

# The Suicide Motive of Hannah Baker in Jay Asher's 13 Reasons Why

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## ABSTRACT

Suicide has been one of the most significant issues in the world. Thus, this topic is very interesting to be discussed. The study aims to analyze the suicide motive of Hannah Baker. The study is focus on what the suicide motive of Hannah Baker is. The study applies descriptive qualitative methodology using the theory of needs by David McClelland to analyze the suicide motive of Hannah Baker. The result of the study reveals that Hannah Baker is lack of human needs fulfillment. Hannah cannot reach human needs like achievement needs, power needs, and affiliation needs. Those three aspects are supported by her personality. She is an introverted person who prefers to be alone and keep all her sadness within herself. In the end of the story, she tries to tell everything she feels to her counselling teacher, her teacher does not give the advice that she needs. It makes her feel helpless and worthless. She ends her life by cutting her wrist.

**Keywords:** *Motive, Suicide, Novel, Mental Health*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Suicide is an act of taking one's own life. Each year, 800.000 people die by suicide and making it the second main cause of death among the youth. American Foundation for Suicide Prevention stated that suicide is the tenth leading cause of death in the US. Besides, the World Health Organization (WHO) stated that 79% of global suicides occur in low and middle income countries. There are many factors on why someone decides to end his/her life by doing suicide. Some of the factors are history of substance abuse, history of mental health condition, relationship problem, bullying, and so on. But the most common reason for doing suicide is depression. People who commit suicide usually think that by ending their life, the pain will be stop that is why this issue is important to be discussed to prevent the increasing number of suicide. Usually, people commit suicide by hanging, self-poisoning, taking pills, or cutting the hand.

Through this paper, the writer expects the readers to be aware of mental health. Mental health is no joke. Mental health is very important. It includes individual's emotion and affects individual's way of think, feel, and act. It is usually affected by individual's personality and environment. For example, if a person has neuroticism personality which makes him feels sad, angry, and fear, there is a tendency for him to be depressed in the future.

Thus, person with this kind of personality should change the way of think, feel, and act. Person with this personality should think positively, feel the positive vibes, and act positively to decrease the possibility of being depressed in the future. Also, this person has to move to better environment for reaching good vibes. People should understand their own personality, thus they will know how to deal with their own self. By reading and understanding this study, the writer hopes that the readers will be aware of mental health and the number of suicide will be decreasing.

The 13 Reasons Why novel mainly talks about mental health issue that experienced by a young-seventeen-year-old girl named Hannah Baker. Hannah Baker experiences many traumatic events in her school. She is bullied and has no friend at school. She starts recording twelve tapes contains of the name list of her friends that disappoint her and become the reason she depressed. Her last tape or the thirteenth tape is made while she is talking to the last person she wishes can help her, who is her counselling teacher. Unluckily, the counselling teacher makes mistake in answering and responding to Hannah's question and finally Hannah run back from school to her house. She goes to her bathroom and commit suicide by cutting off her hand. After dying, the tapes is sent to the first person, Clay Jensen who becomes the narrator of the novel. The novel uses first person point of view that done by Clay Jensen, Hannah Baker's only friend.

In 2017, the novel was visualized as an American teen drama web television series with exactly the same name, *13 Reasons Why*, and its existence got even much bigger attention from society because of the controversial issue that teen suicide rate in US was rising after the film debut. Actually, from the first time the web series was released, the mental health community has been so worried that the film would result in people's death, especially for young people who had the similar problem with the main character Hannah Baker [1]. Besides of the issue, this drama series also got attention because at the second season of the drama series, there is frustrating scenes including sexual violence which is not good for teenagers. The drama shows teenagers common problem like being ignored among friends, being bullied, and being sexually harassed. Those are affecting teenagers' mind which is still unstable. That is why when the scene very relatable to some teenagers, it might affect them to also commit suicide just like what the main character, Hannah Baker, does. That is one thing on why this drama series is very controversial and increases the suicide number of teenagers in US.

There are some previous studies about the *13 Reasons Why* novel, but most of the studies focus on the literary devices like symbolism, imagery, setting, genre, and tone. The tone of the novel is somber and serious, with elements of dark humor included. The party where Clay and Hannah had their time together is the symbol for all of the events that cause her end her life [2]. The study includes the summary and the literary devices of the novel.

Another study discuss about the social impact after the publishment of the novel. The number of teen suicide was increasing after the publishment of the novel. Death increased more than expected between April and June 2017 [1]. The study reveals that about 94 more teenagers commit suicide after the debut of the novel. The study says if it does not give the definitive proof that the reason for the teenagers suicide is because of the novel, but still the novel leads to the harmful event.

None of the studies above talk about the personality of Hannah Baker and the suicide motive of her. The study will reveal in detail that the personality of Hannah Baker takes role on her suicide motive.

This paper answers the following questions. 1) How is the personality of Hannah Baker? 2) What is the suicide motive of Hannah Baker?

## 2. METHOD

The study applies descriptive qualitative methodology using the theory of needs by David C. McClelland to analyze the suicide motive of Hannah Baker. McClelland's [3] Theory of Needs (1961) contains of three main human needs: 1) need for achievement, 2) need for power, and 3) need for

affiliation. First, everyone has a strong desire to achieve goals. For example, a student has a strong desire to pass the exam with high score. Second, everyone wants to be heard by other people and win an argument. For example, a son tells his willingness to join basketball club and his mother allow him. Third and last, everyone needs affiliation. For example, a daughter needs love and caring from her parents.

The main data source of this study is the novel by Jay Asher titled *13 Reasons Why* published by Penguin Books Great Britain in 2009 consists of 288 pages. The data are taken in form of direct and indirect speech of the characters, paraphrase, quotation, dialogues and monologues. The data will be taken selectively based on the problems of the study to make it easier to understand the analysis of the suicide motive of Hannah Baker.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Hannah Baker's Personality

Personality is special for each person. Each person has different personality one to anothers. Personality can be seen from the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of someone. There are five most widely personality factors based on an American psychologist, Goldberg [4], which are openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeable, and neuroticism.

Hannah Baker is type of person who is included in neuroticism type. Neuroticism people usually have tendency to have negative emotions like anger, worry, and sadness. In the whole story from the first tape until the thirteenth tape, it is very rare to find Hannah Baker's joyful events. Anger, sadness, disappointment, anxiety and fear are the dominant side of Hannah Baker that is shown in the novel. People around Hannah might not think that what they are doing really matters to her, because this type of person is a very sensitive person. It can be seen in the novel that shows how disappointed Hannah to people in the tapes as stated in the following quote.

"Betrayal. It's one of the worst feelings. I know you didn't mean to let me down. In fact, most of you listening probably had no idea what you were doing—what you wee truly doing." (Page 13).

Another part of the story that shows Hannah's anger when her classmate, Alex, writes down her name as the hottest girl in the freshman class as stated in the following quote.

"But what happens when someone says you have the best ass in the freshman class? Let me tell you, Alex, because you'll never know. It gives people—some people—the go-ahead to treat you like you're nothing but that specific body part." (Page 44).

The event that happens after those voting is that Hannah faces several sexual harassment like when she goes to her favorite shop nearby the school as stated in the following quote.

“My backpack was resting on the counter while I zipped it shut. Wally’s eyes were focused down, just beyond the edge of the counter, near my waist, and I knew what was coming. A cupped hand smacked my ass. And then, he said it.

“Best Ass in the Freshmen Class, Wally. Standing right here in your store!”

Did it hurt? No. But that doesn’t matter, does it? Because the question is, did he have the right to do it? And the answer, I hope, is obvious.” (Page 48).

Hannah received another sexual harassment after that event that gets her very angry and ashamed at the same time. That makes her feel unvaluable and have more negative thoughts. From the quotation above, it is very clear that Hannah Baker is a very sensitive person that a small ridiculous words or treatments mean a lot to her that not everyone could understand it.

Each person has two different personalities which are introvert and extrovert. Hannah Baker, in this case, is included as an introvert [5]. Introverted people usually like to be alone and far away from crowd. She rarely speaks to other people and choose to keep it in her mind. It can be seen from the novel when Hannah finally put everything she feels when she was alive in the tapes. She talks about everything, even the small things in detail—that she never said before when she was alive. It shows that Hannah doesn’t really like to talk and likes to be alone. Also, Hannah likes to be alone and far from crowd. It can be seen in the novel when Hannah usually goes to the shop near her school and old house where there are not many people there, as stated in the following quote.

“Ninety-five percent of the time, Blue Spot was empty. Just me and the man behind the register. I don’t think a lot of people know it’s even there because it’s tiny and squished between two other stores, both of which have been closed since we moved here.” (Page 45).

From the quotation above, it is quite clear that Hannah spends her time mostly in the quiet store that far from crowd which means she is an introvert person.

### **3.2. Suicide Motive of Hannah Baker**

Motive is a strong reason for someone to do something. Motive in this case refers to the reason on why Hannah Baker decides to commit suicide. There are many reasons why she decides to commit suicide like having no friends, suffering with bullying and sexual abuse, having no confidence, and so on. Hannah Baker is lack of human needs fulfillment. Thus, this discussion will be using McClelland’s [3] Theory of Needs which contains three main human needs: 1) need for

achievement, 2) need for power, and 3) need for affiliation to make it easier in analyzing the novel.

The first thing that need to be fulfilled as human needs is need for achievements. Every human in this world have a willingness to achieve something in their live. People usually do everything to get achievement to be proud of themselves. And, it also happens to Hannah Baker. As a human, Hannah also wants to achieve something in her life. In the novel, it is stated that Hannah likes to make poetry as stated in the following quote.

“If you could hear other people’s thoughts, you’d overhear things that are true as well as things that are completely random. And you wouldn’t know one from the other. It’d drive you insane. What’s true? What’s not? A million ideas, but what do they mean?

That’s what I love about poetry: The more abstract, the better. The stuff where you’re not sure what the poet’s talking about. You may have no idea, but you can’t be sure. Not a hundred percent. Each word, specifically chosen, could have a million different meanings.” (Page 175).

Hannah starts to make poetry about her feeling which is randomly made. She learns to make good poem with the leader of poetry making club, Ryan Shaver. He is the one who could understand the meaning of Hannah’s poem even when she doesn’t. But then, Ryan purposely steals Hannah’s notebook, prints and publishes her random poem in the school magazine as stated in the following quote.

“Well, Ryan, you were right. It went much, much deeper than that. And if you knew that—if that’s what you thought—then why did you steal my notebook? Why did you print my poem, the poem that you yourself called “scary” in the Lost-N-Found? Why did you let other people read it?

Dissect it. And make fun of it.” (Page 189).

Hannah was very upset because after the publishment of her poem, her teacher and friends make fun of it. Mr. Porter, her teacher said that reading a poem from unknown author is similar to reading a classic poem by dead poet. She is embarrassed for weeks. Students in the class cut up to Hannah’s poem, looking for the meaning of it because her poem is just so random. For weeks Hannah being teased by her schoolmates as stated in the following quote.

“This doesn’t seem like a big deal, does it? No, maybe not to you. But school hadn’t been a safe haven of mine for a long time. And after your photo escapades, Tyler, my home was no longer secure. Now, suddenly, even my own thoughts were being offered up for ridicule.

Once, in Mr. Porter’s class, when those girls were teasing her, Hannah looked up. Her eyes caught mine for just a moment.” (Page 192).

Hannah wants to make poem, just for her own happiness. But then Ryan destroys everything. When Hannah wants to achieve her goal to make a good poem and happy for it, then her poem is published and received bad response from her classmate. That is why she is lack of need for achievement. In the end, she gets sadness for the publication of the poem, not happiness for the good poem she made.

The next human needs is need for power. Everyone want to be heard and appreciated, including Hannah. Hannah is lack of power needs. No one wants to listen to Hannah, including her best friend, Jessica Davis. One day, Jessica gets mad to Hannah because she thinks Hannah betrays her. When Hannah tries to explain everything, Jessica does not care with Hannah's explanation as stated in the following quote.

“For Jessica, it was easier to think of me as Bad Hannah than as the Hannah she got to know at Monet's. It was easier to accept. Easier to understand. For her, the rumors needed to be true” (Page 66).

“i told her I knew all about their relationship. On that first day at Monet's, he had been checking one of us out.”. (Page 67)

In this point, Hannah figure out that Alex actually likes one of them between Jessica and her, but she knows that Jessica likes Alex so she does not have any idea about liking Alex. It is so dramatic because the truth is that Alex likes Hannah and it makes Jessica hates Hannah.

Another one, in the last tape, when Hannah meet her counselling teacher, Mr. Porter, he doesn't listen to Hannah well. He just doesn't care with Hannah and her sayings as stated in the following quote.

“—Hannah, wait. I'm walking down the hall. His door is closed behind me. He's not coming. He's letting me go. A lot of you cared, just not enough. And that . . . that is what I needed to find out. And I did find out. And I'm sorry.” (Page 280).

She makes the last or the thirteenth tape while talking to Mr. Porter. She really hopes that Mr. Porter, the last person she meets could listen to her story well and give some good advice, but as expected, she doesn't get what she really wants. She doesn't get any good and acceptable advice from Mr. Porter, the last person she meets before ending her life.

Hannah Baker is really mad at Mr. Porter because he is the last person she wishes could help her but he couldn't help it as stated in the following quote.

“And you, lucky number thirteen, you can take the tapes straight to hell. Depending on your religion, maybe I'll see you there.” (Page 9).

Hannah's thinly veiled anger towards Mr. Porter foreshadows that his role in Hannah's death is

particularly damning. It urges the readers to identify how bad is the thirteenth person on the tape and figure out that what he does really hits Hannah so bad [2].

The fact that Hannah ends her life after being ignored by her teacher shows that Hannah's suicidal event is included as egoistic suicide. According to Durkheim [6], there are four types of suicides which are egoistic, altruistic, anomic, and fatalistic suicide. Hannah's case is included as an egoistic suicide which happens when a person feels isolated from society. In the story, Hannah Baker doesn't have any friend. She goes everywhere alone. She doesn't have any supporter in her life including her family. In the story, there is no part where Hannah's family takes role as her supporter. Her schoolmates always bully and underestimate her, thus she cannot make any friends at school. That is why she has no friend and get no social support to keep alive.

Besides, in the first tape which is a tape for Justin Foley, Hannah's first kiss, she gets a bad rumor about her relationship and Justin. This is how the nightmare comes at the beginning of the story. After kissing with Justin in the garden, a rumor spreads. The rumor says that Hannah lets Justin's hand gets into her bra which is not true as stated in the following quote.

“Well, you're right. Something did happen. Justin grabbed my hand, we walked over to the swings, and we swung. The he kissed me again the very same way. Then? And then, Hannah? What happened then? Then . . . we left. He went one way, I went the others.” (Page ).

The quotation shows that at the time Hannah was alive, no one believe her. Her schoolmates believe in those rumor and no matter how hard she corrects the rumor, no one believe her because she has no power, she is powerless, and no one wants to listen to her. That is why she is so desperate.

The last and the most significant reason on why Hannah commits suicide is because she is lack of affiliation needs fulfillment. She has no friend but only Clay Jensen. He is the only friend she has until the day before she committing suicide. She is lack of affection. In the first tape, it mentioned a name, Justin Foley, Hannah's first kiss. Hannah starts the tape with the person she used to love in the beginning of the school year, Justin. As what has been state previously, Hannah and Justin have a bad rumor. The worst part is the reality that Justin betrays Hannah. When the rumor spreads, he doesn't even try to make the rumor clear. Hannah first love is very terrible and she is so desperate as stated in the following quote.

“So, thank you, Justin. Sincerely. My vey first kiss was wonderful. And for the months or so that we lasted, and everywhere that we went, the kisses were wonderful. You were wonderful. But then you started bragging. A week went by and I heard nothing. But, eventually, as

they always will, the rumors reached me. And everyone knows you can't disprove a rumor." (Page 30).

The quotation above is the moment where Hannah feels loss. She finds out that a guy who she thinks could love her actually only wants to manipulate her and spread a bad rumor. Another similar event happens to her on another day and it is even worse. When valentine day comes, everyone writes the name they want to date on valentine day, including Hannah. But, unfortunately the guy Hannah wants doesn't choose Hannah, but then her schoolmate named Marcus Cooley writes Hannah's name. He comes to Hannah and asks for a dinner that is when the second nightmare happens.

Hannah waits for a long time until finally Marcus comes to a cafe named Rosie's, but he is not alone. Marcus comes to Rosie's with his friends. At first, Hannah doesn't understand this, but then she finally finds out that actually Marcus wants to have dinner with her to prove to his friends that Hannah is a slut, that is why he does sexual harassment as stated in the following quote.

"I stopped laughing. I nearly stopped breathing. But I kept my forehead against your shoulder, Marcus. There was your hand, on my knee. From out of nowhere. The same way I was grabbed in the liquor store." (Page 141).

"Below the table, my fingers were fighting to pry your fingers off. To loosen your grip. To push you away. And I didn't want to yell—it wasn't to that level yet—but my eyes were begging for help." (Page 142).

Hannah feels depressed knowing that Marcus and his friends tease and leave her just like that after that incident as stated in the following quote.

"Anyway, you left. You didn't storm out. Just called me a tease, loud enough for everyone to hear, and walked out." (Page 144).

Justin and Marcus make Hannah doesn't believe in love anymore. She receives too much betrayal from people she love. People don't love her the way she love them. After experiencing those events, Hannah starts to think about suicide because she thinks that no one loves her as stated in the following quote.

"For the longest time, from almost day one at this school, it seemed that I was the only one who cared about me. Put all of your heart into getting that first kiss . . . only to have it thrown back in your face. Have only two people you truly trust turn against you. Have one of them use you to get back at the other, and then be accused of betrayal" (Page 144).

"The next day, Marcus. I decided something. I decided to find out how people at school might react if one of the students never come back. As the song goes, "You are lost and gone forever, oh my darling, Valentine." (Page 145).

From the quotation above, it is clear that Hannah is lack of attention and affection. She is always betrayed by person she truly believes and it happens repeatedly. After knowing Marcus' plan that night just to make fun of her, she feels like she has nothing to do but ending her life. She knows that rumor about that night will spread as what happened to her when she heard the rumor about her and Justin in the first week of the school year. She feels like she is all alone and she is the one who care about herself.

Another thing that makes Hannah feels desperate is that she loses her only female friend in the school, Jessica Davis. Jessica, Alex, and Hannah are chosen to be in the same group for freshmen class. They become friends as time goes by until Jessica has feeling to Alex. One day, Hannah's classmate named Jimmy randomly makes a vote for who's the hottest freshmen in the class. Alex put Hannah's name in the hottest freshmen list. Knowing about this, Jessica feels disappointed to Hannah because she tells Hannah if she likes Alex. She gets angry and talks to Hannah in the Monet's as stated in the following quote.

"He did not choose me over you, Jessica," I said. "He chose me to get back at you and you know that. He knew my name would hurt you more than anyone else's." She closed her eyes and said my name in almost a whisper. "Hannah." Do you remember that, Jessica? Because I do." (Page 65).

"For Jessica, it was easier to think of me as Bad Hannah than as the Hannah she got to know at Monet's. It was easier to accept. Easier to understand. For her, the rumors needed to be true" (Page 66).

From the quotation above, it is clearly shown how Hannah feels sad knowing the truth that even her best friend doesn't believe in her the way she trusts her. Hannah has no friend after all. She is all alone, without lover and friend.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

From the discussion, it can be concluded that the motives on why Hannah Baker ends her life is because she is lack of human needs and it is supported by her personality.

She is lack of achievement, power, and affiliation needs. Hannah is lack of achievement needs. She wants to be able to write good poem, thus she learns to write poem with Ryam Shaver, but then Ryan rewrites her poem and it is read by the whole classmates and the teacher. The whole classmates make fun of the poem and she feels sad about it. She feels invaluable.

Hannah is also lack of power needs. When the kissing rumor spreads, nobody believe in Hannah's explanation. No one care and listen to Hannah. Everyone in the school blame her for the issue. She has no chance to speak up

and listened. Last but not least, Hannah Baker is lack of affiliation or love needs. Firstly, she is left by Justin, her first love, because of the kissing rumor. Then, she is left by her best friend, Jessica because of Alex.

And last but not least, she is being embarrassed by Marcus who sexually abuse her in front of his friends. Hannah received several sexual abuse from people around her. She is verbally and physically abused. In the teenage age, it is very traumatic to experience such events that is why Hannah feels invaluable and helpless.

Those three reasons above are supported by Hannah Baker's neuroticism and introverted personality. Hannah is neuroticism type of person who has negative emotions like anger, sadness, and anxiety that makes her feel very sensitive when she cannot afford the needs of achievement, power, and affiliation. She is also barely talk to other people about what she feels because she is introvert person. When she wants to tell or express what she feels to her counselling teacher, her teacher seems do not care about it. counseThat is why, in the end Hannah feels helpless and decides to end her life as her last option.

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