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Daisy: A Patient Suffering from Bulimia Nervosa

In the film based on a true story, *Girl Interrupted*, writer Susanna Kaysen introduces Daisy, one of several patients admitted into the mental institution who is depicted as having *bulimia nervosa*. Bulimia is an eating disorder characterized by uncontrollably eating large amounts of food in a short period of time (binges) followed by attempts to rid the food through the use of laxatives, diuretics, vomiting, over-exercising, and/or fasting between binges. Although the film does not directly expose binge episodes, Daisy and her setting (including other patients, nurses, and what she says) provides enough criteria to diagnose her with bulimia.

There are several examples in which the film correctly depicts Daisy’s eating disorder. A patient reveals that Daisy is hiding wrappers where whole chickens were in under her bed. To self-justify, Daisy admits that if she is caught with more than five whole chickens, they are to be thrown away. Consistent with the symptom of binging in secret, she also admits feeling extremely uncomfortable eating in the presence of others. This scene insinuates that she has binge episodes, and even the nurses attempt to prevent them from happening. In addition, Daisy picks apart a whole chicken into pieces--perhaps to eat one at a time in order to prevent a binge. Because all of this is performed in the same scene, the producer may be insinuating that after compulsively overeating, Daisy is fasting between binges by restricting food intake. Daisy is also shown restricting when she solely eats the sprinkles from her dessert one by one.

The film also implies the use of laxatives for purging. After patients were distributed the laxative *Colace,* Daisy desperately begs the nurses for more (if she was given any at all to begin with). She is offered prune juice, but perhaps she believes the laxative effect of it would not be quick enough to alleviate the uncomfortable feeling after binging. Daisy is also accused of being a laxative junkie and is compared to another patient with an eating disorder—an attempt of the producer strongly implying the diagnosis. A patient who had not swallowed her laxatives offered Daisy her Colace and she quickly accepted.

Those suffering with eating disorders may also have or develop anxiety and mood disorders. In regards to anxiety, Daisy feels anxious eating in public and reduces the uneasiness after a binge by using laxatives. Daisy also does not take the *Valium* the nurses give her*,* a drug known to reduce anxiety, perhaps to prevent its effect of reducing her anxiety about her food consumption (Buckley, 2011). Strong evidence for depression, a mood disorder, is also available. Some examples are when several cuts are seen on her arm, a patient notices and announces that Daisy never leaves her room, and living alone even after she was released from the mental hospital. At the end of the scene, Daisy commits suicide—a strong indicator that she suffered from depression. This is consistent with the research that half of individuals suffering from eating disorders commit suicide due to extreme lack of happiness (Barlow & Durant, 2010, 296-300).

Daisy only eats her father’s chicken, claiming that if anything else is eaten, she will vomit. The fact that she binges on her father’s chicken meets the criteria for the binging episode, but eating the same food may be more related to obsessive compulsive behaviors. The *DSM IV-TR* may not recognize consuming the same food as part of the criteria, but would acknowledge that it is a binge, regardless.

Sexual abuse is believed to be one of many causes of bulimia (Wonderlich, Wilsnack, R.W., Wilsnack, S.C. & Harris, 1996). Daisy’s bulimia nervosa could derive from her insinuated history of sexual abuse by her father. Although the movie does not directly state whether she experienced sexual abuse in childhood or at another point in time, it is hinted that it could be a possible trigger. However, this is the only available possible cause of Daisy’s eating disorder development.

Some incorrect depictions of bulimia nervosa was also evident in *Girl, Interrupted.* For example, Daisy never seems to show dissatisfaction with her body—a key symptom of eating disorders.Although she may overuse laxatives after eating or restricts her eating, Daisy never mentions body dissatisfaction or self-hatred. The writer and producer may assume the audience understands what her diagnosis is, but does not show as much support for the reasons of her psychological disorder.

As mentioned before, if Daisy eats anything but her father’s chicken, she “throws up”. Perhaps it was easier for her to purge through laxatives at the mental institution instead of self-induced vomiting or excess exercising, but she continued to solely eat chicken and mustard in her apartment once she was released from the hospital. Her “choice” of how to purge her food had not changed, despite having more opportunities to practice different ways. However, the DSM IV-TR does not mention whether the sufferer interchangeably uses different forms of purging.

In *Girl, Interrupted,* Daisy strongly exemplifies suffering from bulimia nervosa. There may be a lack of direct evidence of Daisy binging, but there are sufficient factors that together, convince the audience of binging episodes occurring. The most evident symptom depicted in the film is her addiction to laxatives. Daisy also restricts her intake of food when not eating, for example, when she only ate the small sprinkles on her dessert. The nurses also try to prevent binge episodes by limiting how many whole chickens Daisy receives, giving a sense that a lack control when eating exists. Daisy suffered from depression which may have given rise to or may have been derived by the eating disorder, ultimately causing her to commit suicide.

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