

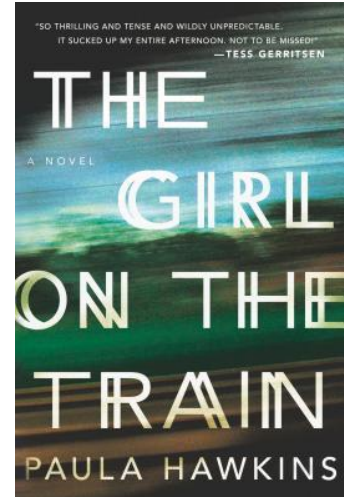


Discussion Questions for The Girl on the Train by Paula Hawkins

These discussion questions were prepared by the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) for the *Reader with a Cause* book club on Goodreads.

If you like our questions please feel free to use them – and don't forget to join the conversation online at:

https://www.goodreads.com/topic/group_folder/290827?group_id=114966



1. The End.

What did you think of the book? Did it change how you felt about Rachel, Megan, or any of the other characters? How did it affect the way you thought about all of the events leading up to this moment? Did you guess how it would end?

2. Technology-facilitated Abuse

In this book, we were floored by the levels of control and deception that characters chose to engage in around technology:

“The behaviour you’re describing -- reading your emails, going through your Internet browser history -- you describe all this as though it is commonplace, as though it is normal. It isn’t, Megan. It isn’t normal to invade someone’s privacy to that degree. It’s what is often seen as a form of emotional abuse.” (59)

Technology is simply one method that abusers will use to assert or maintain power and control over another person - we would take the quote above one step further and say that it's a form of emotional abuse, which is a component of domestic violence.

What do you think?



3. Women in Suspense

The suspense/thriller genre is heavily male-dominated and often caters to the male gaze. How does *The Girl on the Train*, and similar thrillers such as *Gone Girl*, challenge typical tropes and suspense narratives that tend to leave out, eroticize, or minimize women's voices?

4. Motherhood

Motherhood is a strong recurring theme throughout *The Girl on the Train*.

One of Rachel's deepest disappointments is that she can't have children, a fact that she blames the dissolution of her marriage on: "*Nobody warned me it would break us. But it did. Or rather, it broke me, and then I broke us.*" (78)

Her despair leads her to believe that "*women are still only really valued for two things -- their looks and their role as mothers.*" (79)

What do you think about women & motherhood? How do you think motherhood affected the characters' decisions in TGOTT?

5. The Good Guy Myth

All too often, when horrific crimes occur, the media drums up interviews with neighbors and friends who say that the person they know "would never hurt a fly." We see it in TGOTT when Rachel observes, "*I can't believe [Scott] would have hurt her. I know that he wouldn't. I've seen them together; I know what they're like together.*" (66)

We know that it's impossible to know what's happening in a relationship from the outside - yet when crimes occur, you hear this refrain nearly every time. Why do you think this is?



6. Statistics are People

About halfway through the book, Rachel has an epiphany:

“I am ashamed now of the secret thoughts I had. Megan is not a mystery to be solved, she is not a figure who wanders into the tracking shot at the beginning of a film, beautiful, ethereal, insubstantial. She is not a cipher. She is real.” (106)

All too often, it’s easy to forget that each data point is representative of an individual’s life. Their experience. The 1 in 4 women who experience domestic violence are real people.

Why do you think it’s so easy to forget the human side of statistics?

7. Addiction and Domestic Violence

Rachel’s addiction plays a major part in the storyline, and in her relationship with Tom. Near the end of the book, she has a staggering realization:

“I kept thinking about that night...One day I was standing there -- it was evening and I was coming out of the bedroom and I just stopped, because I remembered. I was on the floor, my back to the wall, sobbing and sobbing, Tom standing over me, begging me to calm down, the golf club on the carpet next to my feet, and I felt it, I felt it. I was terrified. The memory doesn’t fit with the reality, because I don’t remember anger, raging fury. I remember fear.” (230)

Sadly, addiction can often be used against victims of domestic violence. In what ways do you think prejudices about mental health or addiction hinder women’s access to resources or support, in particular when seeking support for domestic violence?

8. Leading Cause of Death during Pregnancy?

Do you know what the leading cause of death is during pregnancy in the United States? Homicide.



“If he thought it was his baby, it gives him motive, doesn’t it?” He wouldn’t be the first man to get rid of an unwanted child by getting rid of its mother -- although I don’t say that out loud.” (205)

This statistic is shocking and doesn’t get nearly the attention it deserves. Why do you think women’s lives are considered so expendable? How can we change this attitude?

9. Domestic Violence in The Girl on the Train

By the end of *The Girl on the Train*, it becomes clear that this is a clear case of domestic violence:

“Let’s not start rewriting history. I was good to you. Sometimes...well, sometimes you forced my hand. But I was good to you. I took care of you,” he says, and it’s only then that it really registers: he lies to himself the way he lies to me. He believes this. He actually believes that he was good to me.” (306)

“He’s a master at it, making me feel as though everything is my fault, making me feel worthless.” (315)

We see emotional abuse, physical abuse, and technology-facilitated abuse. This is a severe case of domestic violence involving an abuser seeking lethal levels of power and control. It made for a page-turning read, but was also a stark reminder that thousands of women are experiencing domestic violence every single day.

Did you think this was a clear case of DV? Why or why not?

10. Why Can’t We Just Trust Women?

The unfounded societal belief that women are incompetent or their judgment, especially pertaining to men, cannot be trusted is a theme that arises in *The Girl on the Train*.

How is this belief challenged or perpetuated, in *The Girl on the Train*?