Movie Character Profile: *Girl Interrupted*

By

Carl F. Collins Jr.
Psychology Department
Valdosta State University

for

Psych 3400, Abnormal Psychology
Dr. Katharine Adams
April 19, 2012
**Girl Interrupted** is a 1999 film in which Susanna, a high school senior on the verge of graduating with her class in 1967, is rushed to the Emergency Room because she consumed a whole bottle of Aspirin, followed by a bottle of Vodka. After being treated, Susanna is seen by a friend of her fathers, who is a Psychiatrist who believes that her actions were an attempt at suicide. Susanna, of course denies this, instead stating that she was making an effort to rid herself of a headache. The Psychiatrist recommends that she stay at a mental hospital named Claymore for a rest. While there, Susanna meets a number of individuals with a diverse array of disorders. One individual in particular, Lisa essentially runs the group of girls because they either fear or confide in her. As we later find out, Lisa actually displays the symptoms of the borderline personality disorder, the disorder that Susanna is believed to have (Mangold).

Individuals with borderline personality must be at least 18 years old and display shakiness in all social relationships and the way they see themselves and spontaneous thoughts that must be noticeably disturbed by early adulthood. Strong, often out of the way attempts, at avoiding any type of abandonment is a key element. Should an individual with borderline personality disorder feel abandonment drawing near in their life, their thinking, behavior, and self-image will change drastically. Five of the following nine statements must apply to an individual for them to be diagnosed with borderline personality disorder. 1) Attempts to avoid abandonment, whether it be real or not, 2) unstable relationships with people that are unrealistically amplified to more, or devaluated to less, than what they really are, 3) Identity disturbance that is due to one not having a steady sense of self, 4) Carelessness for oneself in areas such as spending, sex or drug abuse, 5) Frequent suicidal actions or words, 6) Emotional unpredictability due to sensitivity of mood, 7) Enduring feelings of emptiness, 8) Misplaced, and
or difficulty controlling anger, 9) Temporary paranoid thoughts due to stress (Borderline Personality Disorder Resource Center).

In *Girl Interrupted*, Lisa displays unstable relationships with people, difficulty controlling anger, emotional unpredictability, attempts to avoid abandonment, carelessness for oneself and enduring feelings of emptiness, and. Lisa displays a devaluated unstable relationship with Daisy, who is a patient who will not eat in front of other people. While Daisy is eating, or simply wants to be left alone, Lisa will often barge into her room just to annoy her. In a scene that takes place in an ice cream parlor, Susanna is being yelled at by a woman whose husband she had an affair with. Lisa then loses control of her anger and grabs the lady’s wrist violently while yelling at her profanely. Lisa’s emotional unpredictability is displaced, once again, with Daisy. When Lisa and Susanna escape the hospital and flee to Daisy’s apartment, Lisa, knowing Daisy does not want her in her apartment, apologizes for being harsh to her at the hospital, and even gives Daisy a bracelet as a gift. Minutes later Lisa is bashing Daisy for being released from the hospital by bringing up stress related topics such as her father’s money, drug abuse history, sexual acts with the Doctor, and failed suicidal attempts. Lisa’s extreme attempt to avoid Susanna abandoning her, by being released, comes when Lisa steals Susanna’s personal diary and gathers the groups of girls in their hangout spot to read what Susanna wrote about each of them. This almost causes Susanna to have a breakdown which would have made Lisa’s plan to make Susanna stay in the hospital successful. Although no scenes are shown which exhibit such, Lisa is careless sexually. She makes mention of this also towards the end of the movie with statements such as, “…and meanwhile I’m blowing through guys at the bus station”, implying oral sex acts, and “…why doesn’t anybody reach in and rip out the truth and tell me I’m a *explicit* whore?” Finally, Lisa’s feeling of emptiness is shown at the end of the movie when
she chases Susanna down and asks, “…why doesn’t anybody ever press mine [buttons]? Why am I so neglected? Why doesn’t anybody reach in and rip out the truth?” which shows that she feels as though no one cares for her (Mangold).

There are many treatments for borderline personality disorder which include psychotherapy, psychoanalysis such as relational psychoanalytic therapy, and antidepressant, antipolar, antianxiety, and antipsychotic drugs. However, the most empirically supported treatment is Dialectical behavior therapy, or DBT. DBT was derived from the cognitive-behavioral treatment model therefore having many of its techniques. These include homework assignments for the clients, psychoeducation, teaching social skills, therapist modeling, goal setting, and both client and therapist evaluation of the client’s progress and ways of thinking. This treatment makes sure to keep the bond between the client and therapist at the center so that no boundaries are crossed, giving it a hint of the humanistic psychodynamic approach. Clients who undergo this therapy tend to be able to handle stressful life situations better and mature in their social skills. Less suicides and hospital visits are also reported with those who receive DBT (Comer).
Works Cited

