

Depictions of Mental Illness and Recovery in Twenty-First Century Young Adult Fiction

Emma Salt-Raper

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds

School of English

December 2023

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

This copy has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

The right of Emma Salt-Raper to be identified as Author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

© 2023 The University of Leeds and Emma Salt-Raper

Acknowledgements

My primary thanks are owed to my supervisor, Professor Stuart Murray. I am incredibly grateful for your constant support, unwavering patience, and kind words throughout the past four years. I will always be appreciative of your ability to see the bigger picture, particularly when I was finding it so hard to do so.

I would also like to thank the excellent academics in the Department of English and the Centre for Medical Humanities at the University of Leeds, whose passion, thoughtfulness, and sense of community have made me feel so welcome from the first day of my doctoral experience. I am incredibly also appreciative of all involved with the Joseph Wright scholarship. Without you, completing this thesis would not have been possible.

A special thanks is also offered to Dr Clare Barker, an inspirational and compassionate Director of Postgraduate Research Studies.

I would like to extend my gratitude to the rest of my PhD cohort: your friendship has made my time at the University of Leeds even more wonderful.

To my family and friends, I appreciate the untiring love and support you've offered throughout this thesis, and I thank you for your patience across the past four years.

There are a few more people who deserve a special mention. Thank you to my Mum, for the countless childhood trips to the library which inspired my love of reading. You will be glad to know that I am paying it forward now that I have a little bookworm of my own!

To Tom, I am so indescribably grateful for everything you and your family have done for me during the last four years. Thank you for having such confidence in me, even when I didn't. Thank you for helping me remember what life is like outside of my thesis. But most of all, thank you for never asking when this would be finished!

And finally, to Henry. I dedicate this to you, my whole life. All my favourite stories are about you, and I can't wait for us to make a lifetime more together.

Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the proliferation of young adult novels about mental health and illness produced within the twenty-first century: a literary explosion which coincided with a wider public and critical interest in adolescent fiction more generally. This is a vital time for young adult literature as it has only recently begun to be recognized both as an increasingly popular genre of fiction with evolving readerships, and a rich site for academic scholarship. Across three main chapters, it tracks newly formed, constantly evolving voices of mentally ill adolescents. It examines how factors such as experiencing symptoms of mental illness, articulation of such symptoms, and help-seeking behaviours are shaped by other forms of identity politics including gender and sexuality. It attends to the complexities encountered when holding the first and second decade of the twenty-first century as positions on a broad spectrum of fictionalized portrayals of lived experiences of mental illness, whilst demonstrating that literature published in each decade produces a range of sophistications and double movements. Nevertheless, the thesis identifies a trajectory of desired inclusion in which the selected fiction becomes less reliant upon static and linear binaries of illness / restitution and narrow and adult-centred scripts of recovery as the twenty-first century moves on. This thesis explores how young adult literature moves towards agentic constructions of mentally ill subjectivities which produce fiction that pushes the boundaries of the genre beyond the grounded clinical locations outlined as problematic early in the thesis. It discusses how the first decade of the twenty-first century produced fictionalized forms of restitution which require strict assimilation into predetermined patterns of gendered behaviour and power structures which limit adolescents' power over their illnesses, bodies, and recovery. As the thesis progresses, it focuses upon how more recent contributions to the growing body of work challenge naturalistic modes of expression. Such fiction opens possibilities that construct innovative worlds in which mental illness is accommodated, and animated in nuanced formations.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	II
Abstract	III
Introduction: Placing Mental Health in the Shifting Terrain of Young Adult Fiction	1
1.1 Part One: Three Contexts	4
1.1.1 Context One: Historical Precedence	4
1.1.2 Context Two: Changing Directions.....	9
1.1.3 Context Three: Critical Approaches	12
1.2 Part Two: Overviews and Arguments	17
1.2.1 Chapter One Overview.....	19
1.2.2 Chapter Two Overview.....	20
1.2.3 Chapter Three Overview	22
1.3 Conclusion	24
1.3.1 A Note on Language and Labelling.....	26
1.3.2 Coda	31
Chapter 1: Girls, Institutionalized: Identity, Authority and Body Modification in Young Adult Literature, 2000-2009	35
1.1 Part One: Contextualizing Self-Harm and Eating Disorders as a Form of Body Modification	35
1.1.1 Writing Back: Responses to the Shame and Sexuality Cast onto Girls' Bodies	40
1.1.2 Introducing Young Adult Fiction to the Discussion of Female Embodiment 43	
1.2 Part Two: The Construction and Repression of Female Embodied Identity in Patricia McCormick's <i>Cut</i> (2000)	51
1.2.1 Identifying External Conceptions of Power over Female Bodies within Scripts of Recovery.....	54
1.2.2 The Role of the Institution within the Recovery Trajectory	56
1.3 Part Three: Performances of Adolescent Female Body Modification in Early Twenty-first Century Young Adult Fiction	61
1.3.1 Laurie Halse Anderson's <i>Wintergirls</i>	62
1.3.2 Melody Carlson's <i>Blade Silver</i>	67
1.3.3 Ellen Hopkins' <i>Impulse</i>	70
1.3.4 Bringing Texts into Conversation with Each Other	75
1.4 Conclusion	79

Chapter 2: Masculinity and Mental Illness in Young Adult Literature, 2013-2018	82
2.1 Section One: Conformities 2000-2010	85
2.1.1 Heroes, Warriors and Swordsmen	85
2.1.2 Hegemonic Masculinity	86
2.1.3 Male Friendship Groups in Public and Private Spaces	87
2.1.4 Homosexuality	88
2.2 Section Two: Complexities 2010-2020.	90
2.2.1 Reframing the Hero	90
2.2.2 Broad Performances of Masculinity	90
2.2.3 Power Structures and Gendered Performance	91
2.2.4 Nurturing within Friendship Groups	92
2.2.5 Homosexuality	93
2.3 Section Three: Mental Illness and Recovery, 2015-2018	94
2.3.1 Return of the Adolescent Male Hero	94
2.3.2 Collective and Public Masculinity	95
2.3.3 Homosexuality	96
2.3.4 Depression and Narrative	98
2.4 John Corey Whaley's <i>Highly Illogical Behaviour</i> (2016) and Adam Silvera's <i>More Happy Than Not</i> (2015).	102
2.4.1 Symptoms and Recovery	102
2.4.2 Health-related Shame	108
2.5 Heroes and Detectives in Young Adult Novels about Mental Illness 2013-2017. 111	
2.5.1 Adding Mental Health to the Twenty-first Century Boy Hero and Detective Story	113
2.5.2 'A messed up cadre of superheroes': Mental Illness and Heroism in <i>The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B</i> (2013) and <i>A World Without You</i> (2016). 116	
2.6 Mental Illness and the Boy Detective in Wesley King's <i>OCDaniel</i> (2016) and Lisa Thompson's <i>The Goldfish Boy</i> (2017).	124
2.6.1 Reframing Symptoms of Mental Distress as Heroic Attributes	129
2.7 Conclusion	132
Chapter 3: Portrayals of Adolescent Female Mental Illness and Recovery in Young Adult Fiction, 2015-2020	135
3.1 Moving Forward: Shifts in Agency	135
3.2 Part One: The Quest for Normalcy: Scripts, Templates and Diaries in Holly Bourne's <i>Am I Normal Yet?</i> (2015) and Kate Weston's <i>Diary of a Confused Feminist</i> (2020).	138

3.2.1	'A normal having-sex type person': Normalizing Heterosexual Desire	142
3.2.2	'Good thoughts' and 'bad thoughts': Binaries of Mental Health and Illness	146
3.2.3	Normalization of Gender Roles, Ableism and Shame	151
3.2.4	'Immune to the meds that promise to fix me, to turn me into a normal girl again': Transitions and Contradictions in Karen Fortunati's <i>The Weight of Zero</i> (2016)	156
3.3	Part Two: Greater Abstractions: Psychosis, Hallucinations and Delusions	160
3.3.1	Constructing Agentic Schizophrenic Identities	165
3.3.2	'Is <i>normal</i> for me different than it is for other people?' Fragmentations and Shifting Realities in Alyssa Sheinmel's <i>A Danger to Herself and Others</i> (2019) and An Na's <i>The Place Between Breaths</i> (2018).....	169
3.3.3	Moving Beyond Binaries	172
3.4	Conclusion	178
Chapter 4: Conclusion: Sliding Scales and Critical Entanglements in Young Adult Literature about Mental Health		181
4.1	'Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors': Problematic Analogies in Young Adult Literature Scholarship	182
4.2	Young Adult Fiction and an Assumed Importance of Identity Positions within the Classroom	185
4.3	New Possibilities: Moving Beyond Binaries	188
4.4	New Opportunities Represented by Science Fiction and Digital Media	191
4.5	Looking Towards the Future of Young Adult Literature about Mental Illness	193
Bibliography		196
Appendix 1		216
Appendix 2		217
Appendix 3		218
Appendix 4		219

Introduction: Placing Mental Health in the Shifting Terrain of Young Adult Fiction

The twenty-first century is a vital time for young adult literature due to the genre's changing literary and critical landscape. This is a period in which the growing popularity and expanding readership of the writing coincides with its increasing tendencies to respond to problematic ideologies, social issues and systematic injustices. For the past 30 years, much critical attention has been paid to the genre's engagement with certain forms of identity politics, particularly race, sexuality and gender. However, the fiction's portrayals of the lived experiences of mental illness remains an under-researched area. This thesis attends to the complexities that occur when recent young adult fiction participates in conversations about adolescent mental illness and recovery. My intervention is to extend the scholarship on writing for adolescents since 2000 by examining how such conversations regarding the rising mental health crisis among young people are animated within the genre. In their work *From Wallflowers to Bulletproof Families: The Power of Disability in Young Adult Narratives*, Abbye E. Meyer defines adolescent fiction as 'a set of texts *about* adolescence, most often *for* adolescents'.¹ However, a definition of the genre is much more expansive and elusive than Meyer suggests. As Rebekah Fitzsimmons and Casey Alane Wilson argue in *Beyond the Blockbusters: Themes and Trends in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction*, 'young adult literature—much like the audience to which it caters—is both young and profoundly complex'.²

Part One will attend to these complexities by constructing a definition of the body of work known as young adult fiction. Part One is divided into three contexts: Historical Precedence, Changing Directions, and Critical Approaches, as this is the best way to deal with the sophistications and contradictions present in such a new, complex and ever-changing genre of fiction. Context One: Historical Precedence will identify young adult fiction's origins and give a brief discussion of the genre's dominant critical moves since its inception. It will then go on to identify the genre's multiple iterations and trends since the 1960s, such as the coming-of-age story or the problem novel. It will comment upon how contributions to the genre since 2000 show an increasing complexity and often engage with wider social concerns, perhaps contributing to its growing readership. It discusses the parameters of its range of readerships by grappling with the slippery concept of adolescence

¹ Abbye E. Meyer, *From Wallflowers to Bulletproof Families: The Power of Disability in Young Adult Narratives* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2022), p. 12.

² Rebekah Fitzsimmons and Casey Alane Wilson, *Beyond the Blockbusters: Themes and Trends in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2020), p. xi.

within the twenty-first century and seeking to understand the increasingly blurred boundaries between adolescence and adulthood.

Context Two: Changing Directions will move the discussion on to outline the thesis's intervention: to produce a detailed discussion of the explosion of twenty-first century young adult novels that feature characters with mental illnesses. It will investigate the causes of this proliferation of texts, considering how it is a fascinating and vital time for young adult literature due to its increasing responsiveness to social issues such as the recent mental health crisis amongst young people. Context Two attends to the tensions surrounding the popular discourse which aims to be more accepting of mental ill health, and the production of a society which continues to create structures that make young people's mental wellbeing worse. It goes on to outline how critical scholarship has responded to the explosion of mental health narratives. It discusses the function of young adult fiction both inside and outside the classroom and outlines what critical work has already been completed on depictions of mental health and recovery within recent adolescent literature. Context Two moves on to focus on how the examination of this fiction as literary constructs has been excluded from this critical discussion so far. It demonstrates how my work creates and occupies an innovative space within this new wave of critical writing as it goes beyond limited interpretations – which consider the texts as merely instructional – to examine the fiction as literary constructions.

Context Three: Critical Approaches begins by establishing some critical choices which enable my selection of primary material. It will explore how the selection of primary texts across the thesis is shaped by ideas of inclusivity and diversity including, but not limited to, race, sexuality, disability, class, and gender. It demonstrates how the genre's response to calls for wider diversity within protagonists and casts of characters informs the project's use of critical frames such as sex, gender and sexuality. The novels I will examine in this thesis generally reproduce existing binaries of gender, and this factor has shaped my reading and the structuring of the chapters. The literature I will discuss throughout the thesis as a whole has identified a need to understand the social, cultural and political contexts in which femininity and masculinity are constructed as essential components of mental health. Context Three will move on to ascertain how young people negotiate culturally constructed ideas of masculinities and femininities, and the implications these negotiations may have in achieving mental wellbeing. It will comment on the way gender socialization shapes the extent to which boys and girls identify symptoms of mental distress, define and discuss such symptoms, engage in help-seeking behaviour, and experience health-based shame. Finally,

it will discuss my animating ideas and critical frames which enable my readings of the novels, and it will outline the structural choices I have made throughout the rest of the thesis.

Part Two: Overviews and Arguments begins by setting parameters for the thesis in terms of adolescent fiction subgenres. It provides a brief discussion of the role of young adult fantasy novels within the conversation about the fictionalization of adolescent mental ill health. As we will see, themes of mental illness and recovery sometimes feature within recent fantasy young adult novels, and these portrayals are gradually being recognized as a site of critical discussion. However, the potential inclusion of such novels within this thesis creates a series of unmanageable complications. Part Two therefore provides a justification regarding why this topic exists outside of the realms of this current project.

Part Two then moves on to provide an overview of each of the three main chapters. These overviews outline each chapter's selected primary materials and the animating ideas which are used to move the chapter forward. They also outline which realms of study inform the readings of the novels. Part Two moves away from a singular notion of mental health and discusses the types of diagnoses we see within the fiction. Each overview goes on to discuss the complex, and often contradictory, movements and changes within cultural and social discourse that influence thinking on mental health and illness. Part Two concludes with a summary of my project's intervention within the field of young adult fiction. It also outlines the current gap in criticism surrounding young adult novels that feature themes of mental illness. It demonstrates how this project works in dialogue with the research that came before it, but ultimately moves the critical conversation on to provide a significant and innovative contribution to the current body of research by assuming a space within the gap in scholarship.

Part Two provides an observation of language and labelling. It outlines a rationale for using specific terminology when discussing varied emotional and mental states and provides a justification of language and phrasing used when referring to the genre. Part Two ends with a coda which reflects upon the role of the Covid-19 pandemic within this research. As we will see, there is already some indication that the relationship between adolescent fiction and the impact the pandemic had on adolescent mental health is an area for critical investigation. The full implication of this relationship is currently unclear, and such discussion exists outside of the realms of this project. However, Part Two concludes with hinting at this complex relationship as a possibility of further research.

1.1 Part One: Three Contexts

1.1.1 Context One: Historical Precedence

Young adult literature is a complex genre which resists simple definitions. Fitzsimmons and Wilson argue that ‘a product of the 20th century, the category of young adult literature emerged as a means for publishers to capitalize on the rise of the new teenage subculture that grew out of the World War II era’.³ In his canonical work on the genre, *From Romance to Realism: 50 Years of Growth in Young Adult Literature* (1996), Michael Cart points to the 1960s as a time in which research on adolescence gained increased critical attention, suggesting that ‘it would also be the decade when literature for adolescents could be said to come into its own’.⁴ In the second half of the twentieth-century, the genre became recognized for its importance in giving a voice to the new teenage experience and began to deal with the distinct, emerging concerns of, to use Fitzsimmon’s and Wilson’s term, ‘the new teenage subculture’. This shift towards understanding adolescent perspectives produced novels which ‘no longer needed the invasive, prescriptive voice of an adult on the page to be valid and successful—the teenager and her ideas sufficed’.⁵ As Meyer suggests, ‘scholars frequently point to the publication of S.E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders* in 1967 as an accepted beginning of the young adult literary canon’.⁶ *The Outsiders* shows traces of a new type of narrative which ‘captured the imagination of its readers and spawned a new kind of literature’ that depicted the ‘kind of first-person reality’ teenagers experienced in the 1960s.⁷ Therefore, the rising critical attention being paid to adolescence during this time, along with the emergence of a new teenage voice, produced a need for an innovative type of writing for young people equipped to deal with the needs of this new subculture.

Young adult literature has assumed a range of iterations since its conception in the 1960s, and such forms have attracted varying degrees of critical attention. As Meyer suggests, young adult novels produced around the time of its conception frequently assumed the form of the ‘problem novel’, known for its confessional narration and its tendency to address ‘problems and serious issues faced by young people’.⁸ Such novels

³ Fitzsimmons and Wilson, *Beyond the Blockbusters*, p. xi.

⁴ Michael Cart, *From Romance to Realism: 50 Years of Growth and Change in Young Adult Literature* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), p. 45.

⁵ Fitzsimmons and Wilson, *Beyond the Blockbusters*, p. xi.

⁶ Meyer, *From Wallflowers to Bulletproof Families*, p. 11.

⁷ Cart, *From Romance to Realism*, p. 45.

⁸ Meyer, *From Wallflowers to Bulletproof Families*, p. 11.

are frequently 'dismissed' within the realms of literary criticism due to the structure of the model, which is presumed to 'give more attention to lessons than to stories, characters, or other literary complexities'.⁹ As such, the didactic nature of the twentieth-century young adult problem novel causes it to be limited by the notions of accuracy and prevents it from becoming understood as a literary text which is worthy of critical attention. The late twentieth-century then produced a wide range of adolescent fiction which assumed the role of the coming-of-age story and, due to the genre's 'focus on characters whose age positions them on the verge of adulthood',¹⁰ it is perhaps unsurprising that this iteration still remains central to some discussion of recent young adult literature. Fitzsimmons and Wilson argue that 'recognizing that the teenage protagonists must experience some form of growth, regardless of whether or not that growth brings them into adulthood' is still a common topic of discourse surrounding adolescent fiction.¹¹

More recently, young adult literature has been dominated by a series of 'blockbuster' books across a range of subgenres. The 'blockbuster' text has been defined as 'a singular success in one genre [which] makes room for an array of lesser-known entrants to follow'.¹² For example, critics suggest that the success of Stephanie Meyer's novel *Twilight* (2007) 'reinvigorated the [young adult] publishing industry and launched a massive interest in the paranormal romance genre' and led to the production of a range of similar texts.¹³ *Twilight* was succeeded by Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* (2008), which in turn inspired a wide variety of dystopian trilogies that came to dominate the genre. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, Fitzsimmons and Wilson go on to credit John Green's novel *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012) with causing a revival of interest in adolescent romance fiction.¹⁴ As we will now see, the genre's phase of 'blockbuster' texts, which led sales within the genre in the early twenty-first century, coincides with an increasing quality, greater critical discussion, and wider readership of novels written for young people.

Since its conception in the 1960s then, adolescent fiction has undergone frequent and complex shifts, and this evolution continued throughout the beginning of the twenty-first century. In her 2017 work 'History Repeating Itself: The Portrayal of Female Characters in Young Adult Literature at the Beginning of the Millennium', Terri Suico argues that the new

⁹ Meyer, *From Wallflowers to Bulletproof Families*, p. 11.

¹⁰ Fitzsimmons and Wilson, *Beyond the Blockbusters*, p. xi.

¹¹ Fitzsimmons and Wilson, *Beyond the Blockbusters*, p. xi.

¹² Fitzsimmons and Wilson, *Beyond the Blockbusters*, p. xiv.

¹³ Fitzsimmons and Wilson, *Beyond the Blockbusters*, p. xiv.

¹⁴ Fitzsimmons and Wilson, *Beyond the Blockbusters*, p. xiv.

millennium ‘brought about a renaissance for [young adult literature] in terms of popularity, variety and, some critics and scholars would argue, quality’.¹⁵ This ‘renaissance’ for adolescent fiction was matched by an expansion of critical analysis. In a discussion in the 2020 edition of the *International Journal of Young Adult Literature*, Emily Corbett and Leah Phillips argue that during the past twenty years, young adult literature scholarship ‘has become a thriving part of academic discourse’.¹⁶ Literary criticism’s increasing engagement with the complexities of adolescent fiction has continued into the second decade of the twenty-first century, with organizations such as the YA Studies Association (founded in 2020) marking ‘a turning point’ in research into this ‘rich and fertile field’.¹⁷ The increasing quality of twenty-first century contributions to the genre also coincides with a widening readership. As Suico suggests, the past twenty years produced adolescent fiction which is longer, more complex, and aimed at an older audience compared to the previous century, and the fiction’s tendencies to appeal to adult readers has continued into the second decade.¹⁸

As we will now see, like the genre itself, young adult fiction’s readership is complex, expanding, and frequently shifting. Mike Cadden argues that young adult literature researchers face a conundrum: ‘how do we define ourselves and the audience? When you have bodies of literature named for readers, it changes how people talk about it’.¹⁹ Cadden goes on to discuss the challenging nature of defining journals dedicated to adolescent fiction and setting parameters to determine its readerships. In her work on recent trends in writing for young people, Kathy G. Short attributes the ‘purity of the storytelling and the strength of the writing, particularly the fantastical worlds, inventiveness, and imagination’ to a wider readership among adults.²⁰ As a result, adults now make up 55% of the young adult genre readership.²¹ The emergence of the young adult ‘blockbuster’ novel ultimately ‘dissolves the often arbitrary relationship boundaries set up by publishing categories, such as those

¹⁵ Terri Suico, ‘History Repeating Itself: The Portrayal of Female Characters in Young Adult Literature at the Beginning of the Millennium’, in *Gender(ed) Identities: Critical Rereadings of Gender in Children’s and Young Adult Literature*, ed. By Tricia Clasen and Holly Hassel (New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 11-27 (p. 11).

¹⁶ Emily Corbett and Leah Phillips, ‘Ploughing the Field: A Discussion About YA Studies’, *International Journal of Young Adult Literature*, 1.1 (2020), 1-22 (p. 1).

¹⁷ Corbett and Phillips, ‘Ploughing the Field’, p. 1.

¹⁸ Suico, ‘History Repeating Itself’, p. 11.

¹⁹ Mike Cadden, quoted in Corbett and Phillips, ‘Ploughing the Field’, p. 17.

²⁰ Kathy G. Short, ‘What’s Trending in Children’s Literature and Why it Matters’, *Changes in Children’s Literature*, 95.5 (2018), 287-98 (p. 288).

²¹ Short, ‘What’s Trending in Children’s Literature’, p. 288.

between teen and adult readers'.²² Fitzsimmons and Wilson argue that 'blockbuster' novels such as *Twilight* 'find an adult audience despite being written for younger readers', leading readers to consider the lack of agreement surrounding what is deemed to be suitable reading for teenagers as opposed to adults.²³ During the twenty-first century, the genre slipped into the realms of the literary mainstream due to its increased innovation, enabling the genre to blur boundaries between adolescence and adulthood and reach new audiences.

The early twenty-first century was a time at which the concept of adolescence itself became increasingly difficult to define. Susan M. Sawyer et al argue that 'adolescence is the phase of life stretching between childhood and adulthood, and its definition has long posed a conundrum'.²⁴ Certain social situations have led to a questioning of the term 'adolescence' and a blurring of boundaries between adolescence and adulthood. Compared to earlier generations, young people are staying longer in education and delaying marriage and parenthood, therefore reinforcing a type of adolescence and transforming popular understandings of when adulthood begins. Sawyer et al go on to suggest that 'the transition period from childhood to adulthood now occupies a greater portion of the life course than ever before at a time when unprecedented social forces, including marketing and digital media, are affecting health and wellbeing'.²⁵ As such, they argue that adolescence now takes place between 10-24 years of age, as this period corresponds to a time of growth and

²² Fitzsimmons and Wilson, *Beyond the Blockbusters*, p. xiv. Fitzsimmons and Wilson build on Rachel Falconer's 2009 text *The Crossover Novel: Contemporary Children's Fiction and its Adult Readership*. Examining writing for young people produced 1997-2007, Falconer discusses the popular and critical success of novels such as the *Harry Potter* (J.K. Rowling) and *His Dark Materials* (Philip Pullman) series and its adult readerships. Whilst adults enjoying reading books written for young people is not a new concept, Falconer suggests that at the turn of the new millennium 'the crossover novel came into its own' (p. 9). Falconer avoids 'constructing any hard-edged definitions of what does and does not constitute 'crossover fiction' because an essential feature of this category of fiction is that its boundaries are unfixed' (p.9). She goes on to discuss the limitations of attempting to define the characteristics of 'crossover novels' as the texts themselves appear hybrid, and readers 'are hybridising different readerly identities when they 'cross over' to reading a book that was intended, at least ostensibly, for someone other and elsewhere' (p. 9).

²³ Fitzsimmons and Wilson, *Beyond the Blockbusters*, p. xiv.

²⁴ Susan M. Sawyer, Peter S. Azzopardi, Dakshitha Wickremarathne and George C. Patton, 'The Age of Adolescence', *Lancet Child Adolescent Health* (2018), 1-6 (p.1).

²⁵ Sawyer et al, 'The Age of Adolescence', p. 1.

gradually increasing maturity.²⁶ Young people in the twenty-first century are now increasingly likely to delay milestones which signify a form of maturity, such as completing education, embarking on a career, and moving away from the family home. As such, the figure of the adolescent has transformed into a new subculture to include people up to 24 years old.

At the turn of the millennium, the genre moved away from iterations of ‘the problem novel’ or the ‘seemingly frivolous romance’ and critics began to appreciate that the genre ‘can deal with important topics with sensitivity and nuance’.²⁷ Young adult literature critic Angel Daniel Matos comments further on the fiction’s ability to help readers ‘recognise and challenge many of the problematic ideologies and injustices present in [their] community’.²⁸ Recent adolescent novels depict a wider range of social issues than twentieth-century contributions to the genre, by commenting on, to use Matos’s term ‘problematic ideologies and injustices’ relating to race, religion, disability, social class, immigration, social unrest, gender, sexuality and environmental issues. Critical material has followed in response to the genre’s tendencies to discuss sociological concerns and systematic inequalities. In their book *Gender(ed) Identities: Critical Rereadings of Gender in Children’s and Young Adult Literature* (2017), Tricia Clasen and Holly Hassel identify a ‘rich growth in the body of critical work that has sought to interpret the trends, themes, and conventions’ emerging in recent adolescent novels.²⁹ They argue that ‘most recently, critical directions have focused on questions about identity, environmental approaches, postcolonial readings, material contexts, and theoretical trends like historical materialism, psychoanalysis, and extra-textual or paratextual features’.³⁰ Whilst the genre still occasionally assumes the form of the ‘problem novel’ and the romance subgenre, these conventions no longer dominate the material. As Jennifer Gouck argues, adolescent fiction is similar to adult writing in that ‘there are “light-hearted” texts and there are “literary texts” (and, indeed, everything in between)’.³¹ The notion of an individual teenage experience no longer prevails within the genre as it moves towards creating new traditions by covering a wide range of subject matter which includes responses to systematic inequalities and other forms of social injustice. The genre’s

²⁶ Sawyer et al, ‘The Age of Adolescence’, p. 1.

²⁷ Jennifer Gouck, quoted in Corbett and Phillips, ‘Ploughing the Field’, p. 2.

²⁸ Angel Daniel Matos, quoted in Corbett and Phillips, ‘Ploughing the Field’, p. 2.

²⁹ *Gender(ed) Identities: Critical Rereadings of Gender in Children’s and Young Adult Literature*, ed. By Tricia Clasen and Holly Hassel (New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 1.

³⁰ Clasen and Hassel, *Gender(ed) Identities*, p. 1.

³¹ Gouck, quoted in Corbett and Phillips, ‘Ploughing the Field’, p. 2.

heightened quality, broadening readership and ability to address vital social issues make it, as we will now see, the ideal platform to engage with the growing concern regarding young people's mental health.

1.1.2 Context Two: Changing Directions

My intervention in this thesis is to bring a detailed discussion of mental health into this field of young adult literature scholarship. Within the twenty-first century, the genre's increasing tendencies to respond to social issues and its rising popularity and quality coincided with a rising mental health crisis among young people. As such, the era continues to see an explosion of adolescent novels which deals with the topic, and a gradually deepening critical awareness of such fiction. Meyer describes JD Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) and Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963) as 'perhaps the first novels to feature the intelligent, anxious teenage voice that immediately labels many contemporary young adult novels', identifying these texts as the 'starting points' for discussion on depictions of mental illness within the genre.³² However, since the turn of the new millennium, 'young adult novels of mental illness have been published in large numbers' and this trend has grown exponentially since 2010.³³ As Karen Coats argues, writing for adolescents has recently become 'such a dominant market force because it corresponds to the way we live now, but that may not be the way we live three months from now, or next year'.³⁴ The recent trend of fiction that portrays cognitive difference therefore is a response to the growing adolescent lived experience of mental ill health. During the years 2001-2004, 'nearly half of all adolescents ages 13–18 showed signs of some mental illness (as defined by the earlier fourth edition of the *DSM*)'.³⁵ This social issue is now reaching a crisis, with over half of American children aged 6-17 receiving treatment for symptoms of mental illness in 2019.³⁶ In their 2020 research, Janine J. Darragh and Ashley S. Boyd suggest that 'one in five children ages 13–

³² Meyer, *From Wallflowers to Bulletproof Families*, p. 12.

³³ Diane Scrofano, 'Disability Narrative Theory and Young Adult Fiction of Mental Illness', *The Journal for Research on Libraries and Young Adults*, 10.1 (2019), 1-33 (p. 8).

³⁴ Karen Coats, quoted in Corbett and Phillips, 'Ploughing the Field', p. 9-10.

³⁵ Scrofano, 'Disability Narrative Theory and Young Adult Fiction of Mental Illness', p. 3.

³⁶ Chelsea Herndon Warner, "'Can you see me now?" Building Bridges with Literacy to make Hidden Disabilities Visible through Young Adult Literature', *Association of Literacy and Researchers*, 42 (2020), 267-79 (p. 268).

18 has or will have a serious mental illness'.³⁷ As we will now see, these statistics allude to a tension between greater mental health awareness and increased levels of mental illness among young people.

The increased social discourse surrounding mental wellbeing may suggest that society is becoming more progressive in its attitudes towards altered emotional states. However, as we have seen, more young people than ever are becoming diagnosed with poor mental health. There is a possibility that young people's mental health has, perhaps, always been turbulent but recently society has become more adept at discussing this, identifying symptoms and understanding diagnoses. The 2022 updates to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders, 5th Edition (DSM-5)*, originally published in 2013, outlined a wider range of diagnosable mental illnesses than ever before, allowing for a greater possibility for diagnosis.³⁸ Nevertheless we now see tensions in a society that attempts to be more considerate in its discussion of mental health whilst still creating structures that make young people's emotional wellbeing worse. Ultimately, reaching a consensus in response to these tensions exists outside of the scope of this thesis. Instead, it focuses on how these tensions are animated within the fiction. In their work on post-traumatic stress disorder in recent young adult fiction, Kelly Keus and Roxanne Harde argue that 'mass media depictions of disability are predominantly negative, portraying people living with a mental illness as dangerous, peculiar, or unattractive, even when that media is specifically targeted at children'.³⁹ As we will soon see, greater awareness of altered states of emotional wellbeing does not necessarily lead to more enlightened fiction on the topic of adolescent mental health. In some cases, the fiction reinscribes the same regressive attitudes that are supposedly being eradicated within social discourse. Although the twenty-first century produces shifts in how a culture tells stories about its emotional wellbeing, older and more regressive models of mental health frequently continue to be articulated within the fiction discussed in this thesis.

This proliferation of texts that depict symptoms of mental illness is gradually gaining critical attention. In their 2020 work on depictions of OCD in adolescent writing, Elsie Lindy

³⁷ Janine J. Darragh and Ashley S. Boyd, 'Putting the Pieces Together: Destigmatizing Self-Harm through Kathleen Glasgow's *Girl in Pieces*', in *Breaking the Taboo with Young Adult Literature*. Ed. By Victor Malo-Juvera (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2020), pp. 41-47 (p. 41).

³⁸ Taneasha White, 'What the New *DSM-5-TR* Updates Could Mean for Your Mental Health', *PsychCentral*, < <https://psychcentral.com/news/dsm-5-updates-2022> > [Accessed 27 March 2023].

³⁹ Kelly Keus and Roxanne Harde, "'She Wished Someone Would Help Them": PTSD and Empathy in the *Six of Crows* Duology', *Children's Literature in Education*, 53.1 (2022), 130-46 (p. 131).

Olan and Kia Jane Richmond argue that the past two decades have produced a ‘renaissance’ in research on the genre’s depiction of mental wellbeing and illness.⁴⁰ Despite this renewed interest, critical discourse has surrounded the *function* of such young adult literature, both inside and outside the classroom, and largely neglected to consider the texts as literary constructs beyond this limited interpretation. Adolescent novels generally exist outside of the traditional literary canon, and as such the genre ‘does not dominate high school classrooms to the same extent as traditional texts’.⁴¹ When young adult writing is used in the classroom, it is not often valued as a literary text, but instead used for didactic purposes, or to foster empathy and destigmatize certain conditions such as mental illnesses. In their 2020 article on using adolescent literature to learn about marginalized experiences, Emily Booth argues that the genre ‘can act as a window into lives different from that of the reader and have the potential to inform teenagers everywhere about the experiences of marginalized communities’.⁴² The article goes on to use interviews with writers of young adult fiction, drawing attention to ‘the perspectives and frustrations of the authors who are too often expected to be educators’.⁴³ According to Booth, this expectation that such authors must solely create didactic novels for young people prevents them from accomplishing their ‘primary responsibility – to tell a good story’.⁴⁴ Whilst critical discourse has moved on to appreciate the genre as producing a wider range of options than the didactic ‘problem novel’ of the twentieth-century, options for using adolescent writing in the classroom are still limited to being used for educational purposes or, as we will now see, to foster empathy for the voices of marginalized youth.

Critical conversations surrounding the use of the genre in the classroom to destigmatize symptoms of mental illness and empathise with young people who experience cognitive difference make a significant contribution to young adult literature scholarship. In their 2018 research on teachers’ use of adolescent literature to promote advocacy for marginalized young people, Katherine E. Batchelor examines the role of the genre within

⁴⁰ Elsie Lindy Olan and Kia Jane Richmond, ‘Examining Mental Illness in John Green’s *Turtles All the Way Down*: OCD-More than Just Attention to Detail’, in *Breaking the Taboo with Young Adult Literature*. Ed. By Victor Malo-Juvera (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2020), pp. 34-40 (p. 34).

⁴¹ Victor Malo-Juvera and Crag Hill, eds., *Young Adult Literature: Identifying and Critiquing the Canon* (New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 1.

⁴² Emily Booth, ‘“The Expectations that we be Educators”: The Views of Australian Authors of Young Adult Fiction on their OwnVoices Novels as Windows for Learning about Marginalized Experiences’, *The Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults*, 11.1 (2020) p. 18.

⁴³ Booth, ‘“The Expectations that we be Educators”’, p. 18.

⁴⁴ Booth, ‘“The Expectations that we be Educators”’, p. 18.

the classroom with three early career teachers. Batchelor discusses the use of fiction that portrays the lived experience of mental illness in the classroom, arguing that ‘immersing students in various texts regarding mental health will hopefully provide empathy toward this topic’.⁴⁵ Scrofano proposes similar functions of such novels in the classroom as she suggests that such fiction can not only ‘help build awareness of mental illness in adult professionals’ but also ‘can show teens struggles that they can relate to and provide hope for the future’.⁴⁶ There is a vast body of critical work on how young adult fiction should be used in the classroom in ways that foster empathy and remove social stigmas.⁴⁷ However, the discussion of such texts in terms of their literary sophistication still represents a neglected area of scholarship. The intellectual and critical ambition of this thesis is therefore to extend this scholarship by examining the complexities of twenty-first century young adult literature through the lens of mental illness and recovery. As Karen Coats argues, since its inception, the genre’s purpose ‘was to look at social problems’ and to give a voice to ‘cultural outsiders’.⁴⁸ In line with these traditions, this project examines the previously neglected voice of adolescent mental illness as a literary construct. It creates and occupies a space between sociology, theories of medicine, and textual criticism in order to re-frame the young adult genre to investigate the sophistication of such fictionalized health and illness narratives.

1.1.3 Context Three: Critical Approaches

When selecting the primary material for this project, I made a distinction between texts in which adolescents experience some form of emotional distress, and characters who identify as experiencing symptoms of mental illness. As such, I selected texts in which the character articulates the lived experience of mental illness, receives a diagnosis, and works through some form of trajectory. In addition to this critical choice, I have sought to draw out a range of narratives which are broadly inclusive in terms of gender, sexuality and race. I situate my

⁴⁵ Katherine E. Batchelor, ‘Using Lined Text Sets to Promote Advocacy and Agency Through a Critical Lens’, *International Literacy Association*, 62.4 (2018), 379-86 (p. 384).

⁴⁶ Scrofano, ‘Disability Narrative Theory and Young Adult Fiction of Mental Illness’, p. 3.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Alyssa Chrisman and Mollie V. Blackburn’s 2019 work, ‘Interrogating Happiness: Unraveling Homophobia in the Lives of Queer Youth of Color with More Happy Than Not’ in *Engaging with Multicultural YA Literature in the Secondary Classroom: Critical Approaches for Critical Educators*, ed. By Ricki Ginsberg and Wendy J. Glenn; Kia Jane Richmond’s 2019 teaching guide *Mental Illness in Young Adult Literature: Exploring Real Struggles through Fictional Characters*; and Janine J. Darragh and Ashley S. Boyd’s chapter ‘Putting the Pieces Together: Destigmatizing Self-Harm through Kathleen Glasgow’s *Girl in Pieces*’ in *Breaking the Taboo with Young Adult Literature (2020)*, ed. By Victor Malo-Juvera for recent work on how young adult fiction is used in the classroom to foster empathy and teach young people about the problematic stigmatization of mental illness.

⁴⁸ Karen Coats, quoted in Corbett and Phillips, ‘Ploughing the Field’, p. 5.

selections and readings of the texts in relation to the genre's response to critics' and readers' demand for more diverse representations. Kaylee Jangula Mootz argues that for years 'scholars have criticized the "all-white world" of children's publishing, which overwhelmingly preferences white authors, protagonists, and casts of characters'.⁴⁹ Consequently, the #weneeddiversebooks project was established in 2014 and seeks to promote texts that 'recognize all diverse experiences, including (but not limited to) LGBTQIA, Native, people of color, gender diversity, people with disabilities, and ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities'.⁵⁰ As Mootz suggests, this critical discussion has been taking place in the realms of young adult fiction scholarship for many years, but 'only recently have publishers begun to respond' to this need for wider diversity within the genre.⁵¹ My methodology therefore engages with questions of sex, gender, sexuality and race in its discussion of the variety of mental health representation available in the realms of young adult fiction.

Throughout this thesis I use sex and gender to frame my readings of mental wellbeing and illness within writing for young adults. I have divided the chapters into the discussion of mental illness trajectories for girls and boys. However, this critical choice is necessary as it follows how the developing material has presented itself between 2000-2020. In the future, I hope to see a new series of texts that display a more inclusive attitude to gender, including but not limited to mental illness narratives that feature trans, non-binary and intersex characters. In their work on moving beyond binaries of gender in books for adolescents, Ashley E. Pennell and Connie Green assert that despite 'an increase in the number of books featuring gender-diverse characters in recent years, the number is still exceptionally low considering the total number of books published annually'.⁵² When gender-diverse characters do occasionally feature in adolescent writing, they often assume stereotypical and problematic roles. In her 2021 work on transphobia in young adult novels, Chelsea Bowden argues that many representations of transgender and gender non-conforming characters appear 'repetitive and predictable, with the queer inevitably presented as

⁴⁹ Kaylee Jangula Mootz, 'Police-Violence YA, Black Youth Activism, and the Implied White Audience', in *Beyond the Blockbusters: Themes and Trends in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction*, ed. by Rebekah Fitzsimmons and Casey Alane Wilson (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2020), pp. 63-79 (p. 65).

⁵⁰ #weneeddiversebooks, *WNDB: About Us* <<https://diversebooks.org/about-wndb/>> [accessed 14 March 2023].

⁵¹ Mootz, 'Police-Violence YA, Black Youth Activism, and the Implied White Audience', p. 65.

⁵² Ashley E. Pennell and Connie Green, 'Beyond the Binary: Exploring Gender Diversity in Books for Adolescents', *Association of Literacy and Researchers*, 42 (2020), 281-98 (p. 286)

victimized, internally conflicted, mentally unwell, isolated and out of place'.⁵³ Similarly, BJ Epstein suggests that 'trans novels can be depressing' because even in contemporary society the transgender community are subjected to significant adversity, including abuse, social rejection and disproportionately high suicide rates.⁵⁴ Therefore, currently a transgender or gender non-conforming character in a young adult novel would unfortunately be likely to be placed within an ill health context. They may experience types of repression which would impact negatively on their mental health but they may not receive a diagnosis for a specific condition in ways that I will discuss throughout this thesis. Ultimately, the trend of fiction I will discuss still reinforces dichotomized perceptions of gender.

Even in the twenty-first century, boys and girls are still unfortunately frequently socialized into different patterns of gendered behaviour and these roles impact on the way in which they experience, articulate and seek help for mental distress. This socialization of gender roles, and how it shapes the lived experience of mental illness within adolescent writing, is a key area for examination in the thesis. Within *A Sociology of Mental Health and Illness* (2021), Anne Rogers and David Pilgrim discuss the lifetime prevalence of mental illnesses worldwide, finding 'gendered differences in mental health in all countries'.⁵⁵ The authors go on to suggest that experiences of anxiety, mood and substance disorders are 'rooted in women's life experiences'.⁵⁶ Compared to men, women are more likely to identify signs of mental distress, define their symptoms in mental health terms and have positive expectations of psychiatric treatment, leading to a greater ability to articulate their experiences, and these factors may 'account for the female focus of much mental health research'.⁵⁷

Similar patterns of gendered diagnosis emerge within the body of work I examine. This, to use Rogers and Pilgrim's term, historically 'female focus' of mental health, is reflected within the primary material and therefore my chapter organization, and accounts for two chapters dedicated to female characters' articulation of symptoms and negotiations of treatment and one on the way boys experience mental distress. The assumption that girls

⁵³ Chelsea Bowden, 'Transphobic Tropes in Contemporary Young Adult Novels about Queer Gender', *The Australasian Journal of Popular Culture*, 1.1 (2021), 65-77 (p. 67).

⁵⁴ BJ Epstein, *Are the Kids All Right? Representations of LGBTQ Characters in Children's and Young Adult Literature* (Bristol: HammerOn Press, 2015), p. 146.

⁵⁵ Anne Rogers and David Pilgrim, *A Sociology of Mental Health and Illness*, 6th edn (London: Open University Press, 2021), p. 71.

⁵⁶ Rogers and Pilgrim, *A Sociology of Mental Health and Illness*, p. 71.

⁵⁷ Rogers and Pilgrim, *A Sociology of Mental Health and Illness*, p. 75.

are more prone to identifying, articulating and seeking treatment for such conditions is animated in my study of texts in Chapter One, which focuses on fiction about girls produced within the first decade of the twenty-first century. Chapter One uses models of gender and embodiment as its critical ideas and investigates how the genre reproduces adult-created scripts of femininity that contribute towards the internalization of anxieties onto the body in forms such as self-harm and eating disorders. It goes on to examine the novels' constructed notions of female embodiment and bodily autonomy within the ideological confines of the mental health institution. As we will see, Chapter One extends the discussion of gendered experiences of mental illness by discussing how the fiction reproduces narrow binaries of illness and clinical restitution. It traces recovery trajectories, which often assume the form of simplified adult-controlled restitution processes that rely upon assimilation into normative models of mental health.

Moving into the second decade of the twenty-first century, social attitudes towards mental health become broader and more enlightened. This perspective is particularly formative in Chapter Three, in which I explore how these notions are animated within the adolescent fiction about girls produced 2015-2020. Reflecting the greater and more progressive public discourse surrounding mental wellbeing, the novels discussed in Chapter Three generally locate girls in more agentic positions compared to Chapter One. The fiction examined in Chapter Three demonstrates some traces of structures which assume health and illness binaries, and produce pathological scripts that flatten the complexities of lived experience of mental illness. However, Chapter Three generally exemplifies a movement away from the kinds of problematic structures of clinical institutionalization and feminine bodily surveillance outlined previously. Throughout the chapter I use sex and sexuality as a lens to discuss how the genre frames normalcy as a series of discourses which prioritizes the supposed ubiquity of mental well-being and heterosexuality. Chapter Three continues to use gender as one of its key animating ideas. It moves the discussion of feminine gender roles on from Chapter One, examining how they are animated in new ways in their relation to ableism and structures of shame.

Despite increasing discourse surrounding the changing cultural landscape of masculinity, young boys' lived experience of mental distress is still heavily shaped by narrow, culturally constructed male gender roles. In their 2021 work on sociological approaches to mental health, Rogers and Pilgrim examine how 'at the general population level, men continue to express less emotion, seeing it as a sign of weakness and thus are

less likely to view help-seeking in a positive light.⁵⁸ Although there have been changes to the ways in which public discourse views models of masculinity to include discussions of emotion and well-being, young men are still reluctant to view their distress through the lens of mental illness. In her 2020 work on male mental health stigma, Benita N. Chatmon outlines ‘the sociocultural aspects of men’s acculturation to stigma related to mental health issues with emphasis on the influences of culture and traditional masculine norms’.⁵⁹ Their research is part of an increasing body of critical work which examines cultural ideologies that produce health-related stigma and shame that cause public discussion of male mental illness to be repressed.

Within the second decade of the twenty-first century, tensions emerged between increased social discourse surrounding young men’s mental health, and the restrictive ideas of masculinity which inhibit identification of symptoms, recognition of distress as psychiatric in nature, and engagement in help-seeking behaviour. This time period saw an increased social and critical discourse surrounding how the socialization of gender roles shapes young men’s identification of mental distress, articulation of symptoms and inhibits their engagement in help-seeking behaviour. However, certain patterns of male gendered behaviour still pervade society’s understandings of masculine identity and severely limit young men’s understanding of their psychiatric symptoms and the extent to which they will seek help for such issues. Rogers and Pilgrim discuss the increasingly public conversation about men’s mental health, suggesting that ‘there is now more sociological interest than in the past in suicide and masculinity’.⁶⁰ This heightened cultural awareness that young men face distinctive barriers to seeking help for mental distress is reflected in the proliferation of young adult novels about boys’ lived experiences of mental illness in the second decade of the twenty-first century. As such, Chapter Two is structured in line with this growing discourse and covers adolescent fiction produced 2013-2017.

Discussions of mental health now involve emotional literacy and a sense of vulnerability. These are types of behaviours that are constructed in direct opposition to the kinds of hegemonic masculine ideas that feature heavily in Chapter Two. In their 2020 work on the impact of masculine gender roles on mental health literacy and help-seeking behaviour, Laura H. Clark et al argue that within adolescent males, ‘mental health help-

⁵⁸ Rogers and Pilgrim, *A Sociology of Mental Health and Illness*, p. 75.

⁵⁹ Benita N. Chatmon, ‘Males and Mental Health Stigma’, *Mental Health and Wellbeing – Editorial*, 14.4 (2020), 1-3 (p. 1).

⁶⁰ Rogers and Pilgrim, *A Sociology of Mental Health and Illness*, p. 69.

seeking is inhibited by greater alignment with norms of hegemonic masculinity and a socially constructed “men don’t seek help” gender stereotype’.⁶¹ Chapter Two uses health-related shame as a key critical idea, outlining how shame is projected onto those adolescent male characters who do talk about mental well-being, thus displaying emotions and vulnerability and performing a model of masculinity which exists outside the, to use Clark et al’s term, ‘norm of hegemonic masculinity’ and is ultimately cast into shame. Hegemonic forms of masculinity consist of a series of social constructs which prioritizes individual strength, stoicism, courage and a rejection of perceived femininity and homosexuality. Vulnerability and sensitivity, as I will show in Chapter Two, are often played out in terms of sexuality and certain models of masculinity. Terms such as vulnerability, sensitivity and emotional literacy explicitly come to signal mental illness within the recent phenomenon of the discussion of boys’ mental health, and are used as animating ideas throughout Chapter Two.

1.2 Part Two: Overviews and Arguments

As I have outlined earlier, when selecting the primary material for this thesis, I set parameters to include novels in which an adolescent protagonist articulates symptoms of mental illness, undergoes diagnosis, and progresses through a form of trajectory. This critical choice has shaped further decisions in terms of subgenre, and throughout the project I have exclusively selected realist young adult fiction. As Victor Malo-Juvera and Crag Hill suggest, writing for young people is a broad field which ‘includes all its subgenres such as contemporary fiction, science fiction, fantasy, and dystopian fiction’.⁶² The discussion of such subgenres is a vital part of young adult literature scholarship, and depictions of varied and altered mental and emotional states do appear in young adult fantasy literature. As we will see, this area of critical research is starting to be discussed in young adult fiction scholarship, and some of the texts I have selected within this thesis engage with speculative elements. However, I have chosen to only include realist novels as incorporating texts from other subgenres would have resulted in the project becoming unmanageable, particularly when considering how the fantasy subgenre complicates issues surrounding the diagnosis of mental illness within the novels. Including texts across a range of subgenres produces its

⁶¹ Laura H. Clark, Jennifer L. Hudson, Ronald M. Rapee, Katrina L. Grasby, ‘Investigating the Impact of Masculinity on the Relationship Between Anxiety Specific Mental Health Literacy and Mental Health Help-Seeking in Adolescent Males’, *Journal of Anxiety Disorder*, (2020), 1-8 (p. 2).

⁶² Malo-Juvera and Hill, eds., *Young Adult Literature*, p. 6

own set of complexities which cannot be discussed within the scope of this project. The discussion of realist young adult novels about the lived experience of mental illness produces sufficient ambiguities and contradictions to consider within this thesis.

While characters with complex or altered mental states are depicted within twenty-first century young adult fantasy fiction, the fantasy worlds of such novels complicate the possibilities of characters receiving a diagnosis for mental illness. In their research on Leigh Bardugo's fantasy novel *Six of Crows* (2015), Kelly Keus and Roxanne Harde argue that 'YA fantasy novels can depict and foster empathy for mental illness'.⁶³ They go on to argue that 'several recent YA fantasy-fiction series portray, with varying degrees of success, mentally ill characters'.⁶⁴ Their reading of the text relies upon using the *DSM-5* to classify characters within *Six of Crows* as showing symptoms of PTSD, although no diagnosis is made within the fictional world of the fantasy novel. My critical choices avoid classifying characters as having a mental illness when no diagnosis is made within the storyworld of the novel. Young adult fantasy fiction perhaps has the potential to liberate teenage characters from some of the problematic ideologies of mental health that are outlined later on in this thesis. It may have the capacity to create new, innovative worlds which produce progressive ways of accommodating mental illness. However, the issues surrounding the complexities associated with classifying a character as having a mental illness in a young adult fantasy novel exist outside the scope of my project.

Although young adult fantasy fiction may make a fascinating contribution to the discussion of adolescent mental health narratives, it is a subgenre with a multifaceted literary tradition, and the space required to display an understanding of the nuances of the subgenre exists outside of the parameters of this thesis. In her work on young adult fantasy fiction, Kim Wilkins argues that the subgenre 'encompasses so much more than the context of texts', and involves the examination of 'relationships between authors, readers, and the institutions that bring them together'.⁶⁵ She goes on to suggest that genres 'are not static and unchanging categories that can be defined checklist style', and should be understood as 'dynamic formations that respond and circulate socially and industrially, forming and reforming over time'.⁶⁶ Therefore, the processes by which young adult fantasy writing is

⁶³ Keus and Harde, "She Wished Someone Would Help Them", p. 132.

⁶⁴ Keus and Harde, "She Wished Someone Would Help Them", p. 133.

⁶⁵ Kim Wilkins, *Young Adult Fantasy Fiction: Conventions, Originality, Reproducibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 6.

⁶⁶ Wilkins, *Young Adult Fantasy Fiction*, p. 6.

formed requires a different set of critical frames to those I apply to realist texts. Examining fantasy fiction would require not merely a discussion of the text but also, to use Wilkins' term, the constantly changing 'dynamic formations' by which it is produced. Although there are a broad range of altered states of consciousness depicted in fantasy writing for young people, there is a vast expansion of texts within the realist genre in which the protagonist is diagnosed with a specific mental illness. These realist adolescent narratives produce performances of mental illness and recovery which are often contradictory and ambiguous, and as we will now see, much of this thesis attends to the complex nuances associated with these conflicting attitudes towards health, illness and agency.

1.2.1 Chapter One Overview

As outlined earlier, there is no singular notion of mental health and as such, mental ill health assumes a wide and varied range of forms. Chapter One focuses on the first decade of the twenty-first century, and uncovers how the pathologization of the female body is animated within adolescent fiction. It examines the sophistications of altered mental states that involve self-harm and eating disorders through the lens of adolescent female embodiment. The chapter builds on existing scholarship on feminist embodiment to examine how desires to modify the body through self-harm and eating disorders are tightly bound to the need to regain bodily control and achieve a form of self-expression. The selected texts for this chapter are Patricia McCormick's *Cut* (2000), Melody Carlson's *Blade Silver* (2005), Ellen Hopkins' *Impulse* (2007), and Laurie Halse Anderson's *Wintergirls* (2009). The chapter focuses on the ways in which symptoms of mental distress can be identified on the female body, through methods such as self-injury and anorexia. It uses work by gender theorists such as Susan Bordo to extend the conversation regarding the ways in which the projection of shame onto the body is gendered. Chapter One moves on to discuss patriarchal views of young female bodies as sexual, and consequently examines certain forms of body modification as an act of resistance in response to such sexualization. It argues that disordered eating and self-injury form a new corporeal language which acts in opposition to problematic models of sexuality enforced upon passive adolescent female bodies. As such, these practices are politically motivated in their attempts to alter the appearance of the body and therefore deflect the male sexualized gaze. The chapter examines these ideas and moves the conversation into the realms of young adult fiction, discussing how such ideas are animated within the literature.

Chapter One will uncover the structure and movement of gendered power relations within the selected novels and will make visible how agency is distributed within medicalized institutions. The novels have the potential to re-consider the problematic ideological confines of the institution which locate agency solely within the realms of medical authority. However, the chapter argues that early-2000s novels produce gendered scripts which locate mental illness outside of the culturally constructed realms of acceptable feminine behaviour. Within the selected literature, the medical institution is fictionalized in ways that replicate problematic culturally constructed ideologies that repress young women and produce limiting, linear, adult-controlled recovery trajectories. The institution promotes exclusionary, regressive principles surrounding the form of medical recovery it presumes, and the accessibility of such recovery. Such problematic ideologies include the stigmatization of evidence of body modification such as self-harm scars, the correlation of accessing models of recovery with assimilating into culturally constructed norms of feminine beauty, and the prioritization of feminine gender roles such as engaging in heterosexual relationships. In the selected texts, adopting an institutionalised persona which aligns with female patterns of gendered behaviour – such as assuming a culturally sanctioned female bodily appearance, displaying passivity in relation to adult, medicalized authority, and embarking upon a heterosexual romance – frequently leads to a clinical form of restitution. Before the conclusion of Chapter One, I will have a section in which I interweave the novels in order to bring them into conversation with each other. In particular I focus on the dialogue they create in relation to enmeshed constructions of female embodiment, adolescent feminine agency, culturally constructed modes of sexuality, and power structures within medical institutions. Whilst the texts give a voice to the previously silenced mentally ill adolescent female narrator, the forms of recovery offered by these novels are narrow in their reliance upon feminine heterosexual gender roles. As we will see, the ways in which the fictionalization of mental illness interacts with gender roles and sexuality will appear as a recurring theme within Chapter Two.

1.2.2 Chapter Two Overview

Chapter Two acts as a chronological sequel to Chapter One and it will track the development of adolescent writing about mental illness by illustrating how the field has progressed from the first decade into the second. To do this, the Chapter examines cultural attitudes towards the distinctive sophistications and tensions associated with young men's lived experiences of mental illness and discusses how these changing ideas are animated within the literature between 2013-2017. Chapter Two situates the genre's developments within the context of

the changing landscape of masculinities which transformed during this time period to include a broader and more progressive range of patterns of male gendered behaviour. However, the second decade of the twenty-first century also produced a range of cultural anxieties surrounding the increased discussion of young men's mental health. The rising public discourse surrounding young men's emotional wellbeing coincided with a proliferation of certain culturally sanctioned performances of masculinities which embrace vulnerability and emotional availability. However, hegemonic ideals of masculinity – which emphasize control, physical and emotional strength, and heteronormativity – still pervade cultural discourse and impede young males' ability to recognize symptoms as psychiatric in nature, discuss their symptoms, and actively seek help for signs of mental illness. As we will see, similar anxieties and double movements permeate the depictions of adolescent male mental illness across the chapter.

The selected texts discussed within Chapter Two include Teresa Toten's *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B* (2013), Adam Silvera's *More Happy Than Not* (2015), John Corey Whaley's *Highly Illogical Behaviour* (2016), Beth Revis's *A World Without You* (2016), Wesley King's *OCDaniel* (2016) and Lisa Thompson's *The Goldfish Boy* (2017). The chapter moves the recent discussion of masculinities on from work by critics such as Tom Jesse and Heidi Jones (2020) who argue that patterns of male behaviour assume a limited number of iterations.⁶⁷ Chapter Two argues that depictions of male adolescence in the second decade of the twenty-first century are elusive, precarious and, as previously outlined, often contradictory in nature. The chapter extends the conversation surrounding the precarity of masculine capital by building on work by Richard de Visser and Elizabeth McDonnell to argue that masculine performance is constructed as a spectrum, not a binary of polarized oppositions. As such, I produce my readings of texts within this chapter on a spectrum, and discuss how fictionalized representations of adolescent male mental illness represent a broad and varied range of patterns of gendered behaviour. Whilst even the project's most enlightened depictions of mental distress contain some contradictions and ambiguities, the chapter follows the emerging patterns in the fiction to assume the form of a spectrum which demonstrates a general movement from regressive to progressive ways of animating the lived experience of mental illness. The discussion of the primary material is divided into three pairs of texts as this is the best way to deal with tensions between a society that is becoming

⁶⁷ Tom Jesse and Heidi Jones, 'YA Fiction and Masculinity(ies) in the Twenty-First Century', in *Beyond the Blockbusters: Themes and Trends in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction*, ed. by Rebekah Fitzsimmons and Casey Alane Wilson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2020), pp. 109-22.

more aware of the need to discuss young men's mental health, and the problematic models of masculinity that prioritize strength, stoicism and control which continue to pervade cultural discourse surrounding patterns of male behaviour.

Within Chapter Two, I examine depictions of mental illness through aspects of a range of models of masculinity such as young male heroism, power structures and gendered performance, nurturing within male friendship groups, performances of male homosexuality, and collective and public masculinities. As we will see, many of these produce their own ambiguities and tensions. For example, portrayals of homosexuality in young adult fiction produced during the second decade of the twenty-first century often produce complex double movements. Chapter Two reflects the culture's growing concern regarding adolescent male mental health by examining the ways in which depression, anxiety, agoraphobia, dissociative disorder and OCD are fictionalized within the young adult genre. The selected novels animate various facets of these illnesses, such as the enactment of health-related shame, challenges surrounding articulating lived experiences of mental illness, and the elusive relationship between symptoms and selfhood. It builds on the conversation on shame begun in Chapter One by extending scholarship by critics such as Luna Dolezal and Barry Lyons, who identify the contours of structures of health-related shame. The enactment of health-related shame continues to permeate Chapter Three, which will examine this theme in relation to the normalization of gender roles and ableism within adolescent fiction produced between 2015-2020.

1.2.3 Chapter Three Overview

Chapter Three moves on from the previous chapters in its examination of alternative strategies of representing the adolescent female lived experience of mental illness. It brings together a range of fiction produced between 2015-2020, blending a combination of medicalized diary forms, which often reproduce limiting binaries of health and illness, with the widened possibilities associated with more polymorphic deviations from norms of storytelling which depict institutional settings. The chapter asks how the forms this range of fiction assumes impact potentially positive imaginations of adolescent female protagonists' lived experience of mental illness and recovery. The primary material for this chapter includes Holly Bourne's *Am I Normal Yet?* (2015), Karen Fortunati's *The Weight of Zero* (2016), An Na's *The Place Between Breaths* (2018), Alyssa Sheinmel's *A Danger to Herself and Others* (2019) and Kate Weston's *Diary of a Confused Feminist* (2020). Chapter Three explores how these novels animate the lived experience of illnesses such as OCD, depression and anxiety, and other varied cognitive states associated with psychosis, such

as bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. As in earlier chapters, contradictions and ambiguities continue to pervade the texts, but Chapter Three outlines a trajectory of increasing agency and decreasing constructions of identities which rely upon assimilation into culturally produced frameworks of normative mental health.

The chapter adds to Lennard J. Davis and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's seminal work on understandings of normalcy within a health and illness context. Part One of Chapter Three moves this conversation forward to discuss how some recent contributions to young adult fiction establish the advocacy of normative mental wellbeing through a range of structures such as compulsory heterosexuality, feminine gender roles, ableism and health-related shame. These ideas are further complicated as the Chapter progresses to focus on the way fictionalized depictions of psychosis, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia represent challenges to the depictions of grounded clinical locations outlined in Part One. As it moves on, we see some traces of the desire to achieve normalization, but also the beginnings of constructing polymorphic lived experiences of mental illness that exist outside of the frameworks of normalcy.

The fiction's gradual departure from modes of expression which favour institutional settings allows for more progressive and enlightened depictions of mental illness. Chapter Three adds to the critical conversation surrounding the challenges associated with attempting to cast coherence and linearity onto the polymorphic and multifaceted nature of lived experience of mental illness. It extends the work by scholars such as Katrina Longhurst, who criticizes the ways in which orthodox mental illness narratives attempt to simplify individual and sophisticated accounts of cognitive differences and reduce them to linear binaries.⁶⁸ The chapter shifts this conversation into the realms of recent young adult fiction, examining how some of the selected texts move beyond binaries and structures which endorse a presumed return to normative realms of mental health. Such novels therefore produce agentic schizophrenic identities that do not rely on culturally constructed modes of normalcy. Chapter Three utilizes Jo Winning's work on how fractured, non-linear narratives can transcend the limitations of standard prose in order to convey the lived experience of mental illness.⁶⁹ It challenges scholarship by Anastacia Wickham and Marco

⁶⁸ Katrina Longhurst, 'Counterdiagnosis and The Critical Medical Humanities: Reading Susanna Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted* and Lauren Slater's *Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir*', *Medical Humanities*, 47.1 (2019), 1-9 (p. 2).

⁶⁹ Jo Winning, 'Trauma, Illness and Narrative in the Medical Humanities', in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma*, ed. By Colin Davis and Hanna Meretoja (London: Routledge, 2020), 266-74 (p. 274).

Caraccliolo, whose work discusses the presumed ‘reliability’ of a narrator within a mental illness narrative. The final section of Chapter Three moves away from the unreliable / reliable narrator binary to read the selected novels as literary mosaics which consist of shifting narrative voices, voice hearings, images, memories, hallucinations, and unstable structures of time and place.

1.3 Conclusion

Current critical attention on young adult literature has neglected to appreciate the recent proliferation of texts about mental illness in terms of their literary value. Little scholarly research views the texts through the lens of sociological and cultural studies criticism that underpins my research. In their work, *Critical Explorations of Young Adult Literature: Identifying and Critiquing the Canon*, Victor Malo-Juvera and Crag Hill discuss the influences on the adolescent fiction canon and suggest some contemporary contributions.⁷⁰ The authors identify a range of factors when considering the construction of the canon:

The three most important qualifications to be considered for a YA text to be canonical are that it has been widely and continuously read over many years, that it is taught with greater frequency when compared to other YA texts, and that it may have been groundbreaking at the time of its release and/or had lasting impacts on subsequent writers in the field.⁷¹

The authors go on to use these factors to suggest contemporary texts which may be added to the canon. However, their discussion excludes any commentary on the proliferation of adolescent writing about mental wellbeing and illness. Even when the authors include a chapter about John Green’s novel *Looking for Alaska* (2005) – which contains hints that a character ends their life through suicide – the criticism focuses on critical whiteness and neglects to consider the complications associated with the fictionalization of the lived experience of mental illness.⁷² The authors go on to concede that in their identification of a canon, ‘genre was not a factor considered for canonicity’, and as such a range of ‘subgenres of YA literature could be considered to have their own canons, such as canons of queer YA literature, sports-related YA literature, multicultural YA literature as a group or specific non-

⁷⁰ Malo-Juvera and Hill, eds., *Young Adult Literature*, p. 6.

⁷¹ Malo-Juvera and Hill, eds., *Young Adult Literature*, p. 6.

⁷² Brandon Sams and Ashley S. Boyd, ‘Parties, Pranks, and Privilege: Reading *Looking for Alaska* Through the Lens of Critical Whiteness’, in *Critical Explorations of Young Adult Literature: Identifying and Critiquing the Canon*, ed. by Victor Malo-Juvera and Crag Hill (New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 202-14.

White cultures'.⁷³ Considering the abundance of fiction depicting adolescent mental illness, and the increasing critical scholarship which accompanies such a wealth of material, there is perhaps a need for a new canon devoted exclusively to portrayals of teenage mental health. Malo-Juvera and Hill argue that novels within their understanding of the young adult fiction canon 'are firmly established and have demonstrated lasting staying power'.⁷⁴ As the theme of mental illness and recovery is a recent pattern within the genre, perhaps in the future such novels will emerge within conversations of canonicity, either within the wide, diverse field of young adult fiction or as its own discrete subgenre.

When critical scholarship does engage with adolescent fiction which features themes of mental illness and recovery, the discourse is limited to pedagogical outcomes, and such criticism neglects to engage with ideas such as the sociological investigation of health cultures, which are vital to my intervention within the field. The edited volume *Breaking the Taboo with Young Adult Literature* (2020) contains chapters on two young adult texts which feature the theme of mental illness: John Green's *Turtles All the Way Down* (2017) and Kathleen Glasgow's *Girl in Pieces* (2016). The chapter on Green's novel focuses on the ways in which it can be used to 'analyze social stigma associated with mental illnesses' and enable 'teachers to enact a culturally responsive pedagogy'.⁷⁵ Janine J. Darragh and Ashley S. Boyd take a similar pedagogical approach within the volume, suggesting that *Girl in Pieces* offers teachers 'the unique opportunity to combat misconceptions, stereotypes, and stigmas regarding this and other mental illnesses on the frontline through literature'.⁷⁶ Kia Jane Richmond's *Mental Illness in Young Adult Literature: Exploring Real Struggles Through Fictional Characters* (2019) represents the first 'authoritative, comprehensive, book-length text dedicated to the issue of mental disorders in literature for young adults' since the publication of Sharon Stringer's *Conflict and Connection: The Psychology of Young Adult Literature* in 1997.⁷⁷ Richmond's text 'draws on diagnostic criteria from the *DSM-5* to 'provide school and youth services librarians, educators, counselors, and others who work with adolescents with information about how fictional characters who have mental illnesses

⁷³ Malo-Juvera and Hill, eds., *Young Adult Literature*, p. 6.

⁷⁴ Malo-Juvera and Hill, *Young Adult Literature*, p. 10.

⁷⁵ Elsie Lindy Olan and Kia Jane Richmond, 'Examining Mental Illness in John Green's *Turtles All the Way Down*: OCD-More than Just Attention to Detail', in *Breaking the Taboo with Young Adult Literature*. Ed. By Victor Malo-Juvera (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2020), pp. 34-40 (p. 39).

⁷⁶ Janine J. Darragh and Ashley S. Boyd, 'Putting the Pieces Together: Destigmatizing Self-Harm through Kathleen Glasgow's *Girl in Pieces*', in *Breaking the Taboo with Young Adult Literature*. Ed. By Victor Malo-Juvera (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2020), pp. 41-47 (p. 46).

⁷⁷ Kia Jane Richmond, *Mental Illness in Young Adult Literature: Exploring Real Struggles Through Fictional Characters* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2019), p. 7.

are portrayed in young adult novels'.⁷⁸ These examples are not an exhaustive account of recent scholarship on adolescent fiction about mental illness and recovery, but they offer a sample which is indicative of the current approaches to the fiction. As previously suggested, much of the existing criticism views these texts as instructional and prioritizes their content and ability to be used in the classroom for the purposes of fostering empathy, destigmatizing mental distress, and building awareness around mental illness symptoms in adolescents. Within recent scholarship, there is little attention paid to the literary functions of these texts. Current criticism has not yet engaged with the idea of using adolescent fiction as a prism to identify and comment upon shifting cultural attitudes towards teenagers' mental wellbeing. There is currently a dearth of critical discourse which understands the material as literary texts and utilizes the sociological and cultural approaches which underpin my research.

The young adult fiction scholarship that my thesis contributes towards is therefore created in response to the criticism that has come before it, but shows a willingness to form new paradigms which help us understand adolescent fiction about varied mental states as an ever changing, literary subset of the genre. In this conclusion, the thesis asks how the fiction can function as a lens to observe the ways that cultural attitudes towards the pathologization of the young female body, the socialization of masculine and feminine gender roles, and constructions of agentic adolescent identity have shifted in the twenty-first century. As such, it tracks the changing landscape of the genre against the socio-cultural moment in which the books have been published. Informed by young adult literature studies, queer studies, sociological investigations of health cultures, theories of embodiment, disability studies and gender studies, this thesis contributes new perspectives of the intersecting subject positions of the adolescent lived experience of mental illness. As we will see more specifically in the chapters that follow, my project is concerned with the ways in which the corpus has changed across the first two decades in relation to the anxious, and increasingly contradictory, widening conversation on young people's emotional wellbeing.

1.3.1 A Note on Language and Labelling

The process of distinguishing texts about mental illness from other young adult fiction produces the need for a clear definition of what the term means within the socio-cultural context of the genre. The sophistications associated with living with complex mental states is an elusive concept, and attempts to define and label these lived experiences are

⁷⁸ Richmond, *Mental Illness in Young Adult Literature*, p. 7.

challenging and often fraught with tension. Discussion of such mental states invites a broad range of varying terms, including but not limited to mental health, mental ill-health, mental illness, mental disability, and Madness. Current scholarship outlines a series of complex conflicts and overlaps between these phrases and has not yet reached a consensus regarding the appropriate context in which to use such terms. A comprehensive discussion of the language of mental and emotional states exists outside the scope of this project, but the range of criticism I engage with within this thesis labels cognitive states in a range of ways. For example, within *From Wallflowers to Bulletproof Families: The Power of Disability in Young Adult Narratives*, Abbye E. Meyer uses the term disability as ‘an inclusive, umbrella term for varied identities, each different from the rest, but united together to demand basic rights and accommodations’.⁷⁹ She goes on to discuss ‘invisible disabilities’, which she defines as ‘chronic illnesses, mental illnesses, mental disorders, and intellectual disabilities’.⁸⁰ As we will see, Peter Beresford’s scholarship argues for a movement away from discourses rooted in biomedical language by using Mad as a self-identifying term.⁸¹ Some of the criticism I contribute towards in this project uses conflicting terms and this is indicative of wider debates within scholarship surrounding the relationship between mental and emotional states, disability, and Madness. Whilst an exploration of these debates exists outside of the parameters of this thesis, the topic of the project necessitates an outline and a brief rationale of my critical choices of terminology.

Recent trends within disability and mental health scholarship have included an increased exploration of mental illness within the context of disability studies, and this new affiliation has produced a series of critical discussions surrounding the rifts and overlaps between the two realms. In her work ‘Coming Out Mad, Coming Out Disabled’, Elizabeth Brewer suggests that ‘in recent years, disability studies publications have increasingly included perspectives on psychiatric disability’, and goes on to discuss the complex relationship between the two fields.⁸² Brewer describes the potential relationship between the disciplines as an ‘uneasy fit’: although both fields are critical of the pathologization of human difference, ‘many psychiatric survivors do not identify as being disabled, and

⁷⁹ Abbye E. Meyer, *From Wallflowers to Bulletproof Families: The Power of Disability in Young Adult Narratives* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2022), p. 9.

⁸⁰ Meyers, *From Wallflowers to Bulletproof Families*, p. 8.

⁸¹ Peter Beresford, ‘Mad’, *Mad Studies and Advancing Inclusive Resistance*, *Disability and Society*, 35.8 (2020), 1337-42.

⁸² Elizabeth Brewer, ‘Coming Out Mad, Coming Out Disabled’, in *Literatures of Madness: Disability Studies and Mental Health*, ed. by Elizabeth J. Donaldson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 11-30 (p. 12).

likewise, many disabled people do not identify as psychiatric survivors'.⁸³ These discussions of the tensions and overlaps between the two fields invite a need to discuss specific terminology. As Brewer argues, 'no single alternatives to terms like "mental illness" or "handicapped" exist, and word choice is hotly contested'.⁸⁴

Some scholars may be critical of the term 'mental illness' but, as we will now see, the broad range of possible alternatives are frequently challenged and often conflicting. Peter Beresford's scholarship emerges from a new, increasingly debated discourse to discuss mental and emotional states. Beresford's use of the self-identifying term Mad 'rejects a bio-medical approach to the domain widely known as "mental illness" or "mental health" and substitutes instead a framework of "madness"'.⁸⁵ He argues that 'discussion about mental distress continues to be framed in biomedical terms', but concedes that the term is still 'contentious' even amongst service users.⁸⁶ Mad Studies seeks to liberate service users from the dominant, medicalized mental health paradigm. However, this new approach invites questions surrounding its parameters and borders. In their article 'Who is Included in the Mad Studies Project?', Helen Spandler and Dina Poursanidou question the 'boundaries, inclusions, and exclusions' of the approach, asking 'who (or what) is (or should be) included in its remit?'.⁸⁷ Further enquiries arise surrounding 'who is Mad or 'Mad enough' for Mad Studies?' and the approach has been challenged for its risk of merely 'reproducing conventional psychiatric classifications of who is (or isn't) Mad'.⁸⁸ This is not a critique of Mad Studies, but an attempt to reflect on various concerns that arise when selecting the appropriate terminology to discuss mental and emotional states that cause distress. As such, 'mental illness' is the most suitable term to use within this project. This is firstly because its potential inclusion within the realms of disability studies is precarious and frequently challenged, with some areas of overlap but many rifts between the disciplines. Similarly, Mad Studies is a relatively new area of study, which has been criticized for the challenges it faces in setting appropriate parameters and identifying the potential inclusions and exclusions. Whilst in the future the term Mad may eclipse terms such as 'mental illness',

⁸³ Brewer, 'Coming Out Mad, Coming Out Disabled', p. 14-15.

⁸⁴ Brewer, 'Coming Out Mad, Coming Out Disabled', p. 16.

⁸⁵ Beresford, 'Mad', Mad Studies', p. 1337.

⁸⁶ Beresford, 'Mad', Mad Studies', p. 1337.

⁸⁷ Helen Spandler and Dina Poursanidou, 'Who is Included in the Mad Studies Project?', *The Journal of Ethics in Mental Health*, 10 (2019) 1-20 (p. 2).

⁸⁸ Spandler and Poursanidou, 'Who is Included in the Mad Studies Project?', p. 10.

it is currently a 'controversial, conflict-ridden title' which is in its infancy, and as such the project will continue to use the phrase 'mental illness' at this point.⁸⁹

Before moving on to examine young adult texts it is also important to discuss and clarify terminology that defines the literature and offer a rationale regarding what language will be used to identify the genre. Malo-Juvera and Crag Hill suggest that 'one reason for the continued misconceptions about the literary and educative value of YA literature might be because even those who study and teach it have not reached consensus on a definition',⁹⁰ and critics are divided regarding not only *what* the definition is but also *how* to arrive at a definition. As Joan L. Knickerbocker and James A. Rycik argue, attempts to classify the genre that rely upon determining the ages of the readers create a series of critical concerns:

Definitions of literature for young adults are often fuzzy, partly because of who is doing the defining. Publishers, librarians, teachers, common reviewers, and booksellers each have their own ideas as to what constitutes literature for young adults. Some definitions identify literature for young adults according to who *should* read it, while others focus on who actually buys and reads it.⁹¹

They go on to suggest that 'the traditional 12-18 year-old-range no longer describes contemporary young adult readers'.⁹² As I have outlined earlier, the readership of adolescent fiction now expands beyond the teenage years, perhaps because the adolescent experience itself no longer ends at 18. Because of this changing subculture of adolescence, various critics 'have argued against the term "young adult literature" itself' as this phrase requires a clear definition of the slippery concept of young adulthood.⁹³ Knickerbocker and Rycik choose to use the term 'literature for young adults' in place of the more familiar phrase 'young adult literature' to include 'not only the literature that writers, publishers, and translators have marketed to an audience of people who are not yet considered adults, but also literature written for adults that has found an audience with younger readers'.⁹⁴ Their decision regarding terminology is also rooted in their work's 'dual focus on literary works and

⁸⁹ Beresford, 'Mad', *Mad Studies*, p. 1337.

⁹⁰ Malo-Juvera and Hill, eds., *Young Adult Literature*, p. 2.

⁹¹ Joan L. Knickerbocker and James A. Rycik, *Literature for Young Adults: Books (and More) for Contemporary Readers*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2019), p. 2.

⁹² Knickerbocker and Rycik, *Literature for Young Adults*, p. 3-4.

⁹³ Malo-Juvera and Hill, eds., *Young Adult Literature*, p. 3.

⁹⁴ Knickerbocker and Rycik, *Literature for Young Adults*, p. 4.

on the ways in which teachers can introduce readers in grades 4 through 12 to literature that matters to them'.⁹⁵

Unlike Knickerbocker and Rycik's criticism, my selected terminology is not shaped by a pedagogical focus. Whilst this project acknowledges that the genre can be read by readers of any age, I focus on texts marketed towards approximately teenagers up until 24 years. As such, I use the terms 'young adult' and 'adolescent' interchangeably and avoid the phrase 'teenage fiction' because, as we have seen, adolescence now extends well beyond the teenage years. I use the terms 'young adult literature', 'young adult fiction', 'adolescent fiction', and 'adolescent literature' throughout this thesis not so much as titles but as a way of describing these constantly evolving bodies of work. Due to the multiplicities associated with writing marketed towards young people, I need flexible terms that reflect the plasticity of the work and avoid singular, restrictive titles. I have also chosen not to capitalize the descriptors I use as it does not serve a specific purpose throughout the thesis. Using lower case in terms such as 'young adult literature' invites a multitude of possibilities in terms of both the bodies of work and its wide range of readerships.

The critical choices which relate to the terms I use across the full thesis have been outlined within this introductory section, however other issues surrounding language and labelling will occur throughout the thesis and these will be outlined with the chapter in which they pertain to. There is no singular overall, overriding logic applied to approaches to language and labelling across the thesis generally, as a singular approach would be a reductive response to the broad range of language associated with a series of characteristics or identity politics which assume fluid forms, such as sexuality. Throughout the chapters, the thesis adopts a range of approaches towards critical choices of language and labelling. At times, these approaches are responsive, whilst others appear more interventionist in nature. Overall, I respond to the distinctive ideas which are animated within the fiction. I will provide a rationale of each of the terms specific to each chapter throughout the thesis, justifying my critical language choices based upon each chapter contents' different origins and contexts. These different contexts and range of nuances require a brief discussion surrounding labeling, language and nomenclature. Rather than attempting to enforce a singular framework regarding critical choices, the thesis responds to the selected novels in the ways in which they reveal themselves.

⁹⁵ Knickerbocker and Rycik, *Literature for Young Adults*, p. 4. It is important to note that Knickerbocker and Rycik's research focuses on connecting literary theory to pedagogical practice exclusively within classrooms in North America.

The ideas raised in Chapter One meant that I found myself responding to clinical and diagnostic labels. As such, the critical choices regarding diagnostic terms relating to eating disorders and forms of self-harm are influenced by the most recent edition of the *DSM* published in March 2022, the *DSM-5-TR*. The ideas animated by the fiction in Chapter Two led to a range of critical decisions surrounding the contexts in which to engage with terms such as gay, homosexual and queer. Chapter Two uses these terms under different circumstances, such as engaging with critical frameworks that are influenced by queer theory, carrying out literary analysis using a text-led approach to terminology, and discussing the way in which the fiction constructs a simplistic homosexual / heterosexual binary. The literature discussed in Chapter Three gives rise to a discussion surrounding characters' desires to align with culturally constructed modes of normative mental health, and these notions necessitate a rationale surrounding the concepts and boundaries pertaining to the term 'normalcy'. The approach to language and labelling therefore outlines the term in relation to critical work inspired by disability and ablebodiedness to frame normalcy as a supposed ideal way of being constructed by society, but also as a concept that is invisible as it exists only as a presumed natural order. The nuance and distinctions across a wide range of identity politics briefly outlined here require a series of justifications surrounding language choices, nomenclature and diagnostic labels. A distinctive and responsive approach therefore is required to acknowledge the shifting forms, experiences and origins of these concepts based upon the range of contexts in which they are performed.

1.3.2 Coda

The most recent novel in this thesis is *Diary of a Confused Feminist* published in 2020. Therefore, the thesis does not engage with the multiple ways in which the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on the mental health of young people. In many ways, the broad range of novels currently being written which deal with the fictionalization of these issues has not yet been published. However, a small number of young adult novels which portray the impacts of Covid-19 and its accompanying lockdowns on adolescent mental health have recently been published and these represent a rich site for future critical scholarship. Whilst the possibilities of such fiction is related to the topics in my project, a full discussion exists outside of the scope of this thesis.

The wide ranging, long term and complex effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on adolescent mental health are still being determined. However, from the current published

research it has become clear that the pandemic has had a direct and adverse impact on young adults' mental wellbeing. In their article on adolescent mental health during the Covid-19 pandemic, Andrea C. Villanti et al discuss 'increases in anxiety and depressive symptoms in adolescents and young adults in the fall of 2020, compared with a similar sample a year earlier'.⁹⁶ The authors use the term 'COVID-related distress' to describe the challenges faced by young people in adapting to changes in their daily activities and dealing with anxieties surrounding the impact of the pandemic on schoolwork.⁹⁷ They go on to argue that 'the pandemic made many aspects of physical, emotional, and social well-being worse' for adolescents.⁹⁸ As Aileen O'Reilly et al suggest, young people face distinctive challenges during lockdown compared to other demographics:

Many young people are attending school or university, which are among the first institutions to close as part of infection prevention measures, leaving them isolated from their peer groups as well as primary help-seeking and support facilities. Additionally, family distress is often high during a pandemic and young people may find themselves coping with feelings of distress and anxiety in the face of compromised support structures.⁹⁹

By being exposed to the Covid-19 pandemic as they enter a vulnerable developmental period, young people therefore often experience severe emotional distress.

Novels which feature the complex and wide-reaching challenges and disruptions caused by Covid-19 have recently begun to appear in the literary mainstream and in young adult fiction. In November 2021, Lara Feigel discussed the complexities thrown up when books about Covid-19 are being published whilst the pandemic continues to unfold.¹⁰⁰ Feigel argues that 'the pandemic, in its actual and its more luridly imagined forms, will continue to find its way into fiction, even as the actuality of Covid becomes something more everyday'.¹⁰¹ As we will see, fictionalizations of the experiences associated with the pandemic have now begun to also emerge within young adult fiction. Presumably, the few young adult novels that depict Covid-19 related distress currently in publication are just a small minority of the

⁹⁶ Andrea C. Villanti et al, 'COVID-related Distress, Mental Health, and Substance Use in Adolescents and Young Adults', *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 27.2 (2022), 138-45 (p. 138).

⁹⁷ Villanti et al, 'COVID-related Distress', p. 140.

⁹⁸ Villanti et al, 'COVID-related Distress', p. 140.

⁹⁹ Aileen O'Reilly et al, 'A Rapid Review Investigating the Potential Impact of a Pandemic on the Mental Health of Young People Aged 12-25 Years', *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine*, 38.3 (2021), 192-207 (p. 193).

¹⁰⁰ Lara Feigel, 'Inside Story: The First Pandemic Novels have Arrived, but are we Ready for them?', *The Guardian*, < <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/nov/27/inside-story-the-first-pandemic-novels-have-arrived-but-are-we-ready-for-them> > [accessed 4 May 2023].

¹⁰¹ Feigel, 'Inside Story'.

literature that will eventually follow. Whilst it is perhaps too early to make generalizing comments on such a small range of fiction, it is clear that this literature for young people assumes a wide range of forms including anthologies of short stories, romance novels, dystopian thrillers, graphic novel memoirs, and collages incorporating art and poetry.¹⁰² Many of these texts depict the fluctuating emotional and mental states of these teenagers as they struggle to come to terms with an increasingly unpredictable new wave of life.

Presumably, most of the young adult texts about Covid-19 will, to some degree at least, portray the impact lockdowns have on teenage characters' mental health. However, C.J Farley's novel *Zero O'Clock* (2021) is distinctive in the way in which it portrays the impact these stressors have on a teenage protagonist who has been experiencing OCD for many years. The book focuses on a high school senior in New York, whose concern with college admissions, and the challenges in overcoming the grief surrounding her father's death, becomes overshadowed by the Covid-19 outbreak. In a radio interview, the novel's author suggests that the pandemic represents 'a seismic shift in the way in which kids live their lives', going on to argue that 'a lot of them are wildly destabilized because of this'.¹⁰³ Farley also highlights the significance of young adult novels which depict the impacts of Covid-19 on young people's mental health, indicating that 'it's really important for them to have documents out there to help them process it'.¹⁰⁴ The small number of adolescent texts produced so far which feature depictions of the pandemic assume a range of forms, and it is likely that most of these will, to varying degrees, feature the emotional and mental turmoil caused by Covid-19 related stressors. However, *Zero O'Clock* perhaps represents an indication of what adolescent fiction will now emerge which deals with specific mental illness diagnoses. With time, further novels such as these will arise, and they represent an innovative and important area for further study. Whilst the possibilities of such fiction is related to the topics in my project, a full discussion currently exists outside of the scope of this thesis.

¹⁰² See, for example, the following website for a list of books produced about the Covid-19 pandemic so far: The University of Arizona, 'Covid-19 and Pandemic-Related Children's and Young Adult Literature', *The University of Arizona: World of Words* <<https://wowlit.org/links/booklists/covid-19-books/>> [accessed 4 May 2023].

¹⁰³ Tonya Mosley, 'YA novel *Zero O'Clock* Looks at the Early Days of the Pandemic and the Murder of George Floyd', *WBUR.org* <https://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2022/07/15/cj-farley-zero-o-clock> [accessed 4 May 2023].

¹⁰⁴ Tonya Mosley, 'YA novel *Zero O'Clock* Looks at the Early Days of the Pandemic and the Murder of George Floyd', *WBUR.org* <https://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2022/07/15/cj-farley-zero-o-clock> [accessed 4 May 2023].

As we have seen, adolescent novels about Covid-19 are beginning to emerge, and some of these may focus on the lived experiences of mental ill health. There are already further indications that the relationship between adolescent mental health during the Covid-19 pandemic and contemporary young adult fiction will prove to be a rich site for critical discussion. For instance, the University of Roehampton's project and associated reading programme *Reading for Normal: Young People and Fiction in the Time of Covid-19* was created to provide 'teen readers with a temporary digital community for talking about their own lives in relation to fiction'.¹⁰⁵ The online reading group 'explored the potential for shared reading experiences to help address the challenges that lockdown has brought, including threats to mental health and wellbeing' through the use of recent adolescent novels.¹⁰⁶ The existence of such projects implies that the genre is situated in a position to respond to an increasingly severe mental health crisis amongst young people which is compounded by the trauma associated with the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst these complexities currently exist outside of the scope of this project, in the future, new critical research will undoubtedly further illuminate this complex relationship.

¹⁰⁵ Alison Waller, 'Reading for Normal: Young People and Fiction in the Time of Covid-19', *University of Roehampton London* <[https://pure.roehampton.ac.uk/portal/en/projects/reading-for-normal-young-people-and-fiction-in-the-time-of-covid->](https://pure.roehampton.ac.uk/portal/en/projects/reading-for-normal-young-people-and-fiction-in-the-time-of-covid-) [accessed 13 April 2023].

¹⁰⁶ Waller, 'Reading for Normal', <[https://pure.roehampton.ac.uk/portal/en/projects/reading-for-normal-young-people-and-fiction-in-the-time-of-covid->](https://pure.roehampton.ac.uk/portal/en/projects/reading-for-normal-young-people-and-fiction-in-the-time-of-covid-) [accessed 13 April 2023].

Chapter 1: Girls, Institutionalized: Identity, Authority and Body Modification in Young Adult Literature, 2000-2009

1.1 Part One: Contextualizing Self-Harm and Eating Disorders as a Form of Body Modification

The increase in adolescent female self-harm at the turn of the millennium is a phenomenon that blurs boundaries between two culturally constructed oppositions: the socially pathologized actions of self-mutilation associated with mental illness, and the culturally sanctioned gendered bodily practices such as waxing and piercing the body.¹⁰⁷ The pathologization of self-harming behaviour is problematic in the ways in which it marginalizes young women by limiting control over their actions and trajectories, and seeks to normalize, feminize and regulate their bodies. As such, their bodies and identities frequently become governed by medical authority. In her 2007 work, *Writing on the Body? Thinking Through Gendered Embodiment and Marked Flesh*, Kay Inckle questions the distinction between actions regarded as self-injury, and 'normative feminine body practices'.¹⁰⁸ Throughout, Inckle argues that society's attitude towards female bodies and femininity problematizes the assumed polarity between pathologized actions of body modification such as self-harm and socially acceptable forms of body expression including wearing jewellery and clothes.¹⁰⁹ Whilst working in a psychiatric institution, Inckle identified a pervasive but dominant ideology in which a woman who shaved her head would be considered a 'self-mutilator', but one who shaved her legs would be engaging in acceptable female body practices.¹¹⁰ The author rejects the pathological connotations of the phrase 'self-injury', instead adopting the term 'body marking' to encompass a range of body modifications such as cutting the skin and engaging in socially accepted practices of female bodily normalcy.¹¹¹ Inckle uses the term

¹⁰⁷ Attempting to ascertain precise figures associated with self-harm is challenging as 'most people who self-harm do not present to hospitals' (McManus et al, 'Prevalence of Non-suicidal Self-harm and Service Contact in England, p. 573). However, McManus et al's study has found 'steep increases in the lifetime prevalence of self-reported NSSH (non-suicidal self-harm) between 2000 and 2014. This increase was evident in both men and boys and in women and girls, and across all age groups. The absolute rise was greatest in female 16–24-year-olds, in whom the proportion increased from 6.5% in 2000, to 19.7% in 2014' (p. 579). This culturally phenomenon is gradually gaining recognition and critical attention, with the number of studies on self-harm having 'grown worldwide since 2000' (McManus, p. 573).

¹⁰⁸ Kay Inckle, *Writing on the Body? Thinking Through Gendered Embodiment and Marked Flesh* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2007), p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ Inckle, *Writing on the Body?*, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ Inckle, *Writing on the Body?*, p. 2.

¹¹¹ Inckle, *Writing on the Body?*, p. 2.

to critique assumed binaries between self-injury and body modifications that are reproduced through such normative terminology.¹¹²

Medicalized power structures frequently pathologize acts of self-harm and limit young women's agency, forcing them to undergo a lack of embodiment. Inckle's aim to sever links between self-harm and its pathological connotations stems from an argument that the medical model of assessing embodiment 'wasn't working' when it was applied to feminine body marking.¹¹³ The perceived failure to effectively respond to self-injury is documented by Gloria Babiker and Louis Arnold in their 1997 text *The Language of Injury*, which advocates the harm reduction model in aiding recovery for individuals who self-injure.¹¹⁴ The authors criticize the medical model for creating a 'general culture or expectation that in-patient settings take care of patients in something of a parental fashion', effectively distributing a 'large measure of responsibility' to medical practitioners to control service users' emotional distress and associated behaviour.¹¹⁵ In contrast, the harm reduction model aims to liberate the service user from their role as a passive patient by accepting they may need to self-harm to gain comfort and validation at a time of distress.¹¹⁶ The medical practitioner's role is to support the service user in reducing the risk and intended damage to their bodies. In her 2011 article 'The First Cut Is the Deepest: A Harm-Reduction Approach to Self-Injury', Inckle builds on research by Babiker and Arnold by arguing that the harm-reduction method is vital when understanding body modification actions such as self-harm not as a form of mutilation but as a 'necessary survival mechanism'.¹¹⁷ Inckle's work calls for a fundamental deconstruction of cultural power structures which dictate that self-harm should be pathologized and monitored under medicalized control, and advocates responses to self-harm which promote the service users' control, empowerment and choice.

Chapter One of this thesis is concerned with how such ideas of medical power structures are animated within the fictionalized medical institution. In their article on self-

¹¹² Inckle regards much of the terminology used to describe bodily practices as part of problematic power structures. In their 1997 text *The Language of Injury*, Gloria Babiker and Lois Arnold use the terms 'self-injury' and 'self-mutilation' interchangeably to describe self-inflicted actions such as cutting, burning, scratching which deliberately cause visible harm. In a note on terminology which prefaces her text, Inckle is 'uncomfortable' with both terms due to their pathological connotations which her argument seeks to remove. However, Inckle acknowledges such terms and definitions and will use them based on descriptive necessity.

¹¹³ Inckle, *Writing on the Body?*, p. 3.

¹¹⁴ Gloria Babiker and Lois Arnold, *The Language of Injury* (Leicester: PBS, 1997), p. 119.

¹¹⁵ Babiker and Arnold, *The Language of Injury*, p. 119.

¹¹⁶ Babiker and Arnold, *The Language of Injury*, p. 119.

¹¹⁷ Kay Inckle, 'The First Cut Is the Deepest: A Harm-Reduction Approach to Self-Injury', *Social Work in Mental Health*, 9.5 (2011), 364-78, p. 368.

harm and service contact, McManus et al find that young women who engage in these behaviours have 'roughly twice the odds of medical or psychological service contact that men and boys had'.¹¹⁸ Therefore it is perhaps unsurprising that my readings of the novels within this chapter discuss the construction of feminine adolescent bodily autonomy within the cultural politics of the medical institution. The fiction this chapter analyses portrays the act of writing upon female bodies, modes of culturally constructed sexuality cast upon these bodies by the male gaze, the construction of adolescent agency, the role of patterns of female behaviour in accessing scripts of recovery, and power structures within the medical institution. Clearly, it is impossible to give full contextual detail surrounding the contemporary resonances of all of these topics, so I have decided to focus in this introduction on female embodiment, female agency, culturally constructed modes of sexuality, and institutions because they are common factors in each of these ideas. The critical framework outlined in this introduction is therefore led by the novels as they contain fictionalized forms of these notions.

The critical scholarship I have discussed so far advocates a fundamental deconstruction of cultural power structures which dictate that self-harm should be pathologized and monitored under medicalized control. Inckle's construction of embodiment regards forms of body marking as resistance against these external attempts to observe, normalize and feminize the body.¹¹⁹ She identifies a spectrum of corporeal experiences ranging from cutting and scratching the skin to tattooing the body and leg waxing. According to Inckle, these 'transformative' embodied experiences 'exceed simplistic, binary conceptualisations'¹²⁰ And her argument dissolves the association between self-harm and mental illness, and breaches the boundaries between 'normalcy/pathology, agency/mutilation, decoration/damage'.¹²¹ Inckle goes on to draw links between the experiences of women getting tattoos and women who self-injure, arguing that the 'working out of inarticulable emotional pain through cutting and bleeding the body has been understood as integral to the way in which both self-injury as well as body-modification are meaningful and transformative for those who practice them'.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Sally McManus et al, 'Prevalence of Non-suicidal Self-harm and Service Contact in England, 2000-14: Repeated Cross-sectional Surveys of the General Population', *Lancet Psychiatry*, 6.7 (2019), 573-81 (p. 578).

¹¹⁹ Inckle, *Writing on the Body?*, p. 76.

¹²⁰ Inckle, *Writing on the Body?*, p. 167.

¹²¹ Inckle, *Writing on the Body?*, p. 167.

¹²² Inckle, *Writing on the Body?*, p. 196.

Although Inckle here unites injury and modification as processes which transform emotional pain into physical pain, applying such a theory of embodiment to a wide spectrum of body marking practices is problematic. Although actions such as cutting arms to draw blood and getting a tattoo are similar in that they provide a rare opportunity to see an emotional pain manifest in a physical way, Inckle's argument is not adequate to effectively compare a broad range of different experiences of corporeal practices. She underestimates the vulnerability and confusion of young women who self-injure after undergoing severe emotional or physical trauma. Whilst Inckle does not deny the trauma commonly associated with self-injury, her theory does not always go far enough to accommodate the nuanced notions of each form of body marking she attempts to re-examine in her theory.

The act of self-harm is situated in a precarious position as it is assumed to exist in relation to both mental illness and gendered corporeal norms in complex and elusive ways. Inckle suggests a reframing of self-harm which distinguishes it from mental illness, arguing 'labels of "mental illness" or "borderline personality disorder" are in no way helpful, illuminating, or even descriptive in most cases'.¹²³ Such pathologizing labels of medical disorders can be limiting in our understanding of mental illness as they view certain forms of body modification as medical illnesses and Inckle's argument seeks to challenge the strict categorisation of body marking as actions considered self-mutilation and those regarded as feminine body practices. She seeks to deconstruct the socially constructed polarity between pathologized behaviour such as self-harm and culturally accepted feminine body practices including waxing the body. However, her challenge to categorisations of body marking significantly underplays the scale and severity of the acute trauma associated with self-harm, such as physical and mental abuse.

Much critical scholarship is dedicated to discussing how, and to what effect, women's bodies are viewed as objects of the patriarchal male gaze, and the ways in which shame and sexuality are cast onto passive adolescent female bodies. However, comparatively little scholarship has attended to the added distinctions and complexities that are created when understanding the sexualized male gaze in relation to bodies of adolescent females who harm themselves. This form of body modification represents an action of resistance and an attempt to deflect this unwanted sexualized attention. Whilst, as we will soon see, there are a range of prompts involved in these practices, self-harm can often signify a feminized, embodied outlet for anger, and an aggressive response to the sexuality cast upon it from external patriarchal sources. In her 2001 text *Young Women and the Body: A Feminist*

¹²³ Inckle, *Writing on the Body?*, p. 131.

Sociology, Liz Frost further explores gendered embodiment by arguing that these constructions of femininity outlined by Inckle have a close cultural correlation with shame.¹²⁴ Frost's construction of embodiment emphasizes the way shame 'hinges on the notion of being seen': women's bodies are conceptualized and constantly observed as objects of the male gaze and the perceptions of shame and the female body being closely observed become tightly bound together.¹²⁵

This male gaze is frequently constructed in ways that prioritize heterosexuality and slenderness. In her text *Feminist Theology and Contemporary Dieting Culture: Sin, Salvation and Women's Weight Loss Narratives*, Hannah Bacon argues that women 'are expected to lose weight' in order to 'prepare their bodies in sight of the male gaze'.¹²⁶ Whilst both men and women may engage in calorie-restrictive diets, controlling weight 'carries special meaning for women'.¹²⁷ The ubiquity of slender female bodies within popular culture 'expose just how important avoiding fat and maintaining a low body weight is, especially for women'.¹²⁸ Half of all girls in the United States describe themselves as 'overweight', with 80 per cent of girls aged thirteen admitting to trying calorie restrictive, weight loss diets.¹²⁹ With these trends in mind, Bacon goes on to argue that 'fat may not be the real enemy but fear of fat and the quest for an ideal (thin) body'.¹³⁰ As we will now see, such quests to achieve the culturally constructed notion of the ideal feminized body are animated in complex ways within early twenty-first century young adult fiction. The novels examined later in this chapter construct relationships between the male gaze and forms of body modification such as self-harm and disordered eating, and the sexually threatening nature of the male gaze makes it appear elusive and pervasive within the novels. Within these texts, forms of body marking are performed in ways which allow characters to respond to, internalize, reject, destabilize and at times protect themselves from the sexualized male gaze.

¹²⁴ Liz Frost, *Young Women and the Body: A Feminist Sociology* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001), p. 139.

¹²⁵ Frost, *Young Women and the Body*, p. 139.

¹²⁶ Hannah Bacon, *Feminist Theology and Contemporary Dieting Culture: Sin, Salvation and Women's Weight Loss Narratives* (London: T&T Clark, 2019), p. 32.

¹²⁷ Bacon, *Feminist Theology and Contemporary Dieting Culture*, p. 33.

¹²⁸ Bacon, *Feminist Theology and Contemporary Dieting Culture*, p. 33.

¹²⁹ Bacon, *Feminist Theology and Contemporary Dieting Culture*, p. 34.

¹³⁰ Bacon, *Feminist Theology and Contemporary Dieting Culture*, p. 34.

1.1.1 Writing Back: Responses to the Shame and Sexuality Cast onto Girls' Bodies

The adolescent female body has personal agency, but it has sexuality cast upon it through the male gaze. Certain forms of writing on the body signify a complex response to the shame associated with such objectification. While teenagers do have the agency to mark themselves in a range of ways, it's nevertheless the case that outside agencies attempt to write, and cast sexuality upon, their bodies. Girls, therefore, cut themselves in response to a range of triggers, but they do so in a way that enables them to write themselves, as opposed to being written on by others. Susan Bordo's influential text *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (2003) examines the way projections of shame onto the body are gendered. Bordo questions the contemporary dominant ideology that the female body is a source of temptation, and her work challenges the cultural portrayal of the feminine body as an object to actively lure men to arousal.¹³¹ Bordo argues that such a notion is projected by patriarchal attitudes onto the woman's body to blame women for the arousal of male sexual desire.¹³² Her work asserts that conscious intention 'is not a requisite for females to be seen as responsible for the bodily responses of men, aggressive as well as sexual' and that even when women are silent 'their bodies are seen as "speaking" a language of provocation'.¹³³ When women and girls internalize this power structure, they become uneasy with femininity and shameful of their bodies.¹³⁴

The notion of patriarchal attitudes projecting an ideology which depicts silent female bodies as speaking a sexual language problematizes the cultural politics of self-harm. When viewing female embodiment through the lens of patriarchal power structures, self-injury is a response to the projection of, to use Bordo's phrase, 'the language of provocation' onto the female body. For Bordo, the body of the self-harming female no longer speaks a sexual language but one of resistance against the culturally constructed model of sexuality imposed upon her body. Viewed in this way, self-harm symbolizes a denunciation of the attribution of sexuality by external power structures; the seemingly impaired body speaks a language of rejection of culturally imposed scripts of femininity.¹³⁵

¹³¹ Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), p. 6.

¹³² Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, p. 6.

¹³³ Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, p. 6.

¹³⁴ Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, p. 8.

¹³⁵ The imposition of culturally constructed modes of sexuality is only one prompt for self-harm. As we will now see, other stressors associated with self-harm exist, but within the fiction I will discuss this observation of the female body through the sexualized male gaze as the most

The emotional outlet associated with self-harm is characterized by the distinctively feminine experiences of shame and anger. Anna Motz's 2008 book *The Psychology of Female Violence: Crimes Against the Body* asserts that self-injury symbolizes a 'typically female expression of anger'.¹³⁶ It represents one of the few 'legitimate channels allowed women to express their anger' and is political in its 'defiant protest against the idealized, sentimentalized image of them that others hold'.¹³⁷ Motz argues that 'women typically locate their sense of identity in their bodies and this reflects the tremendous cultural emphasis placed on women's bodies'.¹³⁸ Whilst Motz examines women's bodies as extensions of their identities, her argument does not fully appreciate the political ideology which instigates women's self-injury. As Motz argues, self-harm destabilizes the culturally imposed standards

prominent trigger for these bodily practices. Understanding the full range of intent behind such practices is complex because, as Gillies et al argue, 'the major reasons given by adolescents for their self-harm are difficult to quantify because of the different survey tools that are used to collect different reasons for self-harm' (Gillies et al, 'Prevalence and Characteristics of Self-Harm in Adolescents', p. 734). McManus et al highlight the challenges in critically studying reasons behind the behaviour, arguing that 'the issue of self-harm intent is complex and the answers that participants could select about motivations were reductive. Even with open questions, reasons given could reflect subsequent rationalisations. Use of the word "attention" could have been interpreted as an implication that NSSH is attention seeking, which could have led to people not choosing to endorse this option. The coping or affect model of self-harm is now much more widely accepted' (McManus et al, p. 508). While studies which aim to ascertain reasons for self-harm have such limitations, nevertheless some key factors continuously arise in critical discussion surrounding triggers for these practices. Such factors include, though are not limited to, interpersonal stressors, the inability to cope with powerful feelings or trauma, and a history of childhood abuse. In her work on gaining nuanced understanding of self-harm within adolescence, Line Indrevoll Stånicke cites breakdowns in close relationships with peers and other 'difficulties with friends and family' as a stressor linked to the lived experience of self-harm (Stånicke, 'The Punished Self, the Unknown Self, and the Harmed Self', p. 2). Stånicke goes on to critically frame self-harm as a way to 'handle and cope with trauma' and a method to 'communicate mental content that cannot be expressed with words' (Stånicke, p. 2).

Furthermore, adolescent self-harm is linked to a history of a range of childhood abuse, including physical abuse, sexual abuse, and verbal abuse (Brausch and Holaday, 'Suicide-Related Concerns as a Mediator Between Physical Abuse and Self-Harm Behaviors in College Students', p. 440-41). As Brausch and Holaday argue, 'being exposed to parental abuse and negative attitudes may induce the feeling of being a burden on parents, children may experience feelings of isolation or thwarted belongingness as a result of physical abuse, and they may develop acquired capability for later self-harm through repeated exposure to the pain of physical abuse' (Brausch and Holaday, p. 441). The aim here is not to give a comprehensive analysis of the range of triggers behind self-harming behaviour, as the full implication of such causes is currently unclear and such discussion exists outside of the realms of this project. Clearly, it is impossible to give full contextual detail surrounding the historical and contemporary resonances of all of the possible causes of adolescent self-harm. However, it is necessary within the scope of this thesis to outline various triggers that are consistently associated with this behaviour.

¹³⁶ Anna Motz, *The Psychology of Female Violence: Crimes Against the Body* (Sussex: Routledge, 2008), p. 193.

¹³⁷ Motz, *The Psychology of Female Violence*, p. 195.

¹³⁸ Motz, *The Psychology of Female Violence*, p. 195.

of femininity which are projected onto women's bodies,¹³⁹ but also it allows such bodies to speak a new language. As the texts I will focus on in this chapter show, women's self-injury articulates a notion of anger to challenge the scripts of embodiment previously enforced upon the female body; it represents a new language to express a powerful, repressed emotion which challenges cultural norms of embodiment and feminized appearances.

Further complexities of stigma occur when examining the assumed, culturally constructed relationship between the supposedly mutilated body and shame. Janice McLaughlin builds on the closely related notions of shame and the observation of the body by outside forces by seeking to understand the stigmatization associated with the bodies of young people with a physical impairment. Her 2017 article 'The Medical Reshaping of Disabled Bodies as a Response to Stigma and a Route to Normality' examines the stigma associated with society's reaction to the young, impaired body.¹⁴⁰ The body itself is not a source of shame but meanings and expectations are projected onto bodies which are perceived by society to exist outside culturally constructed norms.¹⁴¹ In this constructed hierarchy, the impaired body is an example of a perceived deficiency which destabilizes the normative forms of social interaction. Whilst McLaughlin's article mainly focuses on the stigmatization of young people with a physical disability, a similar model of stigma can be applied to self-harm. Paul Gilbert's 2017 article 'Shame and the Vulnerable Self in Medical Context: The Compassionate Solution' argues that the stigmatization surrounding illness and injury pivots upon an individual's belief that they display aspects which are unattractive, undesirable or deficient.¹⁴² Whilst Gilbert acknowledges that society's attitude to body appearance can be a source of shame, he broadens the view of illness to include 'disease, injury, mental health problems and problematic behaviour'.¹⁴³ Medical lexicon such as 'personality disorder, hysteria, cognitive distortions [and] irrational beliefs' serve to label mental illness and produce the stigma surrounding such conditions.¹⁴⁴

Self-harm marks a precarious intersection within the study of shame and the body and mind. The medicalization of self-harm results in its clinical diagnosis as a mental disorder and, as Gilbert notes, the clinical labelling of mental illness regards many conditions

¹³⁹ Motz, *The Psychology of Female Violence*, p. 195.

¹⁴⁰ Janice McLaughlin, 'The Medical Reshaping of Disabled Bodies as a Response to Stigma and a Route to Normality', *Medical Humanities*, 43.4 (2017), 244-50 (p. 244).

¹⁴¹ McLaughlin, 'The Medical Reshaping of Disabled Bodies', p. 244.

¹⁴² Paul Gilbert, 'Shame and the Vulnerable Self in Medical Contexts: The Compassionate Solution', *Medical Humanities*, 43.4 (2017), 211-17, (p. 211).

¹⁴³ Gilbert, 'Shame and the Vulnerable Self', p. 212.

¹⁴⁴ Gilbert, 'Shame and the Vulnerable Self', p. 213.

as shameful and sees the individual as existing outside normative forms of mental health.¹⁴⁵ However, self-injury manifests not only within the psychological state of the individual but is also evidenced on the body, creating a perception of the supposedly impaired, harmed body as a display of perceived deficiency. The individual who self-injures is stigmatized as they are viewed as existing outside normative modes of mental health. This shame is also reproduced in the way in which they identify with their seemingly injured body, further alienating them from culturally produced realms of normalcy.

1.1.2 Introducing Young Adult Fiction to the Discussion of Female

Embodiment

There is a certain social progression in the first decade of the twenty-first century which, perhaps surprisingly, does not seem to be borne out by the content of the novels themselves. This chapter attends to the rift between a society that attempts to engage in a range of cultural discourse surrounding mental health and illness versus a trend of fiction which negates the possibilities of enlightened, progressive and empowered positions available to young adult characters. Moving on into Chapters Two and Three, we begin to see more structural aesthetic ways of conveying different attitudes towards the questions of mental health, institutional life, adolescent agency, and embodiment. However, Chapter One will outline the complex tensions and contradictions produced within the fiction published in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Though these novels want to fictionalize agency in their young protagonists, in doing so they continually fall back on the feminine submission to external conceptions of authority which seek to control girls' bodies and recovery processes.

This chapter assumes a critical position that seeks to reevaluate overarching principles of female embodiment, adolescent agency, culturally constructed modes of sexuality, and life within the medical institution. It examines their depictions within contemporary novels written for young adults. The construction of these issues in relation to female agency within the genre of contemporary young adult fiction has been underexamined within critical frameworks; the focus of this section is to evaluate how such principles of female embodiment and trauma are performed within the created complexities

¹⁴⁵ Gilbert, 'Shame and the Vulnerable Self', p. 213.

of novels about mental illness written for adolescents in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Overall, this chapter evaluates how such principles of female embodiment, harm and institutionalization are illustrated in fictionalized forms within the young adult genre. Twenty-first century criticism by authors such as Inckle, McLaughlin and Bordo create frameworks to evaluate the issues of self-identity, cultural politics of institutions, and models of recovery. Such frameworks are conducive to investigating the largely underexamined notions of these issues within young adult fiction. This section will use these critics' ideas to move the discussion into a literary realm frequently excluded from dominant scholarly discourse.

As we have seen earlier in this thesis, the beginning of the twenty-first century was a time in which young adult fiction became more mature, sophisticated and literary in nature compared to twentieth-century contributions to the genre. During this time, it captured the attention of a widening audience, particularly readers over the age of 21. The fiction's increasing quality led to its greater popularity and gradually expanding critical scholarship. Given that the situations surrounding the genre have drastically altered, it seems likely that the characters too would have undergone forms of transformation. With these important shifts in mind, it could be presumed that female characters would have evolved to imagine themselves in increasingly empowered positions. However, as Terri Suico argues, 'rather than becoming more nuanced and thoughtful, the female characters of the beginning of the [young adult literature] renaissance are extensions of their predecessors'.¹⁴⁶ At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the genre depicted adolescent femininity in repressive and problematic ways that reinforce outdated stereotypes surrounding what it means to be an adolescent girl. Suico goes on to outline how such texts frequently subscribe to models of gender which limit girls' agency:

Themes on what it means to be female, including the importance of appearances, the contrasting roles of the good girl and the "other girl," and the often complex, competitive, and unsupportive entity that is female friendship, are just as prominent in books from the early 2000s as they were in books from decades earlier.¹⁴⁷

As we will see later in this thesis, the genre's performances of femininity transform within the second decade of the twenty-first century to include a wider range of increasingly agentic models of adolescent girlhood. However, within the texts discussed in this chapter, dichotomized models of femininity, narrow forms of recovery trajectories which rely upon

¹⁴⁶ Suico, 'History Repeating Itself', p. 12.

¹⁴⁷ Suico, 'History Repeating Itself', p. 12.

assimilating within dominant patterns of female behaviour, and complications surrounding female friendship groups appear contradictory, elusive and problematic.

Young adult fiction published in the early twenty-first century often produces regressive and contradictory models of femininity which rely upon outdated tropes of adolescent girlhood. As Suico argues, performances of femininity frequently assumed the roles of ‘good girls’ and ‘Other girls’.¹⁴⁸ Whilst Suico concedes that ‘much of the literary canon features foils for the female protagonists’, this use of contrasting modes of young womanhood appears more prevalent and distinctive within adolescent literature.¹⁴⁹ According to the author, the ‘Good girl’ is rewarded for passivity, accepts having little or no bodily autonomy, and suppresses powerful emotions such as anger, aggression or sexual desire. Contrastingly, the ‘Other girl’ is framed within the novel as undesirable, and is punished for using her body to carry out acts of supposed rebellion such as engaging in sexual behaviour without shame.¹⁵⁰ The depiction of such contradictory models of patterns of feminine gendered behaviour becomes increasingly complex in novels discussed later in this chapter. These ideas of ‘Good’ and ‘Other’ modes of girlhood intertwine in new ways with the accessibility of recovery trajectories, complex issues of bodily autonomy, and the demonstration of powerful emotions associated with self-harm and eating disorders.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Suico, ‘History Repeating Itself’, p. 17.

¹⁴⁹ Suico, ‘History Repeating Itself’, p. 17.

¹⁵⁰ Suico, ‘History Repeating Itself’, p. 17.

¹⁵¹ While the critical debates surrounding the terms used in research on eating disorders represent important scholarship, a full exploration of contemporary resonances of such terminology is impossible and impractical within this thesis. Nevertheless, the topic of this chapter requires a brief discussion of labelling, and an appropriate rationale for the language used within this project. In their article on terms to be avoided within such criticism, Weissman et al outline a range of terms that ‘are frequently misused in the scientific literature on eating disorders’ (Weissman et al, ‘Speaking of That: Terms to Avoid or Reconsider in the Eating Disorders Field’, p. 349). Their work suggests that terms are being inappropriately, nebulously, or inaccurately used, and they go on to argue that scholarship should ‘avoid referring to individuals by a label that implies that the person is defined by the diagnosis or symptoms that they experience’ (Weissman et al, p. 350). As such, they are highly critical of the adjectives ‘anorexic’, ‘bulimic’, and ‘binge eater’ to describe the individuals with the lived experience of the eating disorder, as these terms risk reducing the person to a diagnosis or series of symptoms. Weissman et al’s article is critical of using abbreviated names for eating disorders. Although commonly used dictionaries frequently ‘define “anorexia” and “bulimia” broadly (but not precisely) consistent with the diagnostic criteria for anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa’, the authors recommend that scholarly communication should use the unabbreviated names of eating disorders (Weissman et al, p. 351). This is because ‘both anorexia and bulimia (without nervosa) have additional, established clinical meanings (loss of appetite; an abnormal and constant craving for food) whereas anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa unambiguously refer to specific eating disorders’ (Weissman et al, p. 351).

The phrase ‘eating disorder’ is used within this thesis as an umbrella term to cover a range of specific disorders outlined by the *DSM*. The *DSM-5-TR* suggests that ‘feeding and

The issues surrounding ‘Good’ and ‘Other’ models of femininity become increasingly difficult to determine when considering the critical framing of adolescent self-harm and eating disorders. In her book chapter on the role of the asylum in young adult literature, Maria Rovito discusses such forms of body modification in line with feminine acts of rebellion against a patriarchy which seeks to control young girls:

Young adult literature has portrayed many instances of teenage girlhood rebellion— particularly those that focus on narrating the lives of girls who cut, or self-harm. These novels characterize girls who display alternative forms of "acting up" that redirect their rage and frustration toward their own selves and bodies. Suicide, eating disorders, and cutting have traditionally been viewed as methods for rebellion in girls, as these acts have been culturally constructed as ways for girls to defy societal expectations and norms of femininity.¹⁵²

This thesis is reluctant to incorporate the word ‘rebellion’ within this context as the term implies an unprovoked act of dissent. However, in my readings of the texts, I discuss actions that modify the body, such as self-harm and disordered eating, as acts of bodily autonomy. I argue that these actions are embodied demonstrations of powerful emotions grounded in a response to sexuality cast onto their passive bodies by the heterosexual male gaze.

eating disorders are characterized by a persistent disturbance of eating or eating-related behavior that results in the altered consumption or absorption of food and that significantly impairs physical health or psychosocial functioning’ (*DSM-5-TR*, p. 371). It goes on to include the following conditions within the category of ‘feeding and eating disorders’: ‘pica, rumination disorder, avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder, anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge-eating disorder’ (*DSM-5-TR*, p. 371).

Within this thesis, the term ‘eating disorder’ will be used throughout as the fixed individual terms are too restrictive for this scholarship. According to the *DSM-5-TR*, ‘the diagnostic criteria for anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge-eating disorder result in a classification scheme that is mutually exclusive, so that during a single episode, only one of these diagnoses can be assigned’ (*DSM-5-TR*, p. 371). These categories do not enable the type of flexibility required for the type of critical discussion displayed in this chapter. Within the novels discussed here, characters occasionally show symptoms in line with both anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa, and deciding upon an individual and fixed diagnosis for the character is not necessary or productive within this thesis. The term ‘eating disorder’ is also preferred as it avoids viewing lived experiences as a series of discrete categories, and negates the need for terms such as ‘anorexic’, ‘bulimic’ or ‘binge eater; which suggests that the person’s identity is encompassed within their symptoms or diagnosis. Whilst there are a wider range of terms associated with the full spectrum of eating disorders, this rationale aims at discussing language and labelling that arise within the fiction analysed within this chapter, and as such a full exploration of all of the terms exist outside of the scope of this project. Whilst the term ‘eating disorder’ is used consistently within this chapter, it should be recognized that such terms will change, improve, and become more refined as medical cultures develop and cultural attitudes shift.

¹⁵² Maria Rovito, ‘The Bleeding Edge: Cutting, Mad Girls, and the Asylum in Young Adult Literature’, in *Madwomen in Social Justice Movements, Literatures, and Art*, ed. by Jessica Lowell Mason and Nicole Crevar (Wilmington: Vernon Press, 2023), pp. 205-17 (p. 207).

Critical framing of adolescent body modification suggests there are issues surrounding how to fictionalize the lived experiences of self-harm and disordered eating. Rovito criticizes adolescent fiction about self-harm which has been produced ‘without proper input from girls who cut themselves’ as ‘we cannot know if they represent true experiences and motives of many girls who cut, as there are a variety of reasons why girls engage in these acts’.¹⁵³ However, Rovito neglects to consider that attempts to establish what represents ‘true experiences’ of self-harm is a slippery concept, and fails to discuss what this ‘proper input’ looks like in practice. She goes on to undermine her own argument when attempting to ascertain what she describes as the ‘true experiences and motives’ when there is such a wide ‘variety of reasons why girls engage in these acts’. Her criticism creates a narrow, limiting perspective of body modification which attempts to flatten the complexities relating to embodied outlets for anger and frustration at a world which seeks to control them. Further discrepancies within Rovito’s argument arise later when she discusses Patricia McCormick’s novel *Cut* which I discuss below. Rovito’s reading of the novel focuses on the character of Amanda, who Rovito argues engages in ‘secretive and tension-releasing’ cutting.¹⁵⁴ She claims that ‘Amanda’s cutting patterns and behavior set unrealistic standards of cutting for girls, despite the fact that McCormick used the stories of girls at a residential program’.¹⁵⁵ Rovito fails to consider the vast and complex issues that occur when attempting to define and set parameters surrounding what she describes as ‘realistic’ lived experiences of self-harm. The criticism here creates a binary which allow only two options that occur when portraying self-harm, and these surround blurry, vague notions of what the author maintains is ‘realistic’ or ‘unrealistic’. This dichotomy limits our understanding of the sophistications associated with the lived experiences of girls who self-harm.

As we will now see, such a constructed binary involving ‘realistic’ or ‘unrealistic’ portrayals of self-harm produces further complications. Rovito claims that within *Cut*, Amanda’s experience of self-harm is ‘unrealistic’, even though elements of the novel are based on stories McCormick gathered from a medical institution for girls who engage in self-harming behaviour. Rovito wants to highlight the ‘true experiences and motives of many girls who cut’ in contemporary young adult fiction.¹⁵⁶ However, she simultaneously criticizes what she describes as the ‘unrealistic’ nature of McCormick’s fiction, despite its source. Rovito develops her criticism to discuss the fictionalized recovery trajectories of adolescent girls in

¹⁵³ Rovito, ‘The Bleeding Edge’, p. 207.

¹⁵⁴ Rovito, ‘The Bleeding Edge’, p. 213.

¹⁵⁵ Rovito, ‘The Bleeding Edge’, p. 213.

¹⁵⁶ Rovito, ‘The Bleeding Edge’, p. 207.

medical institutions who experience self-harm. She argues that many characters in such fiction are able to achieve a clinical recovery, suggesting that when they stop cutting themselves ‘other acts of liberation provide girls with agency, ranging from running away from their families and the institutions they were forced into, to creating a community with other Mad girls within the asylum’.¹⁵⁷ However, as my readings of similar texts show, any attempts to gain what Rovito defines as ‘other acts of liberation’ result in other, new modes of repression which take different forms. As we will see in my analysis of the selected novels within this chapter, female characters who seek liberation – particularly those who do not adhere to gendered behaviour patterns – are subsequently subjected to the same patriarchal power structures which emerge in new forms.

The politics of female friendship groups commonly feature in young adult fiction and, as we will now see, these are complicated within the fictionalized medical institution. Whilst some criticism discussed earlier suggests that within some texts the girls create a sense of community, in other novels female friendships within the institution appear more contradictory and complex. Suico suggests that adolescent fiction generally ‘tends to cast female relationships as being complicated and often combative’.¹⁵⁸ Rather than being a resource for support and empowerment, the genre reinforces outdated gendered stereotypes that depict female friendships as competitive, fluctuating and hindering.¹⁵⁹

Young adult literature that features the fictionalized medical institution adds distinctive sophistications surrounding the discussion of female friendship groups. In a presentation at a young adult literature conference, Jeremy Johnston discusses the role of the medical institution in twenty-first century young adult literature.¹⁶⁰ He argues that within the genre, the institution is a ‘haven of recovery’ which provides distressed adolescents with ‘conversations with nurses or therapists, group activities with diverse patients, and moments of introspective musing’.¹⁶¹ Johnston goes on to suggest that ‘protagonists inevitably find their experience liberating and empowering’, and that the time spent in the medical institution ‘encourages active self-development and an increased sense of control over one’s desire to live a healthy, meaningful life’.¹⁶² However, within the contexts of the novels discussed later in this chapter, the accessibility of a recovery trajectory which results in such a ‘healthy,

¹⁵⁷ Rovito, ‘The Bleeding Edge’, p. 207.

¹⁵⁸ Suico, ‘History Repeating Itself’, p. 20.

¹⁵⁹ Suico, ‘History Repeating Itself’, p. 20.

¹⁶⁰ Jeremy Johnston, “Capital Limitations: Psychiatric Hospitals & Pre-Industrial Living in YA Fiction” *YA Studies Association Conference*, <4 November 2020>, Digital Conference.

¹⁶¹ Johnston, “Capital Limitations”.

¹⁶² Johnston, “Capital Limitations”.

meaningful life' is achieved through young female characters adhering to culturally sanctioned models of femininity. Rovito argues that within the realms of the fictional institution, girls 'create a sense of community' and nurture each other's recovery processes.¹⁶³ Whilst some characters in these novels do make strong friendships, I argue that it is not this constructed sense of community which enables the characters to access recovery trajectories. Instead, scripts of recovery are allocated to those girls who passively submit to adult controlled medical authority and assimilate into dominant patterns of female behaviour.

The issues uncovered within this chapter raise broader concerns regarding the way in which fictionalized political ideologies of institutions uphold regressive ideals of female passivity. In her 2005 text *The Madness of Women: Myth and Experience*, Jane Ussher engages with feminist social constructionist theories to examine the way in which 'psychiatric diagnosis and treatment simply act to pathologize and regulate femininity'.¹⁶⁴ She argues that socially constructed notions of what constitute madness and sanity serve to define 'boundaries of behaviour for the "good woman"'.¹⁶⁵ This gendered view of madness maintains the borders of normative femininity and establishes sanity as 'the definition of the "good woman"'.¹⁶⁶ Ussher asserts that madness is a 'spectre' for all women which reminds them of the consequences of displaying behaviour outside the realms of normative femininity: it is 'a warning of their possible fate if they stray from their expected path'.¹⁶⁷ Ussher's text uses the practices of pathologizing femininity to construct a binary between women who demonstrate cultural ideals of femininity and women who are perceived as mad, which continue, as we will now see, into the twenty-first century.

We see traces of such ideologies pertaining to normative femininity and constructed binaries of madness and sanity within early twenty-first century young adult fiction. Suico's book chapter 'History Repeating Itself: The Portrayal of Female Characters in Young Adult Literature at the Beginning of the Millennium', cited earlier, engages with similar notions of feminine dichotomies as she outlines the genre's 'prevalent' use of contrasting female characters.¹⁶⁸ Suico highlights the genre's depiction of the passive, socially acceptable 'good girl' as a juxtaposition to the assertive, radical 'other girl': a problematic trope which

¹⁶³ Rovito, 'The Bleeding Edge', p. 213.

¹⁶⁴ Jane Ussher, *The Madness of Women: Myth and Experience* (Florence: Taylor and Francis Group, 2005), p. 7.

¹⁶⁵ Ussher, *The Madness of Women*, p. 7.

¹⁶⁶ Ussher, *The Madness of Women*, p. 73.

¹⁶⁷ Ussher, *The Madness of Women*, p. 74.

¹⁶⁸ Suico, 'History Repeating Itself', p. 17.

she argues pervades many young adult novels published at the beginning of the millennium.¹⁶⁹ Suico asserts this opposition serves to validate and reinforce culturally imposed ideals of femininity whilst ‘denigrating aggressive, mercenary behaviour’.¹⁷⁰ Though at times her argument creates a binary which risks an overgeneralisation of female characterisation, Suico’s criticism provides a significant perspective to examine gendered notions of madness within adolescent novels.

As the twenty-first century moves on, we will see adolescent characters gaining increasing agency over their bodies, identities and trajectories. Although the young adult genre is continually fraught with tensions and complex double movements, later chapters of this thesis demonstrates how the genre grants characters more control and animates ideas about mental illness in innovative new ways. However, the early twenty-first century produced an increase in adolescent novels which construct culturally produced readings of female bodies in institutions that are controlled by outside agents. Contemporary criticism on the intersection between female embodiment and mental illness aids understanding of a trend of young adult fiction evident at the turn of the twenty-first century which constructs young female central protagonists who repress powerful emotions caused by a range of trauma. This trauma is then internalized and re-written on and within the body, leading to self-harm and other forms of body modification such as eating disorders. This trend creates a trajectory of mental illness and recovery for adolescent girls in which the political role of the institution is vital to create a model of restitution. Though we see more positive depictions of the lived experience in later novels, the texts discussed in this chapter perform notions of female embodiment which are tightly bound to constructs of shame as their female protagonists internalize the male gaze’s attempt to sexualize and feminize their bodies.

Novels written for adolescents within the first decade of the twenty-first century, such as Patricia McCormick’s *Cut* (2000), construct principles of intentional self-harm to create a new language of resistance against forms of trauma and repression; *Cut* performs a fictional ideology in relation to the politics of institutionalization. Like other fictional forms, these novels have the potential to construct progressive ideas of female agency within the health and illness narrative and widen possibilities for unanticipated models of recovery which give agency to the central protagonist. Twenty-first century criticism on embodiment and body modification is vital in constructing a significant and previously underexamined intersection between ideologies of female embodiment in relation to the cultural readings of

¹⁶⁹ Suico, ‘History Repeating Itself’, p. 17.

¹⁷⁰ Suico, ‘History Repeating Itself’, p. 17.

institutionalization and fictionalized interpretations of such issues in contemporary young adult fiction. In this chapter I will examine how the genre constructs notions of female embodiment and bodily autonomy within the ideological confines of the institution. The chapter will evaluate the way the selected novels produce hegemonic structures of power and uncover the location of agency within these dynamics in relation to central female protagonists. It will uncover how the primary texts perform versions of feminized identity which problematize the protagonists' trajectories of medicalized recovery.

1.2 Part Two: The Construction and Repression of Female Embodied Identity in Patricia McCormick's *Cut* (2000)

Patricia McCormick's novel *Cut* centres on 15-year-old Callie who regularly self-harms, in particular cutting her arms with sharp objects. At the beginning of the novel, Callie enters Sea Pines medical facility, an institution designed to support girls with mental illnesses. For a large part of the novel, Callie feels unable to speak and as such she struggles to communicate with staff and the other girls. As the novel goes on, we learn that Callie's younger brother is seriously ill, and her parents are very rarely home to help him. Before entering the institution, her brother had a severe asthma attack when neither of her parents were home, leaving Callie to resuscitate her brother and collect her father from a bar. The therapist associates the trauma, and the blame Callie projects onto herself after this incident, with the beginning of Callie's lived experience of self-harm.

The novel performs a model of embodiment which emphasizes a significant intersection between self-harm, repression and the young female body. McCormick's construction of female embodiment equates self-harm with a lack of identification in the body, and therefore Callie is unable to locate her sense of self within her body due to her self-injurious actions. At the beginning of the novel, Callie's narration exists outside of her body when her mother attempts to engage her in a conversation about cutting: 'I was on the ceiling looking down at a play'.¹⁷¹ Callie sees herself as a 'character' within a fictional construct and she becomes the observer of a body she cannot identify with.¹⁷² McCormick's fictionalization of self-harm precludes Callie's location of her identity within her body. Within the novel's notions of embodiment, the character's self-harm symbolizes a destruction of her body as a source of her identity. In this trajectory, these bodily practices become

¹⁷¹ Patricia McCormick, *Cut*, (London: Collins, 2000) p. 25.

¹⁷² McCormick, *Cut*, p. 26.

incompatible with identity of the self through the body, and to destroy the female body is to destroy the relationship between the self and the body.

The novel's framing of the female body as a site of identity is further complicated by the reproduction of the stigmatization of scars caused by self-harm. In her research on shame and the female body, Frost views shame as 'an identity state' for women that leads to internalized body hatred.¹⁷³ She argues that women's experiences of body hatred are 'angry projection[s] of shameful feelings of inadequacy'.¹⁷⁴ Such notions of perceived bodily failures are reinforced by society's treatment of female bodies which exist outside the culturally formed realms of normalcy. The novel's performance of embodiment replicates socially constructed notions which bind shame to the scarred female body as Callie's shame over her body causes her notions of disembodiment. Inckle argues that 'in mental health institutions, a huge emphasis is placed on women's appearance' and the control the institution has over the service users' bodies.¹⁷⁵ Frost also examines the close relationship between shame and being 'observed and assessed'.¹⁷⁶ The novel's construction of the institution mimics the political ideology of the institution in society: it serves to re-emphasize the notions of observation and assessment of the female body as a form of controlling the service user.

The power structures embedded within McCormick's grounded clinical location project shame onto Callie in complex ways. The novel attempts to challenge the culturally constructed notions that equate female agentic identity with normative models of feminine bodies. However, it simultaneously casts shame onto female bodies that do not conform to these perceived ideals of feminine embodiment. Callie experiences shame not only of her scars but of how her body prevents her from performing the role of femininity: she feels she cannot 'wear a ball gown' or other 'fancy clothes' like the other girls.¹⁷⁷ The novel's construction of gendered embodiment marginalizes the scarred adolescent female body and forces Callie outside the socially constructed realms of female normalcy. Though her therapist reassures Callie she can 'do all the things every other girl does', she tells Callie about a girl who had hundreds of scars on her face and underwent plastic surgery to become 'a very successful, very beautiful model'.¹⁷⁸ The novel's model of gendered embodiment

¹⁷³ Frost, *Young Women and the Body*, p. 139-40.

¹⁷⁴ Frost, *Young Women and the Body*, p. 140.

¹⁷⁵ Inckle, *Writing on the Body?*, p. 127.

¹⁷⁶ Frost, *Young Women and the Body*, p. 140.

¹⁷⁷ McCormick, *Cut*, p. 143.

¹⁷⁸ McCormick, *Cut*, p. 143-44.

reverts to conformist notions through this narrative. Here, the narrative attempts to liberate the protagonist from culturally constructed connections between adolescent female identity and normative modes of female beauty. However, the text only serves to further marginalize the scarred body by reiterating the way that contemporary culture equates women being 'successful' with being 'beautiful', even if they must undergo 'plastic surgery' in order to achieve this mode of normalcy.¹⁷⁹ Women who deviate from the text's normative constructions of femininity cannot be 'successful' and 'beautiful'; such success is only offered to girls who are seen to be adhering to strict, predetermined female norms. McCormick's fictionalization of gendered embodiment takes the form of a problematic binary, creating a polarity between women who are physically impaired and those who are successful.

After a negotiation with the shame associated with her scars, the novel's trajectory of recovery allows Callie to understand and accept them. McCormick's construction of restitution relies upon the acceptance of the scarred female body which is viewed by society as deviating from the norms of femininity. As such, the casting off of shame is vital to the novel's models of recovery. In their 2007 article 'My Scars Tell a Story: Self-Mutilation in Young Adult Literature', Jennifer Miscek and Chris McGee use *Cut* to argue that by the resolution of many young adult narratives about body modification, the 'scars that come from cutting stand merely as souvenirs'.¹⁸⁰ Although McCormick's text frames Callie's scars as a reminder of her previous actions, Miscek and McGee problematically dismiss the scars as simple 'souvenirs'. The critics underestimate the cultural and political ideologies which work to form the novel's construction of embodiment. Vital to the performance of embodiment is Callie's reframing of her scars in order to relieve the culturally created shame imposed upon her body. In McCormick's fictionalization of gendered embodiment, Callie's acceptance of her scars enables her to 'tell a story' about her experience and this acknowledgement and admission of her self-injury is displayed publicly on her body.¹⁸¹

An evaluation of the power structures embedded within such novels reveals that cutting is also a symbolic response to the imposition of the text's sexual frameworks onto passive female bodies. Miscek and McGee examine the framework by which to view what they refer to as self-injurious behaviour (SIB): 'there is certainly something intriguing about those novels that approach SIB from a cultural rather than a psychological perspective. Such

¹⁷⁹ McCormick, *Cut*, p. 143-44.

¹⁸⁰ Jennifer Miscek and Chris McGee, 'My Scars Tell a Story: Self-Mutilation in Young Adult Literature', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 32.2 (2007), 163-78 (p. 177).

¹⁸¹ McCormick, *Cut*, p. 144.

novels imply that there is more to cutting than just a simple cry for help'.¹⁸² Within *Cut*, self-harm does not merely constitute a 'simple cry for help' as it plays a vital role in producing female identity. The body is not only the location of Callie's identity but also the source of narration: it becomes the place in which she writes the story, and the story itself. The novel's model of gendered embodiment consists of a simplified, linear trajectory. Callie's self-harm initially precludes her from identifying with her body as an extension of her sense of self. The text's replication of patriarchal attitudes onto female bodies creates a stigmatization of Callie's scarred body, which is cast outside the cultural scripts of femininity that dictate how a female body should appear. Callie's acceptance of her scars and negotiation with her body, which does not correspond to normative models of femininity, is necessary within the trajectory to recovery, a topic which will be explored throughout the chapter.

1.2.1 Identifying External Conceptions of Power over Female Bodies within Scripts of Recovery

Cut is set against a backdrop of increasingly broad and open understandings and ideologies surrounding recovery. It was produced at a time in which critical scholarship showed an increasing interest in moving away from singular understandings of recovery. In their 2016 article 'Narrative Approaches in Mental Health: Preserving the Emancipatory Tradition', Pamela Fisher and John Lees comment on the view established at the end of the twentieth-century that 'recovery is principally a social rather than a clinical process'.¹⁸³ The 1990s was a time in which critical theory illuminated the shift in attitudes towards models of recovery. Such a paradigm shift consisted of movement away from individual medicalization and the widening possibility of recovery as a process which allows for personal transformation.¹⁸⁴ Fisher and Lees use the term 'recovery together' to create 'the space to imagine recovery as a process of growth and development' which relies upon 'a democratic relationship

¹⁸² Miskec and McGee, 'My Scars Tell a Story', p. 177.

¹⁸³ Pamela Fisher and John Lees, 'Narrative Approaches in Mental Health: Preserving the Emancipatory Tradition', *Health*, 20.6 (2016), 599-615, p. 599.

¹⁸⁴ William A Anthony's 1993 article 'Recovery from Mental Illness: The Guiding Vision of the Mental Health Service System in the 1990s' advocates a mental health service model which comprises of a community support system to aid the service user's attitudes, feelings and goals. In the same year, Patricia E Deegan's publication 'Recovering Our Sense of Value After Being Labelled Mentally Ill' was influential in its critique narrow ideology of recovery to encourage a wider understanding of hope. Such research was reinforced by Ron Coleman's 1999 book *Recovery: An Alien Concept?* which proposed a re-framing of recovery into political terms and a 'shifting the paradigm from one of biological reductionism to one of societal and personal development' (p. 34).

between service users and practitioners'.¹⁸⁵ Critical theory documented a reevaluation of the model of recovery: the principles surrounding rehabilitation widened to include notions that society and community are vital to personal self-transformation.

The novel constructs notions about the cultural politics of institutionalization by creating a trajectory which correlates institution with restitution. In 'Recovery from Mental Illness: The Guiding Vision of the Mental Health Service System in the 1990s', William Anthony comments on the changing landscape of critical response to rehabilitation in the 1990s. The concept of recovery was reevaluated as 'a complex, time-consuming process' which incorporates 'much more than recovery from the illness itself'.¹⁸⁶ Angela Woods, Akiko Hart and Helen Spandler explore a similar notion by asserting that narrative can document a range of different forms of recovery, such as 'therapy, medication, familial or peer support, religious counselling, and mental health activism', broadening the medicalized understanding of recovery.¹⁸⁷ Such critical re-framing of the formerly pathologized notions of recovery highlight the way in which recovery from mental illness is a process which continues outside of the institution and may require family support.

These broadening understandings of restitution inform part of McCormick's fictionalization of the recovery trajectory. This recovery trajectory has many aspects, such as relationships with parents and siblings, but it often remains enclosed within dominant, clinical, adult-controlled realms of medical restitution. Callie's relationship with her therapist guides her to understand that the re-framing of her attitude towards her family is vital to her recovery. Her relationship with her mother is challenging due to her mother's own mental illness, and Callie's brother's life-threatening respiratory illness is a source of trauma for her mother, who becomes 'scared all the time' with a range of phobias including bacteria, illness and driving.¹⁸⁸ Callie's family represents models of recovery which do not take place within a medical institution, and in order for her to continue convalescence after her treatment at Sea Pines, her family must be supportive enough to guide her. Towards the end of the novel, Callie runs away from Sea Pines and has a conversation with her father in which she reframes feelings about her family. Her father informs her that the family dynamic is 'a little different now' and that he and her mother are 'trying to be around more'.¹⁸⁹ Whilst this ending

¹⁸⁵ Fisher and Lees, 'Narrative Approaches in Mental Health', p. 603.

¹⁸⁶ William A Anthony, 'Recovery from Mental Illness: The Guiding Vision of the Mental Health Service System in the 1990s', *Psychosocial Rehabilitation Journal*, 16.4 (1993), 11-23, p. 14.

¹⁸⁷ Woods, Angela, Hart, Akiko and Spandler, Helen, 'The Recovery Narrative: Politics and Possibilities of a Genre', *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, 46 (2019), 221-47 (p. 230).

¹⁸⁸ McCormick, *Cut*, p. 121.

¹⁸⁹ McCormick, *Cut*, p. 170-71.

provides restitution for Callie, her mother's mental illness remains problematically unaddressed. Discussing contemporary young adult literature, Steve Salerno argues the genre of young adult literature 'traditionally consists of reassuring texts infused with values espoused by most of mainstream society', therefore most of 'today's best-selling books in the YA genre remain faithful to that ethic'.¹⁹⁰ In line with the conformist nature of contemporary young adult fiction, *Cut* reproduces traditional notions of the mother's role as an ideal maternal figure, leading to a casting off of Callie's mother's phobias. The text's fictionalization of the recovery model applies only to Callie and not her mother: her mother instead is essential to the post-institutionalized model of recovery in the home.

The novel also replicates ideologies which view the medical institution as vital to the recovery trajectory, demonstrated by Callie's return to Sea Pines at the end of the novel. Callie's conversation with her father at the end of the text represents a reformation of the family dynamic which leads to her decision to return to the institution to engage in treatment. When Callie returns to the institution, she tells the staff she is 'glad' she came back as she 'want[s] to get better'.¹⁹¹ Her family are vital to this process, particularly as her father promises her that he and her mother will be at home more to support both their children. However, Callie's act of running away from the institution does not grant her the freedom she hoped it would, and her return to Sea Pines signifies an assimilation within adult-controlled, pathologized restitution processes.

1.2.2 The Role of the Institution within the Recovery Trajectory

Cut performs ideas regarding the cultural politics of institutionalization through Callie's narrative, which is often controlled by adults. In their discussion of mental health narratives, Joy Llewellyn-Beardsley et al re-examine the narration of the recovery paradigm in relation to mental health policies and practices. They argue that recovery from mental illness 'mirrors other forms of identity politics in which (re)claiming a voice to author one's own story is a central emancipating act'.¹⁹² McCormick's fictionalized projection of recovery and emancipation takes a cyclical form and tracks Callie's trajectory from selective mutism to her decision to engage in therapy and tell her doctor 'everything'.¹⁹³ The novel's construction

¹⁹⁰ Steve Salerno, 'The Unbearable Darkness of Young Adult Literature: Books on Sexual Abuse, Dysphoria, Racism, Gang Life, Domestic Violence and School Shootings', *The WSJ*, <<https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-unbearable-darkness-of-young-adult-literature-1535495594>> [accessed 11 April 2020].

¹⁹¹ McCormick, *Cut*, p. 172.

¹⁹² Joy Llewellyn-Beardsley et al, 'Characteristics of Mental Health Recovery Narratives: Systematic Review and Narrative Synthesis', *PLoS ONE*, 14.3 (2019), 1-31, (p. 1).

¹⁹³ McCormick, *Cut*, p. 173.

of the relationship between Callie speaking to her doctor and her own emancipation is a complex one. From the novel's first line ('You say it's up to me to do the talking') to her final promise to speak to the therapist about her experience of mental illness, the novel takes the form of an unvoiced conversation continuously aimed at the doctor.¹⁹⁴ The text's form of addressing the therapist as 'you' throughout embeds a hierarchical power structure which distributes agency to medical authority and limits Callie's power over her own distress. Her journey to restitution continues to perpetuate adult-constructed scripts of recovery: the institution itself represents the adult created tools used by Callie to aid her ability to reframe trauma and recover from self-harm. The institution is vital in reconciling Callie's private, controlled self-harm with her unstable and chaotic family life. This adult-centred script of recovery allows the adolescent the ability to reevaluate her trauma and regain agency in the face of family chaos. Although Callie gains some empowerment by choosing to remain at Sea Pines and engage in talking therapy rather than going home with her family, both options of recovery represent trajectories created and controlled by adults. A significant moment in her model of recovery is her realisation that she can talk to the therapist and this breakthrough initiates her adult-centred trajectory of restitution.

McCormick's fictionalization of the institution is further problematized by the novel's simplification of the complex process of reframing trauma to achieve restitution. Mary Pipher's influential text *Reviving Ophelia* highlights the importance of therapeutic intervention in helping adolescent girls to 'learn new ways to deal with intense misery and also new ways to process pain'.¹⁹⁵ According to Pipher, the journey to stop self-harm begins with recognising pain before verbalising it and reflecting on it in order to develop adaptive ways to respond to trauma which does not involve hurting their bodies.¹⁹⁶ In one significant exchange with the doctor, Callie seems suddenly able to reprocess the guilt that leads to her self-harm:

'I think you've come up with a way to deal with feelings that you find overwhelming. Overwhelmingly bad, overwhelmingly frightening'.

'Really?' I say.

'Really'.¹⁹⁷

This transformative moment hinges on Callie's realisation that her illness is caused by the trauma surrounding her mother's phobias and her father's secret alcoholism. Her parents'

¹⁹⁴ McCormick, *Cut*, p. 1.

¹⁹⁵ Mary Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* (New York: Random House, 1994).

¹⁹⁶ Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia*, p. 159.

¹⁹⁷ Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia*, p. 91.

issues prevent them from supporting Callie in understanding healthy ways to express powerful emotions. This source of trauma is compounded by the guilt she feels over her brother Sam's respiratory attack: Callie considers herself to blame and undertakes all the responsibility to his severe illness. Miskec and McGee's work critiques the novel's linear trajectory of institution and recovery: 'Could Callie, in fact, be this unaware of what seems like a common-sense diagnosis?'.¹⁹⁸ Miskec and McGee argue that Callie is 'seemingly bright' as she finds ways to cut herself despite being closely monitored in the hospital, yet she is 'oblivious' to her illness and is 'aware of it only because of what the doctor tells her'.¹⁹⁹ This fictionalized, linear trajectory between institution and recovery is further problematized by the novel's tripartite structure which signposts Callie's struggle and recovery. Callie struggles to engage with the therapy at Sea Pines, symbolized by her mutism in the first section of the novel. Once she begins to speak, the second chapter of the text then sees her engaging more effectively with the treatment. After she talks to her therapist about her cutting, Callie begins the process of understanding the root of her issues. McCormick's constructed notion of therapy allows Callie to see herself as a vulnerable young person who is traumatized by the guilt she associates with Sam's illness.

The novel's adult-controlled model of recovery allows Callie to reprocess this guilt and understand that caring for Sam is her father's responsibility which he neglected in favour of leaving the house to get alcohol the night Sam became severely ill. The final chapter of the novel outlines Callie's journey to recovery and is notably the shortest, demonstrating the speed at which the protagonist resolves the emotional issues that lead to her self-harm. The text's model of institutionalized recovery risks presenting a linear simplification of the complex and knotty development of identifying, reprocessing and releasing powerful emotions in a way that does not include practices of bodily modification.

Institutionalized recovery trajectories are animated in complex ways within *Cut*, particularly in relation to the protagonist's relationships with staff and other service users. Beardsley et al's article on narratives of recovery from mental illness identifies a trend of narratives they refer to as 'recovery within the system', in which individuals interpret treatment, medication and relationships with medical staff as positive factors to aid their recovery.²⁰⁰ This narrative form views medical diagnosis as empowering and sees 'treatment, services and/or relationships with practitioners as enabling, positive or a

¹⁹⁸ Jennifer Miskec and Chris McGee, 'My Scars Tell a Story', p. 169.

¹⁹⁹ Miskec and McGee, 'My Scars Tell a Story', p. 169.

²⁰⁰ Beardsley et al, 'Characteristics of Mental Health Recovery Narratives', p. 20.

salvation'.²⁰¹ The authors argue that such 'system' narratives can be portrayed as radical as they symbolize 'a challenge to the therapeutic pessimism which can exist around certain mental health conditions'.²⁰² However, as *Cut* demonstrates, such narrative forms inherently embed hierarchical power structures which distribute agency and authority to medical staff and repress the group of service users.

This act of applying rigid narrative templates to mental illness narratives also risks a lack of appreciation of the contours of varied and nuanced experiences of mental illness. Such models also adopt a method of categorization which ignores the multidimensional nature of mental illness narrative. In their article on emancipation and narrative approaches in relation to mental health, Fisher and Lees are wary of dominant narrative templates which 'insidiously weave their way into people's lifeworlds where they furtively close down our ability to imagine diverse understandings of recovery and alternative ways of being'.²⁰³ They go on to argue that although such models of narrative 'have emancipatory potential, there is a risk that narrative templates may be narrowing'.²⁰⁴ The fictionalization of experiences of body modification allows authors the possibility to challenge conformist and narrow models of rehabilitation. However, the construction of institutionalization in *Cut* reinforces a regressive ideology of recovery which limits the opportunity to view rehabilitation as varied and multidimensional. Instead of constructing possibilities for unanticipated and progressive ideologies of recovery which lead to personal and social transformations, McCormick's simplified relationship between institution and restitution constructs a false binary between the therapist and Callie which serves to pathologize Callie whilst distributing power to her doctor.

The notion of 'recovery within the system' is further complicated by the complex and often problematic female friendship dynamics within the novel. Within the storyworld of the fictionalized institution, any attempts at achieving group friendship or community between the girls is problematized by the girls' repressive attitudes towards each other's bodies and mental illnesses, which often replicate elements of the male gaze. When the girls take part in group therapy, Callie's view of the other service users focuses upon each girl's weight, appearance in line with normative standards of female beauty, and secondary sexual characteristics. She refers to Tara as 'a really skinny girl who has to wear a baseball cap to

²⁰¹ Beardsley et al, 'Characteristics of Mental Health Recovery Narratives', p. 13.

²⁰² Beardsley et al, 'Characteristics of Mental Health Recovery Narratives', p. 20.

²⁰³ Fisher and Lees, 'Narrative Approaches in Mental Health', p. 611.

²⁰⁴ Fisher and Lees, 'Narrative Approaches in Mental Health', p. 611.

cover a bald spot where her hair fell out', and calls Debbie 'a really, really overweight girl'.²⁰⁵ When observing another character, Callie reflects on the way 'her enormous chest rises and falls' as she speaks.²⁰⁶ When a new girl, Amanda, joins the facility, the other girls respond in problematic ways when they see her self-harm scars: 'There's a gasp from across the circle. Debbie's hand is clapped over her mouth and the other girls are staring at the new girl'.²⁰⁷ Similarly, the other girls do not respond to Amanda's justifications when she tries to explain why she cuts herself. Callie is particularly critical of Amanda, saying that Amanda's scars are 'gross' and that they might make people 'upset' if they look at them, and suggesting that she should cover up her body instead.²⁰⁸ As we can see here, the girls' attitudes reiterate the same stigmatizing power structures regarding female bodies that the text attempts to resist. The group of girls display repressive attitudes towards each other's mental illnesses and bodies, making concepts such as community and recovery within the institution a problematic concept.

These problematic constructions are compounded by some of the group's inability to show or articulate emotional literacy with each other. When a therapist asks about her mother's alcoholism, Sydney cries and responds: "I'm not pissed," and then clarifies "I'm just...I don't know, disappointed".²⁰⁹ As we can see here, Sydney selects a less powerful, more feminized emotion associated with sadness, compared to the more aggressive nature of anger, even though being angry may be more of a representation of her feelings. Callie feels 'embarrassed for Sydney', thinking of her as 'pathetic' and comparing this episode to being back 'in grade school when someone wet their pants'.²¹⁰ For Callie, seeing the revealing of such emotion appears embarrassing and overly personal, further inhibiting the novel's possibility of creating a community built on mutual support and honesty. Later in the novel a character called Becca, who is receiving treatment for anorexia nervosa, attempts to eat a brownie and the other girls support her. When the rest of the group looks away, Becca hides the brownie and pretends she's eaten it, letting the other girls praise her because they believe she has eaten it.²¹¹ As we have seen, the notion of attempting to construct a type of community within the group of girls in the fictionalized medical setting is problematic. Overall, the storyworld displays a lack of emotional literacy and communication

²⁰⁵ McCormick, *Cut*, p. 10-11.

²⁰⁶ McCormick, *Cut*, p. 12.

²⁰⁷ McCormick, *Cut*, p. 46.

²⁰⁸ McCormick, *Cut*, p. 97-98.

²⁰⁹ McCormick, *Cut*, p. 16.

²¹⁰ McCormick, *Cut*, p. 16.

²¹¹ McCormick, *Cut*, p. 32.

between girls, and when communication does occur, such as within the context of the group therapy sessions, the girls' attitudes merely replicate the problematic male gaze by focusing upon each other's weight, deviations from normative models of feminine beauty, and secondary sexual characteristics. These attitudes result in repressive structures which signal a lack of female community. As Callie reflects early on in the novel, 'there's a lot of crying here at night. Since there are no doors on any of the rooms, the crying – or moaning, or sobbing – floats out into the hallway'.²¹² The novel's fictionalized friendship dynamics within the institution ultimately replicate the same narrow and problematic power constructs that the novel seeks to liberate these girls from.

These issues of self-identity within marked female bodies, the politics of institution, and the nature of conformist models of recovery are also present in a series of other texts from the first decade of the twenty-first century such as Laurie Halse Anderson's *Wintergirls* (2009), Melody Carlson's *Blade Silver* (2005) and Ellen Hopkins' *Impulse* (2007). The remainder of this chapter will examine how these selected adolescent novels create models of recovery which reinforce, challenge or transform culturally formed attitudes towards female bodies. It will evaluate the location of agency within the created complexities of embedded power structures and evaluate the novels' constructed ideology of the medical institution and its impact on female identity and selfhood.

1.3 Part Three: Performances of Adolescent Female Body Modification in Early Twenty-first Century Young Adult Fiction

As demonstrated earlier in this thesis, young adult literature reacts and responds to changing cultural attitudes. The novels discussed within this chapter reflect contemporary culture's anxieties surrounding where agency is located in relation to pubescent female bodies. In her text *The Outside Child In and Out of the Book*, Christine Wilkie-Stibbs argues that literature written for young people has 'necessarily, if not always consciously, reflected the culture of the time in which it was written'.²¹³ Writing about young adult fiction produced from the 1990s, Beth Younger asserts that the genre 'reflects social anxiety about female bodies'.²¹⁴ *Wintergirls*, *Impulse* and *Blade Silver* illustrate the need to examine the culturally constructed complexities of the self within the adolescent female body and the ownership of

²¹² McCormick, *Cut*, p. 36.

²¹³ Christine Wilkie-Stibbs, *The Outside Child In and Out of the Book* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. ix.

²¹⁴ Beth Younger, 'Pleasure, Pain, and the Power of Being Thin: Female Sexuality in Young Adult Literature', *NWSA Journal*, 15.2 (2003), 45-56 (p. 45).

these bodies by outside agents. In her book *Learning Curves: Body Image and Female Sexuality in Young Adult Literature*, Younger asserts that the genre ‘provides a unique literary space where cultural tensions centering on young female bodies are revealed’.²¹⁵ As Miskec and McGee argue, body modification such as self-harm and eating disorders are tightly bound with the need to achieve self-expression and bodily control.²¹⁶ As I will now demonstrate, *Wintergirls*, *Impulse* and *Blade Silver* expose an underexamined intersection between the social conditions which produce anxiety surrounding female embodiment and fictionalization of the recovery and institutionalization of marked female bodies.

1.3.1 Laurie Halse Anderson’s *Wintergirls*

This chapter will now move this critical discussion on by examining how such ideas are animated within Laurie Halse Anderson’s 2009 novel *Wintergirls*. The text features American adolescent Lia Overbrook: a teenager experiencing anorexia nervosa, her parents’ divorce, and the grief caused by the death of her best friend Cassie, who died by suicide after suffering from bulimia nervosa. After Lia’s unsuccessful attempts at overcoming anorexia nervosa at home, she is admitted to New Seasons clinic towards the end of the text to receive treatment for her condition. The underlying power structure of female embodiment in *Wintergirls* is revealed through the text’s narrative form. In the beginning of the novel, Lia recounts her distress when the nurse tells her she must have a drink to raise her blood sugar levels: ‘I take the cup from her, ~~My throat wants it my brain wants it my blood wants it~~ my hand does not want this my mouth does not want this’.²¹⁷ Anderson’s experimentation with the novel’s form incorporates crossed out sentences and caloric values of foods in brackets within the prose, exposing problematic hierarchal power structures. In her 2014 article ‘How to Be Yourself: Ideological Interpellation, Weight Control, and Young Adult Novels’, Dorothy Karlin argues *Wintergirls* replicates ‘a palimpsest, with words crossed out and replaced, overwritten but not fully erased, a material figure for the revisions Lia makes to her body’.²¹⁸ Tsai Hsin-Chun engages with a similar notion in her 2014 article on eating disorders within contemporary young adult literature, suggesting that the novel’s radical narrative form illustrates Lia’s ‘conflicted anorexic mind’ and her need to ‘eliminate her cravings and her

²¹⁵ Beth Younger, *Learning Curves: Body Image and Female Sexuality in Young Adult Literature* (Maryland, Scarecrow Press: 2009), p. xvi.

²¹⁶ Miskec and McGee, ‘My Scars Tell a Story’, p. 167.

²¹⁷ Laurie Halse Anderson, *Wintergirls* (Warwickshire: Marion Lloyd Books, 2009), p. 20.

²¹⁸ Dorothy Karlin, ‘How to Be Yourself: Ideological Interpellation, Weight Control, and Young Adult Novels’, *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures*, 6.2 (2014), 72-89, p. 85.

body's awareness of her need for food'.²¹⁹ Whilst the narrative style depicts her psychological and bodily discipline, such critical viewpoints represent a misreading of the cultural power structures at work within the novel; both Karlin and Hsin-Chun's criticism fails to address the performance of body modification as an act of resistance against cultural models of female embodiment and control.

Although the experimental structure is used to present an experience of psychological distress that transcends the boundaries of traditional narrative, it serves a broader purpose to highlight and challenge the external forces which attempt to regulate Lia's body. In the 2019 article "'Maybe I am Fixed": Disciplinary Practices and the Politics of Therapy in Young Adult Literature', Jeremy Johnston re-examines the novel's radical form to produce a cultural reading of its experimental style. Johnston theorizes that the combination of crossed out text alongside the prose both produces and resists 'the ideological tenets of [Lia's] social conditioning'.²²⁰ The crossed-out text constructs Lia's acknowledgement of her hunger but also illustrates her resistance against the bodily urge to eat, in order to gain control over her social conditioning and achieve power over her body. As Bordo argues, anorexia nervosa can be viewed as a response to an internalisation of the culturally produced notions that women's bodies should be regulated and controlled by external forces.²²¹ The novel represents a performance of embodiment which is culturally and politically motivated: Lia is aware of the slender ideal of femininity and attempts to take control of this socially constructed notion by controlling and regulating her own body through the narrative. Her crossed out, edited and overwritten narrative becomes an act of resistance against cultural norms and symbolizes her attempt to regain bodily autonomy from external, adult forces.

Anderson's construction of embodiment within the novel tracks Lia's changing attitude to her body during puberty. Lia's attitude towards her newly developed body reveals a sense of shame over her body parts deemed to be sexual: her narrative critically examines her 'mile wide thighs' and discusses the way her 'butt jiggled'.²²² The text's performance of embodiment is further problematized by this onset of puberty: in response to Lia's changing body, her dance teacher 'pinched the extra inches' around Lia's thighs, took away her solo

²¹⁹ Tsai Hsin-Chun, 'The Girls Who Do Not Eat: Food, Hunger, and Thinness in Meg Rosoff's *How I Live Now* and Laurie Halse Anderson's *Wintergirls*', *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures*, 6.1 (2014), 36-55, p. 41.

²²⁰ Jeremy Johnston, "'Maybe I am Fixed": Disciplinary Practices and the Politics of Therapy in Young Adult Literature', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 44.3 (2019), 310-331, p. 321.

²²¹ Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, p. 8.

²²² Anderson, *Wintergirls*, p. 164.

performance and told her to reduce her intake of unhealthy foods.²²³ As Lia's body develops secondary sexual characteristics, the text's notions of embodiment reinforce cultural norms which locate the power over female bodies outside of the central protagonist's identity. As Frost argues, there is a correlation between femininity and shame, which has been 'developed in relation to women's visibility'; a woman's body is often regulated and controlled through observation by 'the 'other' of a social interaction'.²²⁴ The novel's fictionalization of female embodiment is conservative in its reinforcement of cultural norms which deny women ownership of their bodies.

Within the text's trajectory of recovery, Lia is subjected to 'meal plans' and 'rules' outside of her control.²²⁵ She is regularly weighed by her stepmother, with the data monitored and tracked in a book Lia regards as 'twenty-four weeks of humiliating recorded weights'.²²⁶ Her stepmother attempts to help Lia, but this assumes the form of a loss of control over Lia's recovery processes, and the strict, adult-controlled monitoring and regulation of the adolescent female body. What could be described as support for the protagonist is a power structure which marginalizes her and locates agency over her body within the realm of adult authority. Anderson's trajectory of recovery problematizes constructions of embodiment and incorporates external forces of control, monitoring and surveillance over Lia's body. In response to these principles, Lia sews coins into the pockets of her dressing gown to appear heavier than she is.²²⁷ Like the eating disorder itself, this action represents a challenge to the adult centred forms of regulation projected onto her body. Karlin argues that 'ideological interpellation has a strong corporeal element, and with its ideological thrust, YA literature works to regulate how adolescents shape and then inhabit their bodies'.²²⁸ Whilst *Wintergirls* seeks to free Lia from anorexia nervosa, Anderson's constructed model of recovery incorporates notions of family support which correlate with adult surveillance and control over the young female body. Through the fictionalization of embodiment, Lia's act of making herself appear heavier challenges submission to the ruling ideology.

The narrative's model of recovery provides six clear rules for Lia, including 'maintain required calorific intake and hydration'.²²⁹ These guidelines seek to aid Lia's recovery, but

²²³ Anderson, *Wintergirls*, p. 165.

²²⁴ Frost, *Young Women and the Body*, p. 140.

²²⁵ Anderson, *Wintergirls*, p. 28.

²²⁶ Anderson, *Wintergirls*, p. 47.

²²⁷ Anderson, *Wintergirls*, p. 47.

²²⁸ Karlin, 'How to Be Yourself', p. 73.

²²⁹ Anderson, *Wintergirls*, p. 103.

they ultimately represent an adult-created script of femininity which Lia must follow. Although Lia does not engage with these guidelines, her act of resistance against them follows a similar template: 'New rules: 1. 800 calories a day, max. 500 preferred. 2. A day starts at dinner. If they make me eat with them, stuff in enough to keep them off my back'.²³⁰ Lia's own rules merely replicate the strict forms of bodily surveillance outlined earlier as problematic. The novel's fictionalization of embodiment has the opportunity to redistribute agency to Lia in order to create unanticipated models of female bodily autonomy. However, the text limits Lia's agency by producing a narrow view of femininity. She cannot perform embodiment through her own form of expression but instead reproduces 'rules' which replicate adult created templates of femininity.

As we have seen, the novel's regressive model of embodiment produces problematic rules of feminine bodily surveillance and limits Lia's identification within her body. Karlin argues that *Wintergirls* seems to 'offer alternatives to much YA fiction, which frequently reinforces prevalent cultural messages valorising thinness'.²³¹ However, this view disregards the interpretation of anorexia nervosa as a cultural phenomenon and a reaction to external agents undertaking surveillance on the female body. The novel's constructions of recovery and embodiment do not distribute power away from these outside forces and back to the central protagonist. The text's model of recovery relieves the symptoms of Lia's anorexia nervosa, but does not destabilize socially formed power structures which locate power over Lia's body within the realms of adult and medical authority. *Wintergirls* therefore reinforces the same ideological process it supposedly criticizes, working 'to author an alternative template for its expression'.²³² The text's central protagonist does not gain the agency required to perform female embodiment through her own form of expression due to the text's conformist and regressive models of embodiment which produce narrow scripts of femininity Lia must follow.

As we will now see, critical attention has been paid to the complex relationship between size, shape, and weight of adolescent female bodies, and the forms and degrees to which sexuality is cast upon them through the male gaze. In her work on embodiment with contemporary young adult literature, Younger argues that 'thin characters represent control, responsibility, assertiveness, and sexual monogamy' whilst 'heavier and voluptuous characters represent passivity, irresponsibility, and sexual availability'.²³³ Younger's creation

²³⁰ Anderson, *Wintergirls*, p. 103.

²³¹ Karlin, 'How to Be Yourself', p. 72.

²³² Karlin, 'How to be Yourself', p. 72.

²³³ Younger, *Learning Curves*, p. 7.

of such a limiting binary should be responded to with caution as it suggests a generalized opposition across the genre which ostensibly presents two diametrically opposed categories of characterisation. This proposed framework by which to view female characters within the genre produces a narrow and limiting understanding of the complexities of constructions of femininity. However, Younger's criticism illuminates significant principles regarding the fictionalized relationship between weight and projections of sexuality onto the body. She argues that in a culture which valorizes lean female bodies, 'young women whose bodies develop early or who are simply more endowed are viewed as already sexual because of their figures'.²³⁴ Younger asserts that if the female form is viewed by the male gaze as inherently sexual, 'then the unassailable logic is that altering the form might deflect the attention'.²³⁵ The fictionalization of embodiment in *Wintergirls* replicates such gendered power structures when Lia, who is already anxious about her post-puberty, feminized appearance, shows Elijah her scarred, modified body: 'The bruises have surfaced, sunset colours stretched over the tight bones. He doesn't see my breasts or my waist or my hips. He only sees the nightmare'.²³⁶ As Bordo argues, anorexia nervosa 'can be seen at least in part as a defence against the 'femaleness' of the body', protecting the individual's body against the threat of the male gaze which projects notions of sexuality onto the passive body.²³⁷

Within the novel's performance of embodiment, the body parts considered sexual, such as breasts, waist and hips are obscured from Elijah's view, due to the appearance of Lia's emaciated and scarred body. These forms of body modification destabilize Elijah's sexualized male gaze; instead of viewing her body as potentially sexual, he 'only sees the nightmare'.²³⁸ The novel's engagement with body modifying practices such as cutting and eating disorders are politically motivated: vital to the novel's construct of embodiment is Lia's rejection of her feminized body in order to avoid the threat of the male gaze which enforces notions of sexuality onto her body. Instead of creating progressive and liberating modes of power and sexuality, Anderson's fictional form mimics conventional socially formed power structures in which threatening external forces seek to regulate and sexualize the feminine body, resulting in Lia's actions to rid her body of its femininity to protect herself from the sexualized patriarchal gaze.

²³⁴ Younger, *Learning Curves*, p. 13.

²³⁵ Younger, *Learning Curves*, p. 18.

²³⁶ Anderson, *Wintergirls*, p. 259.

²³⁷ Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, p. 8.

²³⁸ Anderson, *Wintergirls*, p. 259.

1.3.2 Melody Carlson's *Blade Silver*

As in *Wintergirls*, Melody Carlson's 2005 novel *Blade Silver* constructs problematic models of female bodily autonomy. *Blade Silver* forms part of a collection of 'Christian-themed books that addresses a range of issues facing teens (sex, suicide, drugs, etc.) in order to guide teens to Christianity'.²³⁹ The novel's central protagonist, Ruth Wallace, has been cutting her arms and attempts to hide these actions from her friends and family at the beginning of the text. After attempts to communicate her distress to her ill mother and abusive father prove impossible, a member of staff at her school finds her a place at Promise House, a Christian institution aimed at supporting young girls who harm themselves. Promise House promotes a 12-step programme which takes the form of a 'spiritual awakening' in which the group of service users are required to 'turn our will and our lives over to the care of our Higher Power, to help us rebuild our lives in a positive and caring way'.²⁴⁰

The novel's fictionalized power structures are parallel to those embedded within the narrative of *Wintergirls* as they reveal similar performances of embodiment which locate power within the sexualized male gaze. Ruth experiences verbal and racial abuse by her father: he refers to her by using the racial and misogynist slur 'useless squaw', causing Ruth to develop shame about her Native American heritage.²⁴¹ The abuse Ruth suffers is underpinned by notions of adolescent female embodiment. When she is preparing for an interview at the shop her father works at, he tells her to 'wear a skirt' as the manager of the store is 'a leg man'.²⁴² As in *Wintergirls*, the text's performance of bodily autonomy reveals the pervasive nature of the male gaze, yet Carlson's narrative locates Ruth's father as the source of the sexualized male gaze. He also regulates the makeup Ruth wears and calls her 'bad names' and forces her to wash her face if she wears what he considers to be 'too much'.²⁴³ Similarly, her uncle describes her as 'all grown up' now she is becoming older and 'getting to be a real pretty girl', leaving Ruth 'self-conscious' at having her appearance so closely scrutinized by a male family member.²⁴⁴ The narrative's model of adolescence consists of a narrow, conformist script of feminine embodiment which casts notions of sexuality onto the protagonist by her male family members, distributing authority within the male gaze.

²³⁹ Miskec and McGee, 'My Scars Tell a Story', p. 169.

²⁴⁰ Melody Carlson, *Blade Silver* (Colorado Springs: Nav Press, 2005), p. 172.

²⁴¹ Carlson, *Blade Silver*, p. 58.

²⁴² Carlson, *Blade Silver*, p. 129.

²⁴³ Carlson, *Blade Silver*, p. 81.

²⁴⁴ Carlson, *Blade Silver*, p. 98.

The construction of repression is further gendered through the novel's fictionalization of abuse. Ruth and her brother, Caleb, are subjected to different forms of abuse; though their father is physically abusive towards Caleb, Ruth experiences emotional and racial abuse. The novel's power structures of repression through surveillance of the female body is stronger and more repressive than physical abuse as Caleb fights back and escapes the home whereas Ruth feels unable to do this. She reflects that she wants her father to beat her so she 'would finally have permission, like Caleb, to just leave'.²⁴⁵ The text's gendered perspective of trauma binds the female form to repressive control and associates male embodiment with outward violence. Though Lia in *Wintergirls* and Ruth in *Blade Silver* have similar sources of trauma, they are displayed differently on the body. Ruth's abuse leads to self-injurious behaviour; she reflects on the way that each of her scars 'could tell its own story'.²⁴⁶ The narrative's correlation between story-telling and self-harm is a significant one. As Babiker and Arnold argue, 'self-mutilation is used at once to speak and not speak': it can be viewed as a rare outlet of self-expression available to a marginalized voice.²⁴⁷ However they further examine the relationship between embodiment and self-harm to suggest the attitude to the self is reflected in the attitude to the body, drawing parallels between lack of care for oneself with forms of body modification.²⁴⁸ Considering this theory in relation to the novel's performance of embodiment, Ruth's self-harm can be viewed as a radical reaction and challenge to the novel's construction of patriarchy which heavily scrutinizes and sexualizes her body, even within her own family. In her 2011 article 'Sparkling Vampires: Valorizing Self-harming Behavior in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* Series', Lydia Kokkola examines the fictionalization of this principle of self-harm in early twenty-first century young adult fiction and argues most texts in her study offer a 'rational explanation for a seemingly irrational activity'.²⁴⁹ Ruth's self-harm is symbolic of a lack of care for her body as a form of resistance in a culture which valorizes the excessive monitoring and surveillance of women's bodies. Whilst the novel's embedded power structures locate agency within the sexualized male gaze, the construction of bodily autonomy re-frames cutting as an attempt by Ruth to regain control of her narrative and body.

²⁴⁵ Carlson, *Blade Silver*, p. 88.

²⁴⁶ Carlson, *Blade Silver*, p. 10.

²⁴⁷ Babiker and Arnold, *The Language of Injury*, p. 1.

²⁴⁸ Babiker and Arnold, *The Language of Injury*, p. 9.

²⁴⁹ Lydia Kokkola, 'Sparkling Vampires: Valorizing Self-harming Behavior in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* Series', *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature*, 49.3 (2011) 33-46, p. 35.

As with Callie in *Cut*, Ruth's trajectory of recovery relies upon some form of acceptance of her scarred body which is marginalized and made shameful by socially constructed ideals of female embodiment. *Blade Silver's* fictionalization of embodiment reinforces cultural attitudes which project shame onto the ostensibly mutated female body and exposes Ruth's internalisation of such shame. She feels 'ashamed' of her 'ugly scars' as they serve as reminders of her 'stupidity'.²⁵⁰ In her book *Radical Children's Literature: Future Visions and Aesthetic Transformations in Juvenile Fiction* (2007), Kimberley Reynolds argues that the contemporary young adult self-harm narrative 'works from the assumption that the self-harming child can (though not without difficulty) identify and reprocess the event(s) that has caused the behaviour and in the process, change her feelings and behaviour'.²⁵¹ However, Carlson's problematic model of female embodiment limits Ruth's agency and renders her unable to cast off her shame and reprocess her trauma in order to gain restitution. Within the novel, restitution can only be gained through Ruth's submission of her self and body to forms of authority prevalent within the institution.

As we have seen so far, protagonists within novels discussed in this chapter frequently submit to external conceptions of authority such as conformist gender roles or adult-controlled power structures within medicalized institutions in order to access scripts of recovery. Within *Blade Silver*, Carlson's protagonist submits her body and identity to another form of external concept of authority: recovery processes based upon Christian ideology. Miskec and McGee examine the constructions of restitution in young adult literature and assert that 'cutting is a problem that is eventually solved with adult (or divine) intervention from an outside authority' which allows healing to begin.²⁵² During her recovery process, Ruth reflects on the acceptance of her self-harm scars and re-examines them as 'Jesus's stripes': 'by his stripes (not mine) I am healed'.²⁵³ The novel's performance of embodiment tightly binds principles of the ostensibly mutilated female form which stands outside cultural norms of femininity with a strong sense of shame, causing Ruth to reject the notions of scars being part of her own body and recovery. Instead of achieving bodily autonomy and casting off socially constructed notions of shame, she can only accept these scars when she views them as being part of Jesus's body, not her own. In her book *Literary Conceptualizations of Growth: Metaphors and Cognition in Adolescent Literature*, Roberta Trites argues

²⁵⁰ Carlson, *Blade Silver*, p. 168.

²⁵¹ Kimberley Reynolds, *Radical Children's Literature: Future Visions and Aesthetic Transformations in Juvenile Fiction* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 108.

²⁵² Miskec and McGee, 'My Scars Tell a Story', p. 169.

²⁵³ Carlson, *Blade Silver*, p. 186.

‘adolescent literature initially appears to empower teenagers, but empowerment proves to be something of an illusion in so many novels’.²⁵⁴ In this sense, young adult literature is ‘the only genre written with the subversive ideological intent of undermining the reader’s subject position’.²⁵⁵ Within *Blade Silver*, the fictionalization of body modification within young adult literature forms trajectories of recovery which, as Trites suggests, relocates sources of power to outside agents. As we will now see, attempts to resist forms of authority which seek to monitor Ruth’s body are only temporarily animated before ultimately resulting in a realignment with submission to dominant medical orthodoxies.

The model of recovery within Carlson’s novel relies on a redistribution of bodily autonomy to medical authority or divine intervention. The control and comfort Ruth gains whilst she was self-harming is removed from her through the text’s performance of institution and recovery; her recovery in Promise House presents, as Trites suggests, ‘an illusion’ of empowerment. The clinic comes to act as an agent of socialization as it provides strict ‘steps to recovery’ which serve as conformist scripts of female embodiment.²⁵⁶ Ruth’s first step in Promise House’s recovery process is to ‘admit we are powerless over our illness of self-mutilation and cutting’.²⁵⁷ The political ideology within the institution does not locate power over female bodies within the identity of the women themselves but instead reinforces socially constructed notions of surveillance of the female body by outside authority. The novel’s trajectory of recovery relies upon adult formed and controlled scripts of femininity that require the sacrifice of female bodily autonomy.

1.3.3 Ellen Hopkins’ *Impulse*

Ellen Hopkins’ 2007 novel *Impulse* constructs similar power structures by engaging with notions of sacrificing female embodiment in order to access a recovery trajectory. The narrative centres around three teenagers whose lives intersect at Aspen Springs, an inpatient facility for teenagers with diagnosed mental illnesses, and the first-person narration ‘alternates perspectives between the three teens, gradually revealing additional problems in each of the characters’ lives’.²⁵⁸ The novel is written in free verse style, a narrative form examined by Mark Letcher in his 2010 article ‘Off the Shelves: Poetry and Verse Novels for

²⁵⁴ Roberta Trites, *Literary Conceptualizations of Growth: Metaphors and Cognition in Adolescent Literature* (Philadelphia, John Benjamin’s Publishing Company: 2014), p. 1.

²⁵⁵ Trites, *Literary Conceptualizations of Growth*, p. 1.

²⁵⁶ Carlson, *Blade Silver*, p. 171.

²⁵⁷ Carlson, *Blade Silver*, p. 171.

²⁵⁸ Brian W. Sturm and Karin Michel, ‘The Structure of Power in Young Adult Problem Novels’, *The Young Adult Library Services Journal*, 7.2 (2009), 39-47 (p. 45).

Young Adults'. Discussing Hopkins' body of work more generally, Letcher argues the 'immediate and visceral nature of poetry' is used in adolescent novels which feature 'extremely emotional topics'.²⁵⁹ Although this nature of poetry is utilized in *Cut* when portraying an experience that resists traditional forms of narration, such as the trauma associated with self-harm, Letcher's interpretation of the text's form fails to consider the verse style of the text in relation to the cultural politics of the institution.

Critical discussion surrounding Hopkins' use of the free verse style is limited to how the novel's utilization of a sparse, poetic structure and short stanzas reflects the transitional nature of adolescence and the ambiguities associated with each character's distress. However the novel is fraught with tensions and ambiguities, enabling a constant moving towards and away from young adult liberation. Even while the free verse style hints at a certain form of emancipation, it is nevertheless the case that the content of *Impulse* relies upon more conformist power structures which limit the degree of agency allocated to young queer characters. In their article on young adult problem novels, Brian W Sturm and Karin Michel assert that the varied formatting of the novel's stanzas, such as indentations and justifications, disrupts the 'dependable reading cadence' and creates 'a feeling of uncertainty, not only about the events that are unfolding, but about how the next page will present itself for reading'.²⁶⁰ Although, as Sturm and Michel suggest, the fragmented formatting creates an uncomfortable lack of certainty which mirrors the teenagers' traumatic experiences, it also serves to reveal the text's performance of the political ideology of the institution. Unlike the narrative style of *Cut*, which takes the form of an unvoiced conversation aimed at the therapist, thereby giving agency to medical authority and consequently limiting Callie's autonomy, the free verse style of *Impulse* challenges such fictional hierarchies of the institution. Though this poetic form represents a radical and uncontrolled resistance against the power structures in place within the novel which mimic cultural hierarchies that validate adult, medicalized authority, by doing so it continually falls back on more problematic structures which limit recovery possibilities for queer characters.

As we will now see, though the novel wants to fictionalize agency within young protagonists, it appears problematic in its production of recovery trajectories, particularly those with such limited possibilities for queer characters. In her article 'Taking a Closer Look: Ellen Hopkins and her Novels', Rebecca Hill describes *Impulse* as 'one of Hopkins' most

²⁵⁹ Mark Letcher, 'Off the Shelves: Poetry and Verse Novels for Young Adults', *The English Journal*, 99.3 (2010), 87-90, p. 87.

²⁶⁰ Sturm and Michel, 'The Structure of Power in Young Adult Problem Novels', p. 45.

optimistic books'.²⁶¹ However Hill's consideration of the novel fails to acknowledge the text's narrow and problematic model of restitution. Her analysis represents a misreading of the created complexities of the political ideology of the institution and its correlation with Vanessa, Tony and Conner's fictionalized recovery outcomes. Sturm and Michel place Vanessa and Tony 'on an upward trajectory' within the text's model of recovery as they 'found solace in their developing relationship and the therapy and medications they have received'.²⁶² This criticism of the novel lacks a developed examination of Hopkins' performance of recovery and its problematic model of adolescent sexuality. Early in the novel, Tony identifies as homosexual but subsequently reflects that he 'was really confused / about this for a while' and then begins a heterosexual romantic relationship with Vanessa.²⁶³ Philip Gordon's 2016 article, 'Bullying, Suicide, and Social Ghosting in Recent LGBT Narratives', explores the way contemporary gay representations present queer desire 'as a kind of death drive for which no gay character can go unpunished'.²⁶⁴ *Impulse* reproduces this regressive notion of queer desire being 'punishable' through its treatment of Tony's sexuality.

Whilst there are no outward, violent depictions of homophobia in the text, Hopkins produces scripts of happiness which are ultimately unachievable for queer characters. Queer characters, therefore, must transform to fit into the novel's predetermined, heterosexual scripts of recovery. In his 2009 article on gay adolescent fiction, Thomas Crisp proposes that the genre does not perform "'mainstream" acceptance of non-normative sexual identities' but produces representations of queer characters who are 'frequently moulded to fit into a heteronormative frame'.²⁶⁵ The novel's performance of sexuality reinforces these regressive notions through Tony's trajectory of recovery. Tony's heterosexual desire for Vanessa 'sure feels / real' and 'right', with the implication that his homosexual desires are ostensibly false or wrong.²⁶⁶ Hopkins' construction of restitution is closely bound to regressive and conformist notions of compulsory heterosexuality as Tony can only achieve recovery through his forced romantic relationship with Vanessa. The

²⁶¹ Rebecca Hill, 'Taking a Closer Look: Ellen Hopkins and her Novels', *The ALAN Review*, 38.2, (2011), no pages.

²⁶² Sturm and Michel, 'The Structure of Power in Young Adult Problem Novels', p. 45.

²⁶³ Ellen Hopkins, *Impulse* (New York: Margaret McElderry Books), p. 608.

²⁶⁴ Phillip Gordon, 'Bullying, Suicide, and Social Ghost in Recent LGBT Narratives', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 49 (2016), 1261-79 (p. 1264).

²⁶⁵ Thomas Crisp, 'From Romance to Magical Realism: Limits and Possibilities in Gay Adolescent Fiction', *Children's Literature in Education*, 40 (2009), 333-48, p. 344.

²⁶⁶ Hopkins, *Impulse*, p. 608.

novel's depiction of sexuality regresses to a reliance upon heteronormative and heterosexist power structures which exclude notions of queer desire from its trajectory of restitution.

Hopkins produces a model of recovery from mental illness in which Vanessa and Tony ostensibly save each other from their disorders through a romantic, heteronormative relationship. This problematic restitution narrative prioritizes heterosexual relationships as the only recovery and survival process available to each character. Tony experiences a crisis of identity within the novel, but he reflects that being with Vanessa 'might answer that / question' of identity for him.²⁶⁷ In line with the text's conformist frameworks of sexuality and recovery, Tony's relationship with Vanessa becomes a replacement for medical treatment of his mental illness. Towards the end of the novel, Vanessa recollects her experience with self-harm, which led her to cope with every event that invokes anxiety by 'slipping away to / a quiet place and opening / my skin'.²⁶⁸ Her relationship with Tony is the only method she now has to re-frame the trauma associated with self-harm: she tells Tony that if he leaves her she will 'never stop cutting, / lithium or no lithium' because 'only love can make me quit'.²⁶⁹ The novel constructs a validation of heterosexual, romantic love above other forms of relationships which is the only journey by which Tony and Vanessa can achieve restitution; their relationship becomes a treatment for their mental illnesses which, conversely, limits the authority they have over their respective illnesses. Vanessa 'saves' Tony from the, to borrow Gordon's term, 'death drive' of queer desire and Tony ostensibly cures Vanessa of her need to self-harm.²⁷⁰ This notion of romantic heteronormativity as a replacement for medicalized treatments of mental illness further problematizes Hopkins' performance of recovery. The novel's conceptualisation of restitution enforces a validation of heterosexual romantic relationships which allows adolescents to save each other from the trauma of mental illness. This problematic construct of recovery reveals a pervasive assumption embedded within the text: that mental illness is merely a problem associated with being a teenager and once these adolescents grow into heteronormative models of adulthood they will gain restitution and be liberated from their distress.

These problematic recovery trajectories are compounded and further narrowed when considering Conner's death at the end of the text. In his 2002 book, *The Poetics of Childhood*, Roni Natov examines the overarching principles of young adult novels, asserting

²⁶⁷ Hopkins, *Impulse*, p. 554.

²⁶⁸ Hopkins, *Impulse*, p. 592.

²⁶⁹ Hopkins, *Impulse*, p. 592.

²⁷⁰ Gordon, *Impulse*, p. 1264.

that a book aimed at young readers ‘must not leave the child-reader in despair’.²⁷¹ Nicholas Tucker engages with similar notions regarding the conclusions of young adult novels in his 2006 article ‘Depressive Stories for Children’. Tucker examines the fictionalized ‘idealisation of childhood’ in America and Britain which assumes young people experience happiness and peace until adulthood.²⁷² Sturm and Michel attempt to reconcile the conclusion of *Impulse* with a conventional restitution conclusion, proposing that Hopkins creates ‘a hopeful ending’ which allows ‘the reader to take comfort that at least two of the characters will survive’.²⁷³ However, Sturm and Michel’s criticism is flawed in its lack of engagement with the novel’s problematic performance of restitution which leads to Conner’s suicide. In her 2000 book, *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature*, Trites argues that ‘death, authority, and sexuality are mutually implicated’ within contemporary young adult literature.²⁷⁴ Conner, who ‘rebel[s] against the idea of love’ and challenges medical authority by not taking his medication, ends his life by suicide in a dramatic and public way.²⁷⁵ During a camping trip, Conner jumps to his death from a cliff edge in full view of all the other service users and his friends walk past his ‘broken shell’ as they return to Aspen Springs.²⁷⁶ Trites’ research contends that death features in adolescent literature as ‘the ultimate and inviolable authority’.²⁷⁷ The novel’s fictionalization of death not only punishes Conner but further represses the observers of the suicide. By witnessing Conner’s death, Vanessa and Tony are, as Trites argues, ‘accepting (once again) their own limitations’.²⁷⁸ The discourse of death within the text serves to empower Vanessa and Tony with knowledge whilst simultaneously acting as a form of repression by forcing them to accept a curtailment of their agency.

Conner’s suicide symbolizes a submission to the text’s conformist power structures which frame narrow scripts of heterosexuality as a replacement for treatment for mental

²⁷¹ Roni Natov, *The Poetics of Childhood* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 202.

²⁷² Nicholas Tucker, ‘Depressive Stories for Children’, *Children’s Literature in Education*, 37 (2006), 199-210, p. 201.

²⁷³ Sturm and Michel, ‘The Structure of Power in Young Adult Problem Novels’, p. 45.

²⁷⁴ Roberta Trites, *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000), p. 122.

²⁷⁵ Hopkins, *Impulse*, p. 659.

²⁷⁶ Hopkins, *Impulse*, p. 656.

²⁷⁷ Trites, *Disturbing the Universe*, p. 140.

²⁷⁸ Trites, *Disturbing the Universe*, p. 140. Trites’ text outlines a range of ‘institutional discourses’, such as school, government, religion, identity, family, sexuality, death and authority, which are embedded within adolescent novels. According to Trites, discourse surrounding death, identity and sexuality recurs simultaneously within young adult literature due to the culturally produced notion that children are innocent and can only flourish if they are free from the knowledge of sex and death. (p. 122).

illness. This embedded power model excludes Conner as he is ‘not relationship material’.²⁷⁹ He reflects that he doesn’t ‘have a real / clue what love is – how to / find it, how to give it’.²⁸⁰ Hopkins’ construction of recovery correlates heterosexual, romantic relationships with cures and recovery, suggesting that mental illness is merely a side effect of adolescence. In her work on power structures in young adult literature, Trites argues that the genre reinforces societal power structures by demonstrating to its readership ‘that the only true form of empowerment comes from growing up and leaving adolescence behind’.²⁸¹ Whilst teenage maturation is inevitable, Trites asserts that ‘the message to young readers is a consistent one: “there is something wrong with your subject position as a teenager. Grow up and become someone else”’.²⁸² Hopkins’ problematic trajectory of recovery exemplifies such a model as it forces Vanessa and Tony to conform to an adult, heteronormative ideal. As such, Conner’s inability to engage in a perceived heterosexual normativity excludes him from the novel’s strict, regressive models of recovery leading to his suicide.

The text’s problematic scripts of recovery validate heterosexual, romantic love as the only option of restitution and this pervasive and regressive ideological perspective creates narrow models of recovery which limit the adolescents’ agency over their illnesses. The pervasive, conformist power structures at work within the genre reinforce cultural attitudes which distribute agency over adolescents to adults. As Trites argues, young adult literature ‘is the only genre written with the subversive ideological intent of undermining the reader’s subject position’.²⁸³ Like the fictional power frameworks they depict, young adult texts themselves become ‘an institutional discourse that participates in the power and repression dynamic that socializes adolescents into their cultural positions’.²⁸⁴ The examination of such dynamics of authority reveal the way created complexities of political hierarchies construct the adolescent genre as an agent of socialisation as it provides instructive frameworks which locate agency within the realms of adulthood.

1.3.4 Bringing Texts into Conversation with Each Other

As we have seen, the pathologization of femininity produces a supposed binary between women who perform gendered bodily modification in culturally sanctioned ways, and women who are considered mad. This trend continues into the first decade of the

²⁷⁹ Hopkins, *Impulse*, p. 595.

²⁸⁰ Hopkins, *Impulse*, p. 597.

²⁸¹ Trites, *Literary Conceptualizations of Growth*, p. 1.

²⁸² Trites, *Literary Conceptualizations of Growth*, p. 1.

²⁸³ Trites, *Literary Conceptualizations of Growth*, p. 1.

²⁸⁴ Trites, *Disturbing the Universe*, p. 54.

twenty-first century with such problematic ideologies frequently pervading the gendered power structures of young adult literature produced during this time. The selected primary texts are problematic in their engagement with the culturally created dichotomy between the 'good girl' who adheres to culturally sanctioned scripts of femininity and the 'mad girl' who represents a perceived challenge to gender normative behaviour. The cultural politics of the institution in *Wintergirls* produces two contrasting female characters. Cassie represents a radical challenge to scripts of female passivity: she rejects adult authority, refuses to engage in therapy and keeps her struggles with bulimia nervosa a secret from her parents. Lia's stepmother is highly critical of Cassie, referring to her as a 'mess' whose radical behaviour leads to her suicide, further projecting the novel's assumption that feminine passivity is preferable to a rejection of gender normative behaviour.²⁸⁵ Not only is the novel's fictionalized model of recovery tightly bound to notions of feminine passivity, recovery for Lia is impossible without submitting to this strict script of gender. During a therapy session, Lia's doctor asks her to draw what she thinks is a life-sized outline of her body; Lia does not express her feelings but purposely draws a 'blobby version' of herself.²⁸⁶ The institution acts as a tool of socialisation to promote narrow models of femininity and Lia does not draw her impression of her body for the doctor because she 'knew what he wanted to hear'.²⁸⁷

Lia's third visit to New Seasons hospital is the most significant within the text's created ideas of recovery as it correlates recovery within the institution with the service user's adherence to adult controlled scripts of passive femininity: 'I don't lie to the nurses this time. I don't argue with them or throw anything or scream'.²⁸⁸ In Johnston's 2019 article on the politics of therapy in adolescent novels, he argues that such texts about mental illness focus on adolescent girls' ability to cope with the traumas associated with body modification through therapeutic discourse.²⁸⁹ Johnston's article proposes that the genre's constructions of therapy do not involve the service users uncovering and reprocessing the reasons behind their desires to modify their body. Instead, contemporary young adult texts perform ideas of therapy and recovery which are 'inextricably linked to how well those characters accept and commit to therapeutic treatment'.²⁹⁰ Johnston's research reveals a problematic and pervasive implication: that body modification actions such as eating disorders 'are not the

²⁸⁵ Anderson, *Wintergirls*, p. 3.

²⁸⁶ Anderson, *Wintergirls*, p. 82.

²⁸⁷ Anderson, *Wintergirls*, p. 82.

²⁸⁸ Anderson, *Wintergirls*, p. 276.

²⁸⁹ Johnston, "Maybe I am Fixed", p. 311.

²⁹⁰ Johnston, "Maybe I am Fixed", p. 311.

norm but the reflection of a psychological failure to operate within hegemonic social networks'.²⁹¹ Recovery therefore requires the service user to sacrifice agency over their trajectories and submit to the dominant ruling ideology within the institution.

As Lia plans to leave the hospital, she reflects on the way in which the medical staff compile a transition plan to 'shift from hospital Lia to real Lia'.²⁹² Whilst the novel's model of recovery locates Lia within a restored, recovered space at the end of the text, it constructs gendered power structures which valorize passive femininity and are highly critical of adolescent female behaviour that transgresses cultural boundaries of gender normative behaviour. The text projects an institutionalized persona onto the central protagonist as part of its model of femininity which requires Lia to sacrifice her identity in order to access the novel's trajectory of recovery and such problematic performances of femininity exclude Cassie, whose rejection of normative femininity results in her suicide. In *Wintergirls*, Anderson's fictionalized version of treatment and recovery from mental illness is closely associated with notions of femininity and reinforces wider, regressive cultural ideals which pathologize femininity. Lia's only option for recovery is to adopt an institutionalized persona which correlates to accepting a female state of passivity.

Hopkins' novel, *Impulse*, displays a similar need to project feminized, institutionalized personas onto adolescent girls. Vanessa describes Aspen Springs as a 'hostile / land' and acknowledges how her 'instincts are shouting / to do what I gotta do / just to get by'.²⁹³ In order 'to get by' within the institution she must become the passive, feminized patient that the political ideology within the institution is shaping her into. She sees taking her medication not as a vital aspect of recovery but merely as 'toeing a straight gray line' in order to appear 'halfway, to what others / call normal'.²⁹⁴ In Karlin's 2014 article on body image in young adult literature, she argues that whilst many adolescent texts 'claim to give voice to historically "voiceless" YA bodies, they nonetheless continue to participate in the ideological interpellation' which limits the agency of female protagonists.²⁹⁵ Karlin's proposition that adolescent texts often profess to provide a platform for marginalized adolescent bodies is a significant one: *Impulse* dismisses Vanessa's voice as it does not conform to the text's strict scripts of feminine passivity. Instead, the text projects an adult prescribed voice onto Vanessa which adheres to the text's idealized form of the passive, feminized patient. Like

²⁹¹ Johnston, "Maybe I am Fixed", p. 311.

²⁹² Anderson, *Wintergirls*, p. 276.

²⁹³ Hopkins, *Impulse*, p. 72.

²⁹⁴ Hopkins, *Impulse*, p. 74.

²⁹⁵ Karlin, 'How to be Yourself', p. 75.

Lia in *Wintergirls*, Vanessa is socialized through the power structures embedded within the institution: they must both adhere to the role of femininity projected onto them by the adult, medicalized authority. These adolescent texts display the need for central female protagonists to perform a role of passive femininity which involves submitting to adult forces and keeping their own feelings about their bodies and recovery hidden. These novels construct the medical institution as an agent to dichotomize and socialize young women: they create binary oppositions between the validated, passive girl and the illegitimate, radical mad girl. Both *Wintergirls* and *Impulse* uphold cultural ideals of femininity by correlating recovery from a mental illness with enforced adherence to culturally approved scripts of femininity.

Similar ideologies appear in *Blade Silver*, in which Ruth sacrifices identity and control over her body to outside intervention to access a form of restitution which aligns with an assimilation within socially sanctioned forms of femininity. In her research on power and repression in contemporary adolescent literature, Trites describes the representation of religion within the genre as a form of identity politics which is used to depict social affiliations constructed by adult members of society ‘to position people in relationship to one another’.²⁹⁶ She argues that adolescents who are ‘taught to believe in the omnipotence of an unseen patriarchal deity who must be obeyed are indeed receiving ideological training that represses them’.²⁹⁷ Examining this criticism in relation to *Blade Silver* reveals problematic constructions of power hierarchies. The novel uses religion as a form of identity politics which serves to distribute power to active adults whilst repressing the passive girls at Promise House. Ruth gains an identity through Christianity, but this is enforced upon her by the strict ideology of the institution. The constructed power structures embedded within the narrative never validate adolescent female autonomy. Like Lia in *Wintergirls*, Ruth’s trajectory begins at home, where she is subjected to repression from a source within her family. Whilst the text’s fictionalization of treatment has the potential to liberate Ruth from this repression, it provides a form of recovery which requires Ruth to sacrifice her identity in order to achieve. The text’s sources of control move from Ruth’s family to medical authority but power remains located within the realm of adulthood.

At the end of McCormick’s novel, Callie’s attempt to run away from Sea Pines – and the time spent at a local café with her father – is pivotal to the possibility of scripts of recovery accessible to the protagonist. In a review of *Cut*, Gail Richmond suggests that the text takes

²⁹⁶ Trites, *Disturbing the Universe*, p. 45.

²⁹⁷ Trites, *Disturbing the Universe*, p. 41.

the lived experience of self-harm 'one step further' than other similar young adult novels produced at the same time by 'helping teens find solutions to problems'.²⁹⁸ These supposedly instructional intentions of the novel lead to what Frances Bradburn describes as 'a too-tidy ending'.²⁹⁹ However, Bradburn's review of the novel neglects to consider the novel's ending as problematic in its tendencies to uphold culturally constructed, narrow norms of femininity. Whilst her escape opens the potential for a form of liberation associated with Callie controlling her own trajectory, such possibilities are simultaneously negated through her return to Sea Pines, signifying an alignment with the forms of culturally constructed norms of femininity associated with such external conceptions of authority. Whilst Bradburn argues that 'elective mutism plays a part' within the text, the reviewer understates the size and significance of the role elective mutism plays in the power structures within the medical institution.³⁰⁰ When Callie does not conform to the narrow scripts of recovery within the novel, her mother tells her 'they say you're resisting treatment' by displaying 'oppositional behaviour', and she goes on to compare her to other girls at Sea Pines who are 'willing to work' and 'want to get better'.³⁰¹ After their conversation, Callie expresses her frustration with this linear form of clinical restitution, reflecting that calling her mutism 'oppositional behaviour' makes it sound 'so premeditated, so on purpose'.³⁰² As such, her own methods of processing complex emotions, through verbal silence and writing upon her body, does not grant recovery, and instead restitution must come in the form of returning to Sea Pines and showing 'good-manners' by conforming to the strict, medicalized forms of treatment prioritized within Sea Pines.³⁰³ In parallel with protagonists in other novels discussed in this chapter, Callie's submission to external conceptions of authority leads to the accessibility of recovery scripts which require the adoption of a feminized, institutionalized persona.

1.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have produced a cultural reading of texts that views modifications of the female adolescent body through self-harm and eating disorders as challenges to the

²⁹⁸ Gail Richmond, 'Patricia McCormick's *Cut*: A Book Review', *School Library Journal*, (2000), 146 (p. 146).

²⁹⁹ Frances Bradburn, 'Review of Patricia McCormick's *Cut*', *Booklist*, 97.2 (2001), 940 (p. 940).

³⁰⁰ Bradburn, 'Review of Patricia McCormick's *Cut*', p. 940.

³⁰¹ McCormick, *Cut*, p. 59-60.

³⁰² McCormick, *Cut*, p. 60.

³⁰³ McCormick, *Cut*, p. 172.

societally constructed notions which locate female bodily autonomy within outside agents. Later in this thesis I discuss how young adult fiction moves to present more empowered adolescent female characters in the second decade of the twenty-first century. However, this chapter has outlined how the selected examples of early twenty-first century young adult literature present adolescent female protagonists within problematic trajectories of illness and recovery which begin with experiences of repression, abuse and neglect within the home. It has uncovered the novels' problematic constructions of medical institutions that seeks to remove the adolescents' identity whilst assuming medical authority over their bodies and psychological distress. I have examined how these texts have the potential to imagine unanticipated interpretations of recovery and female embodiment, yet they ultimately valorize damaging, narrow stereotypes of femininity. This chapter has unveiled embedded power structures within the novels which validate adult authority at the expense of adolescent identity. These issues regarding the intersection of identity, authority and body modification provide a significant insight into other, wider forms of conservatism present within the primary texts' constructions of gendered recovery from mental illness, such as the reinforcement of passive femininity.

As this chapter has demonstrated, early twenty-first century young adult fiction which features themes of body modification appears didactic in its valorization of journeys, processes and models of recovery which result in aligning with models of passive femininity and the giving up of control over the body. In her 2017 essay on twenty-first century young adult literature, Suico examines the 'inclusion of traditional tropes associated with females' which serve to uphold 'the negative frame often used to promote a conventional worldview and maintain the status quo'.³⁰⁴ Although the first decade of the twenty-first century produced 'more mature themes and longer, more complex stories', the genre still reverts to the archetypal ideals of femininity found in earlier texts.³⁰⁵ As Miskec and McGee argue in their research on body modification in contemporary adolescent literature, 'even the most innovative novel turns didactic in the end, despite the subgenre's heavily evolved shape since its earliest incarnations'.³⁰⁶ Although the dialogue surrounding self-harm, eating disorders and other forms of body modification has changed since the subgenre's inception, 'the deeper ideological values of adolescent literature still inform the genre'.³⁰⁷ The selected

³⁰⁴ Suico, 'History Repeating Itself', p. 23.

³⁰⁵ Suico, 'History Repeating Itself', p. 23.

³⁰⁶ Miskec and McGee, 'My Scars Tell a Story', p. 168.

³⁰⁷ Miskec and McGee, 'My Scars Tell a Story', p. 168.

novels deem body modification actions such as self-harm and anorexia nervosa as representative of a radical and unwanted form of individualized femininity. The fictionalized political ideology of the institutions within the novels serves to feminize and socialize the central protagonists while projecting onto them the institutionalized persona of the passive, feminine patient. The novels examined display a need to return female adolescents to obeying the institutionalized scripts of authority. The characters investigated within this chapter can only access recovery if their identity is overwritten by an adult authority figure such as a family member, doctor or a higher religious force. As I have shown, the selected texts produce problematic notions of restitution: culturally formed ideals of female passivity are not solely found in the novels' treatment of female embodiment but in wider issues of femininity such as identity and selfhood.

Chapter 2: Masculinity and Mental Illness in Young Adult Literature, 2013-2018

This chapter will examine adolescent novels about male experiences of mental illness produced between 2013-2018. In order to fully contextualize these texts, I will begin with a critical outline of representations of boys within young adult fiction from the first decade of the twenty-first century to show how my chosen texts exemplify a movement away from dominant performances of masculinity in that period that stress control, strength and heteronormativity. As this chapter will go on to show, writing for young adults between 2000 and 2010 produced conformist performances of masculinity as these novels frequently locate masculinity within the roles of powerful heroes and warriors. Second, this chapter will examine how many aspects of these conformities of male gender roles continue into the second decade of the twenty-first century, but - as I will go on to demonstrate - the performances are reframed within more recent young adult novels to include notions of vulnerability and emotional availability. The chapter will also evaluate complex performances of masculinity within young adult narratives of mental illness over the last ten years. As we will see, this chapter attends to the ways in which the new adolescent literature about males and mental illness presupposes certain masculine stereotypes whilst engaging in a range of ways of being an adolescent male. This chapter utilizes short sections with recurring subheadings on key topics such as male sexuality to organize the critical ideas about imaginings of masculinity in young adult literature from the twenty-first century. Due to the complexities of combining these two decades, and the critical binaries that arise within the study of adolescent novels during this time, this is the best structure through which I can explore these overlapping and sometimes contradictory imaginings that are produced within this literature.

This chapter attends to the complex intersection of masculinity and mental illness. As the literature I will discuss has identified a need to represent the social, cultural and political contexts in which masculinity is constructed, it will begin by examining the changing landscape of masculinity since 2000, and will then go on to discuss how these ideas are animated in the adolescent fiction genre. In their 2021 work on masculinity in young adult literature, Kasey Garrison, Mary Carroll and Elizabeth Derouet highlight a lack of research into 'historic shifts occurring in realistic young adult literature novels in terms of

masculinity'.³⁰⁸ My project addresses this gap in research by examining the recent historic shift in the genre pertaining to ideologies of masculinity through the prism of mental health.

From 2010 onwards a cultural shift occurred which produced a greater recognition of issues surrounding boys' and men's mental health and help-seeking behaviours. In their 2020 article on mental health literacy and help-seeking behaviour in adolescent males, Laura Clark, Jennifer Hudson, Ronald Rapee and Katrina Grasby investigate the 'growing awareness' of the importance of studying male mental health, a research area which was 'oftentimes overlooked' until the second decade of the twenty-first century.³⁰⁹ Similarly, Benita Chatmon's 2020 editorial identifies culturally constructed gendered male behaviour as a key factor which contributes to the lack of discussion of male mental health and the underuse of methods to seek professional help for symptoms of mental distress in men.³¹⁰ Her work goes on to highlight some of the 'sociocultural aspects of men's acculturation to stigma related to mental health issues with emphasis on the influences of culture and traditional masculine norms'.³¹¹ This recent range of critical work frequently discusses how cultural ideologies that produce health-related stigma and shame cause public discussion of male mental illness to be overlooked and repressed. This historic shift has produced a proliferation of research on understanding how patterns of masculine behaviour impact on the hesitance to talk about men's mental health and produce a stigma surrounding male help-seeking behaviour.

This chapter will discuss ideas of vulnerability and sensitivity as essential behaviours that enable discussion surrounding male mental illness. Clark et al discuss the recent rising awareness of issues surrounding displays of vulnerability and sensitivity within constructions of models of masculinity by arguing that 'adolescent males consistently demonstrate lower levels of mental health literacy when compared to adolescent females' and this characteristic of men's gendered behaviour often limits public displays of male vulnerability and sensitivity.³¹² Though showing sensitivity and vulnerability is vital for the discussion of male mental health, these behaviours often are frequently constructed in direct opposition to

³⁰⁸ Kasey Garrison, Mary Carroll and Elizabeth Derouet, 'Of Men and Masculinity: The Portrayal of Masculinity in a Selection of Award-Winning Australian Young Adult Literature', *Knygotyra*, 76 (2021), 228-59 (p. 232).

³⁰⁹ Laura Clark, Jennifer Hudson, Ronald Rapee, Katrina Grasby, 'Investigating the Impact of Masculinity on the Relationship Between Anxiety Specific Mental Health Literacy and Mental Health Help-Seeking in Adolescent Males', *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 76 (2020), 1-8 (p. 1).

³¹⁰ Chatmon, 'Males and Mental Health Stigma', p. 1.

³¹¹ Chatmon, 'Males and Mental Health Stigma', p. 1.

³¹² Clark et al, p. 1.

hegemonic masculine ideals. As such, as Clark et al argue, 'mental health help-seeking is inhibited by greater alignment with norms of hegemonic masculinity and a socially constructed "men don't seek help" gender stereotype'.³¹³ Within the prism of hegemonic masculinity, help-seeking behaviours are not framed as displays of sensitivity but are frequently interpreted as being "weak", "pathetic" and being incongruent to "a tough or self-reliant male" by young men.³¹⁴ Characteristics such as male vulnerability and sensitivity explicitly come to signal mental illness within the recent phenomenon of discussion of boys' mental health and, as I show in the chapter, are often played out in terms of sexuality and certain kinds of masculinity within the adolescent fiction genre.

The proliferation of young adult novels about boys and masculine vulnerability and sensitivity since 2010 have animated these ideas in complex new ways.³¹⁵ These recent young adult texts allow for more productive and sophisticated understandings of how culturally constructed male characteristics interact with the discussion, experience and understanding of symptoms of mental illness, and how various masculine traits impact on the enactment of help-seeking behaviours. The way that these novels animate new ideas about male sensitivity and vulnerability surrounding mental health allow for some innovative textual readings and signify a movement away from concepts I have previously identified as problematic in Chapter One to more productive outcomes across the time period. This chapter will discuss the ways in which representation that is more contemporary moves on from these problematic issues brought up in Chapter One. As the two decades progress, the novels become more imaginative and less grounded in realism in their construction of mental illness symptoms as productive and extraordinary. As we will see, male characters with mental illnesses become elevated to the position of hero as the cognitive difference associated with their conditions are framed by the narrative as useful and at times superhuman. Such cognitive differences do not weaken the young male characters but serve as attributes which convey strength. As the century moves on, the genre begins to

³¹³ Clark et al, p. 2.

³¹⁴ Clark et al, p. 2.

³¹⁵ See Kasey Garrison, Mary Carroll and Elizabeth Derouet, 'Of Men and Masculinity: The Portrayal of Masculinity in a Selection of Award-Winning Australian Young Adult Literature', *Knygotyra*, 76 (2021), 228-59. The authors discuss the increasing range of constructions of masculinity in recent young adult fiction and identify various models of masculinity such as 'Jock', 'Nerd' and 'Rebel'. Whilst their research focuses on contrasting constructions of hegemonic masculinity with the 'Sensitive New Man', my research situates masculinity within a broad continuum of gendered behaviours rather than a series of categories.

produce unanticipated scripts of recovery which, unlike novels discussed in Chapter One, do not rely upon an assimilation into normative realms of mental health.

2.1 Section One: Conformities 2000-2010

2.1.1 Heroes, Warriors and Swordsmen

Young adult literature written at the beginning of the twenty-first century produced dichotomized models of masculinity. In *Boys in Children's Literature and Popular Culture: Masculinity, Abjection, and the Fictional Child* (2008), Annette Wannamaker outlines the way early 2000 young adult modes of masculinity were constructed through binary oppositions. Adolescent narratives were limited to the 'adventurous tales of heroes' or 'dilemmas of sensitive boys'.³¹⁶ The genre was dominated by the former, valorizations of 'traditional stories about (white, heterosexual) boys and men engaged in (white, heterosexual) heroic activities that do not, apparently, involve talking about feelings, being sensitive to others, or being tolerant of difference'.³¹⁷ These hero narratives depict a simple 'linearity' as the hero moved from the difficulties of adolescence to the dangers of young adulthood.³¹⁸ Manifestations of the male hero as a trope of gendered identity pervaded young adult literature during the period. In *Broadening Critical Boundaries in Children's and Young Adult Literature and Culture* (2018), Ruth Caillouet examines how the popularity of the *Harry Potter* franchise was, similarly, instrumental in producing 'an explosion of teen warriors', consisting of 'young master swordsmen', 'boy kings' and 'space travelling soldiers'.³¹⁹ As I will go on to show, the genre later challenges this notion of strength and power as the only performance of masculinity available to male characters, but it remains a prevalent theme in young adult texts up to 2010.

³¹⁶ Annette Wannamaker, *Boys in Children's Literature and Popular Culture: Masculinity, Abjection, and the Fictional Child*, (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 4.

³¹⁷ Wannamaker, *Boys in Children's Literature and Popular Culture*, p. 4.

³¹⁸ Margery Hourihan, *Deconstructing the Hero: Literary Theory and Children's Literature*, (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 47.

³¹⁹ Ruth Caillouet, 'Harry Potter Meets Buffy Summers: Parallel Verses and the Young Adult Hero', in *Broadening Critical Boundaries in Children's and Young Adult Literature and Culture*, ed. By Amie Doughty (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), pp. 119-38, (p. 119).

2.1.2 Hegemonic Masculinity

Adolescent novels up to 2010 frequently allocate narrative centrality to certain performances of gendered behaviour. In particular, those characters who engage in hegemonic masculinity often achieve narrative centrality and are framed as powerful by the institutions within the texts. Garrison, Carroll and Derouet build on work by R.W. Connell to suggest that hegemonic masculinity consists of practices such as 'domination, physical assertiveness and egocentric individualism and in contrast to each other'.³²⁰ They go on to argue that hegemonic masculinity establishes power dynamics which implement dominance and subordination between men, causing them to display attributes such as self-regard, violence, and physical or verbal abuse.³²¹ This dominant pattern of male gendered behaviour evokes condemnation of queerness and femininity and promotes a necessity for men to continually prove their hegemonic masculine role by producing public performances of heterosexuality.³²² As we will now see, young adult novels produced 2000-2010 frequently empower those characters whose narrative arcs culminate in patterns of behaviour associated with hegemonic masculinity. In her 2007 study of the depiction of masculinity in early 2000s young adult novels, Helen Harper explores the interplay between narrative arc and male gendered behaviour, arguing that within these novels, growth and maturity are equated with 'a move to more conventional gendered performances'.³²³ According to Harper, these texts for adolescents display a linear trajectory for male characters which culminates in a performance of masculinity that incorporates 'bravado, boldness and aggression' and other hegemonic practices.³²⁴ Wannamaker engages with similar concepts by exploring the way in which adolescent characters who 'perform their genders appropriately are allowed to fulfill their power fantasies through the text'.³²⁵ Characters who engage in hegemonic practices are validated within the genre as they not only achieve power in the relationships between the characters but they are also granted narrative centrality by the power structures embedded within the texts' institutions. As I will show however, current novels about male mental health for young people add layers of complexities to these narrative trajectories whilst exposing the precarity of masculinity

³²⁰ Garrison, Carroll and Derouet, 'Of Men and Masculinity', p. 232.

³²¹ Garrison, Carroll and Derouet, 'Of Men and Masculinity', p. 233.

³²² Garrison, Carroll and Derouet, 'Of Men and Masculinity', p. 234.

³²³ Helen Harper, 'Studying Masculinit(ies) in Books about Girls', *Canadian Journal of Education*, 30.2 (2007), 508-30 (p. 522).

³²⁴ Harper, 'Studying Masculinit(ies) in Books about Girls', p. 522.

³²⁵ Wannamaker, *Boys in Children's Literature and Popular Culture*, p. 100.

performed within the texts. Within these novels of the last ten years, patterns of male behaviour which include vulnerability and sensitivity explicitly come to signal mental illness and evoke a broad spectrum of alternative performances of masculinity.

2.1.3 Male Friendship Groups in Public and Private Spaces

Young adult fiction from 2000-2010 establishes complex relationships between performances of masculinity and public displays of friendship between teenage boys.³²⁶ Providing a context for this, Tami M. Bereska's 2003 work examines the construction of male friendship groups, or 'collectivities' within adolescent fiction in the 1990s.³²⁷ These collectivities rely upon public and group adherence to masculine norms and 'enhance the manliness of individuals in situations where gender roles might otherwise be questioned'.³²⁸ Such collective enactments of gender expose the precarity of masculinity as manhood can be gained or lost within a group dynamic.

As I will later demonstrate, these collectivities are transformed within the second decade of the twenty-first century by the inclusion of greater emotional literacy, but representations of boys' friendship groups are still often dominated by hegemonic modes of male behaviour prevalent in the genre up to 2010. The constructions of public, collective performances of masculinity are problematic as they marginalize displays of male subjecthood which exist outside heteronormative, hegemonic models of gendered behaviour. As Bean and Harper argue, masculinity and femininity are constructed as polarized oppositions and narratives within the young adult genre between 2000-2010 depict 'serious repercussions for those who might resist or transgress gendered and/or sexual norms' in a public sphere.³²⁹ As I will go on to show, these 'serious repercussions' manifest as stigma and shame in many characters and play a prominent role in more recent young adult texts which feature boys discussing their mental health. However, it is worth emphasizing that public gendered identity plays a significant role in the construction of

³²⁶ Thomas W. Bean and Helen Harper, 'Reading Men Differently: Alternative Portrayals of Masculinity in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction', *Reading Psychology*, 28.2 (2007) 11-30 (p. 16).

³²⁷ Tami M. Bereska, 'The Changing Boys' World in the 20th Century: Reality and 'Fiction', *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 11.2 (2003), 157-74 (p. 166).

³²⁸ Bereska, 'The Changing Boys' World in the 20th Century: Reality and 'Fiction', p. 166.

³²⁹ Bean and Harper, 'Reading Men Differently', p. 12.

individual masculine identity in adolescent literature of the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Male friendship groups constructed within private spaces are also a prominent theme within early 2000s adolescent literature. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the genre produced some 'small but important private spaces where masculinity could be constructed outside normative publicly sanctioned ways of being male in the world'.³³⁰ Whilst Bean and Harper argue that 'these small inroads into doing masculinity differently are still just window dressing',³³¹ I will go on to demonstrate that adolescent literature about male mental health of the last ten years transforms and expands these spaces through boys' friendship groups and group therapy dynamics.

2.1.4 Homosexuality

Between 2000-2010, the adolescent, homosexual male emerged as a prominent image in young adult fiction.³³² While this increased diversity within the genre, it also produced its

³³⁰ Bean and Harper, 'Reading Men Differently', p. 27.

³³¹ Bean and Harper, 'Reading Men Differently', p. 27.

³³² Whilst an extensive analysis of the range of language and labelling associated with sexuality stands outside the scope of this project, this chapter necessitates a brief discussion and rationale of particular phrasing related to sex, sexuality and gender. Sexual identity and orientation are fluid and continually shifting, as are the broad range of terms used to describe various facets of human sexuality. Throughout this chapter, a range of nomenclature used in different contexts to reflect the distinctions of a wide variety of sexual identities. The differences in terms can represent the contrasting situations in which sexuality is performed.

Within this chapter, I take a responsive approach towards the labelling of sexuality. Therefore, the chapter uses the terms gay, queer, homosexuality based upon the shifting contexts in which such forms of sexuality are animated. Where I use the term queer it is because some of the scholarly research that I cite uses the term queer as it is influenced by frameworks of queer studies. Therefore, my work incorporates the term queer to follow up with some of the relevant criticism, which is often inspired by queer theory, for example Derritt Mason's critical work on queer anxieties within adolescent fiction. This chapter does not represent a queer reading of these novels as this discussion exists outside of the realms of this project, however for the purposes of consistency I use word queer in line with this critical material. Throughout this chapter, queer is also used as an umbrella term to describe sexual identities and genders that are not heterosexual and cisgender. This term is also used within appropriate contexts to connote a wide spectrum of sexual and gender identities.

In some cases, this chapter includes the word gay when the argument is led by the novels themselves, specifically as this label is used both in *More Happy Than Not* and *Highly Illogical Behavior*. In some cases, the term homosexuality is used to correspond to the dichotomy in the way in which, as a broad body of work, the genre generally deals with sexuality. The homosexuality / heterosexuality distinction is referred to within this chapter because it aligns with the way in which the genre's fiction presents itself. This binary is produced by the series of novels I discuss here, and as such I use this term solely because it represents the dichotomy which has arisen within this fiction. In the future, I hope to see a new range of novels that display a more

own set of critical questions relating to models of heteronormativity and the portrayal of public displays of homophobia. In his 2009 article, 'From Romance to Magical Realism: Limits and Possibilities in Gay Adolescent Fiction', Thomas Crisp uncovers power structures in adolescent fiction which construct heterosexuality as natural and depict homosexuality as deviant and undesirable.³³³ According to Crisp, young adult literature constructs homophobia either as a 'foil against which characters with non-normative sexual identities struggle in order to find happiness as a monogamous couple' or as a literary mechanism for 'establishing believable ways in which the characters interact with one another and within the world in which they live'.³³⁴ Both of these literary devices reaffirm the view that physical and verbal abuse are inescapable components of the trajectories of gay adolescent characters. The genre's depictions of homophobia as an embedded power structure used to engender realism 'implies that homophobia is too large an issue to confront and is ultimately bad, but inevitable behaviour'.³³⁵ These fictionalized depictions of violent homophobia dominate constructions of marginalized male sexualities within the genre. As we will now see in Adam Silvera's novel, rather than dispelling prejudice and promoting diversity, the proliferation of writing about gay males frequently reinforces the same ideological process it supposedly rejects. Though the genre may attempt to present homophobic practices for scrutiny in the texts, it continually engages in processes that reinstate heteronormativity by relying on homophobia as a literary construct to supposedly engender realism.

As an example, Adam Silvera's novel *More Happy Than Not* (2015) features a character who undergoes a dangerous medical procedure in an attempt to erase his gay sexual desires. The novel's 16-year-old protagonist, Aaron, tries to remove his sexual identity to avoid the violence inflicted on gay men within his neighbourhood and complications caused by the procedure results in severe memory loss, leaving Aaron unable to retain any short term memory at the end of the text. Whilst Crisp suggests that outward displays of homophobia only serve to perpetuate the notion that violence associated with marginalized forms of sexuality is normal, in Silvera's fiction the alternative consists of an elimination of difference in which there is no reference to diversity, or the violence that

inclusive, fluid approach to sexuality, including but not limited to mental illness narratives that feature bisexual, asexual and pansexual protagonists.

³³³ Thomas Crisp, 'From Romance to Magical Realism: Limits and Possibilities in Gay Adolescent Fiction', *Children's Literature in Education*, 40 (2009), 333-48 (p. 335).

³³⁴ Crisp, 'From Romance to Magical Realism', p. 336.

³³⁵ Crisp, 'From Romance to Magical Realism', p. 339.

difference can incur. As we will see, the genre's movement away from homophobia as a literary device produces another set of critical questions relating to the marginalization of homosexuality; the genre presents more complex and elusive forms of homophobia in the second decade of the twenty-first century.

2.2 Section Two: Complexities 2010-2020.

2.2.1 Reframing the Hero

As I have shown, young adult novels at the beginning of the twenty-first century feature young male heroes who perform and reinforce hegemonic models of masculinity. However, the hero, as a model of masculinity in fiction written for adolescents, is transformed throughout the second decade of the twenty-first century to incorporate a wider range of gendered characteristics. In her research on recent young adult dystopian novels, Jessica Seymour argues that patterns of masculine performance demonstrate 'a definite trend towards a different type of masculinity, one that values emotional availability, nonheteronormativity, and female sexual safety'.³³⁶ Whilst Seymour focuses her analysis on adolescent dystopias, there is scope for this argument to be explored in relation to recent young adult literature about masculine identity. These new, broad performances of male gendered behaviour are not reliant upon culturally constructed notions of heroic masculine attributes such as strength, physical power and individuality, but rather focus on interpretations of masculinity which validate vulnerability, inclusivity and, to use Seymour's term, 'emotional availability'. The male hero of the early twenty-first century undergoes a reconstruction within the second decade and, as I will go on to demonstrate, transforms further within novels that deal with male mental illness. This new model of heroic male identity established within texts that deal with mental ill health not only produces a set of questions regarding the construction of male gendered behaviour but also suggests a need for a new language to develop a nuanced appreciation of how this model of manhood is performed.

2.2.2 Broad Performances of Masculinity

Adolescent literature produced during the second decade of the twenty-first century constructs increasingly broad definitions of masculinity by producing a range of ways to

³³⁶ Jessica Seymour, "Murder Me...Become a Man": Establishing the Masculine Care Circle in Young Adult Dystopia', *Reading Psychology*, 37.4 (2016), 627-49 (p. 629).

perform patterns of male behaviour. In their essay 'Manufacturing Manhood: Young Adult Fiction and Masculinity(ies) in the Twenty-First Century' (2020), Tom Jesse and Heidi Jones establish a series of 'iterations' of masculinity within the genre, such as 'The Stereotypical Dude-Bro' and 'The Rebel Outsider,' which repurpose or revise the norms of hegemonic masculinity.³³⁷ Whilst this formulation of categories of male performance can be viewed as a limiting template which flattens the complex precarity of depictions of adolescent masculinity, Jesse and Jones' criticism is nevertheless significant in its depiction of the changing literary landscape of contemporary young adult fiction. As I will show in this chapter, the proliferation of writing from 2010 about boys experiencing mental illness presents a rich area for the critical evaluation of masculinity as these recent novels produce a range of performances on a complex spectrum of gendered behaviours.

2.2.3 Power Structures and Gendered Performance

As we have seen, between 2000-2010 models of hegemonic masculinity prevailed within the genre, with male characters who display performances of hegemonic masculinity frequently achieving narrative centrality. As I will now demonstrate, the more recent adolescent novels complicate this relationship between gendered performance and narrative authority. Although the genre appears to explore power structures based upon race, sexuality and gender - and gives rise to a broader spectrum of gender performances compared to the first decade - the extent to which characters can break free of hegemonic power structures is varied and often limited. Rebeka Fitzsimmons and Casey Alane Wilson's 2020 analysis argues that although the genre aims to 'disassemble [social constructions] in order to put their inner workings on display for teenage readers', the adolescent characters' rebellion against these power structures 'often ends in a sanctioned form'.³³⁸ Though the teenage protagonist is often given the potential to expose the internal hierarchies of culturally produced power systems that structure gendered behavioural norms, they rarely break free of these organisations of power. As my subsequent readings will show, young adult texts about mental illness add a complex distinctiveness that has not yet been included within critical discussion of gendered power structures; adding mental illness to the

³³⁷ Tom Jesse and Heidi Jones, 'Manufacturing Manhood: Young Adult Fiction and Masculinity(ies) in the Twenty-First Century', in *Beyond the Blockbusters: Themes and Trends in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction*, ed. by Rebekah Fitzsimmons and Casey Alane Wilson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2020), pp. 109-22 (p. 113).

³³⁸ Fitzsimmon and Wilson, *Beyond the Blockbusters*, p. Xii-xiii.

discussion of other abstract structures highlights the elusiveness of how mental illness operates in relation to gender and sexuality.

Young adult literature of the last ten years embeds power structures which give rise to a broader *range* of models of masculinity compared to earlier in the century. For example, as noted earlier, Jesse and Jones discuss a series of new iterations of male identity in young adult literature such as 'The Sensitive Thinker': a male protagonist who 'talk[s] freely with friends about fear and self-doubt' and values the role friends and family play in his personal journey.³³⁹ Whilst this male character displays some behaviours associated within previous models of dominant masculinity, 'these components always remain secondary aspects of the character's social persona'.³⁴⁰ Jesse and Jones establish a discrete binary within the gendered constructions of 'The Sensitive Thinker' as their approach to the complexities of gender performance argues that this model of masculinity favours only alternative modes of manhood, relegating any elements of performances of hegemonic masculinity to secondary aspects of the male persona. As my subsequent readings will show, while models of masculinity in young adult writing about mental illness in the last ten years also embody complex introspection and vulnerability, these recent novels complicate Jesse and Jones' model disrupting the discrete binary, and ideas of 'traditional' and 'alternative', within the model's constructions of manhood.

2.2.4 Nurturing within Friendship Groups

Adolescent literature produced within the last ten years rejects these conformist constructions of peer relationships. Seymour establishes the concept of male 'care circles': collective displays of masculinity that challenge normative gendered behavioral indicators.³⁴¹ Such novels construct 'male characters in nurturing positions, with a particular emphasis on their relationships with other characters in the narrative' and these peer relationships represent a movement away from hegemonic masculine ideals of individuality and stoicism typically associated with the dystopian genre.³⁴² Recent young adult novels represent an innovative space in which male friendship groups do not publicly reinforce models of hegemonic masculinity but reframe gender roles in a way that is tightly bound to values such as care and friendship. While the above investigation of the critical context

³³⁹ Jesse and Jones, 'Manufacturing Manhood', p. 115.

³⁴⁰ Jesse and Jones, 'Manufacturing Manhood', p. 115.

³⁴¹ Seymour, "'Murder Me...Become a Man'", p. 629.

³⁴² Seymour, "'Murder Me...Become a Man'", p. 629.

displays a broad consensus that depictions of young men become more varied and flexible as the century has progressed, I will demonstrate that masculine care circles are problematized when adding the distinctiveness of mental illness to peer friendship groups.

2.2.5 Homosexuality

While young adult writing from 2000-2010 was often reliant upon violent displays of homophobia, more recent young adult fiction creates contradictory models of young male homosexuality as traces of conformist attitudes to sexuality feature in literature of the second decade in problematic ways. These novels widen the spectrum of male sexuality whilst maintaining some of the conformist traditions and power structures embedded within young adult literature of the previous decade. As Patricia Kennon argues in her work on young adult novels produced between 2008-2013, the genre creates 'structures of sexual power relations that are predicated on producing homosexuality and femininity as an aspect of its constituent Other'.³⁴³ Whilst externally constructed frameworks project Otherness onto gay male identities and label homosexuality as deviant in its opposition to culturally produced forms of sexual identity, the genre simultaneously attempts to challenge this marginalization of gay characters in its rejection of depictions of violent homophobia, a clash that leads to a clear contradiction in its storytelling.

Today's young adult authors are increasingly resisting the depictions of violent, public homophobia prevalent in earlier texts, whilst continuing to project a sense of Otherness onto gay male characters. As Jesse and Jones argue, recent novels move beyond the 'typical young-adult-novel-with-a-gay-protagonist-formula' to reject the 'typical goonlike villain who hurls derogatory slurs'.³⁴⁴ The authors identify a prominent model of masculinity within these works which they refer to as 'The Problematic Other': a male character who performs masculinity in ways that contradict normative gendered behaviour whilst experiencing shame and self-stigma.³⁴⁵ As I will show, these (often) gay male characters produce a range of internal conflicts relating to identity. The texts of the last ten years therefore frequently reinforce the same ideology they attempt to resist. The literature rejects the earlier discourses of homophobia by producing inclusive and flexible worlds yet also simultaneously embed internal, constrictive power structures of Otherness within the gay male character's identity. The novels produce tensions and contradictions between the two simultaneous

³⁴³ Patricia Kennon, 'Monsters of Men: Masculinity and the Other in Patrick Ness's *Chaos Walking Series*', *Psychoanalytical Inquiry*, 37.1 (2017), 25-34 (p. 27).

³⁴⁴ Jesse and Jones, 'Manufacturing Manhood', p. 118.

³⁴⁵ Jesse and Jones, 'Manufacturing Manhood', p. 117.

models of sexual identity. As we shall see, the tensions between these two ideologies are further disrupted by the added distinctiveness of depictions of mental illness.

2.3 Section Three: Mental Illness and Recovery, 2015-2018

2.3.1 Return of the Adolescent Male Hero

Current fiction about adolescent male mental illness requires using alternative critical models of reading gender identity to those observed above, as the types of hegemonic masculinity previously associated with the young male hero narrative are no longer adequate. Analysing recent male trajectories of recovery requires engagement with attributes that contrast with hegemonic performances of masculinity, such as displaying emotional literacy and engaging with healthcare services. The masculine attributes often performed throughout young male hero narratives, such as control and violence, are reframed in contemporary works within trajectories of mental illness and recovery.

As I have demonstrated, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, 'alternative images and possibilities' of masculinity within young adult fiction were 'not always easy to find'.³⁴⁶ Some recent fictional depictions of males experiencing mental illness reject the binary of masculinities established in earlier writing for adolescents and construct broader and more precarious models. This subgenre exists against a cultural backdrop of pluralized and elusive masculine capital. Richard de Visser and Elizabeth McDonnell build on concepts of masculine capital in a 2013 article to establish the notion of 'Man Points' which men can lose, gain, accrue and manage according to the masculine attributes they publicly display.³⁴⁷ Rejecting ideas of gender as polarized oppositions, the performance of male behaviour is then constructed through an elusive and precarious model within a spectrum in which masculinity can be gained, forfeited and amassed by degrees

Although current novels about male mental illness emerge from the tradition of the young masculine hero, the subgenre transforms the hero's narrative arc into a trajectory of recovery from mental ill health. The emergence of this hero narrative produces an alternative mode of masculinity and a new, more complex performance of the adolescent male hero who overcomes difficulties of recovery. As we shall see in my subsequent readings however,

³⁴⁶ Bean and Harper, 'Reading Men Differently', p. 16.

³⁴⁷ Richard O. de Visser and Elizabeth J. McDonnell, "Man Points": Masculine Capital and Young Men's Health', *Health Psychology*, 32.1 (2013), 5-14 (p. 5)

these recent performances of the masculine hero can be problematic due to the conservative elements of the recovery narrative. While it is true that in some recent adolescent literature recovery from mental illness is equated with a movement towards performances of hegemonic masculinity, problematically constructing trajectories of recovery in which mental illness is 'cured' by the performance of hegemonic masculine attributes, such as strength and control over the boy's mental state, other novels of the subgenre create trajectories of recovery which do not involve a linear shift towards such patterns of male behaviour. For these texts, recovery is incompatible with a movement towards hegemonic masculinity. The past ten years has produced a new era of young male heroes as the adolescent genre engages with contemporary anxieties and uncertainties of male mental illness and recovery. Young adult novels about boys' mental health and recovery disrupt the, to use Margery Hourihan's term, 'linearity' of earlier male hero narratives and create complexities surrounding such protagonists by problematizing their trajectory.³⁴⁸

2.3.2 Collective and Public Masculinity

As I have demonstrated, young adult literature produced since 2010 establishes male care circles through the collective, public performances of male subjectivity which promote open dialogue and emotional literacy. As I will now show, the added distinction of mental illness within the genre adds to the establishment of group displays of masculinity in a fluid and elusive way which both reinforces and challenges hegemonic modes of male gendered behaviour. Within these narratives, male care relationships are vital to the boys' trajectory of recovery as they construct a model of collective male subjectivity that relies upon discussion of mental illness and recovery. For instance, constructs such as group therapy sessions create models of masculinity which encourage intimate discussion about one's own emotions.

Although these notions of emotional availability and vulnerability emerge as a prominent theme throughout the subgenre, reductive forms of masculinity continue to pervade peer relations in new and complex ways. For example, Adam Silvera's 2015 novel *More Happy Than Not* creates complex tensions between the protagonist's friendship with his best friend, which relies upon intimacy, vulnerability and an open discussion of mental

³⁴⁸ Hourihan, *Deconstructing the Hero*, p. 47.

health and suicide, and his wider friendship group, who perform a collective masculine identity in ways that valorize stoicism, violence and aggression. Despite this transgression of gender roles found in some fictionalized depictions of male friendships, group dynamics are often organized in relation to forms of hegemonic masculinity and portrayals of friendship groups still rely upon heterosexuality as a marker of male subjectivity. The male characters who engage in romantic relationships with girls are validated within the constructed hierarchy of social position portrayed in the fiction, and heterosexual forms of hegemonic masculinity still haunt the texts as an ideal standard which the male protagonists cannot achieve. These characters display a psychological awareness that their mental illness contributes to the creation of their gender identity. The construction of male friendship groups reinforces some cultural notions of gender whilst criticizing others. Though adherence to tropes of hegemonic masculinity is diminished in some areas, such as establishment of open dialogue surrounding mental illness, it simultaneously reemerges in others, such as through the valorization of heterosexual relationships. The genre's construction of male friendship groups exposes the precarity and elusiveness of masculine capital.

2.3.3 Homosexuality

Since 2010, published young adult fiction has produced a broader range of gendered performance by increasing queer representation. In his 2020 book on sexuality in young adult literature, Derritt Mason reveals a 'striking uptick' of LGBTQ+ titles at the beginning of the first decade of the twenty-first century and this trend has 'continued to skyrocket'.³⁴⁹ This proliferation of LGBTQ+ themes, combined with the rising number of texts that deal with mental ill health, produces a further set of critical questions surrounding the forms and degrees of visibility allocated to queer adolescent boys with mental illnesses. As we will now see, this added distinction of mental illness complicates, and often limits, the visibility of queer adolescent boys.

Novels such as John Corey Whaley's *Highly Illogical Behaviour* (2016) and Adam Silvera's *More Happy Than Not* (2015) produce complex and precarious boundaries between visible and latent homosexuality which disrupt critical concerns regarding LGBTQ+ young adult literature in a range of ways. Mason builds on work by earlier critics to outline

³⁴⁹ Derritt Mason, *Queer Anxieties of Young Adult Literature and Culture* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2020), p. 8.

concerns about the genre, including the queer characters' access to 'hope and happiness', visibility and their resolution of 'problems surrounding sexual self-identification'.³⁵⁰ Within the most recent texts which feature queer boys experiencing a mental illness, their illness works as an agent to problematize these concerns by limiting hope and happiness for queer characters, producing a recovery trajectory which complicates the characters' narrative growth and creating effects of mental illness which decrease the visibility of the queer character. As mentioned earlier, for instance, Silvera's novel features a young, gay protagonist who undergoes a new medical procedure to suppress memories of his gay desires and depression. The surgery produces complications which severely damage Aaron's memory and he becomes unable to form any type of romantic relationship as he cannot recall people or experiences.

The added complexities of mental illness also influence the contours of adolescent fiction which features a gay protagonist. By problematically attempting to remove homosexuality from its culturally constructed position of, to use Jesse and Jones' term, 'The Problematic Other', this new process creates a series of critical questions surrounding the visibility and distinctiveness of homosexual identity.³⁵¹ For instance, *Highly Illogical Behaviour* constructs a complex relationship between the protagonist's homosexual visibility and his symptoms of agoraphobia. As the central character, Solomon, begins to recover from agoraphobia and interacts with his new friend Clark, subtle and elusive forms of homophobia begin to emerge. For example, Clark says that Solomon's sexual identity is a 'nonissue' because of his agoraphobia, asking 'if he never leaves the house, what's it matter?' as 'being gay or straight would [not] matter at all'.³⁵² This assumption that homosexuality can be erased or made invisible due to Solomon's agoraphobia is reaffirmed by the outside frame of the novel and deeply rooted in homophobic ideology. By attempting to eliminate the differences between heterosexual and homosexual perspectives, the novel endorses a position in which both forms of sexuality are treated identically, with little attention paid to the nuances of each. The texts display little appreciation of homosexuality as a model of agential identity. As in *More Happy Than Not*, *Highly Illogical Behaviour* reinforces the same model of masculinity it attempts to resist. These novels challenge the genre's heteronormativity by creating a gay, male character, yet they simultaneously silence and render invisible their sexual identity.

³⁵⁰ Mason, *Queer Anxieties of Young Adult Literature and Culture*, p. 6.

³⁵¹ Jesse and Jones, 'Manufacturing Manhood', p. 117.

³⁵² John Corey Whaley, *Highly Illogical Behaviour* (London: Faber and Faber, 2016), pp. 86-7.

Corresponding issues of sexuality, masculine performance, hero narratives and male friendship groups are produced in a range of other texts from the second decade of the twenty-first century such as *Highly Illogical Behaviour* and *More Happy Than Not*. The remainder of this chapter will examine how these selected adolescent novels reinforce, challenge and transform certain stereotypes of male subjectivity whilst engaging in complex and contrasting ways of being an adolescent male. It will evaluate the novels' constructed complexities of embedded power structures related to masculinity and their impact on male identity, symptoms of mental illness and recovery arc.

2.3.4 Depression and Narrative

Contemporary criticism has produced a broad spectrum of discussions surrounding the ranges of models through which the diversity of experience associated with depression can be understood. Bradley Lewis's text *Depression* (2012) discusses the cognitive distortions associated with the mental illness using not only the biomedical model but also through a range of other frames such as 'psychoanalytic, cognitive-behavioral, existential/humanist, family, political, creative, spiritual, and biopsychosocial models'.³⁵³ As we will see, the novels discussed in this chapter create diverse fictionalized portrayals of mental illness which engage with some of these models in complex ways. These models of depression, and therefore our understanding of the mental illness, are also influenced by cultural frameworks.

Examining depression across cultures is vital in identifying what Lewis refers to as the 'tremendous plasticity of experience' associated with the mental illness.³⁵⁴ Viewing depression through a cultural framework offers 'a window into how depression is open to cultural change' and reveals the variability of 'labeling strategies' and 'healing approaches'.³⁵⁵ Understanding mental illness through a cultural lens is vital to appreciate this fluidity of depression; when critics attempt to ascertain a 'single medical entity underlying wide ranging experiences', they come to recognize the 'unlikelihood of stripping away layers of cultural camouflage'.³⁵⁶ This chapter will critically discuss not only the selected young adult novels' fictionalizations of cultural context but also the, to use Lewis's term, 'labeling strategies' and 'healing approaches' associated with the experiences of mental illness portrayed within the texts. As we will see, cultural constructions such as family dynamics

³⁵³ Lewis, *Depression: Integrating Science, Culture and Humanities*, p. 2.

³⁵⁴ Lewis, *Depression: Integrating Science, Culture and Humanities*, p. 69.

³⁵⁵ Lewis, *Depression: Integrating Science, Culture and Humanities*, p. 69.

³⁵⁶ Lewis, *Depression: Integrating Science, Culture and Humanities*, p. 70.

feature prominently in the selected novels' portrayals of mental illness. As this chapter will later discuss, family members such as parents often feature within adolescent novels' models of mental illness. As Lewis argues, the family model recognizes the importance of social connections and family relationships in making sense of depression and offering solutions for recovery.³⁵⁷ Within the family model of depression, the individual with symptoms is seen as representative of dysfunctions within the family unit.³⁵⁸ As this chapter will go on to demonstrate, twenty-first century adolescent novels present a spectrum of parental attitudes towards mental illnesses and these family models influence how the narrative conveys the experience of the condition.

Whilst young adult novels often present opportunities to understand mental illness through different models, narratives about depression also produce limitations. In her text *Depression and Narrative: Telling the Dark* (2008), Hilary Clark emphasizes narrative's limitations in 'truly conveying suffering' such as mental and emotional trauma in prose.³⁵⁹ Contemporary criticism on mental illness narratives is concerned with both the 'possibilities and the problems of narratives – its kinds, contexts, motives, strategies, effects — in representing and interpreting depression (or bipolar disorder, or "madness")'.³⁶⁰ As this chapter will show, recent young adult novels produce both limitations and opportunities when representing and interpreting various mental illnesses. As Clark argues, recurring issues within the critical discussion of depression narratives include the 'adjustments in identity' it entails and the 'associated stigma and shame'.³⁶¹ As this chapter will assert, recent young adult novels construct forms of stigma and shame which impact on models of individual mental illness in complex and often contradictory ways.

In contemporary critical theory, the relationship between symptoms and personhood has emerged as a prominent theme within the construction and interpretation of mental illness identities. In her 2018 work on madness and identity politics, PhebeAnn M. Wolframe discusses the role of labels and discourses used to describe experiences of mental illness in narrative. Wolframe goes on to argue that descriptions of symptoms of psychological distress do not serve 'as a way of trying to pin madness down' but exist as 'queries, landscapes, emotions and textures' which construct identities by 'maddening the dominant

³⁵⁷ Lewis, *Depression: Integrating Science, Culture and Humanities*, p. 28.

³⁵⁸ Lewis, *Depression: Integrating Science, Culture and Humanities*, p. 28.

³⁵⁹ Hilary Clark, *Depression and Narrative: Telling the Dark* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), p. 4.

³⁶⁰ Clark, *Depression and Narrative: Telling the Dark*, p. 5.

³⁶¹ Clark, *Depression and Narrative: Telling the Dark*, p. 5.

discourses of madness'.³⁶² As this chapter will later demonstrate, young adult novels utilize models of mental illnesses such as obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and depression which display the conditions' multiplicities and queries, creating anxieties and double movements which continually move characters across a broad continuum of positions within the texts' power structures.³⁶³

Literary representations of the relationship between the self and symptoms of mental illness are 'conspicuously varied' (in Jennifer Raddens' words) due to the nature and severity

³⁶² PhebeAnn M. Wolframe, 'Going Barefoot: Mad Affiliation, Identity Politics, and Eros', in *Literatures of Madness: Disability Studies and Mental Health*, ed. By Elizabeth J. Donaldson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 31-49 (p. 36).

³⁶³ At this point in the thesis, it is necessary to determine parameters pertaining to the definition of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). Whilst it is related to other patterns of behaviour, including but not limited to 'body dysmorphic disorder, hoarding disorder, trichotillomania (hair-pulling disorder), excoriation (skin-picking) disorder', OCD is ultimately characterized by obsessive and / or compulsive elements (*DSM-5-TR*, p. 263). The *DSM-5-TR* describes the differences between obsessions and compulsions in the following terms: '*Obsessions* are recurrent and persistent thoughts, urges, or images that are experienced as intrusive and unwanted, whereas *compulsions* are repetitive behaviors or mental acts that an individual feels driven to perform in response to an obsession or according to rules that must be applied rigidly' (*DSM-5-TR*, p. 263). Whilst the condition is also frequently characterized by fixations on repetitive actions, other related patterns of behaviour are associated with 'body-focused' behaviours such as hair pulling and skin picking (*DSM-5-TR*, p. 263). The diagnosis incorporates a wide range of different obsessive and compulsive actions, however certain themes are common in OCD, such as 'cleaning (contamination obsessions and cleaning compulsions); symmetry (symmetry obsessions and repeating, ordering, and counting compulsions); forbidden or taboo thoughts (e.g., aggressive, sexual, and religious obsessions and related compulsions); and harm (e.g., fears of harm to self or others and related checking compulsions)' (*DSM-5-TR*, p. 264).

Intrusive thoughts are often commonly associated with the lived experience of OCD, as are compulsive rituals performed in response to such distressing thoughts. Such obsessive thoughts are disturbing and involuntary, and frequently lead to attempts to 'to ignore or suppress these obsessions (e.g., avoiding triggers or using thought suppression) or to neutralize them with another thought or action (e.g., performing a compulsion)' (*DSM-5-TR*, p. 267). OCD assumes a wide range of forms with blurry boundaries between the patterns of behaviour related to OCD and an array of other diagnoses such as trichotillomania and excoriation, and as such it is impossible to give a full detailed picture of the symptoms and dimensions associated with the diagnosis. Similarly, the possibilities of examining adolescent fiction which pertains to each of these strands stands outside the capabilities of this project. However, in regards to the ways in which the genre has presented itself, some common themes arise within adolescent fiction produced during the second decade of the twenty-first century that deals with the lived experiences of OCD. Whilst the parameters pertaining to the lived experiences of appear expansive, sophisticated and blurry, this chapter will discuss the commonly depicted complexities within the fiction, mainly focusing upon portrayals of cleaning compulsions, handwashing, and anxieties surrounding the existence of violent, intrusive thoughts, as these manifestations of OCD feature most commonly within the fiction discussed here.

of the condition.³⁶⁴ Some mental illnesses depicted in narrative manifest in ways which produce more trauma, affect individuals' capabilities more severely and impact on self-identity in more explicit and complex ways than other conditions.³⁶⁵ As this chapter will go on to demonstrate, recent young adult novels depict a wide spectrum of mental illnesses which differ in their disabling severity and give rise to varying fictionalized representations of symptoms and experiences. Whilst the genre portrays a broad range of conditions such as obsessive compulsive disorder, anxiety, depression and agoraphobia, all of the novels examined construct some form of relationship between the self and the manifestation of psychological and emotional symptoms. Radden categorizes two contrasting models relating to the relationship between symptoms and the self within narratives about mental illness, arguing that these texts often depict symptoms as alien to, or integrated within, the narrator's identity. She identifies the 'Symptom-alienating model', in which the narrators' symptoms emanate from an 'alien, sometimes diabolical, source of agency outside the self'.³⁶⁶ This model features metaphors that distance the self from medical symptoms and produces models of recovery that consist of regaining control from the external sources of authority that remove agency from the individual.³⁶⁷ Contrastingly, within the 'Symptom-integrating model', symptoms are 'embraced, even valorized' as they appear 'less easily alienated' and sometimes vital to the fundamental identity of the self.³⁶⁸ This model embraces symptoms as profound facets of identity, rather than minor consequences of a biomedical illness. As this chapter will go on to demonstrate, the selected contemporary young adult novels depict a broad continuum of varying, complex, and as yet under researched, fictionalized relationships between the individual and the emotional and psychological symptoms associated with mental illness. As the following textual readings demonstrate, in *Highly Illogical Behaviour* the relationship between self and symptoms creates a contradictory double movement: the narrative employs metaphors to distance the protagonist's personhood from his symptoms while simultaneously engaging with a framework which relies upon an integration of these symptoms.

³⁶⁴ Jennifer Radden, 'My Symptoms, Myself: Reading Mental Illness Memoirs for Identity Assumptions', in *Depression and Narrative: Telling the Dark*, ed. By Hilary Clark, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), pp. 15-28 (p. 15).

³⁶⁵ Radden, 'My Symptoms, Myself', p. 15.

³⁶⁶ Radden, 'My Symptoms, Myself', p. 15.

³⁶⁷ Radden, 'My Symptoms, Myself', p. 21.

³⁶⁸ Radden, 'My Symptoms, Myself', p. 21.

2.4 John Corey Whaley's *Highly Illogical Behaviour* (2016) and Adam Silvera's *More Happy Than Not* (2015).

2.4.1 Symptoms and Recovery

Highly Illogical Behaviour focuses on Solomon Reed, a 16-year-old boy who has been suffering with agoraphobia for over three years. He has not left his house since he experienced a panic attack at his school, during which he jumped into a water fountain in front of his classmates. Whilst Diane Scrofano's 2019 article on disability narrative theory in young adult novels about mental illness suggests that Solomon is 'stubborn', has 'given up' in a supposed struggle against the symptoms of agoraphobia and has 'resigned to the idea that he must never leave his house', *Highly Illogical Behaviour* constructs a model of mental illness which is more multifaceted and conflicted than this suggests.³⁶⁹ The novel's complex and contradictory relationships between personhood and symptoms of agoraphobia are fraught with tensions and these cause Solomon's symptoms to simultaneously exist as integrated within, and alien to, his identity. Though Solomon imagines his thoughts 'stab him like knives' during a panic attack and the text frequently frames his illness as an unforgiving manifestation of external agency, the novel's model of mental illness simultaneously embraces elements of Solomon's experience of agoraphobia.³⁷⁰ The writing constructs metaphors which act to distance the medical symptoms from the narrator's personhood while simultaneously employing models of mental illness that involve an acceptance of these symptoms. When Solomon remains at home, he accepts his mental illness: 'he wasn't bored or lonely or sad. He was safe. He could breathe. He could relax'.³⁷¹ Such forms of relationships between personhood and symptoms, shuttling between alienation and integration, create tensions that permeate the novel's overall trajectory of recovery.

Because of the tensions present in the relationship between self and symptoms of agoraphobia, the recovery trajectory in *Highly Illogical Behaviour* is not a linear journey consisting of regaining control from the illness as a seemingly external, alien force. Rather the novel takes the form of a dual narrative which shifts perspectives between Solomon and his former classmate, Lisa. Though the novel begins to construct Solomon's recovery from agoraphobia, it is overwritten by Lisa's narrative and Solomon's trajectory becomes Lisa's 'escape plan' from her own life.³⁷² This movement between Solomon's recovery trajectory

³⁶⁹ Scrofano, 'Disability Narrative Theory and Young Adult Fiction of Mental Illness', p. 19.

³⁷⁰ Whaley, *Highly Illogical Behaviour*, p. 62.

³⁷¹ Whaley, *Highly Illogical Behaviour*, p. 14.

³⁷² Whaley, *Highly Illogical Behaviour*, p. 17.

and Lisa's 'escape plan' causes Solomon's possible future to be continuously undermined by Lisa's ambitions.

The novel produces a complex model of recovery which attempts to establish Solomon within a hero role whilst simultaneously undermining his control over his mental illness. After Solomon's mother first meets Lisa, Solomon is critical of his mother's assumption that 'some pretty girl would suddenly cure her son and have him walking right out the front door and straight to high school'.³⁷³ Whilst the novel endeavors to resist conformist trajectories of recovery which valorize heterosexuality and situate the protagonist's agency over their illness within external sources, it simultaneously subverts this endeavor by undermining Solomon's role within the recovery narrative. Lisa becomes convinced she will 'fix Solomon Reed' and though the relationship is not romantic or sexual, the novel locates power over Solomon's illness within Lisa's intervention.³⁷⁴ The text does not grant Solomon agency over his recovery trajectory but rather problematically constructs his illness as 'a problem' that Lisa is instrumental in fixing.³⁷⁵ The text establishes a recovery trajectory which reinforces the same power structures it attempts to resist. Whilst it establishes Solomon as the hero of the novel by rejecting the notion that 'some pretty girl' can 'cure' his agoraphobia, it simultaneously distributes power over the recovery process to Lisa, who helps Solomon leave the house for the first time in over three years.

At the end of the novel, the text's recovery trajectory produces a double movement which exposes tensions between the presupposed safety of Solomon's home and the relative dangers associated with the outside world. Whilst one reviewer commented that 'Solomon's parents and grandmother are refreshingly supportive, letting Solomon take the lead as he tests the possibility of re-entry', Solomon's sexuality complicates this and creates anxieties surrounding his reintegration into society.³⁷⁶ Once Solomon begins to make friends and engage with the world outside his home, his sexuality is framed problematically when Lisa becomes worried about Solomon's romantic feelings towards her boyfriend Clark. Concerned that Solomon and Clark may be having a relationship, she tells Solomon 'I'm not mad. Please don't think I'm mad. I just didn't expect him to reciprocate, that's all. I thought

³⁷³ Whaley, *Highly Illogical Behaviour*, p. 6.

³⁷⁴ Whaley, *Highly Illogical Behaviour*, p. 12.

³⁷⁵ Whaley, *Highly Illogical Behaviour*, p. 155.

³⁷⁶ Publishers Weekly, 'Highly Illogical Behaviour', *Publishers Weekly* <[Children's Book Review: Highly Illogical Behavior by John Corey Whaley. Dial, \\$17.99 \(256p\) ISBN 978-0-525-42818-3 \(publishersweekly.com\)](#)> [accessed 14 December 2020].

we were safe'.³⁷⁷ When Solomon then asks her if coming out to his parents is therefore 'dangerous' (original italics), the novel exposes a constructed binary between 'safe' normative heterosexuality and 'dangerous' homosexuality.³⁷⁸ Within the novel's fictionalised models of gender, homosexuality is 'safe' when it is contained and not acted upon, but once Solomon engages with the world outside his home as a gay adolescent male, his sexuality is framed problematically as a threat.

More Happy Than Not (2015) centres on Aaron Soto, a 17-year-old Puerto Rican boy living in the Bronx. In this fictionalized world, scientists have developed a medical procedure known as Leteo, which has the ability to suppress traumatic memories.³⁷⁹ After his father ends his life by suicide, Aaron suffers from depression and cuts his wrists in an attempt to take his own life. As the novel progresses, Aaron develops gay desires and struggles to accept his sexuality in a deeply homophobic community. Torn between his affection for his girlfriend Genevieve and his growing attraction towards his best friend Thomas, Aaron undergoes the Leteo procedure to suppress his gay sexual desires and adhere to heteronormative expectations of happiness. Though Aaron undergoes this through his own choice, Ricki Ginsberg, Wendy Glenn and Kellee Moyer's 2017 article on identity denial in recent young adult literature discusses how characters' decisions to intentionally silence aspects of their own identity are often rooted within the novels' social, political and cultural

³⁷⁷ Whaley, *Highly Illogical Behaviour*, p. 201.

³⁷⁸ Whaley, *Highly Illogical Behaviour*, p. 201.

³⁷⁹ Later in this chapter, I make an argument that non-naturalistic, non-realistic novels of the later period provide an effective way to avoid many of the problematic elements of the naturalistic novels I discuss in this chapter. One of the ways that the genre's fiction moves towards animating mental health in more thoughtful ways is in using speculative elements to productively depict the lived experience of mental illness in ways the realistic fiction I have examined does not, or perhaps cannot. However, it is not solely the speculative elements which make the novels discussed in the second half of this chapter progressive. It should be noted that *More Happy Than Not* contains a singular speculative element which does make it to some degree non-realist, but the minor degree of speculation does not remove the protagonist from a marginalized position.

In the second half of this chapter, I examine how more imaginative and creative texts often are ideally situated to produce more thoughtful, autonomous and polymorphic imaginings of adolescent mental illness, but within Silvera's novel the single point of speculation does not grant liberation to the protagonist. One minor element of the text somewhat distinguishes it from the realms of realism, but my reading of Silvera's novel appears in the first half of the chapter because of its overarching conformist, and often problematic, attitudes towards male sexuality. Within novels discussed in the second half of this chapter, the creativities are integral to subjectivity and agency and expression, whereas in this text the speculative element is used as a plot device. Whilst the singular speculative element in *More Happy Than Not* represents an opportunity to imagine autonomous ways of being for young gay men with mental illnesses, such opportunity is ultimately negated within Aaron's marginalized position at the end of the text, resulting in a reversion to conformist attitudes towards male homosexuality.

power structures and inequalities. As the authors argue in their discussion of the novel, Aaron's choices are heavily 'influenced by societal norms and expectations about sexuality'.³⁸⁰ Aaron's depressive episodes are caused by his exclusion from the novel's dominant heteronormative scripts of happiness: he tells a nurse at the hospital "it's not only what I want," but "it's what everyone wants".³⁸¹ Although the procedure represses Aaron's sexual desires for a period of time, the surgery produces complications and Aaron is left with a form of amnesia which prevents him from making new memories at the end of the text. Chrisman and Blackburn build on work by Sara Ahmed to examine structures of happiness within the novel. They argue that 'the overarching societal message that suggests that heterosexual relationships lead to happiness further minoritizes queer people, like Aaron, for whom this happy object is unattainable'.³⁸² Aaron's subsequent suicide attempt represents a circumnavigation of these models of happiness: he tells Thomas his death would be a 'happy-ending exit strategy' as he is unable to achieve recovery from depression through hegemonic, heteronormative modes of happiness.³⁸³

For Aaron, the Leteo procedure acts as a seemingly simple solution to enable him to assimilate into heteronormative models of happiness and access a cure for his depression that has previously been inaccessible to him. He reflects: 'we're going to kill the part of me that's ruined everything. I'm going to be straight, just like how my father would've wanted'.³⁸⁴ His desire to use what his brother Eric calls 'a cheat code to make life easier' demonstrates Aaron's attempts to integrate within these discourses of heteronormative happiness.³⁸⁵ In a 2021 online talk entitled 'Queer YA Novels that Sadden and Hurt: Adam Silvera's Oeuvre and the Politics of Unhappiness', Angel Daniel Matos argues that these desires 'echo some of the arguments present in queer YA scholarship, that oftentimes both assimilation and normalization are seen as aspirational goals for both queer teen characters and the

³⁸⁰ Ricki Ginsberg, Wendy J. Glenn and Kellee Moyer, 'Opportunities for Advocacy: Interrogating Multivoiced YAL's Treatment of Denied Identities', *English Journal*, 107.1 (2017), 26-32 (p. 26).

³⁸¹ Adam Silvera, *More Happy Than Not* (London: Simon and Schuster UK Ltd., 2015), p. 166.

³⁸² Alyssa Chrisman and Mollie V. Blackburn, 'Interrogating Happiness: Unraveling Homophobia in the Lives of Queer Youth of Color with *More Happy Than Not*' in *Engaging with Multicultural YA Literature in the Secondary Classroom: Critical Approaches for Critical Educators*, ed. By Ricki Ginsberg and Wendy J. Glenn (New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 83-92 (p. 84).

³⁸³ Adam Silvera, *More Happy Than Not*, p. 82.

³⁸⁴ Silvera, *More Happy Than Not*, p. 205.

³⁸⁵ Silvera, *More Happy Than Not*, p. 268.

ideological frameworks of the genre'.³⁸⁶ Matos's discussion of the genre's 'ideological frameworks' of 'assimilation and normalization' raises questions surrounding the production and accessibility of scripts of happiness for queer teenagers. Whilst the novel has the potential to break the genre's link between gay characters and unhappiness, it reinforces the constructed relationship between integration into heterosexual norms and assimilation into the dominant and conventional power structures which grant scripts of happiness.

Reflecting on this novel as a mental illness narrative complicates this argument further. Recent novels within the young adult genre that deal with depression and happiness are less concerned with breaking free from normative scripts of happiness to establish a new model of achieving contentment which includes queer characters, and instead focus upon the assimilation of gay characters into existing, heteronormative frameworks of happiness. Matos goes on to ask: 'does happiness for queer folk involve a revolution in the organization of sexuality, desire and the body or does it simply make queers part of the same world – the world of happy people – even if we have to work to get there?'.³⁸⁷ Whilst Aaron's recovery trajectory produces the potential to establish, to use Matos's term, 'a revolution' in the organization of sexuality and happiness, any resolution is fraught with tensions and contradictions.

The novel's recovery trajectory hints at the establishment of a new discourse of happiness for queer characters of colour that does not include integration into dominant, heteronormative discourses of happiness, whilst simultaneously undermining this by rendering Aaron invisible at the end of the text. Matos argues that the novel 'ultimately suggests that happiness can still be found if you are willing to rethink its causes and its sources. Aaron, as a protagonist, does not want us to lament his current state'.³⁸⁸ Whilst Aaron does not integrate into the heteronormative norms and powers that grant a recovery from depression, Matos does not fully acknowledge the way in which the emergence of a new discourse of happiness accessible to queer adolescents of colour, which does not rely on scripts of heterosexuality, is negated by Aaron's position at the end of the text. After complications during the Leteo procedure, Aaron retains almost no short-term memory and will 'never be in a relationship again' as it is 'not fair' on his partner if Aaron cannot remember

³⁸⁶ Angel Daniel Matos, 'Queer YA Novels that Sadden and Hurt: Adam Silvera's Oeuvre and the Politics of Unhappiness', *The Center for Children's Books 2020-2021 Speaker Series*, 28th January 2021.

³⁸⁷ Matos, 'Queer YA Novels that Sadden and Hurt'.

³⁸⁸ Matos, 'Queer YA Novels that Sadden and Hurt'.

him.³⁸⁹ His life also seems hopeless at the end of the text, as he reflects ‘why bother living’ with such an impaired memory as ‘dying seems easier’.³⁹⁰ During Aaron’s recovery from depression he comes to realize that ‘being gay wasn’t and isn’t the problem. It only seemed that way because of everything that branched out from it’.³⁹¹ Whilst his trajectory begins to move from interpreting his sexuality as a problem to identifying culturally created power structures which locate homosexuality as existing outside normative realms of male sexuality, the text produces a complex double movement which undermines any realization of a new discourse of happiness. The novel’s ambiguous and contradictory ending simultaneously empowers Aaron by creating the potential for radical and broad models of recovery from depression accessible to gay males whilst simultaneously removing his agency and therefore his ability to access such models of recovery.

In September 2020, Silvera published a new, deluxe edition of the novel that contains an additional final chapter. This chapter creates tensions that continuously move Aaron between positions of visibility and invisibility. Set one year after the original ending, the new chapter, entitled ‘More Happy Ending’, features Aaron’s fulfilled quest for happiness after his experience of depression. In the novel’s alternative ending, Aaron undergoes corrective brain surgery to regain the ability to create new memories and begins a close relationship with a gay Latinx male who has also experienced trauma after undergoing the Leteo procedure. In his work on trauma in *More Happy Than Not*, Matos argues that ‘Aaron has the means to find the happily ever after that complies with reader demands and expectations. One that softens, or better said erases, a lot of the sadness and despair present in the original ending’.³⁹² Whilst Matos suggests that this new ending represents the text’s ultimate alignment with normative resolutions which serve to provide a sense of closure and are commonly found in young adult fiction, he neglects to consider the role of ‘More Happy Ending’ as an *alternative* ending to the text which produces an option to read an alternate conclusion, creating a narrative model in which two parallel and contradictory versions of Aaron’s recovery trajectory exist simultaneously. Whilst in the original version of the text, Aaron’s amnesia leads to suicidal thoughts and difficulties in engaging in new romantic relationships, the revised edition constructs a different narrative trajectory in which Aaron has accessed a model of happiness which grants him the agency to act on his sexual desires. These two contradictory representations of recovery trajectories create a double

³⁸⁹ Silvera, *More Happy Than Not*, p. 283.

³⁹⁰ Silvera, *More Happy Than Not*, p. 265.

³⁹¹ Silvera, *More Happy Than Not*, p. 255.

³⁹² Matos, ‘Queer YA Novels that Sadden and Hurt’.

movement which is simultaneously empowering and disabling for Aaron's recovery from depression. This double movement is a fracturing emblematic of the tensions present within the realms of cultural productions of gay male characters who experience mental illness. The form of the text itself is a manifestation of such contradictions: the parallel endings locate Aaron in a position of marginalization and invisibility whilst simultaneously empowering him within a model of happiness and recovery.

2.4.2 Health-related Shame

Health-related shame serves as an important feature within the discussion of narratives about mental illness. Both *Highly Illogical Behaviour* and *More Happy Than Not* perform models of mental illness as a framing category and produce examples of shame within them. This section will draw upon Luna Dolezal and Barry Lyons' research on recognizing shame as 'a powerful force in the clinical encounter' and identifying structures of health-related shame within a cultural context.³⁹³ My analysis will identify the varied and complex ways in which shame operates within the selected primary texts and includes a discussion of: the identification and admittance of shame, the relationship between shame and alienation from social groups, shame caused by viewing illness as a personal inadequacy, and recognizing shame as an emotion which leads to its multiplication.

Discussions of health-related shame are impeded by the reluctance to identify and admit feelings of humiliation, creating a connection between shame and denial. As Dolezal and Lyons argue in their 2017 article 'Shame, Stigma and Medicine', an 'impediment to the investigation of shame that is shared by doctor and patients is that neither are likely to wish to discuss the matter' as conversations about humiliation can be deemed to be humiliating.³⁹⁴ Dolezal and Lyons go on to suggest that although the person experiencing shame is conscious of the emotion, they are 'not able to, or perhaps simply will not, identify it as shame', creating 'an intrinsic connection between shame and the mechanism of denial'.³⁹⁵ As I will go on to demonstrate, the novels frequently fictionalize a reluctance to admit, identify and discuss feelings of embarrassment associated with mental illnesses, creating a silence that pervades the texts' models of shame.

³⁹³ Luna Dolezal and Barry Lyons, 'Health-related Shame: An Affective Determinant of Health?', *Medical Humanities*, 43.4 (2017), 257-63 (p. 257).

³⁹⁴ Luna Dolezal and Barry Lyons, 'Shame, Stigma and Medicine', *Medical Humanities*, 43.4 (2017), 208-10 (p. 208).

³⁹⁵ Dolezal and Lyons, 'Health-related Shame', p. 258.

Another prominent feature of shame is the way it can evoke a fear of alienation from social groups. As Dolezal and Lyons suggest, ‘shame is not just linked to threats to one’s identity, but, significantly, it is linked to threats to social bonds’ and as a result is an ‘isolated experience that is far from trivial, often deeply disturbing and a cause of significant distress’.³⁹⁶ The authors build on work by Gehert Piers and Jane Northrop to compare alienation from social groups to physical pain or the risk of death.³⁹⁷ Experiencing mental illnesses such as depression and agoraphobia can evoke shame as these conditions represent a deviation from culturally constructed normative realms of mental health. However, it is nevertheless the case that discussing and admitting feelings of shame has the potential to endanger social connections and create feelings of abandonment. Models of shame within novels such as *More Happy Than Not* construct it as an affective experience projected onto an individual by a social group, causing social rejection. Internally produced models of shame are constructed by regarding a physical or mental illness as an individual inadequacy or deficiency and can lead to a multiplication of shameful feelings. Dolezal and Lyons assert that ‘patients often regard their illnesses as personal shortcomings, or as arising from personal shortcomings, or as arising from personal inadequacies’.³⁹⁸ They go on to argue that some symptoms of shame ‘provoke a shame spiral, or “loop”, in which, when shame arises it incites more shame’ and the experience becomes an ‘iterated emotion’ as its existence produces an intensification of shameful feelings.³⁹⁹ As a result, attempts to avoid feelings of humiliation can lead to harming the self. As we will see, *Highly Illogical Behaviour* features internally produced models of shame as Solomon interprets his agoraphobia as a personal deficiency. The text’s cyclical structure of shame provokes a multiplication of itself and leads to other manifestations of shame such as Solomon’s self-harming behaviour.

Within *More Happy Than Not*, Aaron’s male friendship group constructs boundaries regarding what is considered shameful for young males. These models originate from perceived transgressions of hegemonic masculine gender norms associated with adolescent boys talking about their emotions and are projected onto Aaron and Thomas through observation and violence. After Aaron tells Thomas about his father’s suicide, his reflections hint at the implicit forms of shame surrounding male conversation about mental

³⁹⁶ Dolezal and Lyons, ‘Health-related Shame’, p. 258.

³⁹⁷ Dolezal and Lyons, ‘Health-related Shame’, p. 258.

³⁹⁸ Dolezal and Lyons, ‘Health-related Shame’, p. 258.

³⁹⁹ Dolezal and Lyons, ‘Health-related Shame’, p. 258.

illness: 'I don't talk about this a lot. Sometimes, because I don't want to; other times because my friends don't like dragging death and grief into things'.⁴⁰⁰ Although Chrisman and Blackburn argue that Aaron's 'neighborhood friends can also be seen as family and play a significant role in the book', they overlook the role Aaron's male friendship group plays in constructing models of shame.⁴⁰¹ Aaron's neighborhood friendship group performs models of male gendered behaviour which valorize heterosexuality, stoicism and aggression, and employ methods such as observation and violence to project shame onto patterns of male behaviour that include discussions of emotions and mental illness. As Tricia Clasen argues in her 2017 work on masculinity in contemporary young adult novels, acceptable male expressions of emotions are 'limited to anger and frustration, and open and honest communication about feelings is practically taboo'.⁴⁰² Within Silvera's novel, Aaron's friendship group monitors open discussion about emotions such as depression and respond with anger and violence. When Aaron privately tells Thomas about his suicidal thoughts, their exchange is interrupted by their neighbourhood friends and both Aaron and Thomas 'freak out for a second' while Aaron 'jump[s] to [his] feet like someone just caught [him] doing something with someone [he] really shouldn't be doing anything with'.⁴⁰³ Aaron's friendship group performs dominant, hegemonic masculinities and observe, monitor and subsequently project shame onto other models of male behaviour which embrace discussion surrounding complex and traumatic emotions. By engaging in discussion about feelings of depression and suicidal ideation, Thomas and Aaron perform patterns of male behaviour in ways that challenge the hegemonic ideals of the neighborhood family and are subsequently violently shamed and cast out of the group.

In contrast to the model of health-related shame in *More Happy Than Not*, in which shame is located outside the central protagonist and projected onto boys who engage in discussion of mental distress, Whaley's novel locates shame within Solomon's identity. *Highly Illogical Behaviour* employs an internally constructed, contradictory model of shame in which Solomon simultaneously views his condition as a personal inadequacy whilst attempting to deemphasize the severity of his agoraphobia. Solomon experiences an internal form of shame associated with his agoraphobia, in contrast to people who

⁴⁰⁰ Silvera, *More Happy Than Not*, p. 48.

⁴⁰¹ Chrisman and Blackburn, 'Interrogating Happiness' (p. 86).

⁴⁰² Clasen, Tricia, 'Masculinity and Romantic Myth in Contemporary YA Romance', in *Gender(ed) Identities: Critical Rereadings of Gender in Children's and Young Adult Literature*, ed. By Tricia Clasen and Holly Hassel (New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 228-41 (p. 232).

⁴⁰³ Silvera, *More Happy Than Not*, p. 50.

experience ‘real problems’ and who ‘got diseases’ and ‘starved to death’, whilst simultaneously acknowledging he is unable to ‘deal with the real world’ due to his agoraphobia.⁴⁰⁴ This internalized, contradictory model of shame manifests in silence and physical pain as Solomon experiences ‘a shooting pain deep in his stomach’ when he considers that he has ‘issues with guilt’ but ‘couldn’t talk to anyone about it, because he was afraid that would make it worse’.⁴⁰⁵ This performance also evokes, to use Dolezal’s term, ‘shame spirals’ which lead to other, more physical manifestations of shame such as self-harm.⁴⁰⁶ Solomon’s guilt over his agoraphobia provokes a multiplication of shameful feelings and results in Solomon hitting himself to gain ‘instant relief’ from the ‘tension built up from all the thoughts swirling through his mind’.⁴⁰⁷ Solomon’s self-injurious behaviour also generates further shame as he kept his self-harming actions secret for years. The first time Solomon had hit himself ‘he immediately started crying, confused and guilty, looking up at his parents like he had no idea how it had happened’, producing a model of shame which incorporates a sense of disembodiment and a desire to become disassociated from the action of self-harm. The novel constructs a cyclical form of shame in which Solomon’s embarrassment over his mental illness leads to self-harm, which in turn further creates an intensification of shameful feelings.

2.5 Heroes and Detectives in Young Adult Novels about Mental Illness 2013-2017.

As I have demonstrated, adolescent literature’s imaginings of male adolescence, sexuality and heroism in the first decade appear conflicted and contradictory and the series of novels selected here from the second decade aims to be more progressive but ultimately restate earlier problematic ideas in complex new ways. As we will now see, the novels from the last ten years that explicitly deal with boys’ mental health can be seen to be better examples of the way narratives can negotiate with the sophistication and confusion associated with cognitive difference. Here I will look at the fictionalized imaginings of adolescent male mental health in four texts which, as I will argue, are themselves creative displays of such sophistication. The following four young adult novels are smart and thoughtful ways of imagining how to think about mental health and its interaction with adolescent life. They

⁴⁰⁴ Whaley, *Highly Illogical Behaviour*, p. 189.

⁴⁰⁵ Whaley, *Highly Illogical Behaviour*, p. 189.

⁴⁰⁶ Dolezal and Lyons, ‘Health-related Shame’, p. 258.

⁴⁰⁷ Whaley, *Highly Illogical Behaviour*, p. 217.

produce a sophistication we have not yet seen in this chapter by taking the material and the tensions discussed earlier and seeking to bring those tensions forward in progressive new ways that produce a broad continuum of masculinities which re-imagine symptoms of mental distress as productive.

Different themes relating to masculinity and mental illness arise within these final four texts, compared to the earlier novels I have examined in this chapter. Novels such as Teresa Toten's *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B* (2013), Beth Revis' *A World Without You* (2016), Lisa Thompson's *The Goldfish Boy* (2017) and Wesley King's *OCDaniel* (2016) are not as imbued with ideas about heteronormativity, sexuality and shame as texts such as *More Happy Than Not* and *Highly Illogical Behaviour*. Whilst the characters' relationships still touch on issues of sexuality, this theme appears to thread trace-like throughout the most recent novels.⁴⁰⁸ The novels engage with ideas of supernormativity by employing specific narrative mechanisms which empower adolescent males with mental illnesses and give them extraordinary perceptions and abilities or exceptional superpowers to elevate them to a heroic position. These recent novels are therefore more illuminating and indicative examples of how fiction can deal with issues of mental illness and cognitive difference well.

This section of the chapter will discuss how mental health changes ideas of the male adolescent hero in *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B* and *A World Without You* and how novels such as *The Goldfish Boy* and *OCDaniel* disrupt imaginings of the adolescent detective through the productive use of symptoms associated with the protagonists' OCD that many people would deem to be problematic. Within these novels, the differences created by the boys' mental illnesses do not weaken the characters but convey strength by enabling them to become heroes and detectives. The texts construct thoughtful and productive ways of imagining cognitive difference by constructing models of mental health which exist beyond the binary of recovery and illness and highlight the polyphony of living with mental health conditions.

As we will see, the final two texts discussed in this chapter are examples of how young adult fiction provides innovative ways for its protagonists to assume the role of boy detective not *despite* but *because of* their symptoms of mental illness. Both *OCDaniel* and

⁴⁰⁸ For example, whilst *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B* and *A World Without You* begin by constructing a heterosexual romantic quest, they ultimately progress to produce cognitive difference led narratives which use the boys' symptoms of mental illness to produce vital strengths that elevate them to the hero position.

The Goldfish Boy transform the elusive, ambiguous, and as we will see later on, perhaps outdated archetype of boy detective to occupy a new narrative space for the formerly marginalized subjectivities of boys with mental illnesses. Lucy Andrew describes the boy detective as ‘an elusive figure’ which continues to ‘survive into the twenty-first century in one form or another’.⁴⁰⁹ She goes on to suggest that though America ‘boasts a whole host of long-running series featuring boy investigators’, the British boy detective ‘is harder to pin down’.⁴¹⁰ Despite the elusive nature of the boy detective, Andrew argues that a discussion of the origins of the character trope reveals some common characteristics:⁴¹¹

He successfully performs detective duties— tracking, spying, undercover work, disguising himself, hunting for clues, making deductions, rescuing damsels in distress and engaging in physical combat where necessary. He works in a professional capacity, alongside the police, and successfully solves crimes and captures criminals. He is intelligent, quick thinking, observant, physically fit, plucky, loyal, patriotic, and incorruptible.⁴¹²

Whilst many traces of these characteristics continue into the second decade of the twenty-first century, we will now see that the boy detective assumes a range of complex new forms within recent young adult literature.

2.5.1 Adding Mental Health to the Twenty-first Century Boy Hero and Detective Story

As the twenty-first century progresses, authors of young adult fiction appear increasingly reluctant to employ the archetype of the boy detective. John Finlay Kerr argues that though they still feature in some contemporary iterations of detective novels for adolescents, boy detectives ‘are not as popular as they once were’ and ‘now seem woefully-outdated: they are pie-eyed and wholesome and utterly WASP, and their mystery-solving is laced with

⁴⁰⁹ Lucy Andrew, *The Boy Detective in Early British Children’s Literature: Patrolling the Borders Between Boyhood and Manhood* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 1.

⁴¹⁰ Andrew, *The Boy Detective in Early British Children’s Literature*, p. 1. While Andrew’s text mainly focuses on boy detective protagonists in British fiction for young people, the final two books discussed in this chapter are British novel *The Goldfish Boy* and Canadian novel *OCDaniel*. Nevertheless, Andrew’s criticism relates, as we will soon see, to my discussion of the ambiguities and elusiveness of the boy detective within this selected fiction.

⁴¹¹ The role of the boy detective has a distinctive literary background and context, but an extensive analysis of this area stands outside of the remit of this thesis. See the chapter ‘The Corruption of Youth Juvenile Delinquency and the Boy Detective Hero’ within Lucy Andrew’s text *The Boy Detective in Early British Children’s Literature* for a further discussion of the origins and transformations of this archetype.

⁴¹² Andrew, *The Boy Detective in Early British Children’s Literature*, p. 2-3.

stereotyping, class-bias and patriarchal values'.⁴¹³ Kerr suggests that 'not all boy detectives have entirely left the scene' however, and that they assume new forms within recent writing for young people.⁴¹⁴ Kerr also proposes a tripartite structure to discuss the recent transformation of the boy detective:

Firstly, the figure is discussed as tragically estranged in a modern world, through the character of an autistic boy savant, Christopher Boone, in Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Secondly, what happens to the classic boy detective when he grows up is interrogated, through the character of Billy Argo in Joe Meno's *The Boy Detective Fails*. Thirdly, how does the classic figure fare when updated, as in the instance of the recent resurgence of the Hardy Boys series.⁴¹⁵

These 'tripartite lines of investigation' appear unsatisfactory and limited in their attempts to ascertain the current position of the boy detective: they reduce the complexities of such characters into one of three formulaic roles.⁴¹⁶ As we will see, these reductive categories are inadequate lines of inquiry by which to understand the polymorphic and nuanced depictions of boy detectives with mental illnesses in *OCDaniel* and *The Goldfish Boy*. Second, Kerr's assumption that boy detectives who represent a previously marginalized voice, such as Christopher Boone in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, are 'tragically estranged' is a problematic one. In my readings of *OCDaniel* and *The Goldfish Boy*, I argue that the protagonists' obsessive observation skills are used by the authors to dissect, modify and challenge assumptions of the genre in innovative and enlightened new ways. These boy detectives are not, to use Kerr's phrase, 'tragically estranged', and their assumption of the detective role is much more complex and multidimensional than this limited and problematically phrased labelling suggests.

Whilst authors such as Wesley King and Lisa Thompson create new, unprecedented spaces to portray the boy detective, it is nevertheless the case that much of young adult literature prioritizes normative forms of masculinity, strength and desirability as 'essential qualities' of the character.⁴¹⁷ Michael G. Cornelius argues that young adult detective fiction frequently employs the use of emblematic names which are 'designed to encapsulate some

⁴¹³ John Finlay Kerr, 'Has the World Outgrown the Classic Boy Detective?', in *The Boy Detectives: Essays on the Hardy Boys and Others*, ed. by Michael G. Cornelius (Jefferson: McFarland and Company Inc., 2010), pp. 180-97 (p. 180).

⁴¹⁴ Kerr, 'Has the World Outgrown the Classic Boy Detective?', p. 180.

⁴¹⁵ Kerr, 'Has the World Outgrown the Classic Boy Detective?', p. 180.

⁴¹⁶ Kerr, 'Has the World Outgrown the Classic Boy Detective?', p. 180.

⁴¹⁷ Michael G. Cornelius, 'Introduction: The Nomenclature of Boy Sleuths', in *The Boy Detectives: Essays on the Hardy Boys and Others*, ed. by Michael G. Cornelius (Jefferson: McFarland and Company Inc., 2010), pp. 1-18 (p. 2).

kernel of truth, some aspect of identity, that said character espouses, usually in a wholly earnest (though sometimes quite ironic) manner'.⁴¹⁸ Boy detectives' names, therefore, often suggest a sense of power, speed, and the pursuit of adventure.⁴¹⁹ He goes on to suggest that 'in many ways, boy sleuths are nothing more and nothing less than what their names suggest, and this single facet of their identity has proven key to both their commercial and generic success'.⁴²⁰ Cornelius's attempts to attribute the success of the boy detective to the character's name is a superficial approach which overlooks a range of other methods by which identity is constructed within adolescent fiction. Furthermore, this line of investigation appears limited in its ability to aid our understanding of complex novels in which the boy detective is diagnosed with a mental illness. Within *OCDaniel*, the protagonist is known simply as 'Daniel' to most characters throughout the novel until, at the end of the text, he refers to himself as 'Deranged Daniel'.⁴²¹ When Daniel and his friend Sara decide they hate this name, Sara calls him OCDaniel.⁴²² Sara also frequently refers to him by his 'Star Child' status, emphasising the way his symptoms of OCD are framed as extraordinary and supernatural abilities within the text. In *The Goldfish Boy* Matthew's neighbour's six-year-old granddaughter, Casey, calls him 'Goldfish Boy' due to his reluctance to leave his house, and the way he observes the neighbourhood from his bedroom window.⁴²³ Within both these texts, the protagonists' nicknames prioritize their lived experience with mental illness, but ultimately it is the symptoms associated with these experiences that give them the skills required to assume the role of boy detective.

The fiction selected here illuminates the formerly neglected subjectivity of the boy detective with a mental illness. Despite the fact that such a voice has previously been marginalized within the realms of young adult fiction, it is nevertheless the case that within *OCDaniel* and *The Goldfish Boy*, the protagonists' symptoms are constructed and framed in ways that enable them to fit the profile of the boy detective. Such fiction extends the boundaries of the boy detective role by expanding the genre's ability to create an innovative literary space for this formerly marginalized perspective. Rebecca Beirne identifies a phenomenon within the second decade of the twenty-first century in which portrayals of mental illness within the detective television genre are framed in increasingly positive

⁴¹⁸ Cornelius, 'Introduction: The Nomenclature of Boy Sleuths', p. 2.

⁴¹⁹ Cornelius, 'Introduction: The Nomenclature of Boy Sleuths', p. 2.

⁴²⁰ Cornelius, 'Introduction: The Nomenclature of Boy Sleuths', p. 5.

⁴²¹ King, *OCDaniel*, p. 287.

⁴²² King, *OCDaniel*, p. 292.

⁴²³ Thompson, Lisa, *The Goldfish Boy*, (London: Scholastic, 2017), p. 64.

ways.⁴²⁴ Her criticism focuses specifically on a development within the role of characters who display symptoms of mental illness: while such characters ‘were previously usually minor and heavily stigmatised’, within the second decade of the twenty-first century they are increasingly allocated ‘special talents or powers associated with mental health conditions’ which enable them to undertake impressive and sophisticated detective work.⁴²⁵ Such developments in the detective television genre move beyond the notion that the diagnosis merely aids the investigative work, as Beirne evaluates a trope in which the broad range of symptoms associated with the lived experience of mental illness leads to extraordinary powers and skills that tie the protagonist ‘to detection by transforming occupation into a compulsory matter of identity’.⁴²⁶ As Beirne suggests, this shift ‘sets up a construct where difference can only be positive if it results in amazing skills, provides some kind of altruistic social benefit that goes above and beyond the call of duty and necessitates some kind of significant personal sacrifice’.⁴²⁷ However, it is nevertheless the case, as we will see in my readings of *OCDaniel* and *The Goldfish Boy* that these positive depictions of symptoms of mental illness serve as productive forces within the storyworld of the text, compared to earlier negative and problematic formulations of cognitive difference.

2.5.2 ‘A messed up cadre of superheroes’: Mental Illness and Heroism in *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B* (2013) and *A World Without You* (2016).

Despite the increased critical attention on the performance of male gendered behaviour and the diversification within the hero narrative during the last ten years,⁴²⁸ the ways in which mental health and illness frameworks intersect with the construction of the adolescent male hero in young adult literature has not yet been fully evaluated. During this time, a range of young adult novels have emerged that allow us to examine the dynamics which arise when frameworks of mental health and illness disrupt existing conventions and fictionalized trajectories of adolescent male heroes. As I will now use this section to demonstrate, novels such as Teresa Toten’s *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B* and Beth Nevis’ *A World Without You* work to reconstruct the contemporary adolescent male hero by reimagining heroic

⁴²⁴ Rebecca C. Beirne, ‘Extraordinary Minds, Impossible Choices: Mental Health, Special Skills and Television’, *Medical Humanities*, 45.4 (2019), 235-39 (p. 235).

⁴²⁵ Beirne, ‘Extraordinary Minds, Impossible Choices’, p. 235.

⁴²⁶ Beirne, ‘Extraordinary Minds, Impossible Choices’, p. 237.

⁴²⁷ Beirne, ‘Extraordinary Minds, Impossible Choices’, p. 239.

⁴²⁸ Esther De Dauw and Daniel J. Connell, eds., *Toxic Masculinity: Mapping the Monstrous in Our Heroes* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2020), p. 10.

conventions, such as dual identities and special abilities, through the prism of mental illness in order to produce sophisticated outcomes for their protagonists. In their 2021 article on superhero texts aimed at adolescents, Ashley K. Dallacuqua and David E. Low discuss recent issues surrounding the diversification of heroic characters, arguing that although heroes are still often ‘synonymous with white cis-hetero male exceptionalism’, recent contributions to the genre frequently produce broader performances of male gendered identity which animate new thinking about being a hero.⁴²⁹ *A World Without You* and *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B* are imaginings which diversify the hero narrative by incorporating the created complexities and recovery trajectories of mental illnesses such as OCD and dissociative disorder. By doing so, they create a new, complex type of hero that utilizes existing conventions and dominant productions of masculinity associated with the hero narrative in sophisticated new ways. My investigations of mental health will contribute to this body of work by beginning with how the prism of mental health changes, disrupts and reconstructs ideas of the male adolescent hero. As this chapter will now go on to demonstrate, texts such as *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B* and *A World Without You* are exemplars of where young adult heroes meet the sophistications of mental health, enabling their protagonists to occupy an unanticipated new space in which symptoms associated with their cognitive difference are re-imagined as useful and heroic characteristics. This section will use *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B* and *A World Without You* to illustrate the progression across the novels in terms of how mental illness can be read as productive.

As Esther De Dauw and Daniel J. Connell discuss in their book *Toxic Masculinity: Mapping the Monstrous in our Heroes* (2020), dual identities play a vital role in the construction of male heroes as characters undertake parallel civilian and extraordinary identities and frequently move between the two positions.⁴³⁰ In a similar mode, the use of mental health frameworks within young adult hero narratives disrupts and transforms the productions of heroic masculinity by reconstructing this idea of dual identities to enable mental ill protagonists to undertake the role of hero. *A World Without You* and *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B* reimagine the idea of dual identities to create hybrid heroic identities, which reconstruct heroic qualities such as strength and sacrifice as intrinsic components of mental illness that are vital to the protagonists’ special abilities. For example, Adam, the protagonist of *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B*, uses his strength to overcome shame

⁴²⁹ Ashley K. Dallacuqua and David E. Low, ‘Cupcakes and Beefcakes: Students’ Readings of Gender in Superhero Texts’, *Gender and Education*, 33 (2021), 68-85, p. 69.

⁴³⁰ De Dauw and Connell, *Toxic Masculinity*, p. 9.

associated with OCD and engages in ideas of personal sacrifice when supporting others in his teenage therapy group. In *A World Without You*, ambiguities surrounding the existence of protagonist Bo's hallucinations enable him to elevate to the position of a time-travelling hero while he receives treatment for dissociative disorder. Contemporary cultural productions of superheroes have the potential to transcend established markers of hegemonic masculinity and construct new identities beyond the discrete binaries of gendered performance. However, as De Dauw asks in her 2021 book on gender representation in American superhero texts, do these narratives take this opportunity or 'do they remain trapped in the hegemony's consumption and restructuring of radical deviation from the norm?'.⁴³¹ As I will demonstrate, my selected young adult novels occupy an unanticipated space to construct new forms of the adolescent male hero by reframing typical heroic characteristics through the prism of mental illness in ways that produce complex and innovative dynamics.

Whilst some recent young adult hero narratives still frequently valorize masculine ideals of stoicism, self-reliance and individualism, others written within the last ten years have constructed male friendship groups based upon ideals of emotional literacy, compassion and empathy, and these tensions between conflicting models of masculinities are further complicated by the inclusion of mental health and recovery frameworks. De Dauw and Connell highlight the prominence of the 'lone wolf' narrative in recent imaginings of heroes: a template of young masculinity which is established by 'removing the hero from a wider social network', enabling them to 'exist as the sole arbiter of power and protection without other heroes (true equals) to share the load'.⁴³² Despite this prominent template of male gendered behaviours, Jessica Seymour's 2016 article on masculine friendship groups in contemporary adolescent novels discusses the role of young males within 'care circles of dependent characters, which guides how male characters approach the performance of masculinity'.⁴³³ Seymour argues that during the last ten years, a collection of young adult novels has emerged which features groups of adolescent boys who 'have a remarkable capacity for empathy and emotional competence' and display 'emotional intelligence and compassion', enabling us to rethink the fictionalized dynamics between boys.⁴³⁴ The complex tensions between the 'lone wolf' template of masculinity, defined by the power to

⁴³¹ Esther De Dauw, *Hot Pants and Spandex Suits: Gender Representation in American Superhero Comic Books* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2021), p. 15.

⁴³² De Dauw and Connell, *Toxic Masculinity*, p. 6.

⁴³³ Seymour, "Murder Me...Become a Man", p. 627.

⁴³⁴ Seymour, "Murder Me...Become a Man", p. 633.

use violence to protect others, and broader understandings of fictionalized adolescent male friendships that have emerged in the last ten years move the protagonists in *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B* and *A World Without You* to undertake unanticipated new positions that encompass compassionate emotional competence and adolescent male heroics.

The protagonists in both novels occupy an innovative space between these frames of male gendered behaviour. They feature young males with mental illnesses who adopt a heroic role while simultaneously embodying ideals of empathy, emotional literacy, and compassion to produce male circles of care in which boys rely on each other to reject violent and aggressive forms of masculinity. As I will go on to demonstrate, the selected novels' models of male friendships within adolescent therapy groups produce empathetic and supportive dynamics based upon open discussion of mental illness symptoms whilst simultaneously elevating the protagonist to the position of hero. For example, *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B* uses mental health as a lens to produce acts of heroism which involve supporting others in the therapy group to openly consider their symptoms of mental illness, enabling them to cast off the shame and stigma associated with mental health discussion. Similarly, the empathetic male friendship group dynamics constructed within *A World Without You* establish dual trajectories of recovery: characters simultaneously achieve resolution and acceptance over challenging aspects of their mental illnesses whilst also resolving performances of masculinity that rely on displays of individual violence and aggression. As I will now demonstrate, *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B* and *A World Without You* demonstrate a progression in terms of understanding the symptoms associated with cognitive difference as productive to enable a wider range of sophisticated outcomes which highlight the polyphonic nature of mental illness.

In *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B*, teenager Adam Spencer Ross has severe OCD and attends a therapy group for adolescents with a range of mental illnesses such as eating disorders, anxiety and hypochondria. When their doctor, Chuck, asks each member to select a new name whilst in therapy, the group decides on naming themselves after superheroes and Adam calls himself Batman. Though initially these superhero identities are constructed outside of the self and appear as 'the exact opposites' of the teenage characters, the novel's models of mental health re-imagines each character's symptoms to produce new heroic identities and enable sophisticated outcomes for characters with mental illnesses.⁴³⁵ Whilst at the beginning of the novel each member of the group adopts an externally located heroic

⁴³⁵ Teresa Toten, *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B* (London: Walker Books Ltd, 2013), p. 136.

persona which enables them to 'leave their doubt-ridden, shell-shocked and agonizing selves at the door and become instead all-powerful beings', the text's trajectory enables their heroic tendencies to converge with their mental illness identities.⁴³⁶ This use of the mental health lens disrupts the hegemonic conventions of the hero and reframes them in new ways, producing a 'messed up cadre of superheroes' who display a 'wonky kind of courage', causing the image of the hero to become both disrupted and reconstructed within the novel's mental health framework.⁴³⁷

The text constructs new and innovative notions of heroism that reimagine symptoms of OCD as productive characteristics. For example, when Adam experiences compulsions to complete specific rituals relating to his fear of certain numbers, he uses 'all of his strength' to overcome this urge.⁴³⁸ Similarly, displays of courage and strength are vital to the novel's depictions of mental illness: after his OCD and anxiety symptoms become more severe, he confesses to his girlfriend Robyn he 'sweat[s] terror' and she explains he is 'the bravest person' she will ever meet because of the courage he has to 'go on despite the fear' surrounding his mental illness.⁴³⁹ When Robyn writes a letter to Adam, she tells him '[y]ou, Adam Spencer Ross, are a man and will forever and always be my Batman'.⁴⁴⁰ The novel reconstructs aspects of OCD that many would deem to be challenging, such as physical manifestations of anxiety, as characteristics which grant Adam the agency to use these symptoms productively, enabling him to assume the position of superhero. *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B* demonstrates a subtle shift in young adult literature which, as we will see, progresses further in novels such as *A World Without You* in which the central character is not weakened by his symptoms of mental illness: the difference in physical and cognitive states that the illness assumes is empowering. Toten's novel often assumes a position of writing from within a cognitive difference-led narrative to demonstrate how the central characters intervene within the world in which they are operating. *A World Without You* represents this continued progression in terms of viewing cognitive difference as productive to achieve a greater sophistication in the resolutions for male characters with mental illnesses and these increasingly sophisticated imaginings of how mental health interact with adolescent male life allow the protagonist to assume the role of superhero.

⁴³⁶ Toten, *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B*, p. 14.

⁴³⁷ Toten, *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B*, p. 91.

⁴³⁸ Toten, *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B*, p. 230.

⁴³⁹ Toten, *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B*, p. 242.

⁴⁴⁰ Toten, *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B*, p. 261.

A World Without You further demonstrates this visible progression towards novels with a greater sophistication in terms of resolutions for characters with mental illnesses by giving validity to what otherwise might be called delusions. The novel alternates between protagonist Bo and his sister Phoebe's narratives, establishing two strands that represent different perceptions of the shared world around them, whilst simultaneously frequently blurring the boundaries between these conflicting insights. The novel creates a series of ambiguities surrounding Bo's special abilities that move him to occupy a position that encompasses both heroic actions and mental illness. Bo believes he can travel through time and that he attends the Berkshire Academy for Children with Exceptional Needs: a boarding school which accommodates teenagers with a range of superpowers such as invisibility, pyrokinesis, healing powers, telekinesis, telepathy and the ability to speak to the dead. However, Phoebe's insights suggests that Bo goes to a school for adolescents with mental illnesses and that his visions of time travel are prolonged visual delusions and hallucinations caused by a combination of dissociative disorder and paranoia.⁴⁴¹

In a 2016 review, Jennifer Barnes argues that the novel's inclusion of Phoebe's perspective acts as 'a counterpoint to [Bo's] distorted perception of reality and shows how his family struggles with Bo's dissociative disorder as he spirals out of control'.⁴⁴² Though Barnes' review draws a sharp binary between what she argues are Bo's delusions and Phoebe's insights into the world around her, the relationship between the two narrative strands is more ambiguous than this narrow assumption suggests.⁴⁴³ These ambiguities surrounding contrasting perceptions of events in the novel locate Bo within a hybrid position between having superpowers and dissociative disorder. When Bo watches a video of his group therapy sessions, he expects to see himself and his classmates displaying their extraordinary powers but instead sees violent displays of emotion and discussion of mental illness symptoms. Although Bo remembers the session as a time when his friend Ryan used what appear to be telekinetic powers to 'make his chair float around the room', the video recording shows Ryan experiencing a violent outburst and 'picking up a chair and throwing

⁴⁴¹ Although the novel's blurb suggests that Bo does not have superpowers and that his visions of time travel are delusions, as we will see, the text constructs a series of ambiguities which validates what might be interpreted as dissociation. As I will argue, the text uses the characteristics associated with Bo's mental illness productively to elevate him to the position of hero.

⁴⁴² Jennifer Barnes, 'A *World Without You* by Beth Revis: Book Review', *The Booklist*, May (2016), 86 (p. 86).

⁴⁴³ Barnes' review neglects to discuss the moments in the novel in which Bo's symptoms of delusion grant him extraordinary perception which, as we shall see, elevate him to the position of hero.

it at the doctor' before the group engage in discussion about their mental illnesses, using terms such as 'depressed' and 'bipolar'.⁴⁴⁴ These two simultaneous and parallel understandings of events in the novel construct what Bo describes as 'a weird hybrid between what I know happened and what doesn't make sense'.⁴⁴⁵ The novel simultaneously constructs and blurs the boundaries between these versions of events and creates an ambiguous hybrid between realities constructed within normative realms of mental health and ways of being that include delusions, hallucinations and dissociation. The complexities of this hybrid assume a position of writing from within cognitive difference that enables Bo to occupy an ambiguous position that incorporates elements of heroism and aspects of dissociative disorder.

Towards the end of the novel, Bo's friend Ryan locks fellow student Harold in a cupboard during a violent outburst and Bo retains the key with the intention of letting Harold out once Ryan has calmed down. When a fire breaks out in the school, Bo appears to go back in time to give Harold the key to unlock the door and let himself out of the cupboard. As Bo returns to the present, he sees Harold 'staggering through the smoke coughing, the iron key in his hand' which then seems to disappear when Bo looks again.⁴⁴⁶ When asked about how he escaped from the cupboard, Harold 'shrugs' and explains "'I guess with the heat, [the lock] sort of snapped"'.⁴⁴⁷ The ambiguities and tensions that exist between these two conflicting interpretations of events allow Bo to occupy a space in which he can undertake the hero role whilst experiencing dissociative disorder. Further ambiguities surrounding Bo's apparent special powers and hallucinations are exposed when Bo travels to the future and sees an image of Phoebe's graduation. In his perception, Phoebe has 'swapped her contacts for winged cat-eye glasses' and loses her grandmother's earrings whilst jumping in a water fountain with two friends.⁴⁴⁸ In the novel's epilogue, narrated through Phoebe's perspective at her graduation one year later, Bo comments on Phoebe's new 'blue cat-eye glasses' and warns her that her grandmother's earrings are loose, preventing her from losing them, and claiming that it was a 'lucky guess' when Phoebe is 'surprised that Bo would pay enough attention to notice that one was loose'.⁴⁴⁹ As we can see from this textual reading, the novel blurs boundaries between ways of being that do not

⁴⁴⁴ Beth Revis, *A World Without You* (London: Penguin Random House, 2016), p. 137.

⁴⁴⁵ Revis, *A World Without You*, p. 262.

⁴⁴⁶ Revis, *A World Without You*, p. 354.

⁴⁴⁷ Revis, *A World Without You*, p. 355.

⁴⁴⁸ Revis, *A World Without You*, p. 125.

⁴⁴⁹ Revis, *A World Without You*, p. 270.

include mental illness, and symptoms of delusions to signal a progressive movement towards innovative understandings of disassociation as productive, supernatural and heroic.

A World Without You produces a complex model of group therapy which utilizes male care circles that promote collective empathy and vulnerability. In doing this, the text produces dual trajectories in which recovery from mental illness and control over its symptoms is equated with recovery from violent forms of masculinity and the control of the anger, violence and aggression associated with such forms of male subjectivity. In a 2016 interview, Revis suggests that Bo is continually ‘connected to the people he loves through invisible strings’ which ‘giv[e] him roots even when he feels adrift’ and this performance of empathy and connection is demonstrated within the masculine group therapy dynamics at his boarding school.⁴⁵⁰ Although Bo describes his empathetic care circle as ‘a tiny, broken family twisted with weird powers’, complex tensions between power and control are exposed within the therapy group framework.⁴⁵¹ The text’s performance of male friendship groups produces dual trajectories as the male characters’ recovery from symptoms of mental illness coincide with the ability to control the physical anger and aggression associated with violent performances of male gendered behaviour.

Bo recalls occurrences when he and Ryan lose control of powers when feeling criticized or inadequate, leading to physical displays of anger which align with a loss of control over what Bo deems to be their extraordinary powers. When Bo attempts to travel through time within the group therapy session, he is unable to do so and ‘flipped from nervous to angry’, imagining ‘there were a red film over everything’ and causing him to accidentally punch Dr Franklin as he loses control of his powers.⁴⁵² Similarly, when Bo watches a video clip of a group therapy session, instead of seeing Ryan make objects move with his mind, he witnesses Ryan’s ‘face scrunched in rage, his eyes flashing, his chest heaving’ and reflects ‘the Ryan I know is always in control – of himself and usually of others. This person is volatile and evil and totally, entirely chaotic’.⁴⁵³ What Bo interprets as the students’ powers are, in fact, ‘weapons’ or ‘tools’ which replicate public displays of violent masculinity and the novel’s model of group therapy produces frameworks to control these powers so the students ‘can be safe in the outside world’.⁴⁵⁴ The text’s performance of group therapy relationships and dynamics valorizes male vulnerability, empathy and emotional

⁴⁵⁰ Drucilla Shultz, ‘Beth Revis Interview’, *The Publishers Weekly*, 263 (2016), 106 (p. 106).

⁴⁵¹ Revis, *A World Without You*, p. 212.

⁴⁵² Revis, *A World Without You*, p. 38.

⁴⁵³ Revis, *A World Without You*, p. 138.

⁴⁵⁴ Revis, *A World Without You*, p. 92.

literacy in ways which achieve not only resolution and acceptance of symptoms of mental illness but also the ability to control powerful emotions such as anger associated with violent models of male gendered behaviour.

In demonstrating a progressive movement towards novels that produce a greater sophistication of outcomes for adolescent male characters with mental illness, *A World Without You* gives validity to what might otherwise be referred to as delusions by constructing Bo's mental illness as productive. The difference associated with Bo's illness and the associated symptoms are what grant him his extraordinary perception and elevate him to adopt the hero role in the text. The novel constructs power structures which do not weaken the central character but empower him to use the characteristics associated with his dissociation productively to achieve heroic status. As we will now see, this trajectory of assuming a position within a cognitive difference perspective continues in two recent novels about OCD: Lisa Thompson's *The Goldfish Boy* (2017) and Wesley King's *OCDaniel* (2016).

2.6 Mental Illness and the Boy Detective in Wesley King's *OCDaniel* (2016) and Lisa Thompson's *The Goldfish Boy* (2017).

In a continued trajectory from *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B* and *A World Without You*, Wesley King's *OCDaniel* (2016) and Lisa Thompson's *The Goldfish Boy* (2017) sustain a position within cognitive difference by understanding and constructing symptoms of OCD as productive in innovative new ways. For example, these novels produce a greater complexity in style and aesthetics which grant their protagonists demonstrable agency to influence the world in which they operate. The central characters ultimately achieve an acceptance of their symptoms by using them as tools for detective processes which drive the novels towards their conclusions. As we will also see, the relationship between *OCDaniel* and *The Goldfish Boy* demonstrates a visible progression to an increasingly non-realist style which enables more imaginative and fictive understandings of OCD beyond linear imaginings of mental illness and recovery.

Both *OCDaniel* and *The Goldfish Boy* use a style and aesthetic reminiscent of Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003) to construct complex ways of seeing the world through the prism of (in this case) mental illness. When Haddon's autistic narrator, Christopher, feels estranged by language devices such as metaphorical speech, Haddon's novel employs the use of graphic elements including charts, photographs,

drawings and maps as a means of communication which function to produce a complex presentation of how Christopher understands and structures the world around him.⁴⁵⁵ As an example, *OCDaniel* and *The Goldfish Boy* employ stylistic features such as numbered lists, daily logs of key events and times, numbered sequences of symptoms and ordered series of suspects to narrate from within a cognitive difference led position. The protagonists in *The Goldfish Boy* and *OCDaniel* have OCD and are not weakened by their mental illness; the very difference their mental illnesses produce conveys strength in a range of ways. Although the characters are anxious and uncertain, the way in which they can show their agency and intervention in the world in which they are operating is through the productive use of symptoms of their condition that many would deem to be problematic. For instance, the nature and specificity of the logs, lists and sequences produced from a cognitive difference-led position provide the tools for the detective processes which drive the novel to its conclusion.

In *The Goldfish Boy*, Matthew's OCD has become so severe he struggles to leave the house and he watches and records events and his neighbours' activities from his bedroom window. When his neighbour's two-year-old grandson, Teddy, goes missing, Matthew's daily logs and the specificity associated with the way he records the details are a vital and productive tool to solve the crime. As shown in Appendix 1, the text's stylistic mechanisms, such as lists of key events relating to the crime which highlight dates, times, locations and the weather, emphasize the logical, methodical and often quantifiable way in which Matthew experiences the world through the prism of OCD, whilst replicating the information recording processes within a police investigation. For example, as seen in Appendix 1, the narration in Matthew's log proves vital as it records the key details of the last sighting of Teddy before he disappears. When he sees Teddy alone in the garden, he senses something is wrong and makes a note of the time and recalls 'that time was important. I don't know why it stuck in my mind, but it did'.⁴⁵⁶ The creation of these lists, logs and sequences as a way of narrating through the prism of OCD enables the text to assume a cognitive difference-led position which distributes agency to Matthew by constructing the differences he experiences due to his OCD as strengths which prove vital in solving the crime.

⁴⁵⁵ Tomasz Dobrogoszcz, 'Signification at its Limits: Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* and the Narrative Potential of Graphic Communication', *Litteraria Copernicana*, 35.3 (2020), 69-80 (p. 71).

⁴⁵⁶ Thompson, *The Goldfish Boy*, p. 95.

Wesley King's novel *OCDaniel* demonstrates a positive re-reading of Daniel's tendencies to obsessively identify patterns, meticulously observe minor details, and construct sequences and routines, and this enables him to occupy a space extremely close to the role of boy detective. Throughout the novel Daniel appears intellectually gifted in ways that tie him to investigative skills. He is 'a thirteen-year-old social oddity', but this is framed within the text as being 'gifted'.⁴⁵⁷ For instance, he reflects 'I remember things easily and read novels every night', leading to his teachers telling him he has 'a huge vocabulary' and an ability to 'write way above [his] age level'.⁴⁵⁸ Though Daniel is portrayed as different to his peers, this is continuously depicted positively within the novel: when Daniel's teacher tells him he is 'equal parts smart and unusual', he acknowledges that 'the second part sounds mean, but she meant it in a positive way'.⁴⁵⁹ When given homework to write about his weekend, Daniel 'ended up discussing Middle Eastern politics and how colonialism was still relevant in modern-day politics'.⁴⁶⁰ The teacher acknowledges the cognitive difference animated here positively by describing him as 'a curious boy' and describing his writing as 'meticulous and absorbing, as always'.⁴⁶¹ As we can see here, signs of cognitive difference begin to emerge within the text as positive outcomes which are utilized in productive ways in line with the role of the boy detective.

Similarly, Daniel possesses a range of other extraordinary characteristics which are representative of cognitive difference that allow him to assume the role of boy detective, including heightened observation skills, strong moral principles, and the ability to create and memorize sequences and routines. As the novel moves on, Daniel and Sara investigate Sara's father's disappearance together. The only evidence Sara has is a letter supposedly written by her father telling her that he is going away for a long time. However, Sara believes her mother's boyfriend has killed her father and wrote the note himself to cover up the murder. After creating a scenario in which John would need to leave his home, Sara and Daniel search his house together. Daniel's extraordinary ability to construct sequences and routines enable him to search John's apartment to find information pertaining to Sara's dad's disappearance. When Daniel searches through each of John's drawers, he displays strong observation skills: 'I was closing it again when I noticed that the shirt on the right side was a

⁴⁵⁷ Wesley King, *OCDaniel* (New York: Simon and Shuster Books, 2016), p.3.

⁴⁵⁸ King, *OCDaniel*, p. 3.

⁴⁵⁹ King, *OCDaniel*, p. 219.

⁴⁶⁰ King, *OCDaniel*, p. 219.

⁴⁶¹ King, *OCDaniel*, p. 219.

little crumpled, like it had been shoved hastily into the drawer. On a whim I pulled it out'.⁴⁶² These organization, sequencing and observation skills lead to Daniel finding a gun in John's apartment, which he believes is a murder weapon. Whilst the vast majority of signs of cognitive difference are framed within the text as extraordinary abilities that tie Daniel's identity as a boy with a mental illness to the position of boy detective, it is nevertheless the case that any symptoms of OCD that cannot be used productively to help solve the disappearance of Sara's father are framed as a necessary sacrifice to make in return for such extraordinary abilities. For example, when Daniel is experiencing feelings of anxiety relating to his OCD, Sara responds to his distress by reminding him 'you have to pay the price to be special'.⁴⁶³ Daniel and Sara orchestrate a plan to get John out of his house, organize a successful search of the home, find a potential murder weapon, identify a motive, and attain a sample of his handwriting which matches the letter supposedly written by Sara's father. All these actions stem from the extraordinary skills and abilities which arise due to Daniel's cognitive difference. They are able to discover that Sara's father has ended his life through suicide, leading John to write the letter to Sara and signed it from her father in an attempt to supposedly protect her from learning about her father's death and the grief this would incur. It is the text's framing of OCD symptoms in positive and productive ways that enable Daniel and Sara to arrive at this truth.

Within *The Goldfish Boy* Matthew displays similarly extraordinary skills relating to observation, data collection, and articulation. The text adopts a range of narrative forms and aesthetic markers to enable the protagonist to narrate from within a cognitive difference led position. Matthew writes down his astute observations of the world outside his bedroom window and these form a detective logbook of key events leading to Teddy's disappearance. As shown in Appendix 2, many of these narrative structures which Matthew uses to articulate his understanding of the world around him replicate investigative forms. When questioned by the police officer about what he saw from his bedroom window the day Teddy went missing, Matthew reveals that he wrote down the events of that morning in extraordinary detail – including the fact that when he saw Teddy playing in Mr Charles' garden just before his disappearance, the gate was closed and locked. Matthew's special talent for observation and recall is located within a place of cognitive difference, and the police officer asks Matthew 'why would you notice a thing like that?'.⁴⁶⁴ Nevertheless, this characteristic of

⁴⁶² King, *OCDaniel*, p. 142.

⁴⁶³ King, *OCDaniel*, p. 194.

⁴⁶⁴ Thompson, *The Goldfish Boy*, p. 106.

Matthew's mental illness proves vital in learning more about the crime: he tells the police officer 'I just look at things and see stuff. That's all'.⁴⁶⁵ As the search for Teddy continues, Matthew reflects: 'I need to be alert. I need to keep an eye on things, see if I can spot any clues. You need someone like me, watching things. I was the last one to see him! If I hadn't seen him, they wouldn't have known he was in the front yard at all, would they?'.⁴⁶⁶ His assertion that the police 'need someone like [him]' locates Matthew in a position of a boy with a lived experience of mental illness. It is this cognitive difference that gives rise to a range of extraordinary abilities which can be utilized within the novel to help solve the crime. These special observation and articulation skills enable the police officer to understand that Teddy could not have walked out of the garden himself because the gate was locked, and that the case has become an abduction investigation.

In *OCDaniel*, the protagonist experiences symptoms of OCD and keeps this a secret from his friends and family until his classmate Sara, who herself has a range of mental health conditions such as anxiety disorder and depression, identifies him as a fellow 'Star Child' who possesses extraordinary talents or abilities.⁴⁶⁷⁴⁶⁸ The novel uses stylistic features such as sequences of symptoms, lists of intrusive thoughts and numbered series of actions Daniel must enact to complete his ritualistic routines associated with OCD. When Daniel experiences his symptoms, the narration frequently takes the form of numbered lists or sequences, such as when he lists his intrusive thoughts and believes he is going to die and the mode of narration changes back to prose when Daniel's 'rational brain tried to flick on

⁴⁶⁵ Thompson, *The Goldfish Boy*, p. 106.

⁴⁶⁶ Thompson, *The Goldfish Boy*, p. 126-27.

⁴⁶⁷ King, *OCDaniel*, p. 93.

⁴⁶⁸ In *OCDaniel*, Daniel's relationships with potential romantic partners Sara and Raya allow us to see how sexuality intersects with mental health. While Daniel's initial desires to assimilate into socially constructed, normative realms of mental health are represented through his attempts at heterosexual coupling with 'cool, normal, popular Raya Singh' (p. 242), it is nevertheless the case that his relationship with Sara enables him to assume his Star Child status. Early in the novel, Daniel suggests 'it didn't make sense' for him to be attracted to 'Psycho Sara' because she represents the 'crazy [world] where our minds didn't work right' and instead claims to be attracted to Raya, 'who reminded me of what I wanted to be - normal too' (p. 242). However, he is unable to stop thinking about his moment of heterosexual intimacy with Sara: 'I thought about lying next to her in the field, eyes across her face, reaching down past her lips. I thought of her fingers on my cheeks' (p. 165). Although Daniel reflects that Sara was 'constantly reminding me that I wasn't normal' (p. 165) the differences they experience due to their symptoms of mental illness are constructed productively by the novel as strengths which produce extraordinary talents, abilities and perception. At the end of the text Sara and Daniel discuss their first 'date', which consists of going to a therapy group together (p. 287) and Daniel's relationship with Sara is vital in enabling him to resolve his challenges with his OCD symptoms and accept his elevated position as an extraordinary Star Child.

again'.⁴⁶⁹ This shifting between narration from within an OCD point of view and standard prose creates tensions between Daniel's symptoms and his desire to use his 'rational brain' to attempt to overcome these. After the novel employs lists to convey Daniel's night-time routine, a common symptom of OCD, he learns that Sara has seen the ritual and though initially he feels like 'hiding' due to his 'embarrassment', it is the nature of his mental illness that enables him to be 'extraordinary' and possess a special level of intellect and perception which helps him solve the mystery of Sara's father's disappearance.⁴⁷⁰

2.6.1 Reframing Symptoms of Mental Distress as Heroic Attributes

Unlike texts discussed earlier in this chapter, *The Goldfish Boy* and *OCDaniel* produce trajectories which challenge the scripts of recovery that locate power within the domain of adults and rely on assimilation within normative realms of mental health. Both novels animate new, progressive ways of thinking about mental health that grant the young male protagonists' agency to construct their own forms of expression whilst elevating them to the role of heroic detective. By contrasting these adolescent controlled performances of mental illness with the adult characters who represent prejudiced and restrictive models of mental health, the novels construct innovative ways to integrate the complexities of these issues within adolescence. In *The Goldfish Boy*, Matthew's father comments on how clean his room is and asks Matthew "Where are your dirty socks? Mouldy cups? Empty fizzy drinks cans? The things normal boys would have lying around?", highlighting an adult created method of recovery which stigmatises OCD and creates a problematic binary between 'normal boys' and boys with mental illnesses such as Matthew, who refers to himself immediately after the exchange as 'not right'.⁴⁷¹ When Matthew sees Dr Kerr about his symptoms, the doctor tells Matthew to be a 'good lad' and 'stop all this messing around' before 'dismiss[ing]' Matthew and waving his hand 'as if he was shooing away an annoying wasp'.⁴⁷² After being 'dismissed' by the doctor, Matthew sits alone in his room and talks to an area of wallpaper that bears a resemblance to a lion's face. Throughout the novel, Matthew talks to the lion about things he feels unable to tell his parents or the doctor, such as his OCD and his misplaced feelings of guilt surrounding his younger brother's death. When he finds out his friend Melody may have seen a note he wrote to his late brother, he asks the picture of the lion a question he has never been able to articulate when talking to an adult: "what if she

⁴⁶⁹ King, *OCDaniel*, p. 74.

⁴⁷⁰ King, *OCDaniel*, p. 212.

⁴⁷¹ Thompson, *The Goldfish Boy*, p. 69-70.

⁴⁷² Thompson, *The Goldfish Boy*, p. 63.

sees my note and realizes Callum's death was my fault?"⁴⁷³ Talking to the lion represents an adolescent controlled form of expression for his OCD symptoms as it allows him to voice his feelings about his OCD in ways that exist outside of adult created, stigmatising scripts of mental illness.

Similarly in *OCDaniel*, when Daniel's father witnesses some of his night-time routine including switching his bedroom light on and off, Daniel creates an excuse for these actions and his father is 'relieved' that the unusual behaviour is 'nothing' and 'didn't mention it again'.⁴⁷⁵ When his friend Sara later asks about his routines, Daniel tells her that he can't tell his parents because they would think he is 'crazy'.⁴⁷⁶ King's text grants Daniel the agency to construct his own sophisticated expression of OCD however, when he attempts to write fiction. When Daniel is unable to express his feelings to his parents about his mental illness symptoms, he writes a novel about himself entitled 'The Last Kid on Earth' and finds that writing prevents him from having panic attacks. Though his novel initially represents a desire to exist in a 'world where there aren't crazy people', therefore allowing him to assimilate into normative models of mental health by eliminating mental illnesses, it also represents a fictional space which permits the protagonist of 'The Last Kid on Earth' to orchestrate a new framework that destigmatises mental illness.⁴⁷⁷ King's text uses Daniel's novel to create an imagining of mental health in which Daniel and fellow Star Child Sara do not 'go back to normal' scripts of mental health and instead perform previously unanticipated models of identity in which they have the power to 'take on the monsters' because they are 'not alone'.⁴⁷⁸ Like *The Goldfish Boy*, *OCDaniel* distributes agency within sophisticated forms of expression of mental illness constructed by the young male protagonists to integrate the complexities of mental health within adolescent life.

⁴⁷³ Thompson, *The Goldfish Boy*, p. 125.

⁴⁷⁴ In *The Goldfish Boy*, Melody and Matthew's relationship exposes the complex intersection between sexuality and mental health. His relationship with Melody is instrumental in enabling him to use his symptoms of OCD constructively, causing him to reengage with the world outside his home. Though initially Melody investigates Teddy's disappearance 'at street level' (p. 143) while Matthew attempts to solve the mystery at home due to his fear of germs, her support and relationship with Matthew helps him leave the house to drive the novel to its conclusion and find the missing child. The novel assumes a cognitive difference led position which empowers Matthew by constructing his OCD symptoms as strengths which allows him to undertake the detective role and solve the mystery of Teddy's disappearance.

⁴⁷⁵ King, *OCDaniel*, p. 167.

⁴⁷⁶ King, *OCDaniel*, p. 177.

⁴⁷⁷ King, *OCDaniel*, p. 16.

⁴⁷⁸ King, *OCDaniel*, p. 282.

Both *OCDaniel* and *The Goldfish Boy* produce more thoughtful, sophisticated and fictive resolutions than the novels discussed earlier in this chapter. In their own sophistication, they match the sophistication of the mental health conditions that they discuss by providing polyphonic models of resolution we have not seen in the chapter so far. The protagonists in these novels do not necessarily achieve recovery from OCD but they resolve various challenging aspects of their condition, such as shame and the desire to assimilate to normative models of mental health, to accept their illnesses as innovative, complex and productive imaginings of cognitive difference. The novels' resolutions are not focused upon a return to culturally constructed normative realms of mental health. Rather the texts produce thoughtful and productive ways of imagining mental health beyond linear binaries of recovery and illness. Both novels highlight the cacophony of living with states of mental health that do not take singular forms. As we will now see, Wesley King's novel becomes more imaginative in its polyphonic models of mental health when it becomes non-realist.

As we have seen, the narrative frames Daniel and Sara as 'Star Children' who 'possess special, unusual, and sometimes supernatural traits or abilities' due to the unique characteristics associated with their mental illnesses.⁴⁷⁹ Although this Star Child status produces tensions and contradictions, the resolution of challenging aspects of Daniel's OCD, such as shame and the desire to achieve normative forms of mental health, and the text's imagining of OCD as productive, elevate Daniel to a privileged, and at times supernatural, position within the novel which enables him to help Sara solve the mystery of her father's disappearance. While assimilation and normalization are seen as aspirational goals for teenage characters in much young adult literature featuring mental illness, *OCDaniel* utilizes the Star Child construct to provide sophisticated, non-realist imaginings of OCD which overcome Daniel's desire to access normative modes of mental health. When Sara tells Daniel that they are both 'extraordinary' Star Children and can use their 'combined intellects to ask other questions that lead [them] to the truth', Daniel's response hints at his feelings of health-related shame, reflecting 'we weren't extraordinary. We were mad. All I ever thought about was being normal. I dreamed about it'.⁴⁸⁰ Whilst Daniel's shame associated with OCD initially manifests as a desire to assimilate into culturally constructed

⁴⁷⁹ King, *OCDaniel*, p. 26.

⁴⁸⁰ King, *OCDaniel*, p. 153.

models of mental health, the narrative moves beyond linear imaginings of mental illness and recovery to produce more polyphonic imaginings of mental health.

Though the shame generated by his OCD causes Daniel to attempt to become accepted within other friendship groups, Sara tells him his symptoms are caused by ‘a special strain of DNA passed down from ancient history’ which ‘results in a Star Child – a person of special intelligence and a pure heart’.⁴⁸¹ During the novel Sara tells Daniel some of his ‘DNA is alien’ he is therefore ‘not totally human’, constructing Daniel’s OCD symptoms and consequently his special intellect and empathy as not only genetic but superhuman, producing an imaginative and fictive resolution to problematic aspects of Daniel’s OCD.⁴⁸² This narrative mechanism serves to resolve Daniel’s shame and construct his OCD not as a deficiency he can control but a productive series of abilities, a process also manifested through the removal of self-stigmatising language: he ‘liked that thought’ (of being a Star Child) because it is ‘better than crazy’.⁴⁸³ The novel performs unanticipated scripts of mental health as Daniel decides not to hide his OCD or attempt to ‘be a regular kid again’ but rather be a Star Child.⁴⁸⁴ The most imaginative text discussed in this chapter, *OCDaniel* uses non-realist literary elements to destigmatize OCD by deconstructing ideas of assimilation into normative modes of mental health and resolving internally constructed health-related shame whilst elevating and empowering the protagonist into the hero role.

2.7 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have demonstrated how the changing social and cultural landscape of male gendered behaviour impacts on the intersection between masculinity and mental health. As the twenty-first century progresses, this fluctuating ideology surrounding masculinity produces historic shifts which are animated within the young adult genre in complex new ways. The second decade produced a demonstrable rising critical awareness of models of hegemonic masculinity which promote stoicism and individuality, and serve to disrupt, limit or inhibit the enactment of help-seeking behaviour for mental distress among young males. As we have seen, key behaviours which enable effective emotional literacy, such as vulnerability and sensitivity, are frequently constructed outside the realms of

⁴⁸¹ King, *OCDaniel*, p. 93.

⁴⁸² King, *OCDaniel*, p. 94.

⁴⁸³ King, *OCDaniel*, p. 116.

⁴⁸⁴ King, *OCDaniel*, p. 282.

hegemonic masculinity. As the century moves on, young adult literature animates this changing gendered landscape by producing a continuum of increasingly complex performances of masculinity which frequently incorporates forms of vulnerability and sensitivity that involve an awareness and discussion of mental distress and recovery. As I have demonstrated, these portrayals of masculinity create their own critical questions and tensions surrounding the forms of recovery trajectories accessible to characters who represent this increasingly broad spectrum of male gendered behaviour.

Earlier literature, such as *More Happy Than Not* and *Highly Illogical Behaviour*, has the potential to mark a change in the regressive gendered ideology identified in Chapter One as they seem to explore the possibility of narrative frameworks which empower gay protagonists with mental illness and hint at the construction of progressive, broad spectrums of masculinity. However, both novels ultimately continue to rely upon problematic power structures which assimilate homosexual characters into heteronormative scripts of happiness. Texts such as *More Happy Than Not* hint at the possibility of previously unanticipated recovery trajectories, such as homosexuality, becoming accessible to a wide range of models of masculinities. As we have seen, the protagonist's trajectory has the potential to move from locating their sexuality as a problem to recognizing the culturally constructed frameworks which situate homosexuality as existing outside normative realms of male sexuality. However, the narrative trajectory frequently produces regressive power structures which lead towards a resolution for gay characters that incorporates a model of heteronormative happiness rooted in hegemonic masculinity.

Within the later novels such as *The Goldfish Boy* and *OCDaniel*, literary mechanisms such as fantasy elements establish a relationship between cognitive difference and productivity which is endorsed by the underpinning frameworks of the novels themselves. These texts become less reliant upon hegemonic ideals of gender, regressive trajectories of recovery and power structures which locate autonomy over the teenage protagonists' illness within adult spheres in ways I have identified as problematic in Chapter One. As we have seen, the representation of male mental health becomes more progressive and imaginative as the century moves on. These later novels produce more sophisticated outcomes for male protagonists by engaging with unanticipated scripts of recovery which do not rely upon an alignment with constructed ideals of normative mental health or hegemonic performances of gender, enabling the narratives to frame symptoms of cognitive difference as extraordinary, superhuman and heroic.

Such notions of the superhuman protagonists with mental illnesses connect back to social and cultural attitudes as narrative and aesthetic markers of this attention to greater care. As this thesis moves into the next chapter, we continue to see this shift towards greater abstractions in terms of aesthetic markers and narrative styles. As with much of the literature discussed in this project so far, my readings within Chapter Three produce a range of tensions and ambiguities. However, despite the complex contradictions, the trajectory outlined here in Chapter Two extends, as we will now see, into Chapter Three in the form of a gradual shift towards non-realist modes of storytelling. The next chapter continues to track this upward trajectory away from naturalist narrative forms and towards more inventive aesthetic experimentation, in which a variety of abstract lexical devices productively represent the complex sophistications associated with the lived experience of mental illness.

Chapter 3: Portrayals of Adolescent Female Mental Illness and Recovery in Young Adult Fiction, 2015-2020

3.1 Moving Forward: Shifts in Agency

Much of this thesis attends to the complexities associated with the nuanced, ambiguous and at times contradictory attitudes towards adolescent mental health, and the distribution of agency over restitution in young adult novels across the first and second decades of the twenty-first century. The thesis establishes the two decades as opposing extremes, but each also produces fiction which generates its own anxieties and ambiguities. As we have seen so far, since 2000 the young adult genre has produced protagonists who demonstrate increasing agency over their mental illnesses, and my analysis of this trajectory continues in this chapter. The chapter moves discussion on to examine adolescent fiction's journey away from narrow forms of clinical restitution which locate agency within the realms of adults. Though the selected novels produced between 2015 and 2020 produce their own series of contradictions and ambiguities, I will discuss how the genre distributes increasing agency to teenage protagonists who experience mental illness. As we will see, the fiction in question evidences a movement from limiting binaries of health / illness towards more productive and progressive depictions of cognitive difference.

I will examine how this chapter's selected authors create storyworlds in which the lived experience of adolescent female mental illness is portrayed. To fully contextualize the selected fiction, Part One will open with a critical discussion of how themes such as the quest for normalcy, the normalization of heterosexual desire, binaries of mental health / illness, and the complex relationship between feminine gender roles, ableism and shame, are animated in new ways within writing for young people between 2015 and 2020. As we will see, such fiction often exemplifies a shift away from the kinds of problematic structures of clinical institutionalization and feminine bodily surveillance outlined previously, and sees female protagonists moving forward in innovative and positive new ways. Throughout this chapter, culturally constructed frameworks of normality emerge as a constant theme, and these are ideas that Part One will return to in its textual analysis.⁴⁸⁵ Part Two will further

⁴⁸⁵ In highlighting normalcy here, I am drawing on the work of Lennard Davis and Rosemarie Garland-Thompson. Lennard Davis' 1995 text *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* argues that the 'construction of the normal world is based on a radical repression of disability' (p. 22). Davis goes on to suggest that 'when we think of bodies, in a society where the concept of the norm is operative, then people with disabilities will be thought of as deviants' (p. 29). The argument centres around the way in which normalcy is constructed as a series of assumptions that prioritize the supposed universality of ablebodiedness. Similarly,

illustrate the fiction's shift from a desire to assimilate into existing realms of normative mental health, through methods such as normalizing heterosexual activity and adhering to patterns of feminine behaviour, to the creation of new identities and resolutions for female protagonists that do not rely on culturally constructed frameworks of normalcy. This chapter will ascertain how the selected novels' gradual transition away from realism and naturalism produces polymorphic narratives which increasingly allow young women to become agents. The texts discussed become progressively inventive in their production of sophisticated stories about how the characters see themselves. By imagining themselves in more complex modes and in increasingly positive positions, protagonists can identify and challenge the kinds of problematic gendered power structures outlined previously.

Part One will discuss Holly Bourne's novel *Am I Normal Yet?* (2015) and Kate Weston's text *Diary of a Confused Feminist* (2020). It will make visible the complex, polymorphic and often contradictory relationship between adolescent female heterosexuality and mental illness, outlining the ways in which heterosexual activity is frequently framed as an essential component of gaining a culturally constructed form of normalcy over mental illness. It will evaluate how the broad and varied use of diary-style techniques, including medication logs, recovery journals and questionnaires, determine the location of agency over the protagonists' mental illnesses and restitution trajectories. It will examine how Bourne and Weston's novels use pathological scripts to reinforce problematic social discourses surrounding mental health which flatten the nuances associated with OCD to reductive binaries of illness and recovery. However, the texts also possess the capacity to challenge sexist structures by creating performances of gender in which young female characters identify the structures and ideals of femininity which seek to limit their agency. Part One will also extend the discussion of gender roles, ableism and shame. It examines the ways in which Weston and Bourne depict the pathologization of adolescent females who challenge socially endorsed patterns of gendered behaviour which shame young women into accepting being sexually objectified by men. This section of the chapter will also ascertain how shame manifests in other ways in writing for young people about mental illness, such as how shame is projected onto young menstruating bodies in ways that cause

Rosemarie Garland-Thompson's 1997 text *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Disability in American Culture and Literature*, examines 'the social processes and discourses that constitute physical and cultural otherness' (p. 8). The author uses the term *normate* to describe 'the constructed identity of those who, by way of the bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them' (p. 8). Both Davis and Thompson's texts argue that culture calls toward ideas of normal, even though that normalcy exists as set of discourses and a series of presumptions more than an actuality.

mental distress for young women. Part One also discusses the cultural and sociological processes which depathologize OCD in harmful ways by promoting a problematic duality which both trivializes and restigmatizes OCD. It moves on to evaluate how the fiction animates ideas which both challenge and reinforce these assumptions.

This chapter will use Karen Fortunati's book *The Weight of Zero* (2016) to transition into Part Two. This transition section will move the discussion of the complexities associated with the stress of normalcy on to Part Two. Fortunati's novel employs a narrative form that is constructed independent of dominant clinical orthodoxies by depicting a recovery trajectory that does not culminate in an alignment with normative models of mental health. Though some traces of the desire to align with normative models of wellbeing still pervade the text, it appears stylistically different to *Am I Normal Yet?* and *Diary of a Confused Feminist*. *The Weight of Zero* depicts a performance of mental illness in which the protagonist's psychosis undertakes the role of a character and appears as a fragmented haunting throughout the text. The transition section moves on from Part One in its analysis of the performance of embodiment by adolescent girls with mental illness. My reading of *The Weight of Zero* will go on to examine the ways in which the protagonist's sense of embodiment is constructed outside of cultural constructions of feminine bodily ideals. Fortunati's book exemplifies a challenge to the realist modes utilized by the diary-style books and addresses the possibility of more progressive depictions of mental illness. Moving through the transition section, such possibilities will then be seen to be enacted within Alyssa Sheinmel's *A Danger to Herself and Others* (2019) and An Na's *The Place Between Breaths* (2018) in Part Two.

Part Two will begin with a critical discussion of the complexities associated with expressing the polymorphic lived experience of psychosis in written form. In order to fully contextualize recent young adult fiction about psychosis, it will open with a discussion of the concept of 'reality' in novels about psychosis, and examine a range of modes of representation used to depict such experiences. It will argue that Sheinmel and Na's novels move beyond interpretations of psychosis that presuppose simplistic binaries of reality / hallucinations to produce greater abstractions. Sheinmel and Na's novels demonstrate traces of the problematic frameworks embedded in the young adult diary fiction. However, Part Two will argue that they also use non-linear time structures, pronominal shifts, dream-like hallucinations, voice-hearing, characters which appear only to the narrator, and metaphorical, ambiguous language to create and occupy a new space between internal and external selfhood which best conveys the lived experience of psychosis. I will then go on to

argue that Na and Sheinmel depict cognitive difference in the *form* of the narratives themselves by producing collages of hallucinations, voice-hearing, thoughts and memories, which are drawn together and become enmeshed to represent the lived experience of mental illnesses characterized by psychosis. Part Two outlines recent critical scholarship which reconceptualizes various behaviours often linked to psychosis such as voice-hearing. It highlights the critical debates surrounding the range of origins and manifestations that such voices have the potential to assume. Part Two moves beyond simplistic internal / external binaries to discuss how the selected young adult fiction presents ambiguous and multifaceted experiences of voice-hearing which emanate from a range of sources.

Finally, Part Two will identify the genre's shift away from narrow binaries of reality / delusion and reliability / unreliability of narration. It will discuss how *The Place Between Breaths* and *A Danger to Herself and Others* use ambiguous, metaphorical and at times poetic language to transcend naturalistic modes of expression, creating a polymorphic depiction of mental health that matches the sophistications associated with the lived experience of psychosis. By challenging realist modes of storytelling, Sheinmel and Na create adolescent female schizophrenic identities in more abstract and liberated ways compared to the pathologized scripts identified in diary style fiction within Part One.

3.2 Part One: The Quest for Normalcy: Scripts, Templates and Diaries in Holly Bourne's *Am I Normal Yet?* (2015) and Kate Weston's *Diary of a Confused Feminist* (2020).

Although mental health narratives are frequently associated with fragmentation and a lack of linearity⁴⁸⁶, the young adult novels discussed within this chapter display a broad spectrum of stylistic features, ranging from realist diary entries, recovery journals, questionnaires, medication logs and flow charts to more abstract and sophisticated narrative structures. As Joy Llewellyn-Beardsley et al argue, mental health restitution stories are often 'diverse',

⁴⁸⁶ See, for example Jo Winning's chapter in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma*, in which she discusses how the trauma inured by pain and illness presents challenges in 'putting these intense physical and mental experiences into words and narrative form' (p. 267). She goes on to examine various characteristics associated with health and illness narratives, such as 'fractured language, non-linear narrative structures and multiple modes of representation' (p. 274). Similarly, critics such as Lasse R Gammelgaard investigate 'how authors try to give aesthetic, literary form to mad experiences' by employing 'formal experiments' in narrative style (*Madness and Literature: What Fiction can do for the Understanding of Mental Illness*, ed. by Lasse R Gammelgaard, 2022, p. 12).

‘multidimensional’ and ‘non-linear’.⁴⁸⁷ The authors go on to argue that modes of storytelling, tone and the ‘ways in which recovery narratives are positioned in relation to the dominant clinical narrative’ offer an ‘important understanding of recovery’.⁴⁸⁸ This chapter will discuss the novels’ use of structure, style and challenges to modes of realism to ascertain the degrees to which the texts’ engage with, to use Llewellyn-Beardsley et al’s term, ‘the dominant clinical narrative’: stories which locate agency within the realms of medical authorities and embed patterns of restitution which presume a clinical desire for patients to recover mental wellness.

As we will see, attempting to project coherence and linearity onto the multifaceted experiences depicted in fiction about mental health creates a range of challenges. In her 2019 article, Katrina Longhurst criticises the way orthodox mental health narratives can simplify ‘individual, nuanced accounts of illness to plot-based templates’ and produce a reductive version of a health narrative.⁴⁸⁹ Longhurst describes the categorisation of such stories as ‘frustrating’ due to its ‘disproportionate emphases on tracing templates, establishing categories, gaining insight and fostering empathy’ which ‘flattens the knotty work that narrative, and scholarship on it, can undertake’.⁴⁹⁰ As we will see in *Am I Normal Yet?* and *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, young female characters show an increasing awareness of certain clinical power structures which can limit their agency over their condition, but at the same time their narratives frequently assume the form of clinical templates which attempt to categorise complex thought processes prevalent in conditions such as OCD and depression.

Various novels written since 2015 about girls with mental illnesses employ a diary structure, a style frequently adopted by authors writing novels ‘for and about adolescent women’.⁴⁹¹ In her 2013 work on girls in young adult literature, Sara K. Day argues that girls’ adolescent diary novels construct a sense of ‘narrative intimacy’ which is created through ‘constructions of the narrator and reader that reflect and emphasize the creation of an emotional bond based on trust and disclosure’ and display the narrators’ ‘desire to share

⁴⁸⁷ Llewellyn-Beardsley et al, ‘Characteristics of Mental Health Recovery Narratives’, p. 3.

⁴⁸⁸ Llewellyn-Beardsley et al, ‘Characteristics of Mental Health Recovery Narratives’, p. 4.

⁴⁸⁹ Katrina Longhurst, ‘Counterdiagnosis and The Critical Medical Humanities: Reading Susanna Kaysen’s *Girl, Interrupted* and Lauren Slater’s *Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir*’, *Medical Humanities*, 0 (2019), 1-9 (p. 2).

⁴⁹⁰ Longhurst, ‘Counterdiagnosis and The Critical Medical Humanities’, p. 2.

⁴⁹¹ Sara K Day, *Reading Like a Girl: Narrative Intimacy in Contemporary American Young Adult Literature*, (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2013), p. 3.

personal, private feelings, questions, and struggles as well as a hesitation to share them with other characters within the fictional world of the novel'.⁴⁹² As we will see in novels such as *Am I Normal Yet?* and *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, protagonists often show both a desire and hesitancy to discuss their mental illness with their friends. However, the diary style serves an additional and distinctive function in these novels. Within the diaries, the adolescent female protagonists in both novels identify and discuss power structures which limit their agency over their restitution. However, the diary style also employs realist and naturalist modes which reproduce medicalized treatment templates. Such structural devices normalize mental ill health by reducing the cacophony associated with the lived experience of cognitive difference to linear binaries of illness and restitution.

The second decade of the twenty-first century brought about shifts in cultural understandings of mental illness which has led to some new critical work on the harmful depathologization of mental illnesses such as OCD. As we will now see, the harmful depathologization of OCD exists as a form of epistemic justice which depathologizes the mental illness, thereby reducing it to a series of personality traits, while simultaneously restigmatizing the condition. Culture's recent misappropriation of diagnostic terms such as OCD, particularly by individuals who have not been diagnosed or had lived experience of it, trivializes the debilitating nature of the illness and obscures its severity. In their article on cultural understandings of OCD, Lucienne Spencer and Havi Carel frame harmful depathologization of the illness as a form of epistemic injustice:

In the context of mental disorder, epistemic injustice occurs when ill persons are belittled, silenced, or have their testimonies ignored because of prejudices that depict them as irrational, unreliable, or epistemically defective.⁴⁹³

They argue that the wrongful depathologization of conditions such as OCD 'devalues the epistemic status of such people by reducing their symptoms to mere personality traits, thus denying them a fully recognized psychiatric identity'.⁴⁹⁴ As such, OCD has undergone a problematic depathologization within recent public discourse which has masked its psychological nature and reduced it to a group of personality traits.

It is important to note that not all processes of depathologization are harmful. As Kidd et al argue, homosexuality was previously regarded as pathological as therefore framed as

⁴⁹² Day, *Reading Like a Girl*, p. 4.

⁴⁹³ Lucienne Spencer and Havi Carel, "Isn't Everyone a Little OCD?" The Epistemic Harms of Wrongful Depathologization', *Philosophy of Medicine*, 2.1 (2021), 1-18 (p. 2).

⁴⁹⁴ Spencer and Carel, "Isn't Everyone a Little OCD?", p. 2

a *problem* to be reconciled by medical authorities until it was justly depathologized.⁴⁹⁵ However, recent sociological processes of depathologization relating to cultural understandings and depictions of OCD can occur in harmful and problematic ways. These harmful processes bring about a problematic duality in which a mental illness is both trivialized and restigmatized. Spencer and Carel situate recent cultural and social understandings of OCD within ‘a twilight zone of mental order’ in which the ill person is ‘deemed to both exaggerate their difficulties (trivialization) and to be epistemically suspect because of their psychiatric diagnosis (stigmatization)’.⁴⁹⁶ Depathologization can be a largely positive process, however within recent public discourse diagnostic labels such as OCD are losing their pathological status whilst continuing to be seen as a medical condition, causing the severity of the condition to be diminished whilst cultural stigma is maintained.

The practices which depathologize mental illness create further harm as these processes lead to misappropriation of diagnostic terms such as OCD. For instance, misappropriation of the term by individuals who have not been diagnosed or have any lived experience of OCD obscures the severity of the condition and relegates it from a multifaceted element of identity to a mere personality trait. Spencer and Carel suggest that in recent years various diagnostic terms such as OCD, bipolar disorder and depression have ‘saturate[d] public discourse’ and become ‘immediately vulnerable to misappropriation and easily subsumed by this broader parlance’.⁴⁹⁷ The severity of OCD becomes trivialized when the term is used extensively in public discourse, particularly by individuals without a diagnosis or any lived experience of the condition to create a new, colloquial meaning. Spencer and Carel go on to argue that the term ‘OCD’ in current cultural discourse rarely refers to the mental disorder but, rather, has become a shorthand description of someone who dislikes mess. A multifaceted mental disorder has been reduced to a personality trait’.⁴⁹⁸ The authors argue that recent portrayals of OCD in the media in which the condition is reduced to a series of positive acts of behaviour, asserting that ‘by reinforcing this false positive stereotype, the debilitating nature of OCD becomes invisible’.⁴⁹⁹ Using these terms in a loose sense reduces society’s understanding of the condition as a severe and

⁴⁹⁵ Ian James Kidd, Lucienne Spencer and Havi Carel, ‘Epistemic Injustice in Psychiatric Research Practice’, *Philosophical Psychology*, (2023), 1-29 (p. 10).

⁴⁹⁶ Spencer and Carel, “‘Isn’t Everyone a Little OCD?’”, p. 2

⁴⁹⁷ Spencer and Carel, “‘Isn’t Everyone a Little OCD?’”, p. 12.

⁴⁹⁸ Spencer and Carel, “‘Isn’t Everyone a Little OCD?’”, p. 12.

⁴⁹⁹ Spencer and Carel, “‘Isn’t Everyone a Little OCD?’”, p. 9

distressing condition with specific characteristics and can often reduce depictions of OCD to a set of positive personal characteristics.

As we will soon see, traces of these problematic notions emerge within the young adult literature genre in complex manifestations. Within *Am I Normal Yet?*, the model of mental illness draws attention to the harmful depathologization of OCD whilst simultaneously endorsing a character who trivializes a range of other severe psychological conditions. When the protagonist displays symptoms of OCD, a boy in her class regards her as eccentric and adorable. To the rest of her class, Evie's fear of obscure cognitive states and conditions becomes the source of a long-running joke. Within *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, Kat has internalized some of these cultural attitudes which problematically depathologize OCD. As we will soon see, she expresses frequent surprise that her parents do not reduce her symptoms to typical behavioural characteristics, and arrange for her to see a doctor.

3.2.1 'A normal having-sex type person': Normalizing Heterosexual Desire

Normalcy and female adolescent heterosexuality, discussed as a theme in the fiction analysed in Chapter One, is re-animated in complex new ways within adolescent fiction between 2015 and 2020. In order to examine the complex correlation between normalcy and female heterosexuality, this section will now set parameters to define normalcy in terms of sexuality and able-bodiedness. In his text *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*, David Halperin builds on what Adrienne Rich terms 'compulsory heterosexuality', arguing that 'by constituting homosexuality as an object of knowledge, heterosexuality also constitutes itself as a privileged stance of subjectivity – as the very condition of knowing - and thereby avoids becoming an object of knowledge itself, the target of possible critique'.⁵⁰⁰ As such, heterosexuality is assumed to be invisible as it is framed by culture and society to be the universal order of sexuality. In the influential text *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*, Robert McRuer suggests that compulsory heterosexuality 'reinforces or naturalizes dominant ideologies of gender and race'.⁵⁰¹ McRuer uses the term to transition into notions of compulsory able-bodiedness. He goes on to identify 'the connection between heterosexuality and able-bodied identity, arguing that in a similar way

⁵⁰⁰ David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 47. Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', *Signs*, 5.4 (1980), 631-60.

⁵⁰¹ Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), p. 14.

to heterosexuality, able-bodiedness 'still largely masquerades as a nonidentity, as the natural order of things'.⁵⁰² McRuer identifies parallels between able-bodiedness and heterosexuality: both are assumed to be invisible as they are framed by society and culture as characteristics of normalcy.⁵⁰³ As we will see, both *Am I Normal Yet?* and *Diary of a Confused Feminist* engage with the ways in which society coerces individual identity into realms of heterosexuality and forms of normative mental health. The novels create models of female sexual activity which uphold both heterosexuality and assimilation within normative modes of mental health as supposed forms of normalcy.

As discussed previously, depictions of sex in young adult fiction have traditionally been associated with abstinence, resistance of sexual desires, and punishment for those who engage in casual sexual behaviour.⁵⁰⁴ Louisa-Jane Smith's 2019 article on teenage mothers in adolescent fiction argues that this conservatism is being 'redressed in some ways as contemporary authors tend to recognise that their female protagonists have sexual desires and have depicted them as unapologetically enjoying sex'.⁵⁰⁵ This trajectory of liberated female sexuality becomes increasingly complex within novels that deal with teenage girls and mental illness. In Bourne and Weston's novels, female heterosexual activity appears elusive and multifaceted in its correlation with models of normative mental health. In her 2017 work, 'Girls Online: Representations of Adolescent Female Sexuality in the Digital Age', Victoria Flanagan argues that 'teenage characters who choose to express [sexual] desire in YA fiction are frequently labelled 'deviant''.⁵⁰⁶ Protagonists in Bourne and Weston's novels show varying degrees of awareness of sexist structures which stigmatise

⁵⁰² McRuer, *Crip Theory*, p. 14.

⁵⁰³ McRuer builds on ideas regarding constructions of normalcy by Lennard Davis and Rosemarie Garland-Thompson. As we have seen, Davis and Garland-Thompson's work suggests that normalcy is framed as an ideal by society and culture but is invisible as it exists as a presumed natural order. They are authors of canonical texts within this scholarship, and McRuer's work extends the criticism on locating the theme of normalcy in relation to disability and able-bodiedness.

⁵⁰⁴ For instance, in her chapter 'Girls Online: Representations of Adolescent Female Sexuality in the Digital Age' (in *Gender(ed) Identities: Critical Rereadings of Gender in Children's and Young Adult Literature*), Victoria Flanagan draws on the 'Romantic construction of childhood as innocent' to argue that adolescent fiction exposes society's anxieties surrounding teenage characters 'behaving in an 'adult' fashion', arguing that such characters are punished for this culturally constructed sexual transgression.

⁵⁰⁵ Louisa-Jane Smith, "'No Strings Attached?'" Sex and the Teenage Mother in American Young Adult Novels", *Children's Literature in Education*, 50.4 (2019), 381-99 (p. 384).

⁵⁰⁶ Victoria Flanagan, 'Girls Online: Representations of Adolescent Female Sexuality in the Digital Age', in *Gender(ed) Identities: Critical Rereadings of Gender in Children's and Young Adult Literature*, ed. By Holly Hassel and Tricia Clasen (New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 28-41 (p. 30).

girls' sexual behaviours and view women as sexual objects, but the texts establish heterosexual behaviour not as 'deviant' but as a constructed element of frameworks of normalcy. It is in these performances of female heterosexuality that we see the greatest advocacy of normative mental wellbeing.

The female characters show desires to have sex in an attempt to align their identities within a socially constructed framework of normative mental health, but simultaneously identify the sexist social structures which place sexual value onto young women. As the novels become less concerned with realism and naturalism, this ambiguous and complex relationship between achieving normative realms of mental health and engaging in heterosexual activity becomes increasingly contradictory. I will develop this idea by demonstrating that whilst heterosexual sex is constructed as a framework of achieving normalcy over having bipolar disorder in Karen Fortunati's *The Weight of Zero*, the protagonist is simultaneously depicted as hypersexualized and desexualized due to her mental illness.

Bourne's and Weston's texts construct a complex, and increasingly contradictory, relationship between performances of adolescent female sexuality and models of mental illness. Protagonists in both *Am I Normal Yet?* and *Diary of a Confused Feminist* show an awareness of sexist power structures which stigmatise girls' sexual behaviours and view women as sexual objects, but in spite of this, the novels often construct heterosexuality as a thematic device which attempts to normalize mental ill health. Louisa-Jane Smith argues that young adult literature is 'didactic' in style as it is 'explicit in advising young readers of the pitfalls of being sexually active'.⁵⁰⁷ However, modes of sexuality function differently within writing for young people about mental illness, and so this chapter will now develop to discuss how Bourne and Weston's novels produce performances of sexuality which align adolescent female characters' identities within normative realms of mental health through heterosexual activity. Both of these novels work as examples of McRuer's models of sexuality, in which he identifies the perceived link between heterosexuality and able-bodied identity. As we will now see, McRuer's discussion of how able-bodiedness, like heterosexuality, is framed in society and culture to be a presumed normative state is helpful in illuminating new ways of thinking about models of normalcy and heterosexuality within novels about mental health.

⁵⁰⁷ Louisa-Jane Smith, "No Strings Attached?", p. 396.

In *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, Kat becomes a feminist activist as she calls for ‘an end to all the patriarchy bullshit’ by ‘protesting in solidarity with the #MeToo Times Up movement’.⁵⁰⁸ In spite of this, the text continues to frame heterosexual behaviour as a constructed element of frameworks of normative mental health. When the doctor asks her about her anxiety, she confesses in her diary that she would ‘rather have piles than this. Or some kind of STD. At least then it’d be easier to explain. And I’d be a normal having-sex type person’.⁵⁰⁹ As such, the novel constructs a model of behaviour in which sexually transmitted diseases exist within realms of normalcy, whereas ways of being that include anxiety and symptoms of OCD incur shame. Similarly, the protagonist in *Am I Normal Yet?* discusses the paradoxical feminine ideals found in restrictive models of femininity such as the ‘Madonna-Whore Complex’ and ‘Manic Pixie Dream Girl’ but constructs heterosexual activity as a framework for normative models of mental health.⁵¹⁰ Evie identifies masculine sexist attitudes towards young female sexuality in contemporary society which expect women to have sex with men ‘but not expect anything in return’.⁵¹¹ Despite this, she engages in a relationship with Guy, who treats Evie as a sexual object, in order to ‘mark the end of All That and the start of Normal’, and this in itself is an example of McRuer’s examination of how heterosexuality is framed as a presumed characteristic of normalcy.⁵¹² As Sathiyalingam and Wilkinson imply, her ‘deep-set beliefs play a significant part in Evie’s decline throughout the book’ and ‘lead her to persist with an emotionally abusive relationship that only hastens her deterioration’.⁵¹³ These beliefs that sex with Guy could be a ‘miraculous cure’ for her OCD and a chance to ‘make [her]self normal’ so she can ‘be like everyone else, forever’ are problematic as the narrative works to reinforce the same sexist power structures it attempts to resist.⁵¹⁴ Despite her understanding of the sexism prevalent in culturally constructed feminine ideals such as the Madonna-Whore Complex, Evie still aligns mental wellbeing with heterosexual relationships.

⁵⁰⁸ Kate Weston, *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, p. 3.

⁵⁰⁹ Kate Weston, *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, p.240.

⁵¹⁰ Holly Bourne, *Am I Normal Yet?*, p. 187.

⁵¹¹ Holly Bourne, *Am I Normal Yet?*, p. 186.

⁵¹² Holly Bourne, *Am I Normal Yet?*, p. 186.

⁵¹³ Nigethan Sathiyalingam and Paul O. Wilkinson, ‘*Am I Normal Yet?: Insights into the Teenage Agenda*’, *Psychiatry in Literature*, 213.6 (2018), 722 (p. 722).

⁵¹⁴ Holly Bourne, *Am I Normal Yet?*, p. 375.

3.2.2 'Good thoughts' and 'bad thoughts': Binaries of Mental Health and Illness

Although *Am I Normal Yet?* and *Diary of a Confused Feminist* open a dialogue to highlight the need for more enlightened thinking about mental illnesses such as OCD, both texts employ structural and thematic modes which reduce the sophisticated complexities of mental health issues to reductive binaries of normality and illness. *Am I Normal Yet?* follows 16-year-old Evie's first term of college after struggling with OCD in secondary school. As Nigethan Sathiyalingam and Paul O. Wilkinson suggest in their review of the novel, 'Evie believes that to be happy, she needs to be 'normal', which requires keeping her illness secret, while engaging in everything that she believes normal 16-year-olds do' such as making friends, going to parties and engaging in romantic relationships.⁵¹⁵

The title of Evie's clinical 'Recovery Diary', which she is required to use to outline her medication, thoughts, feelings and her 'homework' from her doctor, has been crossed out and replaced with the phrase 'Normality Diary' and the text continues to employ such clinical language in its production of a dichotomized view of mental health.⁵¹⁶ For example, sections seek to split thought processes associated with OCD into reductive binaries, such as when Evie records her 'Good Thoughts' and 'Bad Thoughts' in a reductive flow chart.⁵¹⁷ The text often takes the form of a 'Worry Tree' Evie has been given by her doctor (see Appendix 3), one of many clinical template-style structures employed by the novel that flatten the complexities of mental illness. When Evie struggles with distressing thoughts associated with OCD, she is encouraged by the doctor to use the Worry Tree as a flow chart to ease her distress and classify her thought processes. The first question on the Worry Tree, 'Is there anything you can do about this worry right now?', produces only two options: yes or no.⁵¹⁸ While the novel frequently engages with more nuanced and enlightened thinking surrounding OCD, its reliance upon medicalized structures such as predetermined, closed questions to form a 'Worry Tree' creates a narrow and limiting binary. For example, despite Evie's criticism that the 'Worry Tree' does not ease her symptoms of OCD because 'you have to exert brain control in order to do it, and isn't a lack of control over your brain why you're in therapy in the first place?', the narrative often risks reproducing the same language

⁵¹⁵ Sathiyalingam and Wilkinson, 'Am I Normal Yet?: Insights into the Teenage Agenda', p. 722.

⁵¹⁶ Holly Bourne, *Am I Normal Yet?*, (London: Usbourne, 2015), p. 5.

⁵¹⁷ Holly Bourne, *Am I Normal Yet?*, pp. 42-3.

⁵¹⁸ Holly Bourne, *Am I Normal Yet?*, p. 138.

and structures that health systems use to limit the girls' agency over their mental illness.⁵¹⁹ The novel often reinforces the same clinical and repressive power structures that in other ways it attempts to resist. It opens a dialogue for more abstract and nuanced thinking about mental health, particularly when Evie and her friend Oli discuss issues surrounding 'how we decide what's mad and what isn't' when people with mental illnesses are not perhaps 'mad' but instead 'just reacting to the weirdness of the universe';⁵²⁰ however, it simultaneously replicates these same repressive structures with the use of clinically enforced diary style templates such as Evie's 'special OCD diary'.⁵²¹

Kate Weston's novel *Diary of a Confused Feminist* animates ideas surrounding the complexities and nuances of mental health, which cannot be flattened by medicalized questionnaires and forms. Despite this, the diary style risks enforcing linearity and coherency on the narrative by positioning it in line with the overarching medical orthodoxies. The novel's protagonist, Kat, is entering her final year of secondary school and uses her diary to record her struggles with OCD and her desire to become 'a BETTER FEMINIST and a PATRIARCHY-SMASHING JOURNALIST'.⁵²² The text tracks the decline in Kat's mental health, her initial reluctance to seek clinical intervention and her many questions surrounding how to engage with feminist activism.

The novel's structure consists of a journal which outlines the date, times and locations of a linear sequence of narrative episodes. In a review, Sammie Boon suggests that Weston's 'tale of self-discovery' employs an 'engaging diary format' but, as we will soon see, such a model rather creates a series of ambiguities.⁵²³ The novel identifies power structures that seek to control women but employs a framework that replicates medicalized classifications in its attempts to categorise thoughts that represent an increasingly disordered sense of mental being. For instance, the diary entries categorise Kat's thoughts into the day's events followed by a list of 'unfeminist thoughts' she has recently experienced.⁵²⁴ When Kat learns about the 'I_weigh' social media movement, which aims to encourage women to focus less on their bodily weight and recognise their 'mental and emotional weight', such as 'survivor' and 'English degree', she decides to begin every entry with an @I_weigh statement to remind herself 'that we're all strong and it's not about how

⁵¹⁹ Holly Bourne, *Am I Normal Yet?*, p. 141.

⁵²⁰ Holly Bourne, *Am I Normal Yet?*, p. 120.

⁵²¹ Holly Bourne, *Am I Normal Yet?*, p. 62.

⁵²² Kate Weston, *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2020), p. 1.

⁵²³ Sammie Boon, 'Review of *Diary of a Confused Feminist*', *The SL*, 68.2 (2020), 124 (p. 124).

⁵²⁴ Kate Weston, *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, p. 27.

we look'.⁵²⁵ Kat uses the @!_weigh statement to focus on her 'mental weight' and to 'give up' on former love interest Josh after he treats her badly; however the format of the diary takes forms that continue to produce dominant clinical orthodoxies.⁵²⁶ For example, when Kat's doctor asks her to write a list of the negative thoughts she experiences during her anxiety attacks, Kat fills in a grid which reduces her condition to a list of phrases which she refers to as a 'thought bingo grid' (see Appendix 4). In her diary, Kat identifies the disparity between spending 'an hour in a little bubble, sharing your secrets with someone, looking at your thought bingo grid and thinking about things you don't want to think about' and 'the real world, waiting for you' outside, in which OCD is animated as multifaceted and complex.⁵²⁷ Although the text identifies power structures that limit the multidimensional nuances of OCD symptoms to a 'thought bingo grid', it simultaneously continues to employ structural devices which replicate ideas of a presumed clinical restitution.

As we will now see, traces of contemporary culture's harmful depathologization of OCD in ways that both trivialize and restigmatize the condition emerge in complex and contradictory manifestations within this selected fiction. Bourne's novel produces a model of mental health which emphasises the problematic nature of harmful depathologization whilst endorsing Ethan – at least initially in the novel – as a potential love interest who trivializes a range of severe psychological conditions. In the beginning of the novel, Evie attends her sociology class and meets Ethan. Evie confesses to fearing 'all the things that can go wrong in your brain' such as a range of psychological conditions.⁵²⁸ Despite her phobia, Ethan comes to class each week to tell Evie about a new, obscure cognitive state. He 'cockily' tells her about a condition called 'Alien hand syndrome', describing it as 'a new thing for [Evie] to be scared of' and later jokes about having the syndrome himself as an excuse to touch Evie's breasts.⁵²⁹ When Evie expresses a sense of 'inner doomness' caused by learning about these distressing cognitive states, Ethan laughs at her and says 'I like you, Evie, you're on the cute and kooky side of weird'.⁵³⁰ The novel highlights the problematic nature of depathologizing OCD, but simultaneously endorses a character as a possible love interest who projects a false positive stereotype onto Evie which renders the severe debilitating effects of her lived experience of OCD invisible. As such, these attitudes embodied by Ethan

⁵²⁵ Kate Weston, *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, p. 86.

⁵²⁶ Kate Weston, *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, p. 108.

⁵²⁷ Kate Weston, *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, p. 324.

⁵²⁸ Bourne, *Am I Normal Yet?*, p. 10.

⁵²⁹ Bourne, *Am I Normal Yet?*, p. 20.

⁵³⁰ Bourne, *Am I Normal Yet?*, p. 24.

undermine the psychiatric nature of OCD and reduce Evie's phobias of various illnesses and cognitive states to mere quirky and amusing eccentricities.

Later on in the novel, Evie expresses her anger at the way in which diagnostic terms relating to mental illness have been misappropriated within public discourse in problematic ways that make invisible the psychiatric nature of various cognitive states. In her diary, she reflects:

Now people use the phrase OCD to describe minor personality quirks.
"Oooh, I like my pens in a line, I'm so OCD."

NO YOU'RE FUCKING NOT.

"Oh my God, I was so nervous about that presentation. I literally had a panic attack."

NO YOU FUCKING DIDN'T.

"I'm so hormonal today. I just feel totally bipolar."

SHUT UP YOU IGNORANT BUMFACE.

Told you I got angry.

These words – words like OCD and bipolar – are not words to use lightly. And yet now they're everywhere. There are TV programmes that actually pun on them. People smile and use them, proud of themselves for learning them, like they should get a sticker or something. Not realizing that if those words are said to you by a medical health professional, as a diagnosis of something you'll probably have for ever, they're words you don't appreciate being misused every single day by someone who likes to keep their house quite clean.⁵³¹

Despite previously endorsing Ethan – who trivializes Evie's phobias and views OCD as an eccentric facet to her personality – the novel criticizes the problematic ways in which diagnostic terms pertaining to mental health are becoming increasingly integrated into everyday public discourse. Within this process diagnostic terms including OCD, which *can* be claimed as vital tools to convey part of an individual narrative or group identity, become vulnerable to misappropriation and trivialization.

This increased prevalence of mental health in popular discourse does not bring about more enlightened thinking on the topic. Despite the increased breadth of conversations surrounding mental ill health, it is nevertheless the case that processes of depathologization suppress the nuances associated with the lived experience of mental illness. Within the novel, Evie reflects: 'despite all this good work, some people. Still. Don't. Get. It. Mental illnesses grab you by the leg, screaming, and chow you down whole'.⁵³² She goes on to suggest that

⁵³¹ Bourne, *Am I Normal Yet?*, p. 91.

⁵³² Bourne, *Am I Normal Yet?*, p. 93.

'just because people know the right words now, doesn't mean that they're any better at putting up with the behaviour'.⁵³³ Ultimately, the ability to 'know the right words' is not sufficient to demonstrate nuanced understandings of the multifaceted nature of mental illness. Despite the novel's initial validation of a character who trivializes Evie's phobias, at this point in the novel the protagonist is situated within an empowered position in which she can criticize problematic power structures pertaining to cultural understandings of mental health and the misuse of diagnostic terms which accompany many such conversations.

Traces of the harmful depathologization of OCD in contemporary society are animated in similarly complex ways within *Diary of a Confused Feminist*. Weston's novel produces a knotty performance of mental illness which incorporates Kat's internalization of these wrongful processes of depathologization, and her father's contradictory attitudes towards trivialization of various states of mental health. Kat's dad takes her symptoms of OCD and anxiety seriously whilst simultaneously negating the individual characteristics of various forms which make up a wide spectrum of mental health and illness. Elements of the wrongful depathologization of OCD are animated within Weston's novel as Kat internalizes such attitudes which make her fear that her parents will not take her symptoms of OCD and anxiety seriously. When Kat experiences these symptoms, she writes in her diary 'I can't tell Dad this. He'll either laugh at me or think I've completely lost it'.⁵³⁴ When she finally tells her parents about her experiences, she is 'surprised that Dad seems so cool and calm about this and isn't laughing at [her]'.⁵³⁵ While her father acknowledges the debilitating nature of Kat's symptoms and takes her to see a doctor, it is nevertheless the case that his attitude negates the sophistications associated with the broad and varied range of complex cognitive states generally.

When Kat is in the doctor's waiting room she feels as though she is 'taking up space that someone with a proper illness could have', but her father reassures her that her illness is 'real' and that she 'deserves help'.⁵³⁶ However, when Kat reflects that anxiety and depression are 'inside us', her father suggests that all these different cognitive states are 'probably normal'.⁵³⁷ In her diary, Kat explains that 'normal isn't a thing, we're ALL different'.⁵³⁸ Her father's attempts at grouping a range of psychiatric conditions together as

⁵³³ Bourne, *Am I Normal Yet?*, p. 93.

⁵³⁴ Weston, *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, p. 228.

⁵³⁵ Weston, *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, p. 234.

⁵³⁶ Weston, *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, p. 239.

⁵³⁷ Weston, *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, p. 297.

⁵³⁸ Weston, *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, p. 297.

'normal' negates the distinctive experiences associated with each cognitive state and undermines the severity of various debilitating states of mental health. To refer to mental illnesses as 'normal' therefore groups together individuals with and without the lived experience of a psychiatric diagnosis, and renders invisible the distress such conditions can cause. While Kat's father acknowledges that her symptoms are psychiatric in nature, it is nevertheless the case that his attitude represents a trivialization of the broader range of mental illnesses as individual, nuanced and distinctive cognitive states.

3.2.3 Normalization of Gender Roles, Ableism and Shame

The novels produce performances of gender norms which interact with ableist stereotypes of mental illness in complex ways. In their 2018 work on feminist theory, Dean Spade and Craig Willse discuss how 'violating gender norms makes people vulnerable to being labeled mentally ill' and potentially experiencing a 'loss of bodily autonomy'.⁵³⁹ The authors go on to examine the pathologization of children 'whose gender identities or expressions deviate from the rigid norms of the binary gender system' and who are therefore frequently 'subject to surveillance for signs of variance and "treated" to correct as needed'.⁵⁴⁰ In her book *Contours of Ableism*, Fiona Kumari Campbell discusses the pathologization of the female body, suggesting that 'ableist norms produce a belief in femaleness as pathological. Women in this sense do not come up to scratch; 'we' actually fall short of the ableist ideal'.⁵⁴¹ In her chapter in the 2022 book *Madwomen in Social Justice Movements, Literatures and Art*, Maria Rovito engages with similar notions of the pathologization of the female body by examining sexism and sanism in twenty-first century young adult novels about female institutionalization. She argues that such fiction 'confronts the lived realities of living in a saneist society, particularly one that controls girls and young women in patriarchal, ableist, racist and heteronormative ways'.⁵⁴² Nicole Ann Rizzo makes similar links between the normalization of young women being used for sex by men and ableist slurs by identifying a relationship between 'madwomen and the internalization of sanism and ableism, which is

⁵³⁹ Dean Spade and Craig Willse, 'Norms and Normalization', in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, ed. By Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 551-71 (p. 555).

⁵⁴⁰ Dean Spade and Craig Willse, 'Norms and Normalization', p. 55.

⁵⁴¹ Fiona Kumari Campbell, *Contours of Ableism: The Production of Disability and Abledness* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 131.

⁵⁴² Maria Rovito, 'The Bleeding Edge: Cutting, Mad Girls, and the Asylum in Young Adult Literature', in *Madwomen in Social Justice Movements, Literatures and Art*, ed. By Jessica Lowell Mason and Nicole Crevar (Delaware: Vernon Press, 2022), 205-18 (p. 207).

also tied to rape culture / victim-blaming culture'.⁵⁴³ She goes on to ask 'How many times have women been called the ableist slur *crazy* for living with mental illness?'.⁵⁴⁴ As we will now see, when young women in adolescent fiction challenge culturally constructed gender roles which endorse being used by men for sex, they are pathologized and given ableist labels pertaining to mental illness. In Bourne and Weston's novels, the protagonists recognise and discuss the sexist and ableist discourse which casts shame onto young women who do not conform to patterns of gendered behaviour in culturally acceptable ways. As we have seen previously, shame, and its association with viewing mental illness as a personal inadequacy, features frequently in the investigation of restitution trajectories. The emotion often provokes further spirals of humiliation and fear of alienation and frequently displays a resistance to be identified by the patient. Shame also pervades these novels in its assumption of various forms: health-related shame incurred by experiencing OCD, and the stigma projected onto young girls who challenge models of gendered behaviour.

In a diary entry within *Am I Normal Yet?*, Evie asks 'were these my options? Easy lay or mental?' when Guy calls her 'psycho', 'crazy' and 'mental' because she will not engage in casual sex with him.⁵⁴⁵ She goes on to reflect:

He wasn't having a go at me for being mental because I have OCD. He called me mental because, again, I wasn't playing the part I was supposed to. Because...now...women are also 'mad' if we want boys to treat us properly and with respect. We're called 'high maintenance' or 'psycho exes'.⁵⁴⁶

This failure to align within culturally constructed performances of femininity, or 'playing the part' of a woman, by accepting being objectified and used for casual sexual relationships makes Evie vulnerable to pathologized, ableist labels of mental illness. Within *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, Kat is called a 'mad cow' by a former love interest not because of her OCD and anxiety but because she has 'enough self-respect to know that she can do a million times better' than begin a relationship with him.⁵⁴⁷ Like Evie, Kat is called mad not because of her mental illness but because she challenges dominant gendered orthodoxies that objectify and sexualise adolescent girls. Both protagonists identify the problematic

⁵⁴³ Nicole Ann Rizzo, 'Mad Time: On Temporality, Trauma, Hysterical Figures, and Liminal Shifters in Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse*', in *Madwomen in Social Justice Movements, Literatures and Art*, ed. By Jessica Lowell Mason and Nicole Crevar (Delaware: Vernon Press, 2022), 93-114 (p. 102).

⁵⁴⁴ Rizzo, 'Mad Time', p. 102.

⁵⁴⁵ Holly Bourne, *Am I Normal Yet?*, p. 393.

⁵⁴⁶ Holly Bourne, *Am I Normal Yet?*, p. 429.

⁵⁴⁷ Kate Weston, *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, p. 376.

structures which pathologize girls whose identities do not conform to rigid theories of gendered behaviour which encourage young women to accept being used for casual sex.

Weston's novel depicts a complex relationship between growing into a young adult – with the socialization into patterns of feminine behaviour that often accompanies this – and overcoming symptoms of mental illness. In her 2022 text *From Wallflowers to Bulletproof Families: The Power of Disability in Young Adult Narratives*, Abbye E. Meyers makes a simplistic parallel between the narration of adolescent growth and the lived experience of mental illness. The author argues that 'the most ubiquitous representation of disability in young adult literature is easy to miss; the immediately recognisable, "authentic" and "normal" voice of adolescence is also a voice of mental illness'.⁵⁴⁸ Drawing together ideas of disability and mental illness, she goes on to suggest that 'disability is not simply represented by literary adolescents; disability *is* adolescence, and adolescence disability'.⁵⁴⁹ By making this flawed, linear attempt to equate characteristics of adolescence and mental illness, Meyer risks problematically simplifying the complexities associated with the lived experience of those who experience cognitive difference. The author goes on to discuss the relationship between adolescent growth and overcoming symptoms of mental ill health by suggesting that both young adults and those who experience mental illness 'are expected, in Western cultures, to grow up, change, and cure their current conditions'.⁵⁵⁰ However, she examines three contemporary novels written for young people which 'reveal secrets for finding security, or "normalisation," without change and without "cures"'.⁵⁵¹ Meyer discusses how adolescent fiction engages with the notion that mental illness can, or should, be "cured", asserting that the 'narrators find solace when they accept themselves, *refusing* the notion that they must grow, change, or be treated'.⁵⁵² As we will now see, this relationship between growing into

⁵⁴⁸ Abbye E. Meyers, *From Wallflowers to Bulletproof Families: The Power of Disability in Young Adult Narratives* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2022), p. 16.

⁵⁴⁹ Meyers, *From Wallflowers to Bulletproof Families*, p. 36. Within the introduction to Meyer's text, she uses the term 'disability' to include the lived experience of mental illness. The author argues that 'invisible disabilities of chronic illnesses, mental illnesses, mental disorders, and intellectual disabilities are often the most difficult to identify as disabilities; they also appear quite ubiquitously in young adult narratives' (p. 8). Meyer goes on to suggest that 'a return to accepting bodily and biological basis of all disabilities and—especially those are invisible and associated with the mind—allows the disability community to accept its heterogeneous makeup' (p. 9). She uses the word 'disability' as 'an inclusive, umbrella term for varied identities, each different from the rest, but united together to demand basic rights and accommodations' (p. 9-10).

⁵⁵⁰ Meyers, *From Wallflowers to Bulletproof Families*, p. 17.

⁵⁵¹ Meyers, *From Wallflowers to Bulletproof Families*, p. 17-18.

⁵⁵² Meyers, *From Wallflowers to Bulletproof Families*, p. 18.

an adult, and potentially finding a “cure” for mental illness becomes more complex in Weston’s novel. At the beginning of *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, Kat equates growing up and aligning with culturally constructed gender roles – and assimilating into the problematic structures of femininity and bodily shame such patterns of female behaviour incur – with overcoming symptoms of OCD and anxiety. As the novel progresses, she moves to a more imaginative position in which she identifies certain structures, such as social media and toxic forms of masculinity, that project ideals of femininity onto adolescent female bodies. She gains some agency over her illness by gradually understanding that these problematic pressures may lead to her feelings of depression and anxiety.

Initially, Kat draws parallels between growing into an adult who aligns with culturally constructed deals of feminine behaviour, and her ability to gain control over her symptoms of OCD. In her diary, she reflects:

I don't feel very womanly. I don't feel like I'm feminine or attractive. I don't feel like the women on adverts with perfect nails, wearing pure white cotton floaty shirts, with their long thick hair and beautiful smiley teeth and skin. I don't feel like I can really be a proper woman, not the way I am.⁵⁵³

Kat considers how she feels she cannot conform to socially constructed gender roles – and therefore become a ‘proper woman’ – due to her symptoms of OCD and anxiety, and instead imagines herself as ‘a silly little girl playing at being an adult’.⁵⁵⁴ She also feels pressured to fit into culturally created models of femininity which cast shame onto pubescent female bodies, particularly those who menstruate. In her 2020 work on the stigmatization of menstruation, Jill M. Wood discusses the degree to which ‘society views women’s menstruation as taboo, shameful, disgusting, and consequently is shrouded in secrecy’.⁵⁵⁵ Wood adopts the term ‘the culture of concealment’ to examine ‘how menstrual taboos and stigma shape women’s experience of menstruation and manipulate women into menstrual shame and secrecy, often via menstrual hygiene products’.⁵⁵⁶ At the beginning of *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, Kat is socialized into a position of shame due to having her period. Though she is later able to identify the problematic stigmatization of menstruation, she initially logs ‘feeling ashamed of my menstrual cup’ as one of her ‘unfeminist thoughts’ in her

⁵⁵³ Weston, *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, p. 211.

⁵⁵⁴ Weston, *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, p. 211.

⁵⁵⁵ Jill M. Wood, ‘(In)Visible Bleeding: The Menstrual Concealment Imperative’, in *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies*, ed. By Chris Bobel, Inga T. Winkler, Breanne Fahs, Katie Ann Hasson, Elizabeth Arveda Kissling, Tomi-Ann Roberts (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 319-26 (p. 319).

⁵⁵⁶ Wood, ‘(In)Visible Bleeding’l, p. 319.

diary.⁵⁵⁷ When Kat falls over outside her school, her skirt lifts up, exposing her underwear, and her menstrual cup falls out of her bag in front of her classmates. The next morning, she experiences symptoms of anxiety and depression and ‘hid[es] behind a bush outside the school gates, waiting for the bell to ring’, avoiding her classmates due to the shame cast on to adolescent menstruating bodies.⁵⁵⁸

As the novel progresses, the protagonist moves from equating adhering to gendered models of behaviour with overcoming OCD, to identifying the structures that project feminine ideals onto young female bodies – such as social media and toxic forms of masculinity – as sources of her mental distress. Towards the end of the novel, Kat establishes social media as problematic in its portrayal of feminine ideals. In her diary, she reflects ‘at least three times a day I see something on social media about how to do feminism right, how to be a modern woman, how not to do this or that. And maybe that in itself is overwhelming?’.⁵⁵⁹ Kat discusses the pressures associated not only with undertaking the role of womanhood, but also with engaging with toxic forms of masculinity. Throughout the novel her classmate Tim makes sexualized comments towards her and though she initially remains silent, towards the end of the text Kat is able to understand that ‘this needs to stop’ as ‘it’s actually harassment now’.⁵⁶⁰ Kat moves away from interpreting assimilating into narrow gendered models of behaviour as a way of overcoming symptoms of anxiety, OCD and depression by recognizing and actively calling for an end to sexist structures that are sources of female adolescent anxiety and mental distress.

Towards the end of the novel, Kat begins a ‘Feminist Friday’ column in her school newspaper to address problematic sexist structures that create young girls’ mental distress. The first topic she covers is overcoming the culturally constructed shame cast onto menstruation and raising awareness about period poverty. In one of her final diary entries, Kat discusses her Feminist Friday column about women’s mental health:

It was scary but I wanted to open up the discussion. I can't be the only person in the school who struggles and I know how isolating and lonely it can feel, how your brain tricks you into thinking that you're weird and no one else would ever feel like that, it felt important to me to be honest.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁷ Weston, *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, p. 46.

⁵⁵⁸ Weston, *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, p. 49.

⁵⁵⁹ Weston, *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, p. 256-57.

⁵⁶⁰ Weston, *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, p. 304.

⁵⁶¹ Weston, *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, p. 371.

Kat 'opens up the discussion' of the sources of women's mental ill health, creating an 'important way of taking control' of her OCD and anxiety.⁵⁶² Her trajectory moves from interpreting growing up to conform to strict culturally constructed gender roles as a way to gain control over her OCD and anxiety, towards identifying external structures which cast narrow and problematic ideals of femininity onto young women as sources which exacerbate feelings of anxiety and mental distress. It is this movement which allows her to gain some agency over her mental illness.

3.2.4 'Immune to the meds that promise to fix me, to turn me into a normal girl again': Transitions and Contradictions in Karen Fortunati's *The Weight of Zero* (2016)

This chapter will now utilize *The Weight of Zero* as a transition text. The novel shows traces of frameworks and themes found in the diary style novels, such as the desire to assimilate into culturally constructed normative realms of mental health, and the framing of heterosexual activity as a route to achieve such assimilation; however, Fortunati's text is structurally different to the diary texts in its framing of mental illness as a character that pervades the protagonist's storyworld, and its construction of complex, contradictory and polymorphic structures of sex and sexuality. The divergence from realism and naturalism employed by Bourne and Weston alludes to the possibility of more enlightened depictions of mental illness, and these possibilities are later enacted in *The Place Between Breaths* and *A Danger to Herself and Others*. My reading of the final two books will demonstrate a further divergence from any requirement to conform to normative standards of mental health.

The Weight of Zero features 17-year-old Catherine, who is diagnosed with bipolar disorder and is haunted by Zero, a character only Catherine can see and hear who represents symptoms of depression associated with her mental illness. Throughout the novel, Catherine makes plans to end her life by suicide so she will escape the control Zero has over her and ensure she will 'never again have to deal with Zero's bottoming me out, flattening me into a numb hollow nothing'.⁵⁶³ Catherine briefly experiences a 'riptide of loss' when thinking about having sex with her boyfriend, Michael, as she considers 'what might have been with this boy' if she was 'normal'.⁵⁶⁴ Despite this, the novel continues to animate

⁵⁶² Weston, *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, p. 371.

⁵⁶³ Karen Fortunati, *The Weight of Zero*, (New York: Ember, 2016), p. 210.

⁵⁶⁴ Karen Fortunati, *The Weight of Zero*, p. 78.

structures of sexuality which assume a range of other forms that go beyond constructing heterosexual relationships as a framework of normalcy.

The Weight of Zero creates performances of sexuality that appear elusive and often contradictory: Catherine simultaneously experiences hypersexualisation and desexualisation through the male gaze due to her experience of bipolar disorder. For example, a boy in Catherine's class repeatedly tells her that 'crazies like you are complete freaks in the sack'.⁵⁶⁵ The novel critiques such sexist conventions that project sexuality onto adolescent girls' bodies but it also desexualizes Catherine when she attempts to have sex with Michael. Michael had a 'wealth of opportunities' but, according to Catherine, 'could not bear' to touch her or 'exploit the sick girl's mind and body' as having sex with her is 'just not the right thing to do' due to her illness.⁵⁶⁶ The novel produces a polymorphic model of sexuality which assumes contradictory forms. This model evidences a range of complexity beyond the limits of diary style fiction discussed earlier in the chapter which often constructs heterosexual activity solely as a framework of normative mental health.

The novel's movement away from the establishment of sexual relationships as an essential component of achieving normative realms of mental health coincides with the utilization of abstract structures to depict the polymorphic nature of living with bipolar disorder. Compared to the realist novels discussed earlier, *The Weight of Zero* is less reliant upon the dominant clinical forms - questionnaires, recovery diaries and other pathologized templates - which seek to achieve a culturally constructed form of normalcy. When attending an appointment with her doctor, Catherine reflects: 'I'm sick of spewing forth my every thought and emotion, my sleep and eating cycles and every other bodily function for someone's clinical examination and dissection. I'm tired of questionnaires and health form updates and drug histories'.⁵⁶⁷ Unlike protagonists in Bourne and Weston's novels, Catherine is aware that her illness 'will always be a part of [her]'⁵⁶⁸ and is 'immune to the meds that promise to fix [her]' and turn her into a 'normal girl again'.⁵⁶⁹ As in Weston and Bourne's texts, *The Weight of Zero* depicts discourses surrounding the normalization of mental ill health. However, unlike these novels, Catherine does not engage with forces that will 'fix' her, or align her within models of normative mental health. The novel utilizes a

⁵⁶⁵ Karen Fortunati, *The Weight of Zero*, p. 169.

⁵⁶⁶ Karen Fortunati, *The Weight of Zero*, p. 341.

⁵⁶⁷ Karen Fortunati, *The Weight of Zero*, p. 249.

⁵⁶⁸ Karen Fortunati, *The Weight of Zero*, p. 357.

⁵⁶⁹ Karen Fortunati, *The Weight of Zero*, p. 5.

narrative form that exists outside of dominant clinical orthodoxies: it constructs a recovery trajectory that does not rely upon assimilation into normative realms of mental health and employs a polymorphic narrative less substantiated in realism to deal with the sophistications of ways of being that include bipolar disorder. The text animates a model of mental illness in which Zero undertakes many forms and appears elusively to haunt Catherine: He often ‘circles’ her,⁵⁷⁰ ‘pants on [her] neck’,⁵⁷¹ ‘bore down’ and ‘sucked [her] dry’.⁵⁷² As her symptoms of bipolar disorder become more severe, Catherine sees Zero ‘waiting in the wings, biding his time for the inevitable cracks to appear. So he can seep back in and flood [her]’. Zero, as a manifestation of Catherine’s symptoms, appears polymorphous and pervades the novel by re-appearing fragmentedly to haunt Catherine. Fortunati’s use of sexual language to describe Zero further demonstrates this fragmental haunting through which he pervades the novel’s storyworld.

As I have discussed within the examination of *Am I Normal Yet?* and *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, the relationship between conforming to models of gendered behaviour, and the lived experience of adolescent mental illness is depicted in elusive and complex ways. This relationship is animated in new ways within *The Weight of Zero* due to the added complexities associated with culturally constructed ideals of adolescent female bodies, and the conformist patterns of feminine behaviour that such bodies assume. In Fortunati’s novel, Catherine’s sense of embodiment is framed in relation to socially constructed ideals of the female body, and her relationship between mental health and her body becomes most complex when she considers how her medication caused her to gain weight and give up ballet dancing. In her 2020 work ‘Sharpening the Pointe: The Intersectional Feminism of Contemporary Young Adult Ballet Novels’, Sarah E. Whitney argues that the genre is a space in which ‘only exceedingly slender bodies perform ballet’.⁵⁷³ They go on to suggest that adolescent novels about women frequently depict young dancers within the gendered roles of ‘sleeping beauties, sylphs, and princesses’.⁵⁷⁴ According to the author, young adult fiction has the power to depict dancer’s bodies in ways that ‘place agency into the hands of

⁵⁷⁰ Karen Fortunati, *The Weight of Zero*, p. 40.

⁵⁷¹ Karen Fortunati, *The Weight of Zero*, p. 19.

⁵⁷² Karen Fortunati, *The Weight of Zero*, p. 41.

⁵⁷³ Sarah E. Whitney, ‘Sharpening the Pointe: The Intersectional Feminism of Contemporary Young Adult Ballet Novels’, in *Beyond the Blockbusters: Themes and Trends in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction*, ed. by Rebekah Fitzsimmons and Casey Alane Wilson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2020), pp. 203-17 (p. 205).

⁵⁷⁴ Whitney, ‘Sharpening the Pointe’, p. 205.

the dancers' rather than within the realms of adults.⁵⁷⁵ However, such narratives also frequently reproduce 'institutionalized roadblocks' which limit the bodily autonomy of the protagonist.⁵⁷⁶ Whilst Whitney predominantly discusses 'institutionalized roadblocks' relating to weight, sexuality and race, there is scope to add the complexities of mental illness and wellbeing to this conclusion. In her 2014 article on constructions of girlhood within literature written for young people, Mariko Turk considers the role of the ballet dancer as a model of ideal feminine behaviour.⁵⁷⁷ Turk argues that many ballet narratives depict the protagonist as 'a conventional good girl', therefore reiterating 'ideological ties between girlhood and ballet'.⁵⁷⁸ She goes on to suggest that the genre often produces a performance of femininity 'which is molded into ideal forms through obedience to knowing elders. In this way, balletic progress mimics so many girls' narratives featuring the progression to proper feminine conduct'.⁵⁷⁹ Narratives about adolescent female dancers, therefore, frequently uphold dominant ideologies of femininity, such as beauty, grace, thinness, and obedience.

Within *The Weight of Zero*, Catherine's body, along with her lived experience of bipolar disorder, does not align with such patterns of feminine gendered behaviour. Catherine's dancing career 'came to an abrupt end' due to the weight gain and the death of her grandmother, the grief and trauma of which exacerbated her symptoms of bipolar disorder.⁵⁸⁰ Catherine reflects that her body is 'heavier now from my prescription buffet', and that 'while my brain has failed me, my body's been good. Too good to be tied to such a diseased mind. It's unfair, and I mourn the things this body won't do'.⁵⁸¹ When discussing her changing body, Catherine undergoes a sense of disembodiment: whilst her previously slender body is depicted in a way which reproduces conformist ideals of female embodiment in its ability to 'dance with strength and grace', Catherine classes her mind as 'diseased', and therefore existing outside of culturally constructed realms of femininity, due to her symptoms of bipolar disorder.⁵⁸² Later on in the novel the protagonist watches an old video of herself dancing, and undergoes a similar sense of disembodiment, reflecting:

I know this girl's story like I know Jane's. This skinny, dance-loving freshman

⁵⁷⁵ Whitney, 'Sharpening the Pointe', p. 212.

⁵⁷⁶ Whitney, 'Sharpening the Pointe', p. 208.

⁵⁷⁷ Mariko Turk, 'Girlhood, Ballet, and the Cult of the Tutu', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 39.4 (2014), 482-505 (p. 482).

⁵⁷⁸ Turk, 'Girlhood, Ballet, and the Cult of the Tutu', p. 490.

⁵⁷⁹ Turk, 'Girlhood, Ballet, and the Cult of the Tutu', p. 490.

⁵⁸⁰ Fortunati, *The Weight of Zero*, p. 7.

⁵⁸¹ Fortunati, *The Weight of Zero*, p. 7.

⁵⁸² Fortunati, *The Weight of Zero*, p. 7.

is less than a year away from her lithium and Prozac overdose. I want to cry for her. Because she looks okay right then and there. She's dancing, for Christ's sake. *I don't want her to die.*⁵⁸³

Catherine refers to the younger version of herself, before she is diagnosed with bipolar disorder, as 'this girl', who reproduces a performance of ideal femininity which prioritizes thinness, grace, and health. Her diagnosis, symptoms of psychosis and weight gain cause her to give up dancing as her body no longer aligns with such narrow models of femininity.

As this chapter has demonstrated, female protagonists assume contradictory spaces in novels about mental illness written between 2015 and 2020. Bourne and Weston's novels identify the sexist clinical frameworks that were outlined as problematic and repressive in Chapter One, but continue to engage with social discourses which attempt to locate adolescent girls' identities within normative realms of mental health. *The Weight of Zero* marks the beginning of a movement away from reductive binaries and linguistic scripts which enact dominant pathologized frameworks as it engages with fragmented, multifaceted and polymorphic structures to match the sophistication of individual nuanced experiences of mental illness. Fortunati's text shows some traces of desire to align with conformist patterns of feminine behaviour, particularly in relation to performances of female embodiment. However, it also signals a development towards abstract structural devices which, as we will now see, are more enlightened and increasingly capable of attending to the lack of linearity associated with mental health narratives compared to diary fiction discussed earlier in this chapter.

3.3 Part Two: Greater Abstractions: Psychosis, Hallucinations and Delusions

As I have previously demonstrated, mental ill health is an increasingly urgent social issue for young people and their families. Therefore, as Anastasia Wickham argues in her 2018 article on mental illness in young adult fiction, it is unsurprising that authors of the genre 'have begun to explore issues associated with mental illness, even severe ones like schizophrenia, to introduce these new perceptions'.⁵⁸⁴ These 'new perceptions' of mental illnesses such as schizophrenia create a set of critical questions regarding how authors of young adult fiction utilize forms that embody the schizophrenic identities of adolescent

⁵⁸³ Fortunati, *The Weight of Zero*, p. 295.

⁵⁸⁴ Anastasia Wickham, 'It is All in Your Head: Mental Illness in Young Adult Literature', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 51.1 (2018), 10-25 (p. 11).

characters. This chapter will now examine how An Na's *The Place Between Breaths* (2018) and Alyssa Sheinmel's *A Danger to Herself and Others* (2019) attend to the nuances of constructing a sense of schizophrenic identity. In his recent work on recovering a sense of self for people diagnosed with schizophrenia, Larry Davidson argues that symptoms such as hallucinations, delusions, and the attribution of 'one's own experiences, thoughts, and actions to others, real or imagined' can distort or erase a 'persons' basic sense of self as an originating subject of their own experiences'.⁵⁸⁵ As I will go on to demonstrate, this dichotomous notion of 'real or imagined' events is complicated within young adult literature however, as the concept of 'reality' becomes elusive and precarious in texts such as *A Danger to Herself and Others* and *The Place Between Breaths*. I will further develop this by exploring how these two novels employ stylistic structures that construct schizophrenic identities and enable young female narrators who experience psychosis to become agents of their own trajectories and actions.

Much current scholarship seeks to reconceptualize mental illnesses including psychosis, and transform public attitudes towards phenomenon such as voice-hearing.⁵⁸⁶ Recent critical work on voice-hearing discusses the locations from which these voices emanate, the manifestations they assume, and the extent to which they exist as indicators of mental illnesses. In his work on shifting conceptualizations of psychosis, Rory Neirin Higgs highlights the precarious, elusive and often blurred boundaries between voice-hearing and characteristics of mental illness. Higgs argues that although the 'diverse phenomena gathered under the diagnostic umbrella of "psychosis" are often perceived as uniquely biological', interpreting voice-hearing 'as part of a spectrum of human reactions to our environment remains a frontier within the mental health field'.⁵⁸⁷ Higgs builds on vital work achieved by the Hearing Voices Movement (HVM), a project which disrupts the assumption that experiences such as voice-hearing and hallucinations should be treated as a biomedical or psychiatric disease. He suggests that 'the present-day HVM remains explicitly concerned with the right of voice hearers to self-determination' and the 'recognition and integration of parts of self, in contrast to the denial that characterizes biomedical approaches'.⁵⁸⁸ Current iterations of the HVM embody 'an essentially pluralistic movement, stepping outside of the

⁵⁸⁵ Larry Davidson, 'Recovering a Sense of Self in Schizophrenia', *Journal of Personality*, 88.1 (2019), 122-32 (p. 122).

⁵⁸⁶ Rory Neirin Higgs, 'Reconceptualizing Psychosis: The Hearing Voices Movement and Social Approaches to Health', *Health and Human Rights Journal*, 22.1 (2020), 133-44 (p. 133).

⁵⁸⁷ Higgs, 'Reconceptualizing Psychosis', p. 134.

⁵⁸⁸ Higgs, 'Reconceptualizing Psychosis', p. 134.

bounds of pathology and meandering across disciplinary lines, exposing the entanglement and co-construction of social and biological realities in the process'.⁵⁸⁹ Whilst the HVM emphasises the cultural and personal importance of voice-hearing, it is nevertheless the case that many critics identify complex, knotty potential ties between voice-hearing and a diagnosis of mental illness.

As we will now see, recent scholarship on voice-hearing examines this precarious and elusive potential relationship between voice-hearing and the lived experience of mental illness in more detail. Discussing the possibility of voice-hearing and hallucinations as symptoms of mental illness, Christopher C.H. Cook asserts that:

Traditionally, psychiatry regarded schizophrenia and other diagnostic categories of psychosis as categorically and qualitatively different from normality. Increasingly, in recent years, this view has been questioned and there is now evidence to understand psychotic-like experiences observed in individuals in the general population as being on a quantitative continuum with those observed in mental illness.⁵⁹⁰

Voice-hearing can occur in individuals who have no diagnosis of a mental illness, and as such Cook's criticism raises questions surrounding the complex, blurry boundaries between the lived experience of voice-hearing and the lived experience of psychosis. Ultimately, the potential relationship between the two notions appears elusive, and reaching a consensus on this topic stands outside of the realms of this project. Whilst voice-hearing itself is not necessarily an indication of mental illness, and various forms of psychosis do not involve these experiences, it is nevertheless the case that voice-hearing is an integral part of the lived experience of psychosis within the genre, and therefore within the novels I have selected within this chapter.

As this chapter will now demonstrate, recent critical work on voice-hearing has highlighted the broad and diverse range of experiences associated with the phenomenon, particularly in relation to the locations from which these voices emanate and the varied manifestations they assume. In her work on voice-hearing, Angela Woods examines the multiple, and often conflicting, positions and perspectives such voices can undertake by asking '(how) are voices others?'.⁵⁹¹ Her work outlines a spectrum of voice manifestations, ranging from 'characterful' to 'nothing person-like about the experience', and as such voices

⁵⁸⁹ Higgs, 'Reconceptualizing Psychosis', p. 135.

⁵⁹⁰ Christopher C.H. Cook, *Hearing Voices, Demonic and Divine* (London: Routledge, 2018), p. 8.

⁵⁹¹ Angela Woods, 'On Shame and Voice-Hearing', *Medical Humanities*, 43.4 (2017), 251-56 (p. 254).

can take multiple positions between the oppositions highlighted in this spectrum.⁵⁹² She goes on to discuss the forms such voices assume, identifying a range of characteristics including:

amorphous entitativity (an undefined disembodied personality), to stereotypical person-like presentations (an angry man, an old woman), spiritual entities with anthropomorphic traits, specifically recognisable individuals, and voices that are subjectively experienced as representing all or part of the person's own self.⁵⁹³

Woods goes on to argue that most critical frameworks used to comprehend voice-hearing adopt one of two perspectives: that the voice exists independently of the person's sense of self (as 'a disruption in brain activity; the symptom of an underlying biomedical disease; a divine or other-worldly agency'), or that the voice is contained within the self (as a 'misrecognised, disowned or dissociated part').⁵⁹⁴ However, Woods builds on work by Dan Zahavi to disrupt this binary by suggesting that 'the voice might be *productive of the self*'.⁵⁹⁵ Woods and Zahavi therefore move away from this dichotomy which asserts that the voice can only exist inside or outside of the self to imply that the self is constructed in relation to this voice and is constituted by it.

Recent criticism reconceptualizes the lived experience of voice-hearing by moving further beyond dichotomies pertaining to internal / external constructions of such voices. In their article on how young people make sense of voice-hearing, Claire Mayer et al outline a 'mixed picture' of lived experience, with adolescents describing 'an experience of powerlessness', 'positive aspects of voices such as companionship and comfort', and a 'loss of control over their emotions and actions overall'.⁵⁹⁶ The authors go on to discuss how young people who experience voice-hearing understand the voices as simultaneously 'both part of them *and* an "other"' (emphasis added).⁵⁹⁷ These evolving ideas pertaining to the origins, location and construction of these voices are animated in increasingly complex ways as this chapter moves on. As we will soon see, portrayals of voice-hearing within *A Danger to Herself and Others* and *The Place Between Breaths* do not take the form of simplistic internal / external binaries. Within these novels, the experience of voice-hearing manifests

⁵⁹² Woods, 'On Shame and Voice-Hearing', p. 254.

⁵⁹³ Woods, 'On Shame and Voice-Hearing', p. 254.

⁵⁹⁴ Woods, 'On Shame and Voice-Hearing', p. 254.

⁵⁹⁵ Woods, 'On Shame and Voice-Hearing', p. 254.

⁵⁹⁶ Claire Mayer et al, "'Figuring Out How to be Normal": Exploring How Young People and Parents Make Sense of Voice-Hearing in the Family Context', *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Research and Practice*, 95 (2022) 600-14 (p. 601).

⁵⁹⁷ Mayer et al, "'Figuring Out How to be Normal"', p. 604.

in complex and multifaceted ways to create contradictory voices which emanate from a range of locations.

As I have suggested so far, expressing the multiple and broad range of experiences associated with illnesses such as schizophrenia in written form is frequently challenging. In her work on the language of mental illness in adolescent graphic novels, Sarah Thaller builds on Elyn Saks's memoir *The Center Cannot Hold: My Journey Through Madness* to examine the complexities which occur 'when reality and illusion are so tangled and blurred that it is difficult to distinguish, much less describe, the difference'.⁵⁹⁸ The author problematically suggests that the experience of living with schizophrenia in adolescence is 'indescribable'.⁵⁹⁹ Her criticism fails to recognize that the process of writing about psychosis may be provoking and challenging but, as we will see, can be achieved through a range of stylistic and literary devices. Thaller goes on to suggest that authors must 'find avenues to bridge [the] gap' between living with schizophrenia and "'normal" comprehension' as hallucinations frequently appear 'dreamlike, all-consuming, and a part of their physical reality'.⁶⁰⁰ Her argument becomes more precarious and contradictory when she suggests that the process of expressing the lived experiences associated with cognitive distortions produces a need for an alternative mode of expression that does not employ what she describes as 'normal written text'.⁶⁰¹ Despite initially implying that experiences associated with psychosis are 'indescribable', Thaller ultimately asserts that such symptoms *can* be described by utilizing an alternative mode of storytelling. As we will see, Sheinmel and Na describe the lived experiences of psychosis and the power it has on characters by eliminating what Thaller describes as the 'gap' between living with schizophrenia and "'normal comprehension'. I will now discuss young adult fiction's movement away from the medicalized templates that I have outlined as problematic earlier. Instead, Sheinmel and Na portray young female narrators with schizophrenia by using a range of stylistic devices such as non-linear time structures, pronominal shifts, dream-like hallucinations, voice-hearing, characters which appear only to the narrator, and metaphorical, ambiguous language.

⁵⁹⁸ Thaller, 'Comics, Adolescents, and the Language of Mental Illness', p. 45.

⁵⁹⁹ Sarah Thaller, 'Comics, Adolescents, and the Language of Mental Illness: David Heatley's "Overpeck" and Nate Powell's *Swallow Me Whole*', in *Graphic Novels for Children and Young Adults: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. By Michelle Ann Abate and Gwen Athene Tarbox (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2017), 45-58 (p. 45).

⁶⁰⁰ Thaller, 'Comics, Adolescents, and the Language of Mental Illness', p. 46.

⁶⁰¹ Thaller, 'Comics, Adolescents, and the Language of Mental Illness', p. 46.

3.3.1 Constructing Agentic Schizophrenic Identities

The challenges surrounding writing about the lived experiences of psychosis, hallucination and disordered thinking calls for a series of structures and devices which transcend the limits of standard prose. In her 2020 work on health and illness narratives, Jo Winning argues that although science and medicine are ‘tasked with a call to action in the face of pain and illness’, it is literary devices such as polymorphic storytelling, fractured narratives, and non-linear timeframes which ‘best convey the trauma of pain and illness’.⁶⁰² The author goes on to suggest that ‘scientized frameworks make it hard for medicine to hear (or speak)’ stories of health and illness.⁶⁰³ Therefore it is exactly the multiple and varied modes of representation discussed within this thesis that allow such storytelling. As we will soon see, novels such as *A Danger to Herself and Others* and *The Place Between Breaths* utilize non-linear timeframes: the narratives move constantly between present events, past experiences and hallucinations as structures of time become unstable. Both texts also employ other modes of representation such as voice-hearing and pronominal shifts to create collages of voices and images that represent the experiences associated with schizophrenia. Such stylistic features within the novels work to, to use Winning’s term, ‘best convey the trauma of pain and illness’ as they tell stories in more liberated and multidimensional ways compared to the pathologized scripts seen in diary style adolescent fiction.

As we will now see, writers of narratives about mental illness frequently use a range of complex metaphors to convey the lived experiences of psychosis. In her 2019 article on madness narratives, Renana Stanger Elran views metaphors as a way to ‘tell a subjective story about the collapse of subjectivity’.⁶⁰⁴ Elran suggests that ‘many writers of madness narratives use metaphors as a way to communicate to others what madness meant to them and how it felt like to be mad’.⁶⁰⁵ However, she classifies metaphors used in madness narratives according to a set of problematic categories, such as the notion that a mentally ill character is ‘outside of themselves’ and must ‘recover’ by ‘re-finding [their] lost rational mind’.⁶⁰⁶ Similarly, she suggests that ‘going mad meant becoming a nonhuman “Other”’, resulting in a ‘loss of contact with human reality’ and becoming a ‘stranger to one’s self and

⁶⁰² Jo Winning, ‘Trauma, Illness and Narrative in the Medical Humanities’, in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma*, ed. By Colin Davis and Hanna Meretoja (London: Routledge, 2020), 266-74 (p. 274).

⁶⁰³ Winning, ‘Trauma, Illness and Narrative’, p. 274.

⁶⁰⁴ Renana Stanger Elran, ‘A Mind Trying to Right / Write Itself: Metaphors in Madness Narratives’, *Humanities*, 8.2, (2019), 1-14 (p. 3).

⁶⁰⁵ Elran, ‘A Mind Trying to Right / Write Itself’, p. 3.

⁶⁰⁶ Elran, ‘A Mind Trying to Right / Write Itself’, p. 5.

world'.⁶⁰⁷ Elran's work on metaphors to depict the lived experience of mental illness is flawed in its limited, narrow understandings of schizophrenic identity. According to Elran, other classifications of metaphors within madness narratives include 'a set of spatial images describing schizophrenia as a foreign country, another world or a parallel reality'.⁶⁰⁸ The author's discussion of such metaphors problematically locates schizophrenic lived experience outside of the self. It portrays psychosis as a place or force discreet from the person with lived experience, and shows disregard for the complex nuances associated with the multidimensional nature of psychosis. However, Na's novel *The Place Between Breaths* uses metaphors to create and occupy a new place to imagine adolescent female schizophrenic identity. Her use of metaphors convey schizophrenia not as, as Elran problematically suggests, 'a foreign country', and not as an internal force: an entity neither within nor outside of the self. Instead, the adolescent female schizophrenic identity occupies a new space between internal and external selfhood.

The identities of characters with complex mental states can also be represented through shifts in narrative voice.⁶⁰⁹ As Alice Herve argues in her 2022 research on madness in literature, the pronominal shift – a 'substitution of one pronoun for another in a way that is inappropriate, or bizarre' – is a 'widespread and persistent device for articulating a sense of alienation' frequently associated with characteristics of psychosis.⁶¹⁰ The technique serves to express 'the confusion of self with not-self' and denotes how 'parts of the body, perceptions, actions, and attributes may be described as objectified, alien, or otherwise apart' from the narrator's self.⁶¹¹ In particular, shifting the pronouns from first person to second person 'plays with the multi-functionality of the second person pronoun': It articulates the narrator's fractured identity and 'reaches out to and encompasses the reader', inviting them inside the world of cognitive distortion.⁶¹² I will develop this by discussing the complex ways in which the pronominal shift is used in recent adolescent novels about girls who experience psychosis. *The Place Between Breaths* frequently shifts to second person pronouns when the protagonist enters a medical institution and experiences a lack of control over her mind and body. Though Herve mainly focuses on pronominal shifts relating to

⁶⁰⁷ Elran, 'A Mind Trying to Right / Write Itself', p. 6.

⁶⁰⁸ Elran, 'A Mind Trying to Right / Write Itself', p. 8.

⁶⁰⁹ Alice Herve, 'Pronominal Shifts and the Confusion of the Self with Not-self', in *Madness and Literature: What Fiction can do for the Understanding of Mental Illness*, ed. By Lasse R. Gammelgaard (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2022), 128-42 (p. 131).

⁶¹⁰ Herve, 'Pronominal Shifts', p. 128.

⁶¹¹ Herve, 'Pronominal Shifts', p. 129.

⁶¹² Herve, 'Pronominal Shifts', p. 139.

second person narration, I will examine how the novel also utilizes the shift to third person narrative voice, particularly when the narrator recalls her childhood.

I want now to develop these ideas and argue that such polymorphic narration frequently invites concerns regarding reliability of narrator. Herve suggests that ‘the authentic voice of the mad narrator is [...] unreliable’ as it ‘does not necessarily say what it means or mean what it says’.⁶¹³ However, when discussing the notion of unreliable narration, Wickham argues that ‘the very concept is slippery’.⁶¹⁴ Attempting to fit characters who experience psychosis into a schema for unreliable narrators is problematic as such characters articulate skewed versions of events of their experience in what Wickham describes as ‘a very truthful way’.⁶¹⁵ In his work on cognitive difference in contemporary literature, Marco Caraccliolo examines the role of the narrator with a mental illness, asking ‘what is the reality status of the story he tells?’.⁶¹⁶ However, attempts to ascertain the ‘reality status’ of a story featuring a narrator who experiences psychosis presupposes problematic binaries of reality / hallucinations and madness / sanity. In *A Danger to Herself and Others* and *The Place Between Breaths*, the narrators frequently reflect on the ambiguous nature of interpreting their constantly fluctuating worlds in ways that appear truthful. Sheinmel and Na’s novels move the construction of agentic psychotic identities on from *The Weight of Zero* in more imaginative ways. In comparison with Fortunati’s book, we see greater abstractions and more polymorphic depictions of the lived experiences of psychosis. Within *The Place Between Breaths*, we see how the characters move beyond dichotomous binaries of reality / hallucinations and occupy a new space for them to form objective articulations of an increasingly skewed storyworld.

The novels’ plots and lexical structures construct empowered schizophrenic identities which enable narrators to become agents of their own trajectories and actions. In her 2015 article ‘Troubled Teens and Monstrous Others: Problematic Depictions of Characters with Mental Illness in Young Adult Literature’, Thaller argues the genre frequently depicts schizophrenia as ‘over-exaggerated, unrealistic, and likened more to the wildness of animals

⁶¹³ Herve, ‘Pronominal Shifts’, p. 130.

⁶¹⁴ Wickham, ‘It is All in Your Head’, p. 17.

⁶¹⁵ Wickham, ‘It is All in Your Head’, p. 17.

⁶¹⁶ Marco Caraccliolo, *Strange Narrators in Contemporary Fiction: Explorations in Readers’ Engagements with Characters*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), p. 82.

than to a real human disease'.⁶¹⁷ She goes on to suggest that if the goal of adolescent fiction is to socialize its target readership, 'then a character who is incapable of conforming to "normal" or acceptable behaviors or conventions must be disposed of in order to reinforce fear of nonconformity'.⁶¹⁸ Despite Thaller's assertions, attaining a culturally constructed model of 'normalcy' is not an objective for narrators in *A Danger to Herself and Others* and *The Place Between Breaths*. Sheinmel's novel's use of fragmentation, non-linear time structures and voice-hearing constructs a new identity that does not require assimilation into normative realms of mental health. Similarly, in *The Place Between Breaths* the protagonist's cognitive differences – the way in which she interprets the world, and in particular how she views numbers and scientific data – is depicted as constructive within the novel. In her 2019 book on mental illness in adolescent fiction, Kia Jane Richmond suggests that within recent novels about schizophrenia, protagonists are 'depicted convincingly as typical teenagers, whose lives are complicated by their mental illnesses but who do not appear to be monsters-in-waiting'.⁶¹⁹ As Richmond suggests, the protagonist's life in *The Place Between Breaths* is 'complicated' by her psychosis, but the very difference her mental illness produces conveys strength and drives the plot towards its conclusion. As Winning argues, 'telling stories, of self-representation in written form, is the singular way to reconstruct identity and subjectivity'.⁶²⁰ Though Winning is mainly discussing memoir here, there is potential to extend the scope of this argument to include fiction. Within *The Place Between Breaths* and *A Danger to Herself and Others*, schizophrenic selfhood is constructed through stylistic choices such as non-linear structure, fragmented language, dream-like hallucinations, voice-hearing, ambiguous endings and characters who appear only to the narrator. These novels are, therefore, enlightened and effective examples of schizophrenic 'self-representation' as they 'tell stories' in more liberated, polymorphic ways compared to patterns seen earlier in this chapter.

⁶¹⁷ Sarah Thaller, 'Troubled Teens and Monstrous Others: Problematic Depictions of Characters with Mental Illness in Young Adult Literature', *Study and Scrutiny: Research of Young Adult Literature*, 1.1 (2015), 212-53 (p. 216).

⁶¹⁸ Thaller, 'Troubled Teens and Monstrous Others', p. 217.

⁶¹⁹ Kia Jane Richmond, *Mental Illness in Young Adult Literature: Exploring Real Struggles Through Fictional Characters* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2019), p. 42.

⁶²⁰ Winning, 'Trauma, Illness and Narrative in the Medical Humanities', p. 268.

3.3.2 'Is *normal* for me different than it is for other people?' Fragmentations and Shifting Realities in Alyssa Sheinmel's *A Danger to Herself and Others* (2019) and An Na's *The Place Between Breaths* (2018)

A Danger to Herself and Others features Hannah, a privileged seventeen-year-old living in New York. Following an incident in which a game of truth or dare goes horribly wrong and her college roommate Agnes is left comatose after falling from a building, Hannah enters a psychiatric hospital. Convinced that her institutionalization is a mistake, and desperate to demonstrate to the staff that she is not ill and would never harm Agnes, Hannah befriends her new roommate Lucy. In a review of the novel, Jaki Brien suggests that 'the revealing of Hannah's story and the unravelling of her life is handled with delicacy and great skill'.⁶²¹ Gradually, Hannah's mental state is 'unravelling' to reveal that her roommate Lucy and her love interest Jonah are both hallucinations and Hannah comes to terms with a life involving psychosis. The novel involves utilizing stylistic features that portray a schizophrenic identity and produce an insightful narrative about psychosis. During a night in the hospital, Hannah hears an old childhood chant in her mind: 'the words fill my head: *Light as a feather, stiff as a board. Light as a feather, stiff as a board.*'⁶²² The phrase repeats every few lines and is interspersed among worries about Agnes's health, Hannah's current experiences in the hospital, memories of her time before Agnes's fall, and hallucinations of her friend Lucy. Hannah's mental distortion is represented by the form of the narrative itself as it becomes a collage of hallucinations, voice-hearing, thoughts, and memories. Images from different locations and timeframes, some of which are hallucinatory, are punctuated by the voice-hearing.

In An Na's novel *The Place Between Breaths*, high school senior Grace lives with her father after her mother, who has schizophrenia, goes missing. When Grace begins working in a laboratory on a study that aims to find a cure for schizophrenia, she notices she is showing symptoms of psychosis. As the novel progresses, Grace's symptoms become more severe, and she loses track of her hallucinations and sense of time itself. A review of the novel argues that the novel is 'told obliquely, with frequent shifts in time marked by seasons in the chapter headers'.⁶²³ It begins, as the review suggests, by employing a non-linear shift between the seasons. However, as the text progresses and Grace's sense of time

⁶²¹ Jaki Brien, 'Book Review: *A Danger to Herself and Others*', *The School Library Journal*, 67.3 (2019), 187 (p. 187).

⁶²² Alyssa Sheinmel, *A Danger to Herself and Others*, (London: Atom, 2019), p. 77.

⁶²³ Kirkus Reviews, 'An Na: *The Place Between Breaths*', *Kirkus Reviews* < [THE PLACE BETWEEN BREATHS | Kirkus Reviews](#) > [accessed 23 November 2022].

deteriorates further, the narrative occupies spaces between seasons. After an episode in which Grace is haunted by the possibly hallucinatory sound of a train approaching, the narrative is split into four short, fragmented chapters, the titles of which appear in a poetic style towards the end of the text: 'Spring Slips into Summer. Summer smoulders down for autumn. Autumn kneels to winter. Winter yields. Spring'.⁶²⁴ Contrasting with the organised classification of dates and times found in novels discussed earlier, each season 'slips' and 'smoulders' into the next as Grace struggles to make sense of the passing of time in conventional terms.

This fragmented narrative is further exemplified by Na's use of pronominal shift, which is used to portray the confusion between the self and the not-self and Grace's sense of alienation from her own body when she enters the medical institution. A *Publisher's Weekly* review of the novel has argued that 'the disjointed structure of the novel--jumping from one reality to another, and moving among first-, second-, and third-person perspectives--effectively reflects the state of Grace's mind, in which time is not linear but rather an incomplete mosaic of events past, present, and imagined'.⁶²⁵ The review neglects to consider that the narrative, like Grace's lived experience of schizophrenia, does not distinguish between past, present and imaginings. However, Na's 'incomplete mosaic of events' is illustrated in part by the frequent shifting between perspectives. The text features several discrete episodes which are distinguished from the rest of the novel by the use of pronominal shifts, unnamed characters and shifting timeframes and locations. Early in the novel, the text shifts from first-person to second-person narrative voice, focusing on the perspective of an unnamed character. The character, designated only as 'you', is lost and approached by others on the street who appear threatening: 'They will find you. They will find the shell of you lying on the street. You will try to tell them you are just sleeping, but there will be no sound'.⁶²⁶ This episode takes place between Grace's experiences at school and work as the text moves between different constructs of reality and Grace struggles to interpret a world around her which appears increasingly unstable. Towards the end of the text, the book employs a second person narrative when it shifts to the summer after Grace spends time at a medical institution. The unnamed character is embracing a small child: 'Her life will press against your chest, into your heart, entwining your beats until they are one'.⁶²⁷

⁶²⁴ An Na, *The Place Between Breaths*, (New York: Atheneum, 2018), p. 170.

⁶²⁵ Publishers Weekly, 'Children's Starred Reviews 2018: *The Place Between Breaths*', *Publishers Weekly*, (2019), 71-72 (p. 72).

⁶²⁶ Na, *The Place Between Breaths*, p. 23-24.

⁶²⁷ Na, *The Place Between Breaths*, p. 174.

Na's novel presents ambiguities surrounding whether this character is Grace's mother, or Grace herself who is holding a baby towards the end of the text. These ambiguities associated with the shift in perspective convey Grace's lived experience of psychosis, particularly the enmeshment of conflicting memories, time frames and voices that her illness can incur.

Na also moves from first-person to second-person pronouns when Grace enters the medical institution, particularly when describing her body:

Stop breathing. Stop it. But your body will betray you. Your lungs will fill with air. Your heart will continue to beat. You will feel the blood moving inside you, living. Living a life that will not be yours. In a body you will not want. What other choice will you have after they assign you to a room?⁶²⁸

As we have seen, the shift to second-person narration often portrays the distortions associated with a fragmented mind. However, the second-person pronouns also represent Grace's alienation from her own body and the lack of control and choice she has over her body within the medical institution. As previously discussed, Herve's work on pronominal shifts focuses on movement from first-person to second-person perspective. However, Na's novel frequently employs third-person narrative voice within a collage of memories, hallucinations and present events to distance Grace from her childhood self. When the novel depicts Grace's childhood, it portrays a girl whose 'misaligned pigtails shook every time she bowed her head rhythmically to the silent counting in her head as she peeled each paper muffin liner away from the stack'.⁶²⁹ When the narrative moves to third-person, Grace is distanced from the images of herself as a child. This emotional disconnection represented by the shifting pronouns distinguishes between Grace as a child and Grace as a teenager with schizophrenia. She is no longer imagining herself as having the same identity as she did before her illness.

The issue of narrative perspectives, particularly notions of supposedly unreliable narrators, is an elusive concept in novels that deal with psychosis. A review of *A Danger to Herself and Others* argues that the text asks us to question 'exactly which parts of her story we can trust and which we can't'.⁶³⁰ However, the novels discussed here move beyond simplistic binaries of reliable and unreliable narration to produce what Krisa Hutley describes

⁶²⁸ Na, *The Place Between Breaths*, p. 85.

⁶²⁹ Na, *The Place Between Breaths*, p. 38.

⁶³⁰ Kirkus Reviews, 'Alyssa Sheinmel: *A Danger to Herself and Others*', *Kirkus Reviews*, <[A DANGER TO HERSELF AND OTHERS | Kirkus Reviews](#)> [accessed 23 November 2022].

as ‘a nuanced exploration of mental illness’.⁶³¹ These texts transcend binaries of what I have demonstrated is commonly referred to as ‘real’ and ‘not real’ to occupy a space in which a range of different versions of reality combine to create a collage of experiences associated with schizophrenia. In *A Danger to Herself and Others*, Hannah reflects on the ambiguous nature of reality when living with schizophrenia: ‘The things we don’t tell each other aren’t actually *secrets*; they’re simply pieces of information we happen to leave out. Like accidents’.⁶³² When Hannah is questioned by the police about what happened on the night Agnes fell from a two-storey building, her response is similarly equivocal as she reflects ‘I wasn’t lying. Really, I wasn’t. But I wasn’t telling the whole truth either. I didn’t *remember* the whole truth’.⁶³³ Her memories, skewed by her psychosis, are not truth or lies but her own interpretations of a world that appears increasingly unstable. Throughout *The Place Between Breaths*, Grace is haunted by auditory hallucinations of trains which frequently signal the beginning of a schizophrenic episode until her friend Will shows her an old freight train which travels near the laboratory she works at. When hearing the train, Grace reflects on how ‘the ghost of what I have been hearing and living within my mind is nothing like the reality of the strength that reverberates out from the passing cars’.⁶³⁴ She asks herself ‘all this time could I really have been hearing a real train when I thought I was imagining things? Can I rule this out as a possibility?’⁶³⁵ Both possibilities – the train being a ‘real train’ and Grace ‘imagining things’ – are simultaneous and intertwined versions of reality for the protagonist.

3.3.3 Moving Beyond Binaries

As this chapter has discussed, *A Danger to Herself and Others* and *The Place Between Breaths* construct a model of reality in which hallucinations, voice-hearing and memory become interwoven. The texts diverge from constructed binaries between reality and delusion, or reliability and unreliability, by portraying characters who appear only to the narrator. In Sheinmel’s novel, when Hannah realises she created Lucy and Jonah herself, her doctor tells her parents ‘Lucy was there [...] just not in a way that you and I can

⁶³¹ Krista Hutley, ‘Alyssa Sheinmel: *A Danger to Herself and Others* – Book Review’, *Booklist*, 1 (2018), 55 (p. 55).

⁶³² Sheinmel, *A Danger to Herself and Others*, p. 173.

⁶³³ Sheinmel, *A Danger to Herself and Others*, p. 204.

⁶³⁴ Na, *The Place Between Breaths*, p. 155-56.

⁶³⁵ Na, *The Place Between Breaths*, p. 157.

experience'.⁶³⁶ Lucy tells Hannah about a girl called Rhiannon that Lucy disliked and when Lucy replies, her voice and the protagonist's memories become entwined: "What happened?" I prompt. *I pushed her. Not a push, not really. A little tap. Just to see what would happen.* I sit up. Did Lucy say that? Those are *my* thoughts, *my* memories from the night Agnes fell'.⁶³⁷ The text creates a model of schizophrenia in which Lucy's voice permeates Hannah's recollections and the image of Lucy becomes seamlessly integrated within the protagonist's memories. As Hannah reflects, 'my hallucinations didn't entirely remove me from the real world. My hallucinations were subtle enough to allow me to continue functioning in the real world'.⁶³⁸

As we will now see, phenomena such as voice-hearing is incorporated into, and *productive of*, the protagonist's interpretation of the novel's storyworld in complex, multifaceted ways within both *A Danger to Herself and Others* and *The Place Between Breaths*. Sheinmel's novel produces a performance of voice-hearing which incorporates a range of strands of meaning, with all of these strands intertwining to create a representation of how Hannah sees the world around her. The voices themselves assume a range of forms and origins: Hannah's own internalized voice tells her to harm herself, Agnes's voice projects past memories onto current experiences within the storyworld, and an ambiguous perspective recreates fragmented memories of the night of Agnes's accident. When Hannah is told that people who experience psychosis are 'more likely to hurt themselves than others', she looks at the window of her room in the institution and hears a voice suggesting that she should harm herself by punching the glass. She reflects: 'Hurt themselves. Hurt yourself. I don't hear anyone's voice but my own'.⁶³⁹ Hannah's understanding of the storyworld is also interspersed with Agnes's voice. The protagonist hears her friend telling her she is 'too old for these games'.⁶⁴⁰ She hears the voice speaking 'over and over, like a song I can't get out of my head. It's Agnes's voice I hear, not my own. Like she's in the room with me. I can practically see her flipping her long blonde hair'.⁶⁴¹ The novel possesses a duality in which two timelines occur simultaneously and the voice-hearing episode projects the memory of Agnes onto Hannah's interpretation of the current events in the storyworld.

⁶³⁶ Sheinmel, *A Danger to Herself and Others*, p. 302.

⁶³⁷ Sheinmel, *A Danger to Herself and Others*, p. 203.

⁶³⁸ Sheinmel, *A Danger to Herself and Others*. p. 278.

⁶³⁹ Sheinmel, *A Danger to Herself and Others*, p. 280.

⁶⁴⁰ Sheinmel, *A Danger to Herself and Others*, p. 9.

⁶⁴¹ Sheinmel, *A Danger to Herself and Others*, p. 9.

At other times, the voice that Hannah hears emanates from a source without a recognizable identity, and emerges as a part of a memory from the night of Agnes's accident. Hannah remembers Agnes standing on the window ledge of a second storey building and recalls what she refers to as 'the voice' saying '*just a little tap*'.⁶⁴² In other instances, a similar ambiguous personality emerges simply as 'words' that 'fill [her] head'⁶⁴³ In these experiences of voice-hearing, the voices manifest themselves as nebulously undefined identities and exist as fragments of skewed and confused memories. All these voices – Hannah's voice suggesting she engages in acts of self-harm, Agnes's voice casting memories onto the current events of the storyworld, and the disembodied voices which recall unclear memories - contrast in terms of their origins and manifestations. Each performance of voice-hearing represents differing elements of a collage which both represents and produces Hannah's interpretation of the storyworld of the novel.

As I have demonstrated, all these conflicting voice-hearing experiences are vital to constructing Hannah's ability to make sense of the world around her. When discussing her voice-hearing experiences, Hannah reflects: 'It will take me some time to figure out the rules regarding what's real, what's imaginary, what's hallucinatory. If I ever figure them out at all'.⁶⁴⁴ Such potential 'rules' regarding what is 'real' and 'hallucinatory' within the novel, are vague and flexible, and possess blurry boundaries. All these contrasting voices combine to produce a sophisticated depiction of Hannah's lived experience of psychosis, and the voices characterize and construct Hannah's identity. As Hannah suggests towards the end of the novel: 'I was myself this summer: *Myself* when I hooked up with Jonah, *myself* when I befriended Agnes, *Myself* when I heard the voice telling me to give her a little tap'.⁶⁴⁵ As we have seen, the novel diverges away from limiting binaries of 'reality' / 'hallucination' to enmesh different origins and manifestations of voice-hearing which construct a collage that is productive of Hannah's identity and experience of psychosis.

The experience of voice-hearing features less within Na's protagonist's lived experience of mental illness compared to Sheinmel's novel. However, voice-hearing and the place from which such voices emanate become increasingly complex in this novel due to the shifting of perspectives and pronouns both within and between sections of the text. In the beginning of *The Place Between Breaths*, the voices emerge as disembodied,

⁶⁴² Sheinmel, *A Danger to Herself and Others*, p. 261.

⁶⁴³ Sheinmel, *A Danger to Herself and Others*, p. 77.

⁶⁴⁴ Sheinmel, *A Danger to Herself and Others*, p. 232.

⁶⁴⁵ Sheinmel, *A Danger to Herself and Others*, p. 263.

fragmented articulations which confuse the narrator. Later in the novel, voices take contradictory forms: they are portrayed as both familiarly intimate, but also violently invasive. Grace hears a voice which says '*Don't fall asleep. You'll burn*', but she cannot locate the origin of the voice.⁶⁴⁶ In this section of the text, these amorphous articulations are described only as 'the whispers' and 'the voices'.⁶⁴⁷ The voices display no human characteristics or identifiable origins, and are framed as disembodied fragments of speech which confuse Grace but do not harm her. Later in the novel, the voices assume more contradictory and characterful manifestations. The voices are portrayed in complex ways as both attentive family members and a violent, invasive force. Grace initially hears the 'light and sweet' voices associated with 'home' and 'family'.⁶⁴⁸ These intimate voices 'welcome' and 'join' her and are accompanied by 'familiar thrills' when Grace attempts to 'hold each of them' in her arms.⁶⁴⁹ However, they suddenly transform to sinister voices that 'cannot be ignored' which 'pester and torment' the protagonist, causing Grace to respond with acts of self-harm:

Words, simply words, you will say, but when the voices cannot be ignored, you will begin to sing. Softly to yourself at first. Then louder. Then screaming into the cave of your mind. Fighting and yelling at them to leave. You slam your head against the wall over and over again to fight against their voices invading like skittering insects crawling through your skull.⁶⁵⁰

At this point in the novel, the voices are portrayed as 'skittering insects': an infestation of invasive voices that violate her mind and disrupt her subjectivity. Na's novel produces a complex performance of voice-hearing which resists simple classification. These voices simultaneously embody both a simulacrum of an attentive family, and a swarm of insects that attack and occupy her skull.

Na's novel produces a performance of mental illness which enmeshes voice-hearing, hallucinations and memories, often incorporating the projection of one character over another. Towards the end of *The Place Between Breaths*, Hannah sees images of her parents, even though her mother is missing, and her father has died. Following her father's death, Grace experiences a severe psychotic episode in which she considers ending her life through suicide. When looking at her friend Hannah, Grace sees her mother: 'this face I know in my heart before I can remember her name', and also sees an image of her recently

⁶⁴⁶ Na, *The Place Between Breaths*, p. 23.

⁶⁴⁷ Na, *The Place Between Breaths*, p. 23-24.

⁶⁴⁸ Na, *The Place Between Breaths*, p. 101.

⁶⁴⁹ Na, *The Place Between Breaths*, p. 101-02.

⁶⁵⁰ Na, *The Place Between Breaths*, p. 102.

deceased father.⁶⁵¹ However, Grace does not ‘gaze up into the reflection of us in the window above the sink’ because she knows ‘from the outside what a stranger would see passing by this house alone in its field of forget-me-nots’.⁶⁵² In a review, Fredriksen suggests that ‘like the fog and confusion that accompany Grace’s episodes, nothing is cleanly delineated, and the reader is left wondering about Grace and seeking answers long after the story has ended’.⁶⁵³ The reader is forced to navigate, to use Fredriksen’s term ‘the fog and confusion’ as the text does not clearly distinguish between characters at the end of the text. Grace’s friend, mother and father are simultaneously absent and present within her interpretation of the storyworld. However, the novel clearly creates and occupies a new space to imagine new ways of being after a schizophrenia diagnosis. Grace describes her schizophrenic identity in abstract, poetic, and often metaphorical terms:

The middle place. Not death. Not life. A limbo state of existence filled with the hours of planning the wheels. Eating to not feel hungry. Sleeping to not feel tired. Waking to not feel asleep. The middle place exists between breaths, in that pause, that slight breathlessness before an exhale and an inhale. Between the crest and the valley. Where the path always meanders cliffside.⁶⁵⁴

Na’s novel moves away from the realism and naturalism found in *Am I Normal Yet?* and *Diary of a Confused Feminist* to depict a new, innovative space and enlightened ways of being for adolescent girls with schizophrenia. Its use of metaphorical, poetic language to portray the lived experience of psychosis further enacts possibilities to understand schizophrenia as multidimensional and polymorphic. As a review of the novel noted, the text is ‘steeped in lyricism and metaphor’ which enables it to ‘explore the workings of the human mind’.⁶⁵⁵ When Grace sees a figure on the street playing music from her phone, who she thinks is her mother, Na’s lyricism and metaphor represent further challenges to the naturalistic modes of expression discussed previously. Grace can ‘see the music like waves of heat floating above asphalt summer streets’ and this begins an episode of voice-hearing:

*Did you die last night only to be reborn with dawn’s light?
Into this skin you wear.
Eyes that can’t see. Ears that can’t hear. A mind
that holds no truth.
You died but forgot to leave.
The past crawls into the present, birthing the*

⁶⁵¹ Na, *The Place Between Breaths*, p. 165.

⁶⁵² Na, *The Place Between Breaths*, p. 165.

⁶⁵³ Jeanne Fredriksen, ‘Review of *The Place Between Breaths* by An Na’, *Booklist*, 1 (2018), 51 (p. 51).

⁶⁵⁴ Na, *The Place Between Breaths*, p. 45.

⁶⁵⁵ Luann Toth, ‘*The Place Between Breaths*: Book Review’, *Bookmarks*, 1.1, (2018), 50-51 (p. 51).

future.
 Shell-shocked. Shell locked. And all the
 answers.
 On the inside.
 Your mind mirrors.
 A kaleidoscope.
 You inside you inside you.⁶⁵⁶

This point in the novel diverges from conventional prose to portray experience of voice-hearing as melodic and poetical. Na's abstract language and experimental style moves beyond realism to match the sophistications and nuances associated with the lived experience of psychosis.

Both *The Place Between Breaths* and *A Danger to Herself and Others* construct new spaces and ways of being that, unlike Bourne and Weston's novels, do not rely on assimilating into culturally constructed realms of normative mental health, and situate schizophrenic girls within positions of agency. In her article on schizophrenic characters in young adult literature, Wickham argues that the genre portrays such characters as 'merely victims on the sidelines or heroes at the forefront'.⁶⁵⁷ Reducing characters who narrate the sophisticated collages of voice-hearing, fragmented narratives, non-linear time frames and delusions outlined in this chapter to 'victims' or 'heroes' creates a limiting binary. However, the texts frequently locate agency within the realms of the narrators when creating a new schizophrenic identity that does not portray accessing normative realms of mental health as the characters' main objectives. In Sheinmel's novel, Hannah's doctor refers to her mood 'normalizing' and Hannah asks herself 'What does *normalize* even mean? How can there be a *normal* when - left to its own devices - my brain invented people and furniture and scents and language? Is *normal* for me different than it is for other people?'.⁶⁵⁸ The text creates a model of mental illness which moves away from framing 'normal' mental health as an attainable ideal as Hannah confronts her illness and accepts her cognitive difference as a way of being. *The Place Between Breaths* constructs productive performances of schizophrenia which also empower the adolescent narrator. While Grace is working as an intern at the laboratory, she makes a breakthrough in isolating a gene to help find a cure for schizophrenia.⁶⁵⁹ She reflects how her cognitive differences allow her to see 'numbers

⁶⁵⁶ Na, *The Place Between Breaths*, p. 64.

⁶⁵⁷ Wickham, 'It is all in Your Head', p. 22.

⁶⁵⁸ Sheinmel, *A Danger to Herself and Others*, p. 226.

⁶⁵⁹ Within the novel, Grace works in a medical laboratory which is attempting to isolate a gene which may help find a cure for the condition, but this storyline is not developed, and the novel's discussion of a potential cure appears as an anomaly in the text. Cure narratives problematically attempt to normalize the ill or disabled body by depicting fictionalized medical

floating in space, arranging themselves in the air. Twisting and turning like leaves in the wind until they string together like Christmas tree lights'.⁶⁶⁰ The effects of schizophrenia are framed productively as they give her the abilities to identify patterns in experimental data that lead to making a discovery in the search for a cure to schizophrenia. In this sense, Grace is not weakened by the symptoms of her psychosis as the characteristics associated with her psychosis convey strength.

As I have discussed, Sheinmel and Na's novels animate new ways of being for adolescent girls with hallucinatory disorders and allow them to imagine themselves in complex positions of agency and selfhood. *The Place Between Breaths* and *A Danger to Herself and Others* demonstrate a movement away from realism and naturalism and exemplify a divergence from diary styles which reduce complex thought processes associated with cognitive difference to linear binaries of illness and restitution and seek to normalize mental ill health. Stylistic features such as non-linear time frames, voice-hearing, characters who appear only to the narrator, pronominal shifts and ambiguous, dreamlike interpretations of events in an unstable storyworld construct frameworks in which notions of reality become elusive and precarious. Such lexical devices attend to the complex nuances associated with the lived experiences of psychosis and create a new space which allows narrators to become agents of their own trajectories and actions.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined a trajectory in which adolescent female characters with mental illnesses gain increasing agency by gaining control over their symptoms and imagining themselves in more powerful positions compared to novels discussed in Chapter One. As the chapter moves on, the novels generate greater sophistication and become more adept at attending to the nuances associated with the lived experience of mental illness. However,

or scientific advancements that attempt to 'cure' a perceived weakness or inadequacy caused by the disability. As Kathryn Allan argues in her 2013 work *Disability in Science Fiction: Representations of Technology as Cure*, the cure narrative seeks to 'cure' or 'fix' 'the disabled body of its perceived lack of normality and health' (p. 9). This trope is based upon harmful and ableist social discourses which characterize the disabled body as requiring a cure to become normalized. The cure narrative is instrumental in problematically "'curing" or "fixing" the disabled body of its perceived lack of normality and health' within fiction (p. 9). However, Na's novel does not tend towards this assumption that the condition can be cured. My argument relates to the way *The Place Between Breaths* structures and portrays its discussion of schizophrenia as a state of mind, and the way in which it is framed as a productive force produces a sophisticated and progressive understanding of cognitive difference.

⁶⁶⁰ Na, *The Place Between Breaths*, p. 121.

each point on the chapter's trajectory produces its own series of contradictions and ambiguities as these new imaginative positions assumed by female characters produce their own set of critical questions. Normalcy developed as a central theme as the chapter outlines a movement from the desire to assimilate into normative realms of mental health towards the creation and occupation of new spaces and agentic schizophrenic identities which exist independent of normalcy.

Part One ascertained how Bourne and Weston's realist diary narratives create pathologized scripts such as flow charts, recovery diaries, questionnaires and medication logs which replicate notions of a presumed clinical restitution and often flatten the complex thought processes associated with mental illness to narrow binaries. It discussed how female heterosexual desire becomes normalized in *Am I Normal Yet?* and *Diary of a Confused Feminist*: these novels perform models of sexuality which frame heterosexual romance as a way of achieving a culturally constructed form of normalcy. Part One went on to discuss how Weston and Bourne's texts produce elusive performances of shame and stigma, identifying the ways in which shame is cast onto young women who experience mental illness and therefore do not align with culturally constructed models of feminine behaviour.

Fortunati's novel showed traces of structures specified in Part One, such as some engagement with the desire to assimilate into normative performances of mental health, but the text appears much more structurally complex than those discussed in Part One as it shows less reliance upon naturalistic modes of storytelling. *The Weight of Zero* serves as a transition text as it develops the discussion of depictions of psychosis from simplistic binaries of wellbeing / illness by opening the possibility of more imaginative polymorphic narratives. This possibility to portray agentic schizophrenic identities is then executed in Part Two.

The second series of texts discussed in this chapter occasionally evidences some traces of the frameworks and themes found within the diary narratives, such as a desire to assimilate into normative modes of mental health. However, Part Two marks the shift towards greater modes of abstraction which attend to the complex nuances of mental health in more imaginative ways than discussed in Part One. Na and Sheinmel employ techniques such as pronominal shifts, collages of hallucinations and memories, voice-hearing, the inclusion of characters who appear only to the narrator, and non-linear timelines to resist linear binaries of reality / hallucination. These polymorphic narratives diverge from the realist and naturalist modes of storytelling in their ability to create a multifaceted model of complex mental states that matches the sophistications of the characters' lived experiences of

psychosis. It is this deviation from realist modes of expression which enables Na and Sheinmel to open new spaces in which agentic schizophrenic identities can be productively and positively imagined.

As this chapter has shown, writing for young people which deals with the theme of complex mental and emotional states up to 2020 has produced a range of issues. For example, as the chapter moves on, the novels generate greater sophistication and become more adept at attending to the nuances associated with the lived experience of mental illness. However, each point on the chapter's trajectory produces its own series of contradictions and ambiguities as these new imaginative positions assumed by female characters produce their own set of critical questions. The novels discussed so far present a type of friction: they open the discussion surrounding possibilities for more enlightened and progressive thinking about adolescent female mental health whilst reinforcing structures which reduce complex mental states to simplistic binaries and encourage assimilation into existing realms of normative wellbeing. Even within the texts featured in Part Two of this chapter, ambiguities and contradictions still remain, yet they present some positive movement in terms of progressive attitudes towards mental illness due to wider social forces which are increasingly accepting and inclusive.

This chapter features the thesis' most recent texts which were produced at a time in which shifting social perceptions reflect a movement away from problematic ideas of institutionalization, and the increasing social discourse surrounding mental health demonstrates an awareness of various barriers to accessing care, such as shame. These more enlightened understandings of mental health discussed at the end of this chapter help us understand the wider movement across the twenty years of material I've investigated. This is now something I will discuss in more detail in the conclusion to the thesis as a whole.

Chapter 4: Conclusion: Sliding Scales and Critical Entanglements in Young Adult Literature about Mental Health

Even perhaps ten years ago, it would have been unusual for this thesis to exist because of its focus on adolescent mental wellbeing, a topic largely excluded from public discourse until it gradually gained social recognition in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The thesis could only have been written because of young adult literature's increasing focus upon teenage emotional wellbeing, and it is clear the texts themselves feature more depictions of mental illness than ever before. Representation of the lived experience of mental illness within young adult fiction has increased considerably both across the period the thesis covers and during the time I have been writing it. The cultural relevance of conversations pertaining to the young adult mental health crisis has grown and evolved over the course of my research project. The combination of this growth with the genre's response to broader social changes and market demands, such as increasing calls for a wider diversity of characters, was a key source of investigation for the analyses in this thesis. Throughout, I have traced the trends in recent adolescent novels which portray lived experiences of mental illness and linked them not only to the social and cultural backgrounds in which they were produced but also the fluctuating landscape of young adult literature publishing.

My project has examined how the genre has taken part in a wide cultural understanding of the young adult mental health crisis, and discussed the importance of representing such experiences in fiction. As such, I have constructed a complex trajectory across my work by evaluating how authors introduced themes of mental illness at the turn of the new millennium, and considered how these representations have evolved as the century moves on. While there is a broadening range of subject matter, it is nevertheless the case that such texts are full of contradictory ideologies, ambiguous motives, and critical entanglements. They simultaneously both reinscribe and attempt new inscriptions of performances of mental health and recovery. As such, young adult literature which features themes of mental health and illness has grown into a multiplicitous body of work which is continually in flux. Although there is a greater focus on adolescent wellbeing than ever before, twenty-first century society continues to make young people's mental health worse.⁶⁶¹ This thesis has discussed these interweaving notions within the elusive context

⁶⁶¹ According to UK charity The Children's Society, society is actively moving forward to 'reduce the stigma surrounding mental health' and making it a 'public issue'. Despite this, their 2022 Good Childhood Report finds that 1 in 6 children aged 5-16 are likely to have a mental health problem, and this figure has increased by 50% since 2019. By age 14, 50% of all mental

of adolescence – a concept which in itself is constantly establishing and re-establishing blurred boundaries between childhood and adulthood.

In this Conclusion, I want to map out developments in critical scholarship that focus on ideas of personal identity in the reception of young adult fiction by its audiences. I will discuss what I understand to be the strengths and weaknesses of certain critical frames commonly used to animate ways of thinking about the fiction. Finally, I will go on to outline my hopes for a future of young adult fiction, specifically in its engagements with new forms of digital media.

4.1 ‘Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors’: Problematic Analogies in Young Adult Literature Scholarship

While metaphors and analogies feature in young adult literature critical scholarship and enable certain ways of examining texts produced within the genre, it is nevertheless the case that such critical frames are not always helpful or productive in terms of thinking about recent novels which feature themes of mental health. As such, my readings of this fiction call for the removal or overhaul of such limiting explanatory modes. In Rudine Sims Bishop’s foundational 1990 article on racial representation in writing for young people, she argues that readers seek to find reflections of themselves in books and goes on to construct a simplistic analogy, suggesting that books solely take the form of windows, mirrors, or sliding glass doors.⁶⁶² Bishop’s analogy ‘has stood the test of time in its profound message which

health problems have already begun. (The Children’s Society, ‘Children’s Mental Health Statistics’, *The Children’s Society UK* <<https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/what-we-do/our-work/well-being/mental-health-statistics>> [accessed 19 October 2023]). Similarly, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Youth Risk Behaviour Surveillance System also reports that between 2010-2020, various symptoms of mental illness – including persistent sadness, hopelessness and suicidal thoughts and behaviours – increased around 40% among young people. (Zara Abrams, ‘Kids’ Mental Health is in Crisis. Here’s what Psychologists are doing to Help’, *American Psychological Association* <<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2023/01/trends-improving-youth-mental-health>> [accessed 19 October 2023]).

⁶⁶² Rudine Sims Bishop, ‘Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors’, *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*, 6.3 (1990), ix-xi (p. ix). Bishop’s work is part of a wider tradition of literary scholarship: it is influenced by theories of New Criticism, specifically M.H. Abrams’s text *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953). In this text, Abrams argues that literature assumes one of two discrete positions. First, it can take the form of a mirror which enables the reader to see reflections of contemporary society. Second, it can take the position of a lamp, illuminating certain identities or ideologies that have previously been neglected from the fiction. However, literature discussed in this thesis appears much more complex and contradictory than this analogy predicates. This metaphor allocates a great degree of power to the critic, who holds the proverbial ‘torch’. While the notion that

has impacted teachers, librarians, publishers, editors, and many others,⁶⁶³ and her critical work continues to be used by scholars and applied to contemporary young adult fiction. However, it is nevertheless the case that her critical use of metaphor is no longer helpful or adequate to produce new ways of thinking about recent iterations of the young adult fiction genre.

Bishop's scholarship mainly focuses upon the degree to which 'all the children from all the cultures that make up the salad bowl of American society' are represented within children's fiction, but there is scope to consider such ideas in relation to other forms of identity politics, including gender, social class, disability, sexuality, and mental health.⁶⁶⁴ Discussing the lasting legacy of Bishop's theory, Jonda C. McNair and Patricia A. Edwards argue that although Bishop 'used the analogy mainly in regard to race, it should be noted that the analogy can be thought about in ways that move beyond race'.⁶⁶⁵ They go on to suggest that:

African American children vary in regard to identity markers such as socioeconomic status, disability, sexuality, and so on. Like race, these identity markers should be reflected in the books that children read. All these various identity markers can and should be seen in mirrors.⁶⁶⁶

As I have demonstrated throughout this thesis, young adult literature about mental illness and recovery is more sophisticated and contradictory than this limited analogy permits. Such fiction does not fit neatly into one of Bishop's prescriptive categories, which only serve to

literature shines a light on a subject matter and allows us to see it differently, it is nevertheless the case that it situates the critic in a very privileged position as the only entity who can interpret the light and shadow.

In Sims Bishop's article, she argues that young adult texts can be windows which are capable of 'offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange' (p. ix). Alternatively, they can symbolize a mirror which 'transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience' (p. ix). Finally, texts for young people may represent sliding glass doors, which readers 'only have to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author'. Though Bishop's analogy is central to a body of writing which discusses the representation of a range of races within writing for young people, the metaphor itself is unhelpful and restrictive. Such analogies assume that literature has a degree of transparency which is not evident in the fiction discussed throughout this thesis. These metaphors also suppose that literature creates a simulacrum of the society in which it exists. The comparisons between novels and mirrors limit ways of thinking about young adult fiction as they limit the literature's position to a mere replication of contemporary society.

⁶⁶³ Jonda C. McNair and Patricia A. Edwards, 'The Lasting Legacy of Rudine Sims Bishop: Mirrors, Windows, Sliding Glass Doors, and More', *Literacy Research: Theory, Method, and Practice*, 70 (2021), 202-12 (p. 207).

⁶⁶⁴ Bishop, 'Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors', p. x.

⁶⁶⁵ McNair and Edwards, 'The Lasting Legacy of Rudine Sims Bishop', p. 207.

⁶⁶⁶ McNair and Edwards, 'The Lasting Legacy of Rudine Sims Bishop', p. 207.

determine which, to use McNair and Edward's term, 'identity markers' are neglected within the genre. When creating readings of adolescent fiction, I engage with critics who employ queer theory, and I use medical humanities scholarship regarding mental health which is an interdisciplinary and entangled area of academic criticism. Analogies pertaining to mirrors and windows limit how such interwoven ways of thinking can help understand how texts animate ideas surrounding mental health, as they focus solely on ideas of reflection and refraction in the representation of a range of identity positions.

Bishop's critical aesthetic article is foundational and has a long history, but more recent scholarship has illuminated more productive ways of thinking about young adult fiction that do not fall into simplistic binaries. Various critics have continued to use Bishop's critical framing, however increasingly they now do so in educational settings.⁶⁶⁷ One way that young adult literature scholars have tried to move away from Bishop's use of linear binaries is by valuing the texts in a classroom setting, in which another type of identity politics are in play. However, here too they presuppose a way of using the texts to enable students to see themselves, simplifying both constructions of young adult identity and how such constructions are produced within the fiction.

A key objective of this thesis was to determine what, and who, are excluded from these images of adolescent mental illness. Whilst other critics have attempted to employ similar approaches, their scholarship continues to reinscribe the same critical frameworks

⁶⁶⁷ Elements of Bishop's foundational article still pervade some young adult literature scholarship in the twenty-first century as certain critical material has continued to use this foundational idea. This in itself is a sign of a lack of critical sophistication in the subject area as such scholarship fundamentally presupposes a simplistic idea of reflection and refraction, which assumes the reader can visualize themselves in the narrative as they read it. As I have shown, the texts animate ideas about mental illness in much more contradictory ways than this limiting framework permits. In her article on hidden disabilities in adolescent fiction, Chelsea Herndon Warner suggests there is a need for 'quality young adult literature that authentically and respectfully represents characters with a hidden disability', which supposedly facilitates conversations amongst young adult readerships 'about what it means to see and experience the world in different ways'. By problematically attempting to identify 'authentically' produced portrayals of characters with mental illnesses, Warner proposes a limited and reductive binary between authenticity and inauthenticity and neglects to consider the range of sophistications that occur when creatively portraying the broad and varied range of lived experiences of mental illness. As this thesis has demonstrated, fiction which represents such illnesses resists simplistic dichotomies, and as such a movement away from linear binaries allows for more nuanced and abstract discussion of texts. By continuing to employ Bishop's critical framings, Warner limits the fiction's role to an assumed ability to produce – to use Warner's term – 'authentic' facsimiles of adolescent mental illness. These analogies are central to a body of writing about the way young adult fiction is discussed in the realms of literary scholarship, but the metaphor itself needs to dramatically change or be withdrawn from current young adult literature criticism as it does not capture the sophistication or complexity of the writing or indeed the relationship between the writing and the readers.

pertaining to mirrors and windows that I have previously outlined as problematic and restrictive. In *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Children's and Young Adult Literature*, Karen Coats asks 'what if we think more carefully about the *qualities* of the mirror itself, rather than what it reflects?' [emphasis added].⁶⁶⁸ She goes on to suggest that such fiction 'doesn't fully reflect or represent reality in a transparent and unproblematic way'; rather it 'selects particular moments, highlights them, and puts a frame around them', and as such certain important literary contexts become neglected.⁶⁶⁹ Coats argues that 'the author's perspective might act like a distorted mirror, exaggerating some aspects and giving others short shrift, idealizing or stereotyping characters or exposing their cracks and flaws'.⁶⁷⁰ In doing so, she constructs a contradictory and problematic argument: while acknowledging that fiction cannot exist as a representation of contemporary reality, Coats' criticism continues to employ the language and framework associated with the mirror metaphor. Her scholarship discusses how the fiction acts as a literary mirror to determine which facets of adolescent experience of mental illness are illuminated, which are cast into darkness, and which are excluded from the reflected image entirely, but such discussion is still embroiled within the logic of the analogy. By examining the characteristics of the literary mirrors, Coats' scholarship continues to employ the limited assumption that texts may only take one of a narrow range of predetermined forms and function in restricted ways. Throughout this thesis I have demonstrated that young adult fiction destroys such mirrors, and my work acknowledges the critical entanglements presented in such fiction. Removing these limiting critical frameworks involving metaphors and analogies allows us to animate new ways of thinking about young adult literature, and fully examine the texts' tensions and contradictions.

4.2 Young Adult Fiction and an Assumed Importance of Identity

Positions within the Classroom

Some recent scholarship on adolescent literature values the role of the text in its supposed ability to enable students in educational settings to see themselves reflected in the fiction. Limiting fiction's role to its potential in schools to allow adolescents to visualize themselves

⁶⁶⁸ Karen Coats, *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Children's and Young Adult Literature* (London: Bloomsbury 2018), p. 1.

⁶⁶⁹ Coats, *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Children's and Young Adult Literature*, p. 1.

⁶⁷⁰ Coats, *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Children's and Young Adult Literature*, p. 1.

in texts is a restrictive mode and oversimplistic way of imagining how texts work and how young adult readerships engage with them.

This critical approach of moving away from the fundamentally aesthetic concerns of mirrors and windows by stressing a location-based value of the role of the texts in classrooms highlights the increasing representation of characters with disabilities and mental illnesses. However, it also limits this discussion by problematically focusing simply on the existence of various identity positions within young adult fiction. In Jessica Gallo and Bailey Herrmann's article on using young adolescent literature within the classroom, the authors argue that progress being made 'with racial and gender representation hasn't always extended to books that represent adverse childhood experiences' such as drug use, emotional abuse, and mental illness.⁶⁷¹ They recommend that teachers must teach texts which 'reflect the lived experiences of our students, including difficult or challenging life experiences'. Similarly, Chelsea Herndon Warner's article discusses how to use adolescent fiction which features a character with an invisible disability – including mental illness – within the classroom. Warner argues that:

stories that depict the inclusion of characters with a hidden disability and validation of their experience through the social model of disability can be the catalyst to combat stigma and address what it means to be a "normal" human being.⁶⁷²

While Warner uses a critical disability studies lens to identify classroom texts in which readers with invisible disabilities can visualize themselves in fiction (itself a version of the mirrors, windows and doors analogy), her article neglects to consider the literary dimensions of such representations. Warner's research also disregards the texts' construction in relation to changing public discourse surrounding adolescent mental health by focusing on the assumption that young adult literature, used solely in educational settings, will enable its readership to empathize with a range of different identity positions.

Critical frameworks such as these, which limit the potential of young adult fiction within the classroom environment overstate the genre's role in representing a range of subjectivities, and produce restrictive frameworks pertaining to the capabilities of such fiction in an educational setting. In their work on portrayals of disability in writing for young people, R. Roshini and V. Rajasekaran equally misrepresent the potential purpose of the genre by suggesting that it possesses 'powerful tools it acquires in modelling attitudes and shaping

⁶⁷¹ Jessica Gallo and Bailey Herrmann, 'Shining Light in the Dark Corners: Choosing Heavy Books for the Classroom', *English Leadership Quarterly*, 42.4 (2020), 7-10 (p. 7).

⁶⁷² Gallo and Herrmann, 'Shining Light in the Dark Corners', p. 7.

children's minds'.⁶⁷³ Their article overemphasizes the literature's role in teaching its readership about diversity within contemporary society. By arguing that disability fiction 'introduces the world to young minds, and hence the impression it creates in children's minds would not easily be eliminated', their criticism reduces the fiction to a role of merely portraying a range of identity positions and static experiences.⁶⁷⁴ By framing young adult literature as solely educational in nature, their critical framework limits the wide-ranging possibilities of the genre.

Such critical movements are problematic because they invariably construct narrow and oversimplified dichotomies between what such scholarship deems to be the instructive and recreational purposes of the genre. In their article on marginalized characters and experiences in young adult novels, Emily Booth and Bhuva Narayan argue that 'young adult fiction has been recognized as a category of literature dedicated to serving the entertainment and informational needs of teenagers'.⁶⁷⁵ This article draws a sharp and reductive contrast between what they describe as the only two functions of adolescent literature: 'entertainment' and 'informational' purposes. But while the genre may at times be both entertaining and educational, it can also transcend these two functions to play a constantly evolving, complex role in youth culture. In an interview with Cynthia Alaniz and April Whatley Bedford, author Jason Reynolds reflects:

I've worked really hard to make books that are engaging and entertaining but also books that can be analyzed and dissected and [that are good for] close reading, and there's metaphor and symbolism and all the things that make for teaching literature.⁶⁷⁶

While Reynolds makes a valid suggestion that adolescent novels can have aspects which make them both engaging and suitable to be taught in a classroom, his approach continues to employ the language and logic of the restrictive education / entertainment dichotomy. This thesis has moved away from these two functions to consider adolescent fiction's role in helping young people to construct an identity and understand their position within

⁶⁷³ R. Roshini and V. Rajasekaran, 'More Than an Invalid: A Comparative Study Addressing Disability Portrayal in Children's Fiction', *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 12.3 (2022), 551-57 (p. 551).

⁶⁷⁴ Roshini and Rajasekaran, 'More Than an Invalid', p. 551.

⁶⁷⁵ Emily Booth and Narayan Bhuvu, "'The Expectations that we be Educators": The Views of Australian Authors of Young Adult Fiction on their OwnVoices Novels as Windows for Learning about Marginalized Experiences', *The Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults*, 11 (2020), 1-21 (p. 1).

⁶⁷⁶ Cynthia Alaniz and April Whatley Bedford, 'Celebrating and Inspiring Young Voices: A Chat with Jason Reynolds', *Journal of Children's Literature*, 46.2 (2020), 66-72 (p. 67).

contemporary society. As Antero Garcia argues in his article on science fiction and fantasy young adult novels, ‘youth culture and identity are constantly in flux [and] the language practices, cultural references, and modes of communication differ today from those of even a few years in our past’.⁶⁷⁷ Young adult fiction, much like its readership, transcends simplistic classifications to exist in a constant state of flux. It is continually forming and reforming its identity outside of educational realms and as such it is difficult to set any parameters. The genre is now moving beyond interpretations which view its function as merely educational or entertaining, and recent iterations of young adult literature are constantly evolving by establishing and re-establishing the genre’s complex positioning within contemporary youth culture.

4.3 New Possibilities: Moving Beyond Binaries

Although the fiction selected within this thesis resists simple classification, my readings have demonstrated a trajectory in which teenage protagonists with mental illnesses gradually gain increasing agency over their bodies, minds, and illnesses as the twenty-first century progresses. Across this thesis as a whole, I have identified a range of complex, and at times, contradictory developments in recent fictionalized portrayals of mental health and illness. My work has attended to the range of challenges associated with holding the first and second decade of the twenty-first century as positions on a broad spectrum, whilst demonstrating that the fiction published in each decade produces a range of sophistications. Despite the contradictions and ambiguities, I have identified a trajectory of desired inclusion in which the texts become less reliant upon naturalistic modes of expression as the decades move on, and this coincides with the construction of more nuanced, multifaceted and agentic performances of the lived experience of mental illness. The trajectory outlined in this thesis also coincides with a greater awareness and shifting social discourse surrounding adolescent mental health during the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Throughout, I have traced the trends pertaining to the constructions of empowered and agentic portrayals of adolescent mental illness whilst situating such readings within the context of increasingly broad and more inclusive recent public discussion of young people’s emotional well-being.

Chapter One discusses the range of contradictions presented within young adult novels about female eating disorders and self-harm practices published within the first

⁶⁷⁷ Antero Garcia, ‘Worlds of Inclusion: Challenging Reading, Writing, and Publishing Science Fiction and Fantasy-Based Young Adult Literature’, *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 61.2 (2017), 221-24 (p. 222).

decade of the twenty-first century. Though these novels demonstrate clear attempts to construct agentic female identities in their representation of girls who engage in these bodily practices, by doing so the fiction continually falls back on feminine submission to external conceptions of authority which gain control over young girls' bodies and recovery processes. The expansion of adolescent fiction about mental health to include the conception of models of young masculinity and sexuality is explored in Chapter Two.

Chapter Two spans the second decade of the twenty-first century and discusses portrayals of adolescent male mental health which are increasingly complex and fraught with tensions. Although the texts share some similar problematic power structures as those found in Chapter One, these become overlapped and intertwined with the introduction of more nuanced interpretations of adolescent mental health. As the chapter progresses, we see an inclusion of new aesthetic forms, and my readings of these novels demonstrate how such imaginative and creative texts often are ideally positioned to produce increasingly autonomous and polymorphic imaginings of adolescent mental illness. Whilst the novels discussed in Chapter Two do not necessarily mark a departure from the realist tradition, their creativities are integral to subjectivity and agency of male characters who experience mental illness.

Chapter Three continues this trajectory to consider how the publication of some of the most recent contributions to young adult literature expand the boundaries of the genre beyond the realist tradition identified in previous chapters. While Chapter Three highlights some traces of the same problematic power structures and attitudes found in the previous chapters, here emerging in complex new ways, it is nevertheless the case that these challenges to naturalistic modes of expression open new possibilities to construct worlds in which mental illness is imagined in nuanced formations. Novels discussed in the final section of Chapter Three assume a position on a trajectory which represents a greater degree of sophistication compared to literature discussed earlier in the thesis. Such polymorphic narratives challenge realist and naturalistic modes of expression and in doing so show an ability to create a multifaceted performance of cognitive difference.

This is a thesis which makes a claim for a greater consideration of the ways in which mental health is discussed in young adult literature. It is a call to produce a broader and more nuanced range of fictionalizations associated with the multiple lived experiences of adolescent mental illness, but any call to improve such concerns must acknowledge the complex tensions encountered upon the way. In her work on using a disability studies lens to examine young adult fiction, Diane Scrofano contends that 'the empowerment of young

adults with mental illness is and should be encouraged by recent YA novels of mental illness'.⁶⁷⁸ However, as I have demonstrated throughout this project, there is no assumed linear progression from regressive to empowered imaginings of mental health and illness within the selected literature. As my readings have shown, any patterns which emerge are more sophisticated than this simplistic assumption. The increased representation of characters with mental illness within the genre does not inevitably produce fictionalized models of mental health which grant agency to protagonists undergoing cognitive distress. However, as the twenty-first century moves on, young adult fiction which deals with themes of mental illness gradually diverges from naturalist narrative traditions and opens new possibilities to situate adolescent characters with mental illnesses in new agentic and imaginative spaces.

This thesis has demonstrated that the tensions and contradictions found in twenty-first century young adult novels about mental illness exemplify the varied sophistications found in such texts. Scrofano's work does not acknowledge the very nuanced nexus of the fiction, the expanding and evolving young adult readership, and the publishing industry. This thesis challenges Scrofano's simplified assumptions by arguing adolescent novels which feature the themes of mental health and illness have transcended such limiting binaries to grow into a diverse body of fiction with varied readerships, genres, forms, and ideologies. It is a newly formed body of work which resists reductive binaries by experimenting with a range of new aesthetics and forms, and negotiates a complex and constantly shifting role within youth culture.

As we have seen throughout this thesis, characters who display cognitive difference have been portrayed across a range of forms, and sometimes in ways that represent a divergence from traditional realist modes of storytelling. As I demonstrated in Chapter Three, texts that represent a disruption to realist modes of storytelling are often associated with a greater degree of nuance compared to the realist novels discussed earlier in the thesis. Whilst it demonstrates that even the texts which represent the greatest departure from realist forms of storytelling contain ambiguous ideologies surrounding the lived experience of mental illness, the thesis' trajectory of desired inclusion is most predominantly articulated within Chapter Three. Throughout, I have constructed a sliding spectrum spanning two decades: as the second decade of the twenty-first century progresses, the genre gradually adopts new aesthetic forms which are more capable of depicting the sophistications

⁶⁷⁸ Scrofano, 'Disability Narrative Theory and Young Adult Fiction of Mental Illness', p. 5.

associated with the portrayals of adolescent mental health compared to the more naturalist novels produced in the first decade.

4.4 New Opportunities Represented by Science Fiction and Digital Media

Current critical disability work on speculative and science fiction could provide a body of thinking that would help with the discussion of those young adult texts about mental health and illness which mark a departure from realist modes of storytelling. Science fiction and fantasy subgenres have the potential to create worlds which may transcend the anxieties and tensions found in the fiction I discuss across my work. Genres which mark a divergence from realist forms therefore possess the capability to incorporate altered bodies and altered cognitive states within innovative new worlds that accommodate a variety of forms of embodiment and mental states. In their article on the nexus between disability studies and science fiction, Kathryn Allan and Ria Cheyne argue that the genre is ‘a particularly potent site wherein models of disability are made evident. In fact, it is quite difficult to find a science fiction text that does not reflect or suggest some model of disability either explicitly or implicitly’.⁶⁷⁹ They go on to suggest that

while there are many narratives that reiterate the harmful and reductive elements of a medical model of disability—especially plots that revolve around the concept of cure or fetishization of prosthesis and other adaptive technologies—there are also many texts that explore alternative models, such as the social model of disability, or, at the very least, resist the ableist urge to reduce disability to deficit.⁶⁸⁰

While such fiction frequently resists simple classifications, it is nevertheless the case that science fiction and other genres which diverge from realism can create new worlds in which disability is accommodated for, rather than problematically ‘overcome’.

Though Allan and Cheyne’s article mainly focuses upon portrayals of disability, there is scope to apply similar notions into the realms of mental illness scholarship. Genres which exist outside the boundaries of realist narratives are capable of imagining places and times which integrate the lived experience of mental illness. The possibilities enacted within these genres can offer solutions to the marginalization of mental illness discussed elsewhere in

⁶⁷⁹ Kathryn Allan and Ria Cheyne, ‘Science Fiction, Disability, and Disability Studies: A Conversation’, *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*, 14.4 (2020), 387-401 (p. 390).

⁶⁸⁰ Allan and Cheyne, ‘Science Fiction, Disability, and Disability Studies’, p. 398.

this thesis, and open opportunities which embrace sophisticated and emerging subjectivities such as adolescents experiencing mental distress. Such literary genres possess the capabilities not only to articulate the anxieties and tensions surrounding the young adult mental health crisis but also to re-imagine how we approach conceiving lived experiences of mental illness, both now and in the future. As we have seen throughout this thesis, this freedom - represented by forms and genres which mark a departure from realism – produces increasingly sophisticated and polyphonic performances of mental illness as the twenty-first century moves on. I argue that the genre must move beyond the notion that the visibility of characters with diagnosed mental illness can be regarded as sufficient representation in itself. Ultimately, my work calls for new possibilities and innovative storyworlds which embrace complex subjectivities without reinscribing the same narrow and exclusionary models of mental illness which, as I have shown, are all too frequently problematic.

The ways in which young people use digital communication methods to interact with fiction is constantly shifting and expanding. In her article on how social media engages with recent young adult literature, Eugenia Yizhen Lo argues that ‘young adult books have to compete with other forms of media because the current target audience is one that is assumed to be consuming a range of media’.⁶⁸¹ Whilst young people are utilizing an increasing variety of online media, Lo’s assumption that such digital forms must ‘compete’ with adolescent literature presupposes a simplistic binary between fiction and digital media. Moving away from this dichotomous perspective, however, allows us to understand how young adult literature does not ‘compete’ but in fact *interacts with* forms of digital media in progressively sophisticated ways as the twenty-first century moves on. In her article on contemporary queer young adult literature markets, Katie Schwab argues that ‘the young adult fiction market as we know it today may feel like something new that we just cracked the code to—compared to the endless history of adult fiction, it is objectively new’.⁶⁸² She goes on to describe the change and innovation currently experienced by the genre as ‘tantamount to literary whiplash – not only in numbers, but in content and careers’.⁶⁸³ Acknowledging this change and innovation in relation to the recent proliferation of digital media forms opens new possibilities to understand how the genre situates itself within its readership’s constructions of themselves and the world around them. Young adult literature

⁶⁸¹ Eugenia Yizhen Lo, ‘How Social Media, Movies, and TV Shows Interacts with Young Adult Literature from 2015-2019’, *Publishing Research Quarterly*, 36 (2020), 611-18 (p. 616).

⁶⁸² Katie Schwab, ‘Publishing Queer Literature: A Comparison Between the Adult and Young Adult Markets from the Cold War to Present Day’, *Publishing Research Quarterly*, 39.3 (2023), 249-62 (p. 258).

⁶⁸³ Schwab, ‘Publishing Queer Literature’, p. 258.

and digital media forms work both to parallel each other, and together as sources through which young people gain a sense of identity and knowledge of their place in society. In their article on how young people engage with texts in the digital world, Kristen Hawley Turner, Troy Hicks and Lauren Zucker demonstrate that digital tools enable young people to respond to fiction in innovative and complex ways:

In addition to the general social media tools that teen readers in this study used, such as Facebook and Twitter, they also highlighted specific online spaces and communities in which they created and consumed a variety of textual forms, including discussion posts, pieces of art, and their own fan fiction.⁶⁸⁴

In the spirit of this kind of entanglement, this thesis moves away from the reductive assumption of dichotomies which frame young adult fiction and online spaces as competing media sources by which adolescent subjectivity is constructed. Instead, looking towards the future, I want to conclude my own work by suggesting wider possibilities for thinking about how adolescent novels can interact with digital media to produce new opportunities for a young adult readership to express ideas about fiction, identity, and an evolving role in a progressively online world. Not only do digital media forms allow adolescent readers to discuss and react to novels, they also produce a platform for young people to write their own literary pieces inspired by their selected fiction. The future may produce a broad range of innovative and technologically advanced narrative models by which young people can understand their place within an increasingly complex world.

4.5 Looking Towards the Future of Young Adult Literature about Mental Illness

This thesis has traced a trajectory in which the more sophisticated possibilities surrounding the portrayals of adolescent mental ill health are represented by an increasingly diverse range of aesthetic forms. Such innovative departures from realist and naturalist traditions are therefore more suited to attend to the complexities of the lived experience of mental illness compared to those texts discussed earlier in the thesis. In the light of this, I want to draw to a close by considering how such literary and aesthetic forms may broaden and transform again in the future. My project has covered a twenty-year time period and,

⁶⁸⁴ Kristen Hawley Turner, Troy Hicks and Lauren Zucker, 'Connected Reading: A Framework for Understanding how Adolescents Encounter, Evaluate, and Engage with Texts in the Digital Age', *International Literacy Association Reading Research Quarterly*, 55.2 (2020), 291-309 (p. 304).

projecting perhaps twenty years into the future, we may consider what critical questions will arise pertaining to young adult fiction that engages with new technological concerns and digital demands, such as artificial intelligence and cyber security. At this point we can only presume that such intertwining advancements taking place within future digital worlds will be subject to the same degree of critical entanglements and double movements identified throughout this thesis.

In this thesis I have aimed to achieve a critical vantage point that examines the primary material and the critical scholarship which surrounds it. Whilst it is challenging to project what critical discussions will arise in the next twenty years of young adult literature scholarship, from a personal perspective I would hope that the fiction continues the trajectory identified throughout my analysis by embracing innovative digital forms to construct increasingly sophisticated and empowered performances of the lived experience of adolescent mental illness. Whilst it would be overly prescriptive to create a list of categories or discrete series of forms which such media may produce, I hope that in the future the genre embraces the possibilities associated with new, expanding and varied storytelling methods, experimentation with graphic narrative methods, and innovative interactive digital storytelling.⁶⁸⁵ The future may open up critical discussions surrounding how transformative

⁶⁸⁵ Whilst a small number of young adult graphic narratives and other mixed media texts which deal with themes of mental illness and disability have been published, they exist outside the scope of this thesis. During the first decade of the twenty-first century, 'the popularity of graphic novels rose quickly, as evidenced by their increased library circulation' (Wendy Smith-D'Arezzo and Janine Holc, 'Reframing Disability Through Graphic Novels for Girls: Alternative Bodies in Cece Bell's *El Deafo*, 2016, p. 72). However, despite the rise in popularity of graphic forms more generally, there is still only a scattering of recent young adult graphic narratives and mixed media texts which feature themes of mental illness and recovery. In her article on such texts, Sarah Thaller argues that 'so few comics about mental illness are now aimed at young audiences' (Sarah Thaller, 'Comics, Adolescents, and the Language of Mental Illness: David Heatley's "Overpeck" and Nate Powell's *Swallow Me Whole*, *Graphic Novels for Children and Young Adults: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Michelle Ann Abate and Gwen Athene Tarbox, 2017, p. 47). Despite the relative scarcity of adolescent graphic narratives which portray characters with mental illnesses, the possibility of including them within the scope of this thesis would lead to a series of complications. To acknowledge the contours of young adult graphic novels and a broad range of other mixed media texts would require an additional critical framework to accommodate the nuances of such fiction, and such an ambition exists outside the possibilities of this thesis. Whilst the analysis of adolescent graphic novels which feature themes of mental health and illness between 2000-2022 represents a rich site for potential critical discussion, such texts are still underrepresented within the young adult genre compared to the prose texts I have selected so far, therefore a full reading of such fiction remains outside the parameters of this thesis.

Some critical work is beginning to emerge which discusses young adult graphic novels about mental health, and this scholarship often focuses upon the ways in which such fiction utilizes a complex relationship between image and text. In her article on visual narratives of mental illness in fiction for young people, Imogen Church discusses Hayley Long's illustrated young adult novel *Lottie Biggs is NOT Mad* (2009) (Imogen Church, 'The Picture of Madness: Visual

technological advancements create new possibilities and virtual arenas by which to re-imagine thinking about mental health. As this thesis draws to a close, I hope to imagine a future in which there is more interactive digital storytelling which offers the potential for readers and users to contribute their experiences of mental illness to the development of fictional worlds. Moving forwards, I anticipate the emergence of innovative digital forms which give rise to increasing possibilities of interaction between young people and fictional storyworlds, and I hope to understand what scholarly questions and critical entanglements will arise when new and complex media forms further transform the portrayals of mental illness in an increasingly digital world.

Narratives of Female Mental Illness in Contemporary Children's Literature', *Children's Literature in Education*, 2018, p. 130). Throughout the text, Lottie experiences episodes of bipolar disorder, and the novel is illustrated with 'scribbles notes and stickers, and collaged images of herself, stuck together using wildly varying techniques' (Church, 'The Picture of Madness', p. 130). As Lottie experiences longer and more severe manic episodes, the illustrations assume a wider range of styles. They frequently take the form of collages, fractured drawings, line sketches, childlike cartoons and what Church describes as a 'mishmash' of imagery (Church, 'The Picture of Madness', p. 130). Church goes on to further contemplate the nuanced relationship between the narrator's lived experiences of adolescent mental illness and the use of mixed media texts: 'it is as though the act of visually representing herself on paper serves a cathartic purpose. It adds visual expression to her writing, as though an external representation of her internal feelings helps them, in turn, become externalised and, thus, less dangerous and private' (Church, 'The Picture of Madness', p. 130). As such, the novel uses a powerful combination of both imagery and text to produce an interpretation of the lived experience of mental illness in ways which cannot be achieved through the forms of prose discussed elsewhere in this thesis.

Similar scholarship has emerged on the ways in which young adult comics about mental illness and recovery can disrupt established reading patterns and behaviour. Thaller argues that 'comics are an apt medium for narratives about mental illness because of the way that the process of reading a comic forces readers to adjust their thought processes as they move from panel to panel and from page to page' (Thaller, 'Comics, Adolescents, and the Language of Mental Illness', p. 47). Her article draws attention to Nate Powell's comic *Swallow Me Whole* (2008) which features teenage stepsiblings who experience the onset of schizophrenia. She goes on to suggest that comic forms can 'challenge traditional reading paths by violating panels and borders, creating a free-flowing page with no discernible pattern, or by using formats that are open to interpretation and nonlinear reading' (Thaller, 'Comics, Adolescents, and the Language of Mental Illness', p. 50). Such mixed media forms are therefore 'open to subjective interpretation and challenge the notion of there being only one acceptable perspective or pathway' (Thaller, 'Comics, Adolescents, and the Language of Mental Illness', p. 50). Throughout her article she argues that the ambiguous nature of images within such comics can disrupt certain reading practices, causing them to become uncertain and unfamiliar.

The last twenty years has produced a small collection of young adult mixed media texts which feature themes of mental illness and recovery, including graphic novels, comics, and illustrated fiction. As the twenty-first century moves on, I hope to see the range of forms expand and become more popular. However, this thesis requires clear boundaries and parameters, and currently it is too challenging to use these aforementioned mixed media texts to draw any clear trajectory. Therefore, while such contemporary graphic narratives represent a fascinating site for critical scholarship on mental health narratives, they will remain outside the scope of this thesis.

Bibliography

#weneeddiversebooks, *WNDB: About Us* <<https://diversebooks.org/about-wndb/>> [accessed 14 March 2023]

Alaniz, Cynthia and Bedford, April Whatley, 'Celebrating and Inspiring Young Voices: A Chat with Jason Reynolds', *Journal of Children's Literature*, 46.2 (2020), 66-72

Allan, Kathryn and Cheyne, Ria, 'Science Fiction, Disability, and Disability Studies: A Conversation', *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*, 14.4 (2020), 387-401

American Psychiatric Association, *DSM-5-TR Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (Washington: American Psychiatric Association Publishing, 2022)

Anderson, Laurie Halse, *Wintergirls* (Warwickshire: Marion Lloyd Books, 2009)

Andrew, Lucy, *The Boy Detective in Early British Children's Literature: Patrolling the Borders Between Boyhood and Manhood* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017)

Anthony, William A., 'Recovery from Mental Illness: The Guiding Vision of the Mental Health Service System in the 1990s', *Psychosocial Rehabilitation Journal*, 16.4 (1993), 11-23

Babiker, Gloria and Arnold, Lois, *The Language of Injury* (Leicester: PBS, 1997)

Bacon, Hannah, *Feminist Theology and Contemporary Dieting Culture: Sin, Salvation and Women's Weight Loss Narratives* (London: T&T Clark, 2019)

Batchelor, Katherine E., 'Using Lined Text Sets to Promote Advocacy and Agency Through a Critical Lens', *International Literacy Association*, 62.4 (2018), 379-86

- Beirne, Rebecca, 'Extraordinary Minds, Impossible Choices: Mental Health, Special Skills and Television', *Medical Humanities*, 45.3 (2019), 235-39
- Bentley, Kate H., Nock, Matthew K. and Barlow, David H., 'The Four-Function Model of Nonsuicidal Self-Injury: Key Directions for Future Research', *Clinical Psychological Science*, 2.5 (2014), 638-56
- Beresford, Peter, 'Mad', Mad Studies and Advancing Inclusive Resistance, *Disability and Society*, 35.8 (2020), 1337-42
- Bereska, Tami M., 'The Changing Boys' World in the 20th Century: Reality and 'Fiction', *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 11.2 (2003), 157-74
- Bishop, Rudine Sims, 'Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors', *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*, 6.3 (1990), ix-xi
- Boon, Sammie, 'Review of *Diary of a Confused Feminist*', *The SL*, 68.2 (2020), 124
- Booth, Emily and Bhuva Narayan, "'The Expectations that we be Educators": The Views of Australian Authors of Young Adult Fiction on their OwnVoices Novels as Windows for Learning about Marginalized Experiences', *The Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults*, 11.1 (2020), 1-21
- Bordo, Susan, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003)
- Bourne, Holly, *Am I Normal Yet?*, (London: Usbourne, 2015)
- Bowden, Chelsea, 'Transphobic Tropes in Contemporary Young Adult Novels about Queer Gender', *The Australasian Journal of Popular Culture*, 1.1 (2021), 65-77

Bradburn, Frances, 'Review of Patricia McCormick's *Cut*', *Booklist*, 97.2 (2001), 940

Brausch, Amy M. and Holaday, Tara C., 'Suicide-Related Concerns as a Mediator Between Physical Abuse and Self-Harm Behaviors in College Students', *Crisis*, 36.6 (2015), 440-46

Brewer, Elizabeth, 'Coming Out Mad, Coming Out Disabled', in *Literatures of Madness: Disability Studies and Mental Health*, ed. by Elizabeth J. Donaldson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 11-30

Brien, Jaki, 'Book Review: *A Danger to Herself and Others*', *The School Library Journal*, 67.3 (2019), 187

Caillouet, Ruth, 'Harry Potter Meets Buffy Summers: Parallel Verses and the Young Adult Hero', in *Broadening Critical Boundaries in Children's and Young Adult Literature and Culture*, ed. By Amie Doughty (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), 119-38

Campbell, Fiona Kumari, *Contours of Ableism: The Production of Disability and Aabledness* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009)

Caracciolo, Marco, *Strange Narrators in Contemporary Fiction: Explorations in Readers' Engagements with Characters*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016)

Carlson, Melody, *Blade Silver* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2005)

Cart, Michael, *From Romance to Realism: 50 Years of Growth and Change in Young Adult Literature* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996)

- Chatmon, Benita, 'Males and Mental Health Stigma', *American Journal of Men's Health*, 14.4 (2020), 1-3
- Chrisman, Alyssa and Blackburn, Mollie V., 'Interrogating Happiness: Unraveling Homophobia in the Lives of Queer Youth of Color with *More Happy Than Not*' in *Engaging with Multicultural YA Literature in the Secondary Classroom: Critical Approaches for Critical Educators*, ed. By Ricki Ginsberg and Wendy J. Glenn (New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 83-92
- Clark, Hilary, *Depression and Narrative: Telling the Dark* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008)
- Clark, Laura, Hudson, Jennifer, Rapee, Ronald and Grasby, Katrina, 'Investigating the Impact of Masculinity on the Relationship Between Anxiety Specific Mental Health Literacy and Mental Health Help-Seeking in Adolescent Males', *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 76 (2020), 1-8
- Clasen, Tricia, 'Masculinity and Romantic Myth in Contemporary YA Romance', in *Gender(ed) Identities: Critical Rereadings of Gender in Children's and Young Adult Literature*, ed. by Tricia Clasen and Holly Hassel (New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 228-41
- Clasen, Tricia, and Hassel, Holly, ed., *Gender(ed) Identities: Critical Rereadings of Gender in Children's and Young Adult Literature*, (New York: Routledge, 2017)
- Coats, Karen, *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Children's and Young Adult Literature* (London: Bloomsbury 2018)
- Coleman, Ron, *Recovery: An Alien Concept?*, (London: Handsell Publishing, 1999)
- Cook, Christopher C.H, *Hearing Voices, Demonic and Divine* (London: Routledge, 2018)

- Corbett, Emily and Phillips, Leah, 'Ploughing the Field: A Discussion About YA Studies', *International Journal of Young Adult Literature*, 1.1 (2020), 1-22
- Cornelius, Michael G., 'Introduction: The Nomenclature of Boy Sleuths', in *The Boy Detectives: Essays on the Hardy Boys and Others*, ed. by Michael G. Cornelius (Jefferson: McFarland and Company Inc., 2010)
- Crisp, Thomas, 'From Romance to Magical Realism: Limits and Possibilities in Gay Adolescent Fiction', *Children's Literature in Education*, 40 (2009), 333-48, p. 344
- Darragh Janine J. and Boyd, Ashley S., 'Putting the Pieces Together: Destigmatizing Self-Harm through Kathleen Glasgow's *Girl in Pieces*', in *Breaking the Taboo with Young Adult Literature*. Ed. by Victor Malo-Juvera (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2020), pp. 41-47
- Davidson, Larry, 'Recovering a Sense of Self in Schizophrenia', *Journal of Personality*, 88.1 (2019), 122-32
- Davis, Lennard, *Enforcing Normlacy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (New York: Verso, 1995)
- Day, Sara K., *Reading Like a Girl: Narrative Intimacy in Contemporary American Young Adult Literature*, (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2013)
- De Visser, Richard O. and McDonnell, Elizabeth J., "'Man Points": Masculine Capital and Young Men's Health', *Health Psychology*, 32.1 (2013), 5-14
- Deegan, Patricia E., 'Recovering Our Sense of Value After Being Labelled Mentally Ill', *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing*, 31.4 (1993) 7-11

- Dobrogoszcz, Tomasz, 'Signification at its Limits: Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* and the Narrative Potential of Graphic Communication', *Litteraria Copernicana*, 35.3 (2020), 69-80
- Dolezal, Luna and Lyons, Barry, 'Health-related Shame: An Affective Determinant of Health?', *Medical Humanities*, 43.4 (2017), 257-63
- Dolezal, Luna and Lyons, Barry, 'Shame, Stigma and Medicine', *Medical Humanities*, 43.4 (2017), 208-10
- Elran, Renana Stanger 'A Mind Trying to Right / Write Itself: Metaphors in Madness Narratives', *Humanities*, 8.2, (2019), 1-14
- Epstein, BJ, *Are the Kids All Right? Representations of LGBTQ Characters in Children's and Young Adult Literature* (Bristol: HammerOn Press, 2015), p. 146
- Falconer, Rachel, *The Crossover Novel: Contemporary Children's Fiction and its Adult Readership* (New York: Routledge, 2009)
- Farley, C.J., *Zero O'Clock* (New York: Black Sheep, 2021)
- Feigel, Lara, 'Inside Story: The First Pandemic Novels have Arrived, but are we Ready for them?', *The Guardian*, < <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/nov/27/inside-story-the-first-pandemic-novels-have-arrived-but-are-we-ready-for-them>> [accessed 4 May 2023]
- First, William, et al, 'DSM-5-TR: Overview of What's New and What's Changed', *World Psychiatry*, 21.2 (2022), 218-19

- Fitzsimmon, Rebeka and Wilson, Casey Alane, eds., *Beyond the Blockbusters: Themes and Trends in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction* (Mississippi: University of Mississippi, 2020)
- Flanagan, Victoria, 'Girls Online: Representations of Adolescent Female Sexuality in the Digital Age', in *Gender(ed) Identities: Critical Rereadings of Gender in Children's and Young Adult Literature*, ed. By Holly Hassel and Tricia Clasen (New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 28-41
- Fortunati, Karen, *The Weight of Zero*, (New York: Ember, 2016)
- Fredriksen, Jeanne, 'Review of *The Place Between Breaths* by An Na', *Booklist*, 1 (2018), 51
- Frost, Liz, *Young Women and the Body: A Feminist Sociology* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001)
- Gallo, Jessica and Herrmann, Bailey, 'Shining Light in the Dark Corners: Choosing Heavy Books for the Classroom', *English Leadership Quarterly*, 42.4 (2020), 7-10
- Gammelgaard, Lasse R, ed., *Madness and Literature: What Fiction can do for the Understanding of Mental Illness*, (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2022)
- Garcia, Antero, 'Worlds of Inclusion: Challenging Reading, Writing, and Publishing Science Fiction and Fantasy-Based Young Adult Literature', *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 61.2 (2017), 221-24
- Garrison, Kasey, Carroll, Mary and Derouet, Elizabeth, 'Of Men and Masculinity: The Portrayal of Masculinity in a Selection of Award-Winning Australian Young Adult Literature', *Knygotyra*, 76 (2021), 228-59

- Gilbert, Paul, 'Shame and the Vulnerable Self in Medical Contexts: The Compassionate Solution', *Medical Humanities*, 43.4 (2017), 211-17
- Gillies, Donna, et al , 'Prevalence and Characteristics of Self-Harm in Adolescents: Meta-Analyses of Community-Based Studies 1990-2015', *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 57.10 (2018), 733-41
- Ginsberg, Ricki, Glenn, Wendy J. and Moye, Kellee, 'Opportunities for Advocacy: Interrogating Multivoiced YAL's Treatment of Denied Identities', *English Journal*, 107.1 (2017), 26-32
- Halperin, David, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995)
- Harper, Helen and Bean, Thomas W., 'Reading Men Differently: Alternative Portrayals of Masculinity in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction', *Reading Psychology*, 28.1 (2007) 11-30
- Harper, Helen, 'Studying Masculinit(ies) in Books about Girls', *Canadian Journal of Education*, 30.2 (2007), 508-30
- Warner, Chelsea Herndon, "'Can you see me now?'" Building Bridges with Literacy to make Hidden Disabilities Visible Through Young Adult Literature', *Association of Literacy Educators and Researchers*, 42 (2020), 267-79
- Herve, Alice, 'Pronominal Shifts and the Confusion of the Self with Not-self', in *Madness and Literature: What Fiction can do for the Understanding of Mental Illness*, ed. By Lasse R. Gammelgaard (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2022), 128-42
- Hill, Rebecca, 'Taking a Closer Look: Ellen Hopkins and her Novels', *The ALAN Review*, 38.2, (2011), no pages

Hopkins, Ellen, *Impulse* (New York: Margaret McElderry Books)

Houriham, Margery, *Deconstructing the Hero: Literary Theory and Children's Literature*, (London: Routledge, 1997)

Hsin-Chun, Tsai, 'The Girls Who Do Not Eat: Food, Hunger, and Thinness in Meg Rosoff's *How I Live Now* and Laurie Halse Anderson's *Wintergirls*, *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures*, 6.1 (2014), 36-55

Inckle, Kay, *Writing on the Body? Thinking Through Gendered Embodiment and Marked Flesh* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2007)

Inckle, Kay, 'The First Cut Is the Deepest: A Harm-Reduction Approach to Self-Injury', *Social Work in Mental Health*, 9.5 (2011), 364-78

Jesse, Tom and Jones, Heidi, 'Manufacturing Manhood: Young Adult Fiction and Masculinity(ies) in the Twenty-First Century', in *Beyond the Blockbusters: Themes and Trends in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction*, (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2020), pp. 109-22

Johnston, Jeremy, "'Maybe I am Fixed": Disciplinary Practices and the Politics of Therapy in Young Adult Literature', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 44.3 (2019), 310-31

Johnston, Jeremy, "Capital Limitations: Psychiatric Hospitals & Pre-Industrial Living in YA Fiction" *YA Studies Association Conference*, <4 November 2020>, Digital Conference

Karlin, Dorothy, 'How to Be Yourself: Ideological Interpellation, Weight Control, and Young Adult Novels', *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures*, 6.2 (2014), 72-89

- Kennon, Patricia, 'Monsters of Men: Masculinity and the Other in Patrick Ness's *Chaos Walking Series*', *Psychoanalytical Inquiry*, 37.1 (2017), 25-34
- Kerr, John Finlay, 'Has the World Outgrown the Classic Boy Detective?', in *The Boy Detectives: Essays on the Hardy Boys and Others*, ed. by Michael G. Cornelius (Jefferson: McFarland and Company Inc., 2010), pp. 180-97
- Keus, Kelly and Harde, Roxanne "'She Wished Someone Would Help Them": PTSD and Empathy in the Six of Crows Duology', *Children's Literature in Education*, 53.1 (2022), 130-46
- King, Wesley, *OCDaniel*, (New York: Simon and Shuster Books, 2016)
- Kirkus Reviews, 'Alyssa Sheinmel: A Danger to Herself and Others', *Kirkus Reviews*, <A DANGER TO HERSELF AND OTHERS | Kirkus Reviews> [accessed 23 November 2022].
- Kirkus Reviews, 'An Na: The Place Between Breaths', *Kirkus Reviews* <THE PLACE BETWEEN BREATHS | Kirkus Reviews> [accessed 23 November 2022]
- Knickerbocker Joan L. and Rycik, James A., *Literature for Young Adults: Books (and More) for Contemporary Readers*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2019)
- Kokkola, Lydia, 'Sparkling Vampires: Valorizing Self-harming Behavior in Stephenie Meyer's Twilight Series', *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature*, 49.3 (2011) 33-46
- Lees, John and Fisher, Pamela, 'Narrative Approaches in Mental Health: Preserving the Emancipatory Tradition', *Health*, 20.6 (2016), 599-615

- Letcher, Mark, 'Off the Shelves: Poetry and Verse Novels for Young Adults', *The English Journal*, 99.3 (2010), 87-90
- Lewis, Bradley, *Depression: Integrating Science, Culture and Humanities* (New York: Routledge, 2012)
- Llewellyn-Beardsley, Joy et al, 'Characteristics of Mental Health Recovery Narratives: Systematic Review and Narrative Synthesis', *PLoS ONE*, 14.3 (2019), 1-31
- Lo, Eugenia Yizhen, 'How Social Media, Movies, and TV Shows Interacts with Young Adult Literature from 2015-2019', *Publishing Research Quarterly*, 36 (2020), 611-18
- Longhurst, Katrina, 'Counterdiagnosis and The Critical Medical Humanities: Reading Susanna Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted* and Lauren Slater's *Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir*', *Medical Humanities*, 47.1 (2019), 1-9
- Malo-Juvera, Victor and Hill, Crag, eds., *Critical Explorations of Young Adult Literature: Identifying and Critiquing the Canon*, (New York: Routledge, 2020)
- Mason, Derritt, *Queer Anxieties of Young Adult Literature and Culture*, (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2020)
- Matos, Angel Daniel, 'Queer Consciousness/Community in David Levithan's *Two Boys Kissing*: "One the Other Never Leaving"', in *Gender(ed) Identities: Critical Rereadings of Gender in Children's and Young Adult Literature*, ed. By Tricia Clasen and Holly Hassel (New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 59-71
- Matos, Angel Daniel, 'Queer YA Novels that Sadden and Hurt: Adam Silvera's Oeuvre and the Politics of Unhappiness', The Center for Children's Books 2020-2021 Speaker Series, 28th January 2021
- McCormick, Patricia, *Cut* (London: Collins, 2000)

- McGee, Chris and Miskec, Jennifer, 'My Scars Tell a Story: Self-Mutilation in Young Adult Literature', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 32.2 (2007), 163-78
- McLaughlin, Janice, 'The Medical Reshaping of Disabled Bodies as a Response to Stigma and a Route to Normality', *Medical Humanities*, 43.4 (2017), 244-50
- McManus, Sally, et al , 'Prevalence of Non-suicidal Self-harm and Service Contact in England, 2000-14: Repeated Cross-sectional Surveys of the General Population', *Lancet Psychiatry*, 6.7 (2019), 573-81
- McNair, Jonda C. and Edwards, Patricia A., 'The Lasting Legacy of Rudine Sims Bishop: Mirrors, Windows, Sliding Glass Doors, and More', *Literacy Research: Theory, Method, and Practice*, 70.1 (2021), 202-12
- McRuer, Robert, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: New York University Press, 2006)
- Meyer, Abbye E., *From Wallflowers to Bulletproof Families: The Power of Disability in Young Adult Narratives* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2022)
- Mootz, Kaylee Jangula, 'Police-Violence YA, Black Youth Activism, and the Implied White Audience', in *Beyond the Blockbusters: Themes and Trends in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction*, ed. by Rebekah Fitzsimmons and Casey Alane Wilson (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2020), pp. 63-79
- Mosley, Tonya, 'YA novel *Zero O'Clock* Looks at the Early Days of the Pandemic and the Murder of George Floyd', *WBUR.org* <https://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2022/07/15/cj-farley-zero-o-clock> [accessed 4 May 2023]

- Motz, Anna, *The Psychology of Female Violence: Crimes Against the Body* (Sussex: Routledge, 2008)
- Na, An, *The Place Between Breaths*, (New York: Atheneum, 2018)
- Natov, Roni, *The Poetics of Childhood*, (London: Routledge, 2002)
- Neirin Higgs, Rory, 'Reconceptualizing Psychosis: The Hearing Voices Movement and Social Approaches to Health', *Health and Human Rights Journal*, 22.1 (2020), 133-44
- Nodelman, Perry, 'Making Boys Appear: The Masculinity of Children's Fiction', in *Ways of Being Male: Representing Masculinities in Children's Literature and Film*, ed. by John Stephens (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 1-14
- O'Reilly et al, 'A Rapid Review Investigating the Potential Impact of a Pandemic on the Mental Health of Young People Aged 12-25 Years', *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine*, 38.3 (2021), 192-207
- Olan, Elsie Lindy, and Richmond, Kia Jane, 'Examining Mental Illness in John Green's *Turtles All the Way Down*: OCD-More than Just Attention to Detail', in *Breaking the Taboo with Young Adult Literature*. Ed. by Victor Malo-Juvera (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2020), pp. 34-40
- Pennell Ashley E., and Green, Connie, 'Beyond the Binary: Exploring Gender Diversity in Books for Adolescents', *Association of Literacy and Researchers*, 42 (2020), 281-98
- Pipher, Mary, *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* (New York: Random House, 1994)

- Publishers Weekly, 'Children's Starred Reviews 2018: *The Place Between Breaths*', *Publishers Weekly*, (2019), 71-72
- Publishers Weekly, '*Highly Illogical Behaviour*', *Publishers Weekly* <Children's Book Review: *Highly Illogical Behavior* by John Corey Whaley. Dial, \$17.99 (256p) ISBN 978-0-525-42818-3 (publishersweekly.com)> [accessed 14 December 2020]
- Radden, Jennifer, 'My Symptoms, Myself: Reading Mental Illness Memoirs for Identity Assumptions', in *Depression and Narrative: Telling the Dark*, ed. By Hilary Clark, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), pp. 15-28
- Resene, Michelle, 'A "Curious Incident": Representations of Autism in Children's Detective Fiction', *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 40.1 (2016), 81-99
- Rich, Adrienne, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', *Signs*, 5.4 (1980), 631-60
- Richmond, Gail, 'Patricia McCormick's *Cut*: A Book Review', *School Library Journal*, (2000), 146
- Richmond, Kia Jane, *Mental Illness in Young Adult Literature: Exploring Real Struggles Through Fictional Characters* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2019)
- Rogers, Anne and Pilgrim, David, *A Sociology of Mental Health and Illness*, 6th edn (London: Open University Press, 2021)
- Roshini, R. and Rajasekaran, V., 'More Than an Invalid: A Comparative Study Addressing Disability Portrayal in Children's Fiction', *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 12.3 (2022), 551-57

- Rovito, Maria, 'The Bleeding Edge: Cutting, Mad Girls, and the Asylum in Young Adult Literature', in *Madwomen in Social Justice Movements, Literatures, and Art*, ed. by Jessica Lowell Mason and Nicole Crevar (Wilmington: Vernon Press, 2023), pp. 205-18
- Salerno, Steve, 'The Unbearable Darkness of Young Adult Literature: Books on Sexual Abuse, Dysphoria, Racism, Gang Life, Domestic Violence and School Shootings', The WSJ, <<https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-unbearable-darkness-of-young-adult-literature-1535495594>> [accessed 11 April 2020]
- Sams, Brandon and Boyd, Ashley S., 'Parties, Pranks, and Privilege: Reading Looking for Alaska Through the Lens of Critical Whiteness', in *Critical Explorations of Young Adult Literature: Identifying and Critiquing the Canon*, ed. by Victor Malo-Juvera and Crag Hill (New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 202-14
- Sathiyalingam, Nigethan and Wilkinson, Paul O., 'Am I Normal Yet?: Insights into the Teenage Agenda', *Psychiatry in Literature*, 213.6 (2018), 722
- Sawyer, Susan M., Azzopardi, Peter S., Wickremarathne, Dakshitha and Patton, George C., 'The Age of Adolescence', *Lancet Child Adolescent Health*, 2.3 (2018), 1-6
- Schalk, Sami, 'Revaluating the Supercrip', *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*, 10.1 (2016), 71-86
- Schwab, Katie, 'Publishing Queer Literature: A Comparison Between the Adult and Young Adult Markets from the Cold War to Present Day', *Publishing Research Quarterly*, 39.3 (2023), 249-62
- Scrofano, Diane, 'Disability Narrative Theory and Young Adult Fiction of Mental Illness', *The Journal for Research on Libraries and Young Adults*, 10.1 (2019), 1-33

- Sellers, John A., 'Spring 2015 Flying Starts: Adam Silvera', *Publishers Weekly*, 262.26 (2015), 18
- Seymour, Jessica, "'Murder Me...Become a Man": Establishing the Masculine Care Circle in Young Adult Dystopia', *Reading Psychology*, 37.4 (2016), 627-49
- Sheinmel, Alyssa, *A Danger to Herself and Others*, (London: Atom, 2019)
- Short, Kathy G., 'What's Trending in Children's Literature and Why it Matters', *Changes in Children's Literature*, 95.5 (2018), 287-98
- Silvera, Adam, *More Happy Than Not*, (London: Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, 2015)
- Silvera, Adam, *More Happy Than Not*, 2020 edn, (New York: Soho Teen, 2020)
- Smith, Louisa-Jane, "'No Strings Attached?" Sex and the Teenage Mother in American Young Adult Novels", *Children's Literature in Education*, 50.4 (2019), 381-99
- Smith-D'Arezzo and Holc, Janine, 'Reframing Disability Through Graphic Novels for Girls: Alternative Bodies in Cece Bell's *El Deafo*', *Girlhood Studies*, 9.1 (2016), 72-87
- Spade, Dean and Willse, Craig, 'Norms and Normalization', in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, ed. by Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 551-71
- Spandler, Helen and Poursanidou, Dina, 'Who is Included in the Mad Studies Project?', *The Journal of Ethics in Mental Health*, 10 (2019) 1-20
- Spencer, Lucienne, and Carel, Havi, "'Isn't Everyone a Little OCD?" The Epistemic Harms of Wrongful Depathologization', *Philosophy of Medicine*, 2.1 (2021), 1-18

Stänicke, Line Indrevoll, 'The Punished Self, the Unknown Self, and the Harmed Self – Toward a More Nuanced Understanding of Self-Harm Among Adolescent Girls', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12 (2021), 1-15

Sturm, Brian W. and Michel, Karin, 'The Structure of Power in Young Adult Problem Novels', *The Young Adult Library Services Journal*, 7.2 (2009), 39-47

Suico, Terri, 'History Repeating Itself: The Portrayal of Female Characters in Young Adult Literature at the Beginning of the Millennium', in *Gender(ed) Identities: Critical Rereadings of Gender in Children's and Young Adult Literature*, ed. by Tricia Clasen and Holly Hassel (New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 11-27

Thaller, Sarah, 'Troubled Teens and Monstrous Others: Problematic Depictions of Characters with Mental Illness in Young Adult Literature', *Study and Scrutiny: Research of Young Adult Literature*, 1.1 (2015), 212-53

Thaller, Sarah, 'Comics, Adolescents, and the Language of Mental Illness: David Heatley's "Overpeck" and Nate Powell's *Swallow Me Whole*', in *Graphic Novels for Children and Young Adults: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Michelle Ann Abate and Gwen Athene Tarbox (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2017), 45-58

The University of Arizona, 'Covid-19 and Pandemic-Related Children's and Young Adult Literature', *The University of Arizona: World of Words* <<https://wowlit.org/links/booklists/covid-19-books/>> [accessed 4 May 2023]

Thompson, Lisa, *The Goldfish Boy*, (London: Scholastic, 2017)

Thompson, Rosemarie Garland, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: University of Columbia Press, 1997)

- Toth, Luann, 'The Place Between Breaths: Book Review', *Bookmarks*, 1.1, (2018), 50-51
- Trites, Roberta, *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000)
- Trites, Roberta, *Literary Conceptualizations of Growth: Metaphors and Cognition in Adolescent Literature* (Philadelphia: John Benjamin's Publishing Company, 2014)
- Tucker, Nicholas, 'Depressive Stories for Children', *Children's Literature in Education*, 37.3 (2006), 199-210
- Turk, Mariko, 'Girlhood, Ballet, and the Cult of the Tutu', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 39.4 (2014), 482-505
- Turner, Kristen Hawley, Hicks, Troy and Zucker, Lauren, 'Connected Reading: A Framework for Understanding how Adolescents Encounter, Evaluate, and Engage with Texts in the Digital Age', *International Literacy Association Reading Research Quarterly*, 55.2 (2020), 291-309
- Ussher, Jane, *The Madness of Women: Myth and Experience* (Florence: Taylor and Francis Group, 2005)
- Villanti, Andrea C., et al, 'COVID-related Distress, Mental Health, and Substance Use in Adolescents and Young Adults', *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 27.2 (2022), 138-45
- Waller, Alison, 'Reading for Normal: Young People and Fiction in the Time of Covid-19', *University of Roehampton London* <<https://pure.roehampton.ac.uk/portal/en/projects/reading-for-normal-young-people-and-fiction-in-the-time-of-covid->> [accessed 13 April 2023]

- Wannamaker, Annette, *Boys in Children's Literature and Popular Culture: Masculinity, Abjection, and the Fictional Child*, (New York: Routledge, 2008)
- Weissman, Ruth S. et al, 'Speaking of That: Terms to Avoid or Reconsider in the Eating Disorders Field', *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 49.4 (2016), 349-53
- Weston, Kate, *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2020)
- Whaley, John Corey, *Highly Illogical Behaviour*, (New York: Dial Books, 2016)
- White, Taneasha, 'What the New *DSM-5-TR* Updates Could Mean for Your Mental Health', *PsychCentral*, < <https://psychcentral.com/news/dsm-5-updates-2022>> [Accessed 27 March 2023]
- Whitney, Sarah E. 'Sharpening the Pointe: The Intersectional Feminism of Contemporary Young Adult Ballet Novels', in *Beyond the Blockbusters: Themes and Trends in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction*, ed. by Rebekah Fitzsimmons and Casey Alane Wilson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2020), pp. 203-17
- Wickham, Anastasia, 'It is all in your Head: Mental Illness in Young Adult Literature', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 51.1 (2018), 10-25
- Wilkie-Stibbs, Christine, *The Outside Child In and Out of the Book* (London: Routledge, 2008)
- Wilkins, Kim, *Young Adult Fantasy Fiction: Conventions, Originality, Reproducibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019)
- Winning, Jo, 'Trauma, Illness and Narrative in the Medical Humanities', in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma*, ed. by Colin Davis and Hanna Meretoja (London: Routledge, 2020), 266-74

- Wolframe, PhebeAnn M., 'Going Barefoot: Mad Affiliation, Identity Politics, and Eros', in *Literatures of Madness: Disability Studies and Mental Health*, ed. by Elizabeth J. Donaldson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 31-49
- Wood, Jill M. '(In)Visible Bleeding: The Menstrual Concealment Imperative', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies*, ed. by Chris Bobel, Inga T. Winkler, Breanne Fahs, Katie Ann Hasson, Elizabeth Arveda Kissling, Tomi-Ann Roberts (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 319-26
- Woods, Angela, Hart, Akiko and Spandler, Helen, 'The Recovery Narrative: Politics and Possibilities of a Genre', *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, 46 (2019), 221-47
- Woods, Angela, 'On Shame and Voice-Hearing', *Medical Humanities*, 43.4 (2017), 251-56
- Younger, Beth, 'Pleasure, Pain, and the Power of Being Thin: Female Sexuality in Young Adult Literature', *NWSA Journal*, 15.2 (2003), 45-56

Appendix 1

Monday 28th July. 12:47 p.m. Office/
Nursery. Very hot.

Teddy is in the front garden next door. He's wearing a pull-up nappy and a

white T-shirt with a cartoon ice cream on the front. He doesn't have any shoes on. There is no sign of Casey or Mr Charles. The gate is shut, the small lever on the latch in place.

Appendix 2

9:36 a.m. Gordon and Penny Sullivan appear from number one. Gordon gets into their car as Penny waves to Mr Charles from across the street.

Mr Charles waved back and twirled his garden clippers on his finger like a cowboy, then snipped at the air three times, the silver blades glinting in the sunlight. Penny laughed. Her eyes squinted and she put her hand up to shade them but then her face dropped. She'd spotted something: me. Mr Charles followed her gaze and they both stared at me looking at them from my window. I quickly stepped away and vanished from view, my heart thumping. I waited until I heard Gordon's car reverse out of the driveway and then I looked out on the street again.

9:42 a.m. Penny and Gordon leave to do their weekly supermarket shopping.

9:44 a.m. Melody Bird appears from number three dragging their dachshund, Frankie, behind her.

Appendix 3

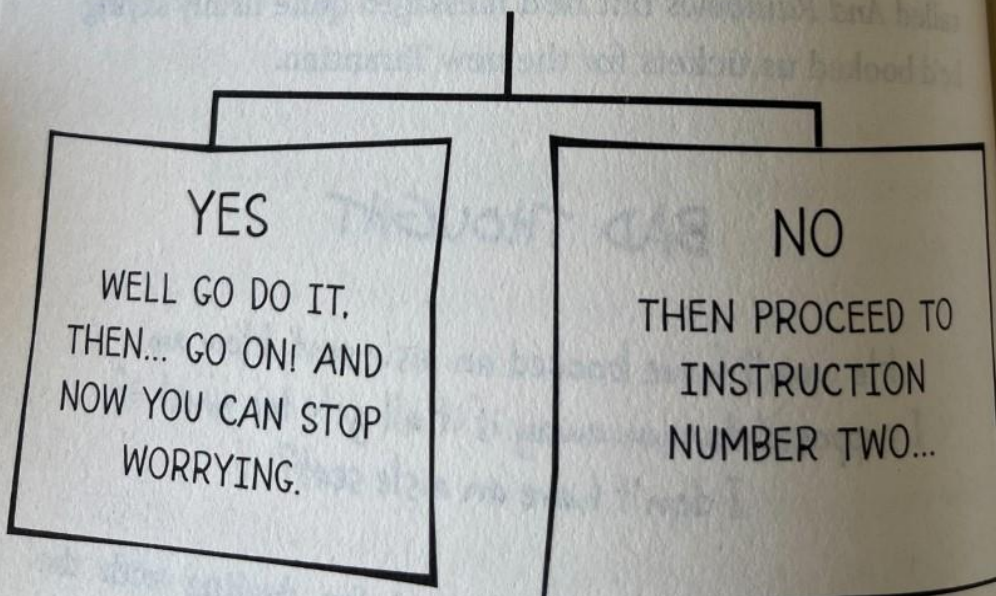
resurrection of bad thoughts – courtesy of Sarah. I was supposed to start owning them, rather than the other way round. This involved a process she'd scribbled down for me, with strict instructions to practise.

HOW TO OWN YOUR BAD THOUGHTS

1) PUT THEM THROUGH THE WORRY TREE.

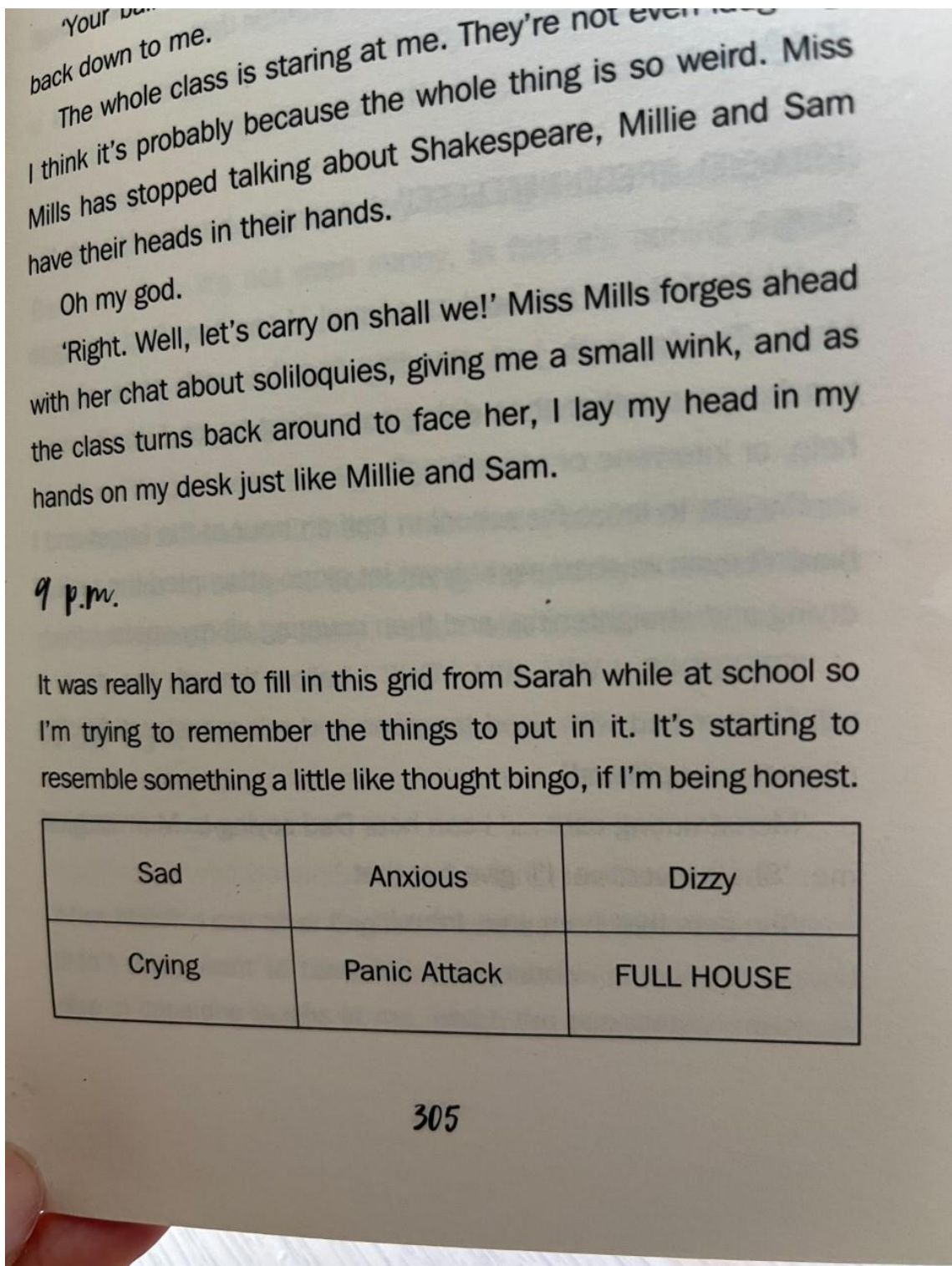
What the heck is a worry tree? Well...it's a bit like those flow chart tests you get in women's magazines that tell you what sort of orgasm you're supposed to be having or whatever. However there are only two branches to the tree.

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU CAN DO ABOUT THIS WORRY RIGHT NOW?



Holly Bourne, *Am I Normal Yet?*, p. 138.

Appendix 4



Kate Weston, *Diary of a Confused Feminist*, p. 305.