy danced with her and wanted to make out but she rejected him. She called her parents and sobbed, begging them to pick her up and take her home.

Much to her chagrin, Lena spent two more partial summers there. As she matured, she got crushes on counselors and older college students. She found her truest love, Johnny McDuff from South Carolina. He was almost twenty-two. He supervised the group as they rode to a cliff over a river that they were going to jump off. She wanted to impress him and said she'd jump first. She got scared when she saw how far the drop was. Johnny jumped with her. She tried to claw herself back in the air. But they made it. She fantasized about him that night. At the end of her third trip to camp, everyone was sad knowing that they wouldn't be back. They were growing up.

Analysis

Lena was in therapy from the time she was very young through her late teens. She was diagnosed with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder but she also suffered from poor self-image and depression. She saw a therapist at the height of her problems three days a week. Her emotional issues undoubtedly played a role in her poor choice of men, her obsession with sex and her inability to form a close personal relationship.

Lena's obsessions included worries about death and illness. Her parents were both artists and had a lot of gay friends in New York City. She saw a number of their friends die of AIDS. For nearly a whole year she was sure she had AIDS and was dying.

When her therapy ended and she was no longer taking medication, she became involved with a boy who really cared about her. She commented that she had graduated to the club of stable women. Another sign that she was becoming healthier was her refusal to have sex with Hollywood types who dangled projects over her head. She was proud of herself for not caving to them.

Vocabulary

penchant, hypochondria, insurmountable, effusive, dalliance, aesthetic, nubile, fallible, comatose, manifestation, bipolar



Important People

Lena Dunham

Lena Dunham is an accomplished and highly successful writer, actress and director. She is the creator of the award-winning HBO TV series, "Girls." Lena won the Golden Globe for best actress in a TV comedy. She also won the Directors Guild of America's directorial award in comedy. From a young child on, she was a gifted writer and poet. Her mother and father were both artists and advocates of the arts. Lena spent many hours in the museums in New York City as a young girl. Art was always a part of her life and it was not surprising that she leaned toward a career in entertainment.

Life didn't start out for Lena on such a high note. Even as a second grader, Lena felt like she didn't fit in at school. She had no friends and hated school. She was inspired by her fifth grade teacher who encouraged her to write but then he made a sexual pass at her and that was the end of that relationship and school. Lena was in and out of therapy for years. She learned that she had Obsessive-Compulsive disorder for which she was medicated and underwent intensive therapy. Ultimately, she was able to go without medication and therapy and learned to cope with the condition herself, knowing that it is never cured.

Lena spent six years at an art institute in New York that focused on creativity and the arts. It was the perfect place for Lena to express her creativity; however, it didn't prepare her for real life. She arrived at college completely unprepared to take on the responsibility and challenges of college life. As bright as she was, Lena did not do well in her studies. She argued with the teachers in the Creative Writing department and begged to get out of the program even though it was her field. She got involved in too many meaningless and hurtful sexual relationships with men while she thought she was pursuing real love.

After Lena graduated from college, she lived a mainly uneventful life with no hope or promise of success. She longed to have creativity in her life and developed a successful comedy webseries with some friends. She felt it was the step forward that eventually brought her to HBO and her hit series.

Lena's Mother

Lena inherited her love of the arts from both parents. Her mother is an artist and photographer. The family spent many hours at the art museums in New York City. Her mother created the first "selfie" with her Nikon camera.

Lena inherited her independent streak and tendency to speak out from her mother. When her mother was in second grade, she was sent home from school for trying to organize a protest about the type of clothes that little girls had to wear. She had defied the dress code by wearing pants instead of a dress. Just as Lena did later, her mother



found her teachers to be boring and repulsive although she became a part-time teacher herself.

Lena's mother never liked to be told what to think or do. As a teacher she always held herself to the highest standards, the same standards that she believed that other teachers should be held to. She was completely against teachers socializing with their students. She said, "There is nothing more disgusting than being the oldest lady at the party."

It is obvious that her mother had an off-beat sense of humor which is also something that was handed down to Lena. Lena's mother gave her some unusual advice that stuck with her and that she included in her book. For example she said that if you have a bad feeling about another person, don't worry about offending them – just run. Being polite, she said, gets your purse stolen.

Her mother also believed that if someone didn't answer your email in six hours it meant that they hated you. When Lena was nine, she wrote a vow of celibacy on a piece of paper and asked her mother to sign it as a witness. Her mother refused to sign it. No one knows what life has in store for anyone. She didn't want Lena to make such a vow because she didn't want her to feel guilty.

Lena's Father

Lena's father was an artist who encouraged Lena's interest in the arts and creativity. She had a penchant for picking the wrong kind of guy. She read that a woman pursued men who were like her father. In the case of Lena's father, that old adage didn't hold water. He was the kindest man she ever knew and he always supported her in whatever she did right or did wrong. He was her protector and defender.

In school, Lena's father was class president and book-club leader in a school in the public school system. He was eventually sent to boarding school like most boys in his family. At Andover he was a rebel who refused to attend chapel and often class. Lena was destined to pick up some of his traits.

Grace

Grace is Lena's younger sister by eight years. Although initially Lena wasn't sure she wanted to keep her baby sister when she first came home from the hospital, she ultimately became her protector. Lena wanted Grace to depend on her, to be aware that Lena was her defender. Her father told her she was trying too hard.

Lena spotted an email when Grace was 15 that exposed the possibility that her sister liked girls. Lena panicked and told her mother which created a temporary schism between the sisters. When she was 17, Grace came out to Lena which made big sister cry. Her emotional reaction wasn't because she was upset that Grace was gay. She was saddened that she had been oblivious to Grace's feelings and struggles and had turned



a tin ear to them. Grace recently finished college and is a self-assured young woman who knows who she is. Lena envies her.

Ben

Ben was one of the four men who Lena said the words, “I love you,” to. However, he did not reciprocate and apparently didn’t feel the same way. Although he did say the words during sex which she said didn’t count. Looking back on it she probably really didn’t love him either. She was on the rebound from the first guy she said those words to who also rejected her. She was working mainly on the east coast and he lived in San Francisco. Their bi-coastal relationship became too difficult and they drifted apart but not before he gave her HPV.

Jack

After Lena’s ill-fated relationship with Barry, Lena vowed not to have sex until she was in love. Just six months later she met Jack who was to become her first serious boyfriend. He was very sympathetic about the incident with Barry and stressed that it wasn’t her fault. He kept her from sinking into a deep black hole. Even when Jack was way across the world, he was loving and kind. He told her that the incident with Barry did not stop him from wanting her. It was music to her ears.

Mike

As soon as Lena transferred to Oberlin, she joined the staff of the Grape, which was the alternative campus newspaper. Mike was an upperclassman and the editor of the paper. She worked well with him and eventually got into a sexual relationship with him. She went home for a month to recover from mono and he checked on her every day. After he graduated the relationship was over and she got involved with his friend, Barry.

Barry

After Mike, the editor of the Grape, graduated, Lena got involved with his friend, Barry. The relationship with Barry was short-lived but a total disaster. The first time she was along with him, she was in a blur from drinking too much and was sure he raped her. Many years later she pitched a TV show about Barry but was told in a stern manner that a show based on rape is not funny at any level.

Nellie

Nellie was a young successful British playwright who Lena met before she achieved her great successes. Lena was in the business when she met Nellie in New York. She had a girl crush on Nellie but there was nothing sexual, at least on Lena’s part. On a trip to



London, Lena contacted Nellie who met her for drinks and took her back to her home. Her “home” was a huge mansion that was filled with an undetermined number of roommates who were all in careers - or pursuing them - in entertainment and the arts.

Nellie and the British roommates plied Lena with more wine than she'd ever been accustomed to which resulted in Lena throwing up all the wine and everything she ate that day on the rug right in front of everyone. No one seemed to be upset other than Lena. Nellie lay on the floor next to Lena seeming to really connect with her after her upchuck for some reason. She told her that she loved knowing her. Lena was pretty sure Nellie wanted to kiss her. At 3 a.m. Lena was in a cab going back to her hotel, nervously clutching a scrap of paper with Nellie's private phone number.

Nathan

Nathan was Lena's fifth grade teacher. He recognized Lena's writing ability and creativity at a very young age. He sensed that she didn't fit in with the other kids and felt uncomfortable with them. She became the teacher's pet. He allowed her to skip her homework and often kept her in at recess so they could talk. He talked about not liking his second wife as much as his first wife. The conversations were inappropriate but at her young age, Lena didn't recognize that Nathan was stepping outside the bounds of teacher/student. Nathan was a good influence because he recognized Lena's talents and urged her not to worry about fitting in. On the other hand, he had a negative impact on her because he eventually made a sexual advance toward her that led to Lena being pulled out of the school by her parents.

Joana and Isabel

After graduation, Lena was unemployed and uninspired. Her old friends Joana and Isabel both worked at Peach and Babke which was an upscale baby clothes store. They were able to get Lena a job as a sales clerk there which she kept for nine months. She was paid \$100 a day cash with free lunch. She enjoyed the mindless work and the social life that she had with her old friends. Eventually Lena missed being in the creative arts and convinced Joana and Isabel to help develop a webseries about their lives. It was called “Delusional Downtown Divas.” It enjoyed a measure of success and Lena considered it a step forward.

Robyn/Dr. Jordan.

Robyn was Lena's therapist from the time she was in elementary school until the age of fifteen. She was able to relate to Robyn who had a daughter, Audrey, who was the same age. The therapy was intense, sometimes as much as three times a week. It was during her therapy with Robyn that Lena was diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder. Audrey had wanted to meet Lena but it was considered inappropriate. Ironically, years later, she and Audrey wound up at the same college and became college friends.

Dr. Jordan was another therapist that Lena worked with. She only talked with her over the phone while Dr. Jordan traveled all over the world. Dr. Jordan had a knack for saying just the right thing that would calm Lena down.



Objects/Places

Finches

When Lena was on the staff of Oberlin College's alternative campus newspaper, the Grape, she helped the editor buy a number of finches for an art project. She was put in charge of the finches because she was a girl, and therefore a caretaker. She kept the finches in the bathroom but they got loose. Lena turned to a dark corner of her psyche and called upon her experiences as an Audubon volunteer to hunt the birds down and coax them away from their freedom. She gathered the birds by hand. As she held them, they flapped their wings furiously in her hands. She compared it to a surgeon holding a beating heart in his hands – although she really didn't know what it felt like because she was a non-surgeon. She recovered the finches and got them back in their cages.

Oberlin College

Lena had been attending the New College in New York, her hometown. She wanted to go away to school and selected Oberlin College in Ohio to transfer to. It was at Oberlin that she had her first sexual experiences most of which fizzled out before they began. She felt like the cool girl after first transferring. During her years there, Lena was generally not a good student because she hadn't apply herself. Several years later she returned as a successful writer and TV series creator to give a lecture. As she wandered around the campus she recalled some of the bizarre and embarrassing experiences she had at school and wished she would have applied herself and done better.

Republicans

Lena grew up in a very progressive family in the SoHo section of New York City. She was sure she hadn't met a Republican until she was 19. However, much to her chagrin, she got sexually involved with several Republicans. The relationships didn't go very far because their ideology wasn't even in the same room.

The Grape

As soon as she transferred to Oberlin, Lena joined the staff of "The Grape" which was the alternative newspaper on the Oberlin Campus. She felt cool being the new blonde transfer who wore platform shoes and did reviews on porn movies and put-downs on the Facebook culture. She got involved with Mike, the editor of the Grape, the relationship went nowhere. After he graduated she never saw him again.



Endometriosis

Lena had a pain in her female organs from the time she was a little girl. She would call it a “stinging” feeling. Her mother just told her to wipe better. She was examined several times but no disease was discovered. After she began having her period when she was 13, the pain got worse although it was intermittent. Still no one found anything wrong with her. Finally, when she was in her mid-20s the pain became unbearable. She went to a specialist who took an ultrasound of her uterus. Her condition was diagnosis as endometriosis. She was advised by several doctors that if she wanted to have children she needed to “get going.”

“Delusional Downtown Divas”

When Lena and two friends were leading aimless lives working at a upscale baby clothes store, Lena started getting the creative itch. She convinced her two friends to create a webseries basically about their lives as young women in New York. The webseries was called “Delusional Downtown Divas.” It enjoyed a modicum of success and Lena felt it was a stepping stone toward the “Girls” TV series that she was ultimately able to develop and star in.

“Girls”

“Girls” was Lena's award-wining HBO TV series. It was a smash-hit that Lena created, developed, directed and starred in. She became the It girl with the success of the critically acclaimed comedy. When Lena pitched the show to HBO the studio bigwigs were immediately interested. They were looking for a comedy about girls Lena's age. They wanted the show to be funny as well as bold and daring. Lena didn't have to be told twice. She wrote, directed and starred in a comedy the likes of which TV had never seen before.

Awards & Acclaim

Lena Dunham receive great acclaim for her HBO series, “Girls.” She is the first female director to win the Directors Guild of America's directorial award in comedy. Lena was nominated for eight Emmy awards for the series and won two Golden Globes including one for best actress in “Girls.”

Hollywood

Lena Dunham lived in New York City but often had work to do in Los Angeles. She experienced the inequality that women in Hollywood face. Despite her phenomenal success, she was subject to veiled threats and put-downs by men who tried to control her through power and sex. A friend of hers in Hollywood referred to the old lechers in



Hollywood as the “sunshine stealers.” Len didn’t cave to any of them. When she’s eighty and when everyone she knows in Hollywood is dead she wants to write a book about the real Hollywood and name names.

Therapy

Lena suffered most of her life from fear that she could not quite define. Even as a little girl, she was worried about the food she ate and diseases she might be catching. It was debilitating to her social and family life and education. Her parents placed her into intensive therapy where she was diagnosed with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. She was on medication for many years to combat the effects of the disorder. She stayed in some form of therapy throughout her late teens. She eventually was able to do without medication and without therapy and recognize the warning signs when the condition was once again rearing its ugly head.



Themes

Sex

“Not That Kind of Girl” is the memoir of author Lena Dunham. From her childhood Lena had a difficult time feeling that she fit in. She was average-sized until after she started her period which was between eighth grade and her first year of high school. She began to steadily gain weight, and with her love of food she was soon overweight, something that she has struggled with ever since.

As a young teenager, it doesn't take much to feel ugly or like a misfit. Lena already had already felt like that for years. So when she gained weight on top of her already wounded self-esteem, she felt totally unattractive and unappealing. The remarks from kids at school only reinforced the worse feelings about herself. It was the perfect storm and led to her seeking sex with the wrong guys and then equating sex with love and caring. Lena wanted to find out who she was and where she belonged, but journeying down a path to find it through sex with always the wrong type of guy did little to further her pursuit of self.

Lena wanted to be recognized for the talents and abilities that she knew she had. She had a sharp comedic wit and the ability to express herself in the written word with great success. However, those talents paled in her mind because she was “unlovable.” What she wanted most of all was to be loved by what she perceived to be a desirable boy or man. Lena did not realize how vulnerable she was but her fragility was very transparent. Her vulnerability drew the wrong kind of guy who she ultimately recognized as “jerks.” But even after she realized that her choice of men were those who used and exploited her, it was difficult for her to distance herself from them. She was under the mistaken idea that having sex with someone she barely knew would lead to real love.

Self-Esteem

From a small child through adulthood and even through her great successes which she achieved before the age of 30, Lena Dunham continually suffered from a lack of self-esteem. Even in the primary grades, she felt she didn't fit in. She didn't have friends and didn't know how to make them. Although she didn't excel at school because she hated it, it was impossible to hide her talents and gifts from her teachers. In the fifth grade, she was already a good writer. But a 10-year-old does not generally consider being able to write well that important. What was important to Lena was having friends and having fun, but she didn't know how to do either.

At first blush one would think that being a gifted child is a real blessing. In the big picture, it is a blessing. However, the young gifted child has several adult-sized issues to deal with, issues that they are ill-prepared to handle or even recognize. Teachers often have an issue although unexpressed with gifted children because they upset their



curriculum. They race ahead of the rest of the class and the teacher is left with the problem of what to do with the kid. Also, kids quickly see who the smart kids are and that's not always the best label to have when you're ten. There is jealousy and accusations of being teacher's pet or a goody-two-shoes who always finishes the test first. The gifted kid quickly senses the animosity and is not flattered by the jealousy. All she gleans from this behavior is that she is different and that the other kids don't like her. As gifted as Lena obviously is, she suffered from the "sin" of being the smart one.

By the time she got to high school she had gained quite a bit of weight which, in the world appearance obsession, did not help her self-esteem; in fact, it just added another layer onto it. Every child is faced with feelings of being left out and not being as good as other kids. Lena just had a double dose of it. Her sense of humor, intelligence and achievements, along with some therapy, helped her get through much of it. But one's self-worth can never be considered fixed forever. It's something that Lena and everyone else has to work at maintaining and strengthening despite whatever the successes the individual is able to attain.

Exhibitionism

Even though Lena had an issue with her appearance and was overweight from 13 years of age on, she had no problem with being nude. And not just being nude with herself or another person. She felt perfectly fine stripping and being completely nude for the millions of viewers of the HBO hit series, "Girls."

When she first pitched the script, her concept for "Girls" was positively received. The producers were looking for a story about young women her age. They were pursuing a kind of coming-of-age story about women who were younger and more daring than the slightly older women in "Sex and the City." There was one caveat, however, they wanted the story to be not only real but also daring. Lena had no problem with that and she took them at their word.

It seems that Lena's issues with self-image and being willing to strip naked for the TV cameras and millions of viewers are at odds with one another. Lena felt that her comfort with exhibitionism may have come from her mother who she was sure invented the first "selfie" with a Nikon camera and a full-length mirror. Additionally, Lena always had an interest in nudity. It seemed natural to her. As far as the series was concerned, she felt that her body was just a tool to tell the story. It didn't matter what her body looked like.

After the show aired, she was annoyed when so many people told her how brave she was. She knew what they meant: she was brave to go naked with such a fat body.

Humor

It's not a secret that Lena Dunham has a way with words. She is an award-winning writer and an accomplished creative force among today's young comedy writers. Not surprisingly, her book is filled with funny anecdotes and witty commentary even when



she writes about serious issues such as self-image, depression, sexual abuse and disease.

Lena describes a number of not so pleasant sexual experiences she had in college. She was looking for herself in all the wrong places and hooking up with all the wrong guys or “jerks” as she referred to them. But she loved her “jerks” and couldn’t get enough of them despite the fact that they humiliated her, exploited her and emotionally abused her. Even in the retelling of these incidents, Lena uses humor to take some swipes at both herself and the guys.

In one incident, she was so drunk that she was not certain exactly what went on but she was fairly sure she’d been raped. Later when she was developing story ideas for TV shows and movies, she pitched the maybe-rape incident to a producer who sternly told her that rape was not funny in any sense of the word. In one incident, she was in London at the home of a young playwright she was trying to impress. The “home” was really a mansion with endless halls and rooms. She had too much wine and threw up – not in the privacy of the bathroom but rather right on the Persian rug in the main room where the playwright and all her many guests had gathered. No one felt bad except Lena. Although she wasn’t laughing at the time, she told the story with self-deprecating humor that made the vomiting incident hilarious.

Lena’s gift is telling a story in a unique and succinct way and always with a twist of humor.

Lists

Lists of “things” is a motif that appears throughout, “Not That Kind of Girl” by Lena Dunham. Naturally, they are all funny and cleverly written. They are all lists of things that Lena has learned, said or thinks.

Lena has a list entitled, “18 Unlikely Things I’ve Said Flirtatiously.” Some examples from this list are “Not to sound like a total hippie, but I cured my HPV with acupuncture,” and “I once woke up in the middle of sex with a virtual stranger!”

She lists “15 Things I’ve Learned from My Mother” which includes quips like, “Barbie’s disfigured. It’s fine to play with her just so long as you keep that in mind,” and “It’s okay to ignore the dress code if you’re an ‘artist.’ People will think you’re operating on a higher plane and feel suddenly self-conscious.”

Lena has another list, “13 Things I’ve Learned Are Not Okay to Say to Friends,” which includes, “She’s chubby in a different way than we are” and “No, please don’t apologize. If I had your mother I’d be a nightmare, too.”

Lena also lists, “10 Reasons Why I Love New York,” with “Because the rules are really more like suggestions,” and “Because everything is everyone’s business, but every story starts with, ‘There I was, minding my own business...’”

A couple of examples from “17 Things I Learned from My Father,” are “Drunk emotions are real emotions,” and “Men, watch out: the ladies are coming for your toys.”

The lists serve as a break to the narrative and help with pace.



Styles

Structure

“Not That Kind of Girl” by Lena Dunham is a memoir of Lena’s life and is written in a series of anecdotes. It is an episodic retelling of parts of Lena’s life and is not organized in a chronological manner. She writes about college life in one paragraph and then shifts to something that happened to her in the second grade. Rather than telling the story of her life from beginning to her current age (late 20s), she uses the anecdotes to make her point and to draw parallels and comparisons between incidents that occurred at different times of her life. She does not concern herself with what order or sequence the retelling is in. The reader has to be prepared for the disorganization of the narrative relative to chronology.

Lena uses two epigraphs at the beginning of the book – one from Madame Bovary by Gustave Flaubert and the other from her father. In the “Introduction” she describes the lead up to and the inspiration for her book. There are five main sections including, Section I: Love & Sex; Section II: Body; Section III: Friendship; Section IV: Work; and, Section V: Big Picture.

Throughout the book are cartoon-like drawings that illustrate the topic that Lena is writing about. She also includes a number of “list” of things she’s learned, thinks or has done.

At the conclusion of the book there is “A Guide to Running Away for Nine-Year-Old Girls,” an “Acknowledgements” section and an “About the Author” section.

Perspective

“Not That Kind of Girl” by Lena Dunham is a non-fiction memoir about Lena’s life, her struggles with fitting in, issues with self-esteem and battles to discover her purpose and who she was. It’s a coming-of-age kind of story that is written in the first person from Lena’s perspective. No one else could have written this story with as much conviction and intimate knowledge of experiences and the feelings and reactions she had to them.

Lena Dunham is an extremely successful young writer, actress and director. She is the creator of the critically acclaimed “Girls” series on HBO. She’s been nominated for numerous awards including Emmys and Golden Globes for her acting, writing and directing. She was the first woman to win the award for directorial achievement in comedy from the Directors Guild of America. Lena Dunham attained this high level of success after emerging from a childhood that was wrought with experiences that convinced her that she didn’t measure up. Obviously, she got past at least some of that.

That Lena is a comedic actress and comedy writer comes through the pages of “Not That Kind of Girl.” Her perspective on events – good and bad – that were part of her life



is unique and her interpretation of events usually contains surprising twists of humor that the reader doesn't see coming. Since Lena includes many incidents that illustrate her weaknesses and flaws, the reader can be sure that her story is written with honesty and from the heart.

Tone

Lena Dunham is a well-known and award-winning writer and actress. Her most successful credit to date is "Girls" that was a series on HBO. Although the accounts of her sexual encounters are told in a tongue-in-cheek manner, some of it is quite graphic and could border on the erotic. She describes in some detail having sex with multiple partners. Her language often matches the level of her descriptive narrative. Readers beware.

Lena tells the story of her childhood, adolescence and young adulthood in a straightforward and direct manner. The story rings true because she tells relates the details of many humiliating and embarrassing experiences that no one would make up about themselves.

While many of the stories are funny, a sadness tinged with regret comes through during her account of some of them. She is abused, used and exploited in many cases. She's the clown who puts on the happy face yet there is an underlying poignancy, even pathos, that at times emerges.

Lena broaches some serious issues while using her comedic skills. She writes about her struggles with self-esteem issues, sexual abuse and obsessive-compulsive disorder with a twist of humor, but her gift of expression always allows her to get her point across.



Quotes

For a long time, I wasn't sure if I liked sex. I liked everything that led up to it: the guessing, the tentative loaded interactions, the stilted conversation on the cold walks home, looking at myself in the mirror in someone else's closed-sized bathroom... but sex itself was a mystery.

-- Lena (I paragraph Page 18)

Importance: This captures Lena's obsession with and confusion about sex. It illustrates her immaturity. She was playing a game rather than just living, doing.

When someone shows you how little you mean to them and you keep coming back for more, before you know it you start to mean less to yourself.

-- Lena (I paragraph Page 58)

Importance: Lena captures the essence of self-worth. Her penchant for being attracted to "jerks" as she puts it was not leading to good self-esteem.

I have uttered the words 'I love you' to precisely four men, not including my father, uncle, and assorted platonic neurotics I go to the movies with.

-- Lena (I paragraph Page 74)

Importance: Lena injects humor into her thin romantic history. The words were important to her and she just didn't spew them without meaning which, she found out, many people do.

Both of our credit cards were declined at the health-food store. Wherever you go, there you are.

-- Lena (I paragraph Page 77)

Importance: Lena makes the point that a person cannot escape from himself no matter how good the purpose.

I am thinking particularly of a shower I took where the lower half of my body was under the running water and the upper half was laid out on the bath mat, eating a loaf of bread.

-- Lena (II paragraph Page 90)

Importance: This quote is a taste of Lena's self-deprecating humor. She developed an eating disorder while in high school. This quote illustrates the level of her obsession.

Why spend \$200 once a week on therapy when you can spend \$150 once a year on a psychic?

-- Lena's mother (II paragraph Page 113)



Importance: Like mother like daughter. This quote captures the great sense of humor that Lena's mother had and obviously inherited.

I've never wanted to be with women so much as I wanted to be them: there are women whose career arc excites me, whose ease of expression is impressive, whose mastery of party banter has me simultaneously hostile and rapt.

-- Lena (III paragraph Page 128)

Importance: Lena's issues with self-esteem surfaced in many ways. One way they expressed themselves in her admiration for other women. She wanted "to be them." There were problem many who wanted to have a hit TV show like Lena did, but Lena didn't think that way.

In the cab to her house, we talk. About why we write, what its purpose is when she says, 'the world is full of so much stuff we can't fix.' 'And in our work, we create a better or clearer universe,' I tell her breathlessly. 'Or at least one that makes more sense.

-- Nellie/Lena (III paragraph Page 135)

Importance: Lena and Nellie, who is a playwright, discuss why they write. Lena admires Nellie and is hoping to impress her. Lena had never talked to anyone so intimately about her career – especially someone her own age.

He told me that popular kids never grow up to be interesting and that interesting kids are never popular.

-- Lena (IV paragraph Page 163)

Importance: Nathan, who was Lena's fifth grade teacher, sensed that Lena didn't fit in with the other kids. He also recognized her writing talent even at that young age. He was trying to encourage her to follow her natural abilities and not worry about the other kids. She will leave them in her dust.

I'm going to write when I'm eighty. You know, once everyone I've met in Hollywood is dead. It will be a look back at an era when women in Hollywood were treated like the paper thingies that protect glasses in hotel bathrooms – necessary but infinitely disposable.

-- Lena (IV paragraph Page 192)

Importance: Lena is dispelling the myth that women are treated equally in Hollywood. Even though Lena did succeed she was the exception to the rule. As talented as she was, she had barriers placed before her that men in similar levels of achievement did not have to contend with.

I walked into the kitchen, laid my head on the table and asked my father, 'How are we supposed to live every day if we know we're going to die?' ... 'You just do.

-- Lena/Lena's father (V paragraph Page 219)

Importance: Lena's paternal grandmother had just died. It was the first time Lena had



seen her father cry. Lena had always been spooked out by death. She was looking for answers from her father but he had none.

If my behavior that first summer at camp was the only evidence a psychiatrist had to go on, they would have diagnosed me as a fast-cycling bipolar. My emotions vacillated wildly, from joy to despair to disdain of my fellow campers.

-- Lena (V paragraph Page 233)

Importance: Lena describes the trauma of her camp experience as only she can. Her experiences at camp went from harrowing to the sublime.



Topics for Discussion

Topic 1

Describe the thinking behind Lena's "bed sharing" years. What was the motivation behind her establishment of this innovative way to approach relationships? Describe the pros and cons and whether or not it was successful for her.

Topic 2

What kind of relationship did Lena have with Igor? Why did Igor refuse to meet Lena? What were the circumstances of his "death" and was his death real? How could this incident be used as a teachable moment for kids and electronic relationships?

Topic 3

What was Lena's attraction to, as she called them, "jerks?" What in Lena's psychological make-up led her to be attracted to this type of boy? Describe how a relationship with a "jerk" can be damaging.

Topic 4

Describe the two times in Lena's life that she felt cool. What image was Lena trying to portray when she joined the staff of the Grape and what duties did she have there?

Topic 5

How did Lena's weight gain impact her? Describe Lena's on-going battle with weight gain and how the comic strip "Cathy" and her mother's nutritionist affected her battle with obesity.

Topic 6

Define obsessive-compulsive disorder. How did the condition impact Lena? What symptoms did she display?

Topic 7

What was positive about Lena's relationship with her fifth grade teacher, Nathan? What was negative? Did the positive balance out the negative and what were signs that it was heading down the wrong path?



Topic 8

What was Lena's theory about nudity and exhibitionism as it related to her TV series? What explains her lack of self-esteem about her body yet her eagerness to strip naked in front of the cameras for a show that would be seen by millions without the blink of an eye?

Topic 9

How did HBO executives react to Lena's pitch about her idea for a TV series? What was HBO looking for in the series and what did it stress to Lena about the tone of the series?

Topic 10

Describe Lena's three experiences at camp. Why did Lena, who was afraid of everything, insist that she was going to be first to jump off the cliff into the river? How did that episode turn out and what did she learn?