

Homework Exercise: Kaysen

Susanna Kaysen's memoir *Girl, Interrupted* reflects on her experience, as a young adult during the late 1960s, of being an in-patient at McLean Hospital in Belmont, Ma. Suffering from mental anguish (and diagnosed with "borderline personality disorder"), Susanna Kaysen is pressured by her psychiatrist and parents to sign herself into McLean. Once an in-patient, she discovers, to her surprise, that it is quite difficult to leave. Kaysen spends about 18 months as an involuntary psychiatric patient at McLean. Her memoir reflects on the nature of what many call "mental illness" and prompts readers to think about what they can learn from her experience.

1. Comment briefly on these two quotes from the Kaysen excerpt. How do they influence the way that you see mental anguish/illness?

But most people pass over incrementally, making a series of perforations in the membrane between here and there until an opening exists. And who can resist an opening?

In the parallel universe the laws of physics are suspended. What goes up does not necessarily come down. A body at rest does not tend to stay at rest, and not every action can be counted on to provoke an equal and opposite reaction.

2. Why do you think Kaysen includes the section "Etiology"?

3. What's the effect of reading "Velocity vs. Viscosity"?

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