

The Effect of Cruel Punishments in The Mental Hospital To Susanna's Depression in Susanna Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted!*

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ABSTRACT

This paper is basically a study of depression. Through the study on Susanna Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted!*, I intend to analyze the effects of cruel punishment in the mental hospital to Susanna Kaysen, the main character in the novel. In order to fulfill the goal of this thesis, I use psychological theory on depression to analyze the novel. Finally, I conclude that Susanna becomes more depressed after she enters the mental hospital and sees the cruel punishment in there. The cruel punishments can be classified into two groups. They are mental and physical torture. In the novel, Susanna experiences both of them that make her feel more depressed than before she enters the mental hospital. In other words, watching the cruel punishment or torture can make a healthy person becomes depressed and depressed person becomes more depressed. Therefore, a person should avoid watching anything cruel in the television, radio, newspaper, and society so that they will not get depressed or more depressed by it.

Key Words: Psychology, Novel, Depression, symptoms of depression, losing interest to have friend and boyfriend, losing focus, feeling guilty worthless, helpless, and wanting to commit suicide.

The genre I choose is a memoir novel. I choose this genre because this genre is about something that really happens in the writer's life. Moreover, I think reading a memoir novel is more interesting compared to the other genre, such as romance novel which usually only sell dreams to the readers. In line with my argument, Sidone Smith and Julia Watson, the writer of *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, ask: "What could be simpler to understand than the act of people writing about what they know best, their own lives? ("Interesting")". Another comment in line with my argument comes from Samuel Haynes, the author of *The Growing Season: An American Boyhood before the War*, stated: "In this novel, Kaysen has been successful enough in making such a convincing story about her own experience and make the readers get involve emotionally in the story ("Interesting")". These comments show that some people still like to read memoir because it is a convincing and simple story. That is why I want to talk about memoir novel entitled *Girl, Interrupted!* by Susanna Kaysen.

Susanna is very famous American writer. She is a memoir novelist number one according to *Master Sin Health Care Web* who has written so many novels, such as *As I Knew Him* (1987), *Far Afield* (1990), *Girl, Interrupted!* (1993), *Camera My Mother Gave Me* (2001) ("Susanna" par. 1). From all novels that she wrote, *Girl, Interrupted!* and *Camera My Mother Gave Me* were adopted into a film, but compared to the other one, *Girl, Interrupted!* has become the most popular and success novel. The success of *Girl, Interrupted!*, a bestseller novel in America, encourage the best director who has won Oscar several times, James Mangold, to adopt it into a film ("James" par. 2).

I would like to analyze Susanna Kaysen's novel entitled *Girl, Interrupted!* which has been filmed with the same title. This novel is very popular. According to *Master Sin Health Care Web*, it is included on number one from the list of the twenty greatest memoirs of mental illness. That is why when this story was adopted into film, the film also becomes very popular. The main character in this novel is also named Susanna as the author. Since this is a memoir novel, the plot of the story is what Susanna remembers about her own experience in the past.

"*Girl, Interrupted!*" is a story about Susanna Kaysen's experience in the mental hospital after she is sent there by her family after eating 50 aspirins and she also has been diagnosed by her doctor having bipolar syndrome. Bipolar syndrome is one of the mental sicknesses that cause people to experience dramatic change of mood from the lows of depression to the high rate of mania. In one time

when bipolar person is depressed about some problems in life, she can will become an energetic person and have full energy to do something ("Bipolar"). After she lives there, she sees how cruel the nurses are to punish the other patient, Lisa and treat her inhumanly. Moreover, it also tells about the relationship between the doctor, the nurses and the patients there, including how the nurses treat the patients harshly and how the patients response to it ("Girl"). Moreover, before she enters the mental hospital, she feels depressed because the father force her to go to the college. Living inside the mental hospital and watch the cruel punishments happen to almost all of the patient makes Susanna become more depressed. These things make me wonder how these cruel punishments affect the patients in the hospital, especially on how the cruel punishments affect Susanna's depression.

The purpose of this paper is to find out the ways the cruel punishments can make Susanna Kaysen feel more depressed. The significance of this thesis is analyzing the issue of "The Effect of the Cruel Punishments in the Mental Hospital to Susanna's Depression in Susanna Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted!*". By analyzing this issue, I want to reveal that the cruel punishments cannot make the patients in the mental hospital follow the rules and become more diciplined, but the cruel punishment will only make the patients in the mental hospital get more depressed.

In order to analyze this paper, I would like to apply the theory of depression as the main theory which is needed to do the analysis. According to the research findings by Dr. Metin, "Any kind of cruel punishments and tortures can make the victim suffer from MDD ("Major" par. 1). Findings revealed that being held captive in the hostile and life-threatening environment, deprivation of the basic needs, sexual torture, psychological manipulations, humiliation, isolation and so on can cause more psychological damage ("Major" par. 2)".

Dr. Metin Basoglu is the head of depression study in King College in London. He conducts a research related with his field which is depression. One of his researches is about the cruel punishment and torture can influence the victim's psychology even worse than the victim's physiology. He does his research by asking some people who has become the victim of the war. As the victim, they have the experience of being tortured by the soldier. Metin ask them what they feel after the war has finished. Dr. Metin gives them number to choose from one to four. Number one is for less depresses feeling and number four is for the very high rate of depression. When those victims of the war feel less depressed of what they experience, they should choose number one, but when they feel really depressed of what they experience, they should choose number four. As the result, almost all of them choose number four. It means that they feel really depressed after the war. Their depressed rate is even worse than the scars in their body as the result of torture during the war.

After looking at this result, Dr Metin concludes several things. The first, he divided torture or cruel punishments into two groups, mental and physical tortures ("Major" par. 1). Mental torture is when the torturer forbids the victim to drink and eat, force them to see torture action, and isolate them from the outside world. Physical torture happens when the torturer hurts the victim's physic or body, such as giving the electroshock to the victims, hanging the victim's hands, and doing anal or genital torture ("Major" par. 2). Both mental and physical tortures can affect the victim's psychology, but the effects of mental tortures are more dangerous for the victim's psychology compares to the physical tortures. Mental tortures need more time to heal than the physical tortures. Even when the physical torture's signs are gone but the victim still feels trauma and feels depressed because of their experience of being tortured mentally.

In the novel *Girl, Interrupted!* Susanna Kaysen is being tortured mentally every times she sees the patient who tries to rebel the rules in the mental hospital tortured both physically and mentally as their punishment because of what they have done. The patients being torture physically by pulling their hair to the back, grabbing their arms tightly, isolating them in the seclusion room for several days without any food or drink, giving them an electroshock, putting something to the patient's mouth to keep them silent, and injecting something to the patient's body that makes them ill. Not only being tortured physically, but the patients in the mental hospital are also being torture mentally by calling them with the name of an animal, scared them with the words that makes them feel scared, answering their question with anger, and avoiding to touch the patients as if the patients have very dangerous sickness and doing the physical torture to one patient in front of Susanna and the others in order to encourage fear inside the victim, including Susanna. According to Dr. Metin, encouraging fear inside the victim can certainly causes depressive feeling for the victim who in this story is Susanna Kaysen.

In order to analyze this paper, I use depression theory, especially on the symptoms of depression. Depression is a normal response to lives stresses (Brennecke, 1978, p.138). Depression is painful and no one likes it, but still it is the normal response to the stresses in lives. In the novel *Girl, Interrupted!*, Susanna also feels depressed because she can do nothing to go out from the hospital and to stop watching the nurses torture the patients in the mental hospital. Moreover, she becomes even more depressed and afraid after knowing that one of the patients in the mental hospital, named Daisy decided to kill herself because she also often being tortured in front of her friends.

Depression has seven symptoms, including having difficulty to sleep or insomnia, early-morning wakefulness, or excessive sleeping, feeling aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems that do not ease even with treatment, losing interest in doing activities or hobbies once pleasurable, including sex, the difficulties on concentrating, remembering details, and making decisions, feeling anger, feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness, and thinking of suicide or suicide attempts. These symptoms usually appear gradually (Depressive Disorder, 2002, p. 37).

In the *Girl, Interrupted!*, Susanna Kaysen has four symptoms of depression that appear gradually, such as losing interest in making friends, meeting and having a boyfriend, losing concentration, feeling of guilty, worthlessness, and helplessness, and wanting to commit suicide. In the novel, first, Susanna loses her interest to mingle with friend and meet her boyfriend. Second, she often loses her concentration or focus when she communicates with somebody. Third, she starts to feel worthless and helpless because she cannot even help herself for not seeing cruel punishments that make her depressed. At the end, she wants to commit suicide several times, but by the end of the story, she cannot do it because of the strict supervision of the nurses to her as the patient in the mental hospital.

The first symptom Susanna experiences is she loses interest to make with friends, meet her boyfriend, and even have a boyfriend. When people are depressed, they become different people. They can hate what they love to do before the depression. They have no desire anymore to do their hobbies. It seems like no one and not a thing, including their hobbies, can make them feel the happiness again.

The second symptom Susanna experiences is she begins to have the difficulty to focus or concentrate, remembering details, and making decision. People can be depressed because they only think about their problems. They never think about the solution or may fail to think about the solution. They only focus on their problems and their failure to solve it. That is why when someone wants to communicate with them, they have to repeat it several times to get response or when somebody talks about a topic, their answer is unrelated with the topic they discussed (Depressive Disorder, 2002, p. 25-26).

The third symptom Susanna experiences is feeling of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness. People get depressed when they have already done so many efforts to get what they really want to get, but they still fail. This failure of reaching something can encourage people to feel guilty, worthless, or helpless. People can blame themselves for the failure that they experience. They can think that they are no good in everything or worthless. They also usually feel that nobody want to help them solve their problem. They will feel lonely and depressed (Depressive Disorder, 2002, p. 24-25).

The last symptom Susanna experiences is the thought of suicide or suicidal attempts. The depressed people feel depressed when they fail in solving their problem. Their failure can cause them to feel useless and because they always think that they are useless. When they are dead, their failure to solve is gone. They cannot enjoy the world they live in. That is why the depressed people must ever think to kill themselves to stop the pain that they feel (Depressive Disorder, 2002, p. 36).

Losing Interest in Having a Boyfriend, Meeting her Boyfriend, and Making Friend with Others.

Before Susanna enters the mental hospital and sees the cruel punishments, she loves her boyfriend so much. That fact can be seen in the quotation from the novel: "I had a boyfriend named Johnny who wrote me love poem—good ones" (Kaysen, 1993, p. 12). From this quotation, I can see clearly how much she loves her boyfriend. It is all becomes different when she enters the hospital and watches the nurses punish the other patient cruelly in front of her eyes. I believe that the nurses punish the patients in front of others, including Susanna, on purpose which is to encourage fear and depressed feeling for those who are watching. After watching the cruel punishments happen every day in front of her, she begins to lose her interest to meet her boyfriend. It is proven by Susanna rejection to run away with her boyfriend, just after she saw the nurses punish the other patient named Lisa cruelly, as it is written on the novel, like this:

I was so afraid and suddenly a nurse came in to tell me.

"You've got a visitor," the nurse said. "A man."

"Jim!" I said.

"Look at that. You and me, we could leave to England". He pointed at his car.

"England? With you? I cannot be with you again. I'm here now, Jim and I've got to stay here.

Sorry, but I can't meet you again" I said (Kaysen, 1993, p. 6).

By looking at the quotation, the effect from watching the nurses torturing the other patient named Lisa is that Susanna becomes afraid and more depressed. She feels afraid and more depressed because she thinks it is possible for her to be tortured like that someday. Furthermore, not only rejects the boyfriend's offer to run away with him, she also rejects to meet her boyfriend. Her depression makes her lose interest to meet her boyfriend, which is the beginning of depression syndrome. As the result of not meeting with her boyfriend, she breaks up with him.

Not only does she lose her interest in meeting boyfriend, but Susanna also loses her interest in making friends. She is too afraid of being punished by the nurses. That what makes her feel more depressed and because of her depressed feeling; she likes to stay in her room to avoid the nurses rather than to mingle with others. Her depression makes Susanna lose her interest to make friends as it can be seen from the following quotation:

One day, though, I decided to take a walk around the hospital and suddenly Wade comes and talks a story about him again. I have to admit I didn't believe a word of what Wade said, so I leave him as soon as I can. After all, seeing Wade remind me of what happened yesterday when Wade started yelling about his family hysterically and then the nurses came to give him something that makes him fall asleep and then put him to the seclusion room. (Kaysen, 1993, p. 11-12).

This quotation happens after she lives several months in the hospital and sees the nurses give cruel punishment to the patients every day. This moment happens when Susanna decides to walk around the hospital in her free time, but suddenly, Wade, one of the patients in the mental hospital, joins with her and tells her a story of her life. Susanna, who loses her interest to make friends, does not have any interest to listen to Wade's impossible story, so she leaves Wade quickly to go to her own room. From this quotation, I can know that Susanna remembers how the nurses torture Wade physically by giving him sleeping pill. Remembering about how the nurses treat the other patients badly make her feel depressed and she begins to lose her interest to make friend with others.

Having Difficulties to Focus

After losing the interest in making friends and meeting the boyfriend, the depressed person like Susanna will start to have difficulty in concentrating or focusing on something. In the *Girl, Interrupted!*, Susanna Kaysen loses her focus on the conversation several times because she always thinks or she replays the moment when the nurses torture the other patients in front of her eyes. This is what Dr. Metin calls as a mental torture.

In order to strengthen this argument, I would like to quote some stories from the book about the way Susanna loses her concentration:

"Hello?", I said again.

"Susanna?", said the voice from the telephone.

"Hi, mum", I answered my mom.

"Hi, honey. Your father's on too...", my mother is talking.

During the phone call, Daisy complains loudly and yells at some nurses, "Oh, god! Valerie! Valerie please, if you can't give me any ExLax, can I please have some Colace? Please?". "Can you just shut your mouth up? You are fucking crazy dog. I wouldn't give you anything of that kind, understand me?", Vallerie grabs her arm and pulls her hair to the back. Susanna is not paying attention to the conversation with her mother on the telephone anymore but her attention has been distracted by how the nurse treated Daisy badly (Kaysen, 1993, p. 11).

From the quotation, Susanna's attention is distracted by watching at the nurse who shouts at Daisy. At first, she can focus on the conversation with her mom, but then her focus is dictacted by the nurse who treats Daisy cruelly. When the nurse named Vallerie gives Daisy physical torture, Susanna feels depressed, and then she starts to lose her attention with her mother in the telephone.

This kind of distraction can happen to both the sane people and insane people. When this kind of distraction happens to sane people, they will lose their focus for a while, and then they will be able to get their focus back to what they are doing. They do not have to think much about it because it will not happen to them anyway. Different from the sane people, the depressed person, like Susanna will be distracted very much by this kind of distraction and it will need more time for her to get her focus back to what she is doing. This happens because she is not just seeing Daisy being tortured by the nurses, but she is also aware with the possibility for her being tortured like Daisy someday. Moreover, it is so hard for a depressed person as Susanna to be focused on one thing because the experience of seeing other patients in the mental hospital being tortured by the nurses disturbs her mind repeatedly. This makes difficult for her to focus on one thing. She can have the desire to focus only on one thing. It might be able to happen for a while, but then there will be something, which distract her focus. In this quotation, Susanna gives no response to what her mother talks about, this is because Susanna feels depressed after seeing what the nurses do to Daisy.

Feeling Guilty, Worthless, or Helpless.

After losing her focus, the next symptom is she starts to feel guilty, worthless, and helpless. Guilty feeling means feeling sorry for what a person has done in his or her life (Brennecke, 1978, p.138). Guilty feeling normally happens to a person who has made mistakes in his / her life. A person who has done some mistakes will think that he or she is responsible for the impact of his / her mistakes. Thinking about their mistakes all the times can make them depressed.

In the *Girl, Interrupted!*, Susanna Kaysen feels guilty because she cannot save herself and be brave enough to defend herself from watching cruel punishments. She cannot run away from the hospital and she cannot be brave to stop the cruel punishments she sees every day. She just lets herself be depressed watching the cruel punishments all the times in front of her, without being able to do anything to help her out from her depression. Moreover, she does not feel guilty for not saving the others because as I have stated before that when Susanna sees the cruel punishments happen all the times in front of her eyes, she feels more depressed and that depression makes her lose her interest to make friend. Susanna has no friends in the mental hospital, so she will not feel guilty for not saving them, but more to her disability to defend herself from her own depression caused by the cruel punishments.

There are some quotations from the book that are in line with my argument that a person who often sees torture or sarcasm will get depressed and the third sign of a depression feeling is feeling guilty, worthless, and helpless. The first quotation comes from the novel *Girl, Interrupted!* is:

Seeing how the nurses give cruel punishments to almost the entire patients make me feel terrified that I will be the next to be tortured and I can't run away from this place because the securities will find me sooner or later. Here comes the I'm-no-good thought. That takes care of today. All day the insistent dripping of I'm no good. The next thought, the next day, is I'm the Angel of Death. I'm stupid, I can't do anything. Thinking the first thought triggers the whole circuit. It's like the flu: first a sore throat, then, inevitably, a stuffy nose and a cough (Kaysen, 1993, p. 33).

From this quotation, when she sees and remembers of all the cruel punishment she sees it make her feel depressed. She has the feeling of guilt, worthlessness, and helplessness. She even calls herself stupid and incapable of doing anything. She says this because she feels confused about how to make her free and not feel depressed again. It seems like she knows a way out from her depression, but she cannot do it because she feels afraid to do it.

Wanting to Commit Suicide

When someone has the feeling of worthlessness and helplessness, she tends to lose her spirit to live. She only focuses on the problem not on the solution. When someone looks only on the problem, she will give up easily, as the way to escape from her problem she chooses to end her life. This kind of person will never think about people care about her will be sad if she dies. After enters the mental hospital, Susanna's depression is getting worse and that makes her have more ideas to commit suicide because she sees almost every day the nurses torture the patients cruelly. In line with my argument, in the story of *Girl, Interrupted!* Susanna always wants and imagines herself dead, like what is clearly stated in the story:

I have the desire to commit suicide because I am too afraid of being tortured like what I see happens to my friends and I can't run away because the security will find me and take me back. That fear feeling makes me have more dangerous ideas to commit suicide, like putting a gun in my mouth. But I put it there, I taste it, it's cold and greasy, my finger is on the trigger, and I find that a whole world lies between this moment and the moment I've been planning, when I'll pull the trigger. That world defeats me. I put the gun back in the drawer. I'll have to find another way (Kaysen, 1993, p. 5).

From this quotation, I know that Susanna is depressed because of seeing the cruel punishments or tortures, both physically and mentally that happen in front of her eyes. She does not want to be tortured like the other patients, but she cannot run away from the hospital because the securities of the mental hospital will find her. That makes her depressed until she views everything as the way to commit suicide, for example by putting a gun in her mouth. Her depression because of watching the cruel punishment is worse until she wants to end her life. The sentence from the quotation, "That world defeats me", it means that the cruel punishments defeat her and make her feel very depressed until she wants to end her life.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis, I find out that only by watching people being tortured can make somebody feel depressed and it is categorized as mental torture. When people watch others being tortured, they will repeat what they saw unconsciously in their mind and that will make them become either rebellious people or depressed people. They will become rebellious after watching people being tortured if they have the tendency to copy what they saw. Thus, when they often see good thing, then they will be good people, but if they often see bad things, then they will be bad people. They will become depressed when they have no power to defend themselves from being tortured, like what happened to Susanna Kaysen in the novel. That is why, in order to avoid being depressed, I need to avoid watching cruel action anywhere, including in the movies. Moreover, I also find out that I have to be brave enough to defend myself from anything bad, which can make me consciously or unconsciously feel depressed. I should have the bravery to define what is good and what is bad for me.

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