

## Research Article

Received: 5/12/2021; Accepted: 17/12/2021; Published: 17/01/2022

# Lana Granger's Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Lisa Unger's *In The Blood*

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## Abstract

This paper analyzes the main character, Lana Granger, in Lisa Unger's *In The Blood*. The aim of this study is to explain the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) portrayed by Lana Granger. The analysis includes the causes, the symptoms, the effects, and the development of Lana's PTSD throughout the story. The writer uses psychological approach to analyze the story and library research as method of data collection. The writer uses textual and contextual methods to analyze the novel. The contextual method supported by the concept of trauma and the concept of PTSD by the American Psychiatric Association and Gerald C Davidson. The result of the analysis shows that Lana Granger has shown all symptoms of PTSD after experiencing major traumatic event in her life. It also shows that trauma affects Lana social life, personality, and identity. The social supports obtained by Lana from his aunt and his best friend play important roles in the process of his healing journey from PTSD.

**Keywords:** *traumatic event; trauma; PTSD; mental health.*

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## 1. Background of the Study

PTSD has been taken by many authors as a source of inspiration for their writing. One of those authors is Lisa Unger who depicts the condition through her novel entitled *In The Blood*. Lisa Unger is a *New York Times*, internationally bestselling author. She is recognized as an expert in suspense. She was born on April 26, 1970 in New Haven, Connecticut and later, grew up in the Netherlands, England, and New Jersey. She worked in publishing for a decade in New York after graduating from the New School for Social Research [1, p.245]

One of her works is the novel that portrays PTSD entitled *In The Blood* (2014). The portrayal of PTSD in the novel is presented through the main character, Lana Granger.

Lana has suffered from a traumatic experience in his past. The experience has caused him to suffer from PTSD due to the long effect of the trauma. However, there are several

causes that led him to suffer from PTSD such as his family's history of mental illness, the domestic violence, and his unstable mental state since childhood.

The writer is interested in analyzing the portrayal of PTSD by the main character of the novel *In The Blood*. The writer would like to analyze the cause, the symptoms, effects, and recovery of Lana Granger's PTSD. The writer finds the issue interesting to be discussed in this study because it is the reflection of what can happen in society. This also shows that severity of the trauma can affect someone's mental health and their life in society.

## 2. Purposes of the Study

The purposes of the study are:

1. To analyze the causes of Lana Granger's PTSD.
2. To analyze Lana Granger's PTSD symptoms depicted in the novel.
3. To analyze the effect of Lana Granger's PTSD on his social life.
4. To analyze the treatment and recoveries of Lana Granger's PTSD.

## 3. Methods

Method of research in this thesis consists of research approach, method of data collection, and method of analyzing data.

The writer uses psychological approach in literature to analyze Lana Granger's Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in the novel *In The Blood* by Lisa Unger. The writer uses library research method in this study. Library research is a method of gathering data through studying and comprehending information from textbooks, journals, articles, virtual resources, and documents [2]. In this study, the writer also uses contextual methods [3]. Based on this method, the writer analyses the internal aspects related to PTSD in Lisa Unger's *In The Blood* and the external contexts which surround it.

## 4. Finding of the Study

There are several factors causing Lana Granger's PTSD. According to DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual] V someone may suffer from PTSD after experiencing or witnessing traumatic events in person. However, some people may not suffer from PTSD after experiencing trauma. Therefore, there are various risk factors that can cause someone more prone to suffer from PTSD after a traumatic event. The discussion of the cause of Lana Granger's PTSD is as follows:

### 4.1 Witnessing Traumatic Event

The traumatic event is the death of his mother. He could not forget about the condition of his mother's dead body. "I kept watching the rug, willing it to move. Maybe she was still alive. But no, her skull was shattered. The shape of it; I'll never forget that or all the blood" [1, p.156]. He has seen the gruesome scene of his mother's dead body

#### 4.2 Genetic Cause

Lana Granger's family is not new with the case of mental disorder. In the story, it is told that Lana's mom has suffered from chronic depression. "... my mother suffered from chronic depression, although she had some manic episodes" [1, p.97]. This condition of his mother show that genetic condition of mental illness also take part in her PTSD.

#### 4.3 Domestic Cause

. The relationship between his mother and father had become worse, especially after his mother gave birth to him. "What happens to a marriage? Before the baby, we were truly happy—with our lives, with each other. After he came, we just started to come apart. Would it have happened anyway?" [1, p.90]. This situation of Lana's family has caused him to grow closer to his mother than his father. Therefore, when his mother dies, he feels lost. He lost the support system of his life. Moreover, it is caused by his own father. Due to the absence of his parent figure following the tragedy, the support is kind of lacking from his domestic side. The lack of support has affected his way of coping with the trauma.

#### 4.4 Psychological Cause

Lana has a history of being a troubled child. When he was a child, he showed signs that he had an odd personality. His mother then takes him to see a child psychiatrist. There are many oddities about Lana's personality that his mother worries about. Lana's history of mental state before the traumatic event is not in good condition. Therefore, it makes him more prone to suffer from Post-Traumatic Disorder after the traumatic event in his past. His mental state leads him to poor coping skills and it makes him develop PTSD.

#### 4.5 The Symptoms of Lana Granger's PTSD

The PTSD symptoms that are represented in Lana Granger can be discussed as follows:

##### 4.5.1 Intrusion Symptom

Lana Granger himself is always reminded by the memory of his traumatic event by having a flashback. It is shown when Lana is having his session with Dr. Cooper in her office. The sudden flashback happens after Dr. Cooper mentioned Lana's father who tried to contact him. "I could see the blood on the floor, the perfect red handprint on the white of the wall. It was all still so vivid, if I closed my eyes I could go back and live in that house, in that moment, forever" [1, p.54]. Lana's father is the person that is involved in his trauma therefore, the sudden mention of him makes Lana undergo a flashback.

##### 4.5.2 Avoidance Symptom

In the story, it shows that Lana tries to avoid everything related to his trauma. It is clearly shown when he changes his identity and moves to a secluded area where nobody knows about him or his history. “My decision to move to The Hollows was just for Fieldcrest; neither she nor Luke had any idea I was here, hiding from my ugly past” (Unger, 2014, 219). Lana also chooses to change his identity to avoid internal reminders of the trauma that is his own self.

#### 4.5.3 Negative Changes in Cognition and Mood Symptoms

One of the several points categorized in negative cognition and mood symptoms is the incapacity of PTSD sufferers to remember a crucial part of the trauma. This condition has happened to Lana. He tries to forget his traumatic event that he experienced and there is one important aspect related to the traumatic event that he seems to forget. This one aspect is a strange pair of shoes that he saw at the door on the day his mother died. However, due to how hard he tries to repress his memory, it does not make him feel sure any more about the presence of the shoes on that day.

#### 4.5.4 Changes in Arousal Symptoms

The writer finds that the changes in arousal symptoms that Lana Granger shows are Greateoaggressivity and sleep problems. In the story, Lana shows aggressive behavior several times. This behavior shows as one of the arousal symptoms of his PTSD. In the discussion of Lana’s intrusion symptoms before, the writer has mentioned that Lana has sleep issues. It is clear that Lana has trouble falling asleep. He is told to take some medicine to help him fall asleep. “You know I was taking an antipsychotic, antidepressant cocktail, not to mention what they gave me to sleep” [1, p.202].

#### 4.6 *The Effect of PTSD on Lana Granger’s Life*

In the story the writer finds that Lana Granger’s PTSD has affected his social life. It has been mentioned before in the analysis of Lana avoidance symptoms that he moves away to a small place where anyone does not know him. This shows that he creates distance between himself and the people around him. Therefore, PTSD affects his social life.

Another fact that shown PTSD has affected Lana’s social life is the difficulty to maintain a relationship. It is shown multiple times that Lana tries to ignore his feelings for Beck.

Another effect of PTSD on the other element of Lana’s life is behavioral change. He is having difficulty opening his emotions. Lana feels people tend to have trouble understanding what someone has gone through. Therefore, he chooses to disassociate herself from them [1, p.38].

In this study, the writer also found the trauma can affect someone identity. Based on DSM V, cognitively, individuals who have experienced trauma are often tormented by thoughts that reflect intensely negative core beliefs about themselves. It makes a person questioning their sense of self or place in the world.

Lana despises his origins. He tries so hard to avoid his biological gender because he is afraid that he will become a murderer just like his father and grandfather. He believes that the blood of murderer has run through the male DNA in the family and as a born male, he believes he will inherit it and become a murderer unless he tried to change his identity. This shows that Lana has intense negative core beliefs about his origins and resulted in lacking sense of self within him

#### *4.7 Treatment and Recovery of Lana Granger's PTSD*

In the story, Lana has two kinds of treatment. The first is medication by using drugs. Lana is shown to be consuming some drugs to help his PTSD. "Some of it has to do with the cocktail of medications I take, a antipsychotic, antidepressant cocktail" [1, p.192]. The second one is Lana has been seeing professional help to help him cope with his trauma. "I saw a shrink in town, Dr. Maggie Cooper, and I had been seeing her my entire time at school" [1, p.51]

#### *4.8 Social Support*

There is some support that Lana gets from his aunt. His aunt keeps encouraging Lana to talk to his dad after the traumatic experience. She thinks it is good for Lana so he can make a peace with the situation, but Lana refuses this idea. He is not ready to meet his father in prison, yet. "I hadn't talked to him in five years. After his last appeal was denied, Bridgette pressured me to find some closure with him. *Not for him, for you*" [1, p.84].

However, later his aunt suggests him to talk to someone again to relieve his trauma and Lana agrees to it. It is shown when Lana is having a session with Dr. Cooper, he thought about how comfortable it is to finally have someone to talk about his trauma.

Another social support that Lana has received is from Beck. The existence of Beck in his life also influences him in an effective way. At some point in his life, Beck can make Lana feel noticed in society. "I was invisible if I wanted to be. And that's what I would have been if not for Beck. She was the first person to notice me, the real me. She was the first person who ever really wanted me, who wanted to love me" [1, p.172]

#### *4.9 The Developments of Lana's Mental Health*

Lana's mental condition is improving. His three stages of functioning, which include rational comprehension, loving relationships, and a meaningful purpose in life have return as he is finally able to open up about his real identity, facing the traumatic reminder of his trauma and starting to have relationship with Beck.

Lana regains his rational understanding, allowing him to manage himself better. Lana used to be unable to discuss or think about his father, who had a role in his trauma, without experiencing flashbacks, but now, he is no longer bothered by it as he finally decides to have a conversation with his father [1, p.216].

Another development in Lana's mental health is when he finally can accept himself as Lane Crowe, which is his real identity. He can accept who he is and no more hiding behind another identity [1, p.223].

Another development of Lana's mental health is he is now able to accept his own feelings. He has allowed himself to feel emotion. If before he was having difficulty in accepting his feelings for Beck, now he fully wants to feel it without any doubt [1, p.218].

Furthermore, as Lana mental health gets better, Lana is motivated to start his master degree. He also has a new goal to work in Fieldcrest, the school for troubled and mentally challenged children. He wants to help people just like what he and his mother want him to [1, p.229].

Based on the analysis above, we can conclude that, in addition to undergo some treatments in the process of recovering from PTSD, the qualities of the sufferers and the social support they receive are also important. The more open patients are about their illness and the more social support they receive, the better their PTSD recovery will be.

## 5. Conclusion

Lisa Unger's novel entitled *In The Blood* portrays the life of Lana Granger. Lana Granger's character in the novel *In The Blood* is described as a psychology student who lives a secretive life and suffers from PTSD due to the traumatic event from his past. The writer analyzes the PTSD reflected in the main character, Lana Granger covering the causes, symptoms, effects, treatment, and recoveries of PTSD supported by the fifth edition of the American Psychiatric Association's theory of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (2013) and Gerald Davidson's twelve edition of *Abnormal Psychology* (2006).

Based on the discussion, it is clear that Lana suffers from PTSD after watching the dead body of his mother when he was teenager. Furthermore, he is also forced to be involved in burying his mother's body under his father's manipulative words. That traumatic incident Lana experienced himself is the cause of his PTSD. The memories of the tragedy later haunt Lana's life even after he moves away and changes his identity.

In the story, Lana has shown various symptoms of PTSD. The writer finds that Lana has flashbacks and nightmares about the tragedy of his past, avoids everything linked to his trauma, has bad thoughts and an inability to feel pleasant emotion, and has aggressive behaviors and sleep issues. These symptoms are consistent with the diagnoses of PTSD based in DSM V. Those symptoms are intrusion, avoidance, negative change in cognition and mood, and changes in arousal symptoms.

The symptoms that were experienced by Lana's PTSD have affected his social life. The writer finds that due to Lana's PTSD, he has distanced himself from society, having difficulty in maintaining relationships and experiencing behavioral change. He tends to disassociate himself from his surroundings.

Instead of facing his trauma, Lana chooses to cope with it by avoiding any reminders related to his trauma. He changes his identity and lives far away from people to avoid his traumatic event. The writer also find that the trauma can affect Lana sense of self. He

despises his root after the traumatic event making him hate his biological gender. However, as there is a lot of social support from his surroundings, he is slowly able to change to be better. Lana is also going through treatment with his shrink named Dr. Cooper. Later, he showed himself to be making satisfactory progress in his mental condition.

This analysis of the novel *In The Blood* not only depicts PTSD through the character of Lana Granger, but it also reveals that the character of PTSD patients and the social supports obtained by them play important roles in the process of healing journey from PTSD

### References

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