



CASE STUDY #21: VICTORIA (The Queen)

The girl who had it all was one of my numerous summer jobs. I worked as a counselor/teacher in a psychiatric hospital in the high school ward. It was challenging and rewarding at the same time. One patient stood out in my memory because of her uniqueness. We'll call her Victoria as in "The Queen".

Even though a male educator is never supposed to notice the physical appearance of his female students; her ravishing beauty made that impossible. I'll spare you the description but simply stated she could most certainly be a model, an actress, a beauty queen or anything she desired. That would be enough to elevate her above 98% of the women I've encountered but beauty wasn't her only gift. She was an excellent student, a brilliant conversationalist, humble, kind, generous and well liked by her peers. You probably would have the same questions I had: What was she doing there?

A visit to the patient's folder revealed that the girl who had it all was cutting her arms with a razor blade! What? Why? When?... It makes no sense but when you reflect on Where we were, the location says it all. She is having serious mental health issues.

In the early 90s journals tell us that roughly 3% of the patients of the clinic where I worked were there because of cutting. Current studies put the number at over 24%. Cutting is now one of the most prevalent conditions studied in the field of teenage mental health among girls.

The DMS-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders; for those not familiar with the "bible" of the head-shrinking business) has a new listing to encompass cutting and other such behaviors. It's labeled "NSSI": short for Non-Suicidal Self-Injury. For more information, search the web for girls who cut themselves.

I wasn't able to follow Victoria's story as school began in the fall ending my assignment at the hospital. I can only hope that she was able to find the help she needed. All the research and literature emphasizes the necessity for "cutters" to seek medical attention ASAP...As soon as discovered.

Note to counselors, PE teachers and other educators:

Consider requesting to see the forearms of any girls who always present covered arms. If they ask why or decline, tell them that you are a mandated reporter and could lose your job if you didn't see proof of an incision-free arm. If they bring up counselor/client privilege say "I do this because I must and also I want to be part of your solution; not part of your problem." I've gone so far as saying: "Right now I need to be your counselor. When you get help I can return to being one of your many friends."