



Highly Illogical Behaviour

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[Rebecca Butler](#) [3]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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Lisa Prayter is a model student at a Californian high school, getting top grades and playing an active part in school life. She is set on gaining admission to Woodlawn University, which has an excellent course in psychology.

To enter Woodlawn, Lisa needs a scholarship. To win the scholarship she needs to write an outstanding essay under the heading of her experience of mental illness. An appropriate subject is at hand.

Some years earlier a boy named Solomon Reed had a panic attack and immersed himself in the school fountain. Thereafter Solomon left school and was educated at home, relying heavily on the Internet to teach himself. Lisa determines to find Solomon and use him as the topic for her essay. Crucially, Solomon is not to be told why Lisa has an interest in him or how she plans to use him.

Whaley's novel, told from two contrasting viewpoints, now becomes the story of a triangular relationship involving Lisa, Solomon and Clark, who is Lisa's boyfriend. The reader also learns that Solomon has become agoraphobic. Will he learn to venture into the world?

I do have a serious problem with the ethical stance adopted by Lisa. Though she is superficially a kind and thoughtful person, she is shown as exploiting Solomon as a research subject in a manner that is cold and self-centred. Any university ethics manual will tell a researcher that obtaining the subject's informed consent is absolutely mandatory, not a matter for tactical debate. Is no teacher available to supervise her research? I fear that as presented, young readers may be led to believe that Lisa's stratagem is merely of questionable morality. It is not. It is a flagrant violation of the researcher's code and should have been signalled as such.

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