Girl Interrupted: Susanna Kaysen

Personality Assessment

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PSY 132 Personality Theory

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May 2, 2022

In the film Girl Interrupted, Susanna Kaysen is an 18-year-old girl who grew up in a nice neighborhood where her parents had lots of friends but seems different from the people she is around. Susanna is very confident with wanting to become a writer, which is very out of the norm for women during that time. We learn more about how Susanna was before going to the psychiatric hospital during flashbacks shown in the film. During Susanna's graduation, she was asleep, showing that she did not show interest in getting her diploma, which would be a significant milestone for any other kid. In another flashback during the film, we saw Susanna attending her father's birthday party, and everyone was dressed very well while she was wearing a casual outfit, a plain shirt and jeans. We also find out that Susanna is sleeping with her parents' friend's husband during this party. Then one night, she decides to take aspirin with vodka, and while she is waiting for the effects to happen, she realizes she does not want to die, but it is too late. She was taken to the hospital, which is the movie's opening scene, and she claims she does not have bones in her wrist anymore. This incident made her parents worry for her and sent her to see a friend of theirs and decided it was best for her to go to the women's psychiatric hospital to get treatment. Susanna then experiences many things and makes friends in the process of her stay while also causing trouble due to befriending Lisa Rowe. In this paper, Susanna Kaysen will be the primary person being focused on her Borderline Personality Disorder and how it developed through Rogers Person-Centered Theory.

In the film, Susanna is diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder, which can be tricky to diagnose because it has similarities and differences to mood disorders, and is diagnosed in three steps according to DSM-5 (Biskin, 2012). The first step in this diagnosis is diagnosticians need to provide something called a type rating which is a rating that best describes their client's personality about the borderline type, using a scale from 1 to 5 (Trull, 2010). The

second step of diagnosing Borderline Personality Disorder is rating the client's traits from 0 to 3. They will be rating 10 traits, with negative emotionality being the more critical trait being looked at (Trull, 2010). Then the third step of diagnosing Borderline Personality Disorder is rating the client's personality functioning that is being rated on a five-point scale (Trull, 2010). Going through this diagnosis, Susanna was diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder, which she did not seem happy about when she found out. Susanna was in denial about her disorder and was constantly asking when she would go home, but since she tried to commit suicide and has not recovered yet, there is a possibility that she could try again. In a study, people searched the World Health Statistics Annual to compare age groups in different countries and what they found was that among the total of 1,179, 94 people committed suicide (Pompili, 2005). This study shows that people with Borderline Personality Disorder are at high risk of wanting to take their own lives.

Susanna Kaysen's personality developed around Rogers's Person-Centered Theory. The Rogers Person-Centered Theory is that instead of viewing people as flawed, we look at the person's capacity to grow and change for themselves (Noel, 2018). Before Susanna was put into the mental institute, she was constantly nagged about her choices. In one scene in the film, Susanna is in an office with someone from her school, who explains that she is the only person in her class who is not going to college. The lady asks her what she plans to do with her life, and Susanna tells her she wants to write. The lady scoffs at Susanna's answer and asks the same question again, and Susanna tells her that she does not want to end up like her mom and will not be doing anything crazy she wants to write. She also tells Susanna that there are many options for women now, but Susanna disagrees with her. In another scene during her father's Birthday, Susanna shows up in casual clothing while everyone else is in formal attire. Susanna's mother

sees her when she gets in and is shocked at what Susanna is wearing to her father's birthday party. One of her parent's friends comes up to tell Susanna and her mother that her daughter is going to Radcliffe and tells Susanna and her mother that women should make up their minds. In these scenes, Susanna is constantly being put down by her choices and contradicting their messages of women being able to choose what they want to do. Everyone is looking at her flaws and is trying to fix them, pushing her to go to college or make her wear the appropriate attire to a party. No one ever tried to help her look for resources to become a writer like she wanted or even told her to do whatever made her happy. Not having support from someone supposed to care can make people doubt themselves with whatever they do.

Then Susanna starts to lose her sense of self after becoming friends with Lisa Rowe. When Susanna showed up at the institute, she was fine, polite, and kept to herself. When she started hanging out with Lisa, she started becoming a different person, acting like everyone else in the institute. Susanna starts acting crazy like all her friends to fit in with everyone else because she did not have many friends before going to the institute. Once Lisa is separated from Susanna, she becomes depressed and always asks where she is but is soon put back into her place by one of the nurses, Valerie Owens. Valerie takes Susanna to the bathroom and puts her in a tub. They start arguing about where Lisa went and how terrible the institute is with treating everyone. Valerie tells Susanna she is not crazy and that she is a lazy, self-indulgent little girl making herself crazy. This scene shows a great example of Self-Concept when people find change and significant learning difficult (Feist, 2020). Susanna finds it hard to believe that she could get better because her friends have been there for a long time, so if they have not gotten better yet, how is she any different from them.

Then one night Susanna and Lisa escape from the institute together because Lisa has a plan. They catch a ride into the city with random people who take them to a party where Lisa steals somones wallet. They both go to Dasiys apartment, Susanna is very respectful towards Dsiy and compliments her place while Lisa picks at Dasiy, her apartment and how her father “loves” her and that they amke love and Dasiy likes it.. This makes Susanna very upset because Dasiy is doing a favor for them and also because shes being rude for no reason. Then in the moring Susanna leaves to take a walk and when she comes back Dasiy had a song playing on repeat. When Susanna walks up there she finds out that Dasiy hanged herself. Susanna was very disturaut crying and called 911 to come to Dasiys apartment while Lisa said that Dasiy was dumb for hanging herslef and even stole money form her which she gave to Susanna so they could leave but Susanna decided to stay. Susanna also realized that Dasiy did this because of what Lisa said to her before she went to bed. Susanna is now aware that she dosent want to friends with Lisa and decides to head back to the institute to start recovering. Susanna became aware that Lisa is never going to get better or even try so she decides its best for her to stpe waya and look after herself. When Susanna returns to the institute she has a deep conversation with Valerie about knowing what its like to want to die, how she tries to fit in but cant, and it even hurts to smile. Susanna darts to really open up about her feelings which is what she wanst doing before. Susanna feels sorry for the way she treats Valerie and apologies to her which is a big step to her recovery.

Susanna went through the stages of therapeutic personality change, starting with being defensive or unwilling to talk about themselves, becoming their therapist, and continuing psychological growth outside of a therapeutic setting (Feist, 2020). Susanna starts writing everything she feels in her notebook throughout her days in the institute and talks a lot in her

therapy sessions. Susanna becoming more open with her feelings is an excellent example of therapeutic personality change. Susanna has found a way to express herself, vital in her recovery journey. Once her therapist saw this change in her, they decided she was recovered and was ready to go back home. She was considered a successful client who could fully function in her life (Feist, 2020).

Some of Susanna's strongest characteristics are creativity, intelligence, and trouble. In many scenes in the film, Susanna has shown how creative she is by writing in her notebook, being able to express how she feels and just whatever she is thinking about at that moment. Doing that allowed her to go into society and live out her dream of becoming a writer. The film also showed many instances where Susanna was troubled, like making fun of Valerie when she was dumped into the tub. Susanna was singing an inappropriate song to Valerie, who was not affected by it and proceeded to tell Susanna she was a lazy little girl. Another time Susanna was shown as troubled was when she tried to commit suicide, which she justified as trying to get rid of a headache, which started her journey in the institute.

Since Susanna was diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder, she has faced symptoms like depression, boredom, and emptiness. We can see an example of Susanna facing depression when she and Lisa are separated from each other after they were caught together with the nurse sleeping outside where Polly was staying. Susanna was very close to Lisa because Lisa made her feel special and was a friend to her since she did not have many before going to the institute. However, Susanna did not get Borderline Personality Disorder on her own. It was suggested in the film that it could have been passed down to her from a parent who also has Borderline Personality Disorder. Borderline Personality Disorder can be attained genetically, with an estimated 40% heritability (Amad, 2014). It could be possible that Susanna could have

gotten Borderline Personality Disorder from her mother, which is hinted at in the film when Susanna's parents are talking to Melvin. Susanna makes a joke asking if it is genetic, and Melvins answers that it is 5% more common among those who have a Borderline parent while staring at Susanna's mom, making her end the meeting. So, it could be possible that Susanna's mother also has Borderline Personality Disorder.

Overall, the film Girl Interrupted does a great job portraying what some of these disorders intel and how they might affect people. Susanna Kaysen portrayed how Borderline Personality Disorder affected her and how it might be affecting others. Susanna's character is intelligent, but because she is so young, she is influenced by someone very ill, making her think that what she has is a gift when it is not. Susanna can then realize her mistake by listening to this friend and starts her recovery journey, leading her to be released. Susanna's journey is an excellent example of the Rogers Person-Centered Theory. Susanna was constantly being judged by her choices making her life harder than it already. In the end, she could come out fully capable of treating her disorder and could go back into society as a recovered Borderline.

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