

Analysis of girl, interrupted

Science



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Film Synopsis

Girl, Interrupted is a true memoir based on author Susanna Kaysen's nearly two-year stay in a mental institution during the late 1960s.

Winona Ryder stars as Susanna, an unhappy, upper-middle-class girl who is uncertain about her life after graduating from high school. Her depression, confusion and promiscuity lead her to chase a bottle of aspirin with a bottle of vodka. She insists, however, that she was not trying to kill herself, but had a "headache."

Susanna's parents take her to a psychiatrist, who asks her if she needs a rest, before suggesting she admit herself to Claymoore Mental Hospital. The psychiatrist diagnoses her with borderline personality disorder and depression.

For the most part, the film flip-flops between Susanna's memories of incidents that may have led to her disorder and her interactions with the other mental patients. Susanna soon realizes that the other patients are much worse off than her.

Each character deals with various types of mental disorders caused by previous events in their lives. Polly is a burn victim trying to cope with her disfigurement; Daisy comes from an abnormal, abusive family. She has an odd obsession with chicken and refuses to eat in front of others; and Georgina, Susanna's roommate, who has been diagnosed as a pathological liar.

There is also another main character, Lisa - a veteran of the hospital. She is wild and seems to have sociopathic tendencies. She spends half of her time instigating fights, and embarrassing and scaring the other patients. The other half of her time is spent trying to nurture them in a way. This is shown by the way childlike Polly looks up to Lisa and believes in everything Lisa says. Played by Angelina Jolie, Lisa constantly escapes from the hospital and makes sure everyone sees her as a leader. Lisa even convinces Susanna to slip out one night after Daisy is released. They visit Daisy in her new house and during the visit Daisy ends up committing suicide.

Susanna seems calm throughout the movie, mainly watching and listening to the other patients, especially Lisa. Because of this, it seems Susanna grows stronger throughout the movie and learns from the other girls.

Evaluation of disorders and symptoms

Susanna's symptoms are excellently portrayed as she is mostly confused, while dwelling on her past mistakes. She obviously has low self esteem and almost sees herself as invisible to the outside world.

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) describes the symptoms of borderline personality disorder as experiencing the same mood for weeks, as well as having intense bouts of anger, depression and anxiety. NIMH indicates on its website, www.nimh.nih.gov, this mood may be associated with self-injury and drug or alcohol abuse problems. Susanna experiences bouts of depression and anxiety before and during the beginning of her hospital stay. The mood eventually leads to her failed suicide attempt.

The institute also says that those with personality disorders view themselves as fundamentally bad or unworthy; they feel unfairly misunderstood, bored and empty, and have little idea of who they are.

According to NIMH, sufferers often have unstable patterns of social relationships. Susanna portrays this with her promiscuity and stormy relationship with her parents. She also partakes in risky behavior, partying too much and sleeping with married men.

The supporting characters' symptoms are displayed accurately. Polly experiences extremely low self-esteem and looks for acceptance from everyone because she feels ashamed and devalued after her burn accident. Trauma usually causes deep feelings of sadness, anger and distress.

Georgina, who is characterized as a pathological liar, seems the most "normal" of the bunch. Although, she spends her time telling stories which the others are not sure they should believe. Georgina is eventually discharged during Susanna's stay.

Daisy is a very disturbing character in the unit. She has been sexually abused which has caused her many problems including a possible eating disorder and various serious psychological problems. The effects of the sexual abuse have apparently taken a toll on Daisy. She portrays symptoms common to sexually abused children: Being overly controlling and angry, striving for perfection, fear of having close relationships with other people, obsessive compulsive disorder, as well as eating disorders. Daisy finds it hard to trust anyone, except Lisa, and is reclusive, staying in her room for most of the time.

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Reaction to film

Overall, I thought *Girl, Interrupted* accurately depicted the disorders of which each girl suffered. The flashbacks to previous events in Susanna's life leading up to her stay at Claymoore helped to explain why she developed the disorder. It almost seemed as though the borderline personality disorder affected her wanting to live in the "real world."

I thought she seemed to feel safer in the institution and was able to, at times, forget about her own problems and delve into the others' problems. When she was ready to be released, though, she realized that she does not want to end up like most of the other girls - who will most likely spend the majority of their lives institutionalized.

The film, especially because it is a true story, was educational, thoughtful and somewhat heartbreaking. It provided me with a better understanding of what people suffering from mental illnesses go through in their daily lives.