Susan Dominus discusses the stress and multiple diagnoses of many high school aged girls who go through a rough plague of the tics in the city of Le Roy, NY. Dominus lays out how the stress starts with the young girls and their families and spreads to the school and into the community. It becomes national news which puts even more stress on all three social networks. Dominus shows how fast an outbreak can affect an entire community in multiple ways.

A number of girls come down with the same symptoms: quick spasms, twitching, fainting, and more. Dominus explains how one diagnosis relates the breakout of spasms and jerks as conversion disorder, which meant the girls were unknowingly converting stress into physical symptoms. Because many were involved it can also be considered mass psychogenic, which is like saying mass hysteria. Basically that it’s being caused by high stress and anxiety. Dominus found that all 5 girls she interviewed had one main thing in common: none had stable relationships with their biological fathers. You can see that the stress and anxiety of the girls conditions quickly spread to the immediate families, boyfriends, and boyfriends families when Dominus states the number of doctor visits, emergencies, and television show appearances they were involved in. Dominus discusses how the doctors arguing the diagnosis of mass psychogenic (mass hysteria) argues that the symptoms got worse and more cases emerged once the appearances on televisions shows like Dr. Drew and the Today show made the story bigger and increased the anxiety and stress in the community. She expresses many times how frustrated the parents of the young girls were getting with each diagnosis. They felt their daughters weren’t stressed out. They were great girls with great grades, they had no reason to be stressed out or have anxiety at such a young age.
Dominus describes the parent’s speculation of past environmental issues they may have been swept under the rug during the more industrial time for Le Roy. There was speculation heard around town of what kind of waste Le Roy’s manufacturing plants may have left behind. The elderly residents started to remember stories from years previous that helped the speculation move forward at a rapid pace. Dominus clearly illustrates the secrecy of the city when she writes (talking about Beth Miller – Mother of Katie who has symptoms) “Not long after she started pursuing these leads, someone placed under her doormat documentation about a train accident near Le Roy in 1970, in which tens of thousands of gallons of toxic chemicals were spilled into the soil, including trichloroethylene, a solvent that has been linked, in high levels of exposure, to nervous system damage, among other things.” This quickly led to Miller contacting Erin Brocavich. Dominus makes it seem like the story became even more of a headline after Brocavich was contacted and brought into the mix. Soon after more doctors with more explanations of the symptoms showed up, testing was being turned down and the soil was being guarded by the police. Dominus made it clear that the community became very concerned once the school refused, with police protection, the soil samples that they wanted the results to. You can see that the situation was putting a damper on the city when Dominus explains the decline in real estate sales, 5 basketball games were cancelled because parents from the opposing city didn’t want their children in Le Roy, and local business’ complained that commerce was down.

Rosario Trifiletti thought the girls were suffering from something similar to Pandas (Pediatric Autoimmune Neuropsychiatric Disorders), a disease in which the immune system alters the neurochemistry of young people suffering from strep infection. He revealed on Dr. Drew that all 9 girls tested showed strep exposure or exposure to the organism associated with pneumonia. Dominus explains that these results weren’t conclusive but there was enough there to start the girls on antibiotics and inflammatories. Most showed dramatic signs of improvement and some showed little. They weren’t sure if the antibiotics were working or if they subconsciously mad the girls feel better just like
they could have subconsciously made themselves ill. Dominus does not give a definite conclusion but
does say at the end “Thera would get better. And surely, the other girls would follow.” This shows that
Dominus’ believes that it could very well be mass hysteria among the young girls.