

Anomie in *The Bell Jar*: The Sociology of a Novel by Sylvia Plath



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Plot Description of *The Bell Jar*

Esther Greenwood is a high-achieving young woman who falls into a descent of depression. *The Bell Jar* chronicles her journey to recover from depression.

Thesis

The sociological imagination and sociology theories will further enhance the study of suicide in the novel *The Bell Jar*.

Works Cited

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Results

"To the person in the bell jar, blank and stopped as a dead baby, the world itself is a bad dream" (237). The bell jar represents how isolated from the world Esther is and many depressed people are. Mental illness can separate one from the world. Esther is treated with shock treatment and traumatized by the experience.

Anomie: a lack of stability caused by a breakdown of societal norms. Esther lives in anomie; she is trying to break down the patriarchy.

Emile Durkheim has 4 types of suicide: anomic, egoist, fatalist, and altruistic. Of these, Esther primarily fits the descriptions of anomic suicide and egoist suicide. Egoist suicide is characterized by a feeling of detachment from society and lack of strong support from society.

Dramaturgy Theory: The world is a stage, and we are all actors. Esther performs differently for different audiences. She convinces people for a long time that she is not depressed with her front stage performance. This façade further isolates her.

"I knew that Catholics thought killing yourself was an awful sin. But perhaps, if this was so, they might have a good way to persuade me out of it." Esther does not have a particular religion. People lacking a religion have higher suicide rates.