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„Representations of suicide, suicidality and its interconnectedness with psychiatric disorders in 21st century American Young Adult Fiction"

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Declaration of Authenticity

I hereby confirm that this diploma thesis was written and conceived entirely by me. Quotations, paraphrased passages, as well as ideas borrowed from the works of other authors are truthfully and distinctly identified and acknowledged in the bibliographical section of this paper. I am aware of the fact that using the material of others without acknowledgement constitutes plagiarism.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Suicide among North American teenagers

Today's youth lives at a time in which capitalism has entered the educational system; sexism, bullying and lack of empathy are often present in their social lives, and more and more young people suffer from psychiatric disorders. The high numbers of suicides among teenagers are thus perhaps not surprising, and indeed, in the last eleven years, suicide has sadly remained among "the top three causes of death in adolescents" (Greydanus 13). Statistics show that on a global scale 90,000 youths under the age of 20 take their own lives every year (Greydanus and Calles qtd. in Greydanus 13). According to the data provided by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (*CDC WISQARS*) and the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 3,898 young people between the ages of 10 and 14 died of suicide in the United Sates between 2006 and 2017. This makes suicide the third most common cause of death of this age cohort, which is only surpassed by unintentional injury and malignant neoplasms (*SCS WISQARS*). In general, teenagers experience a heightened vulnerability during puberty and early adolescence (Rahmandar and Biro 30f), which is one of the reasons why the numbers of suicides among 15- to 24–year-olds are disconcertingly high, with 58,726 adolescents who killed themselves within the same eleven-year period (*CDC WISQARS*). Subsequently, suicide has remained the second most common cause of death in Americans aged 15 to 24 (*CDC WISQARS*). In the year 2017 alone, the United States lost 6,252 young adults aged between 15 and 24 due to suicide (*CDC WISQARS*). The 2017 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Youth Risk Surveillance Survey[1] (*CDC YRSS*) has estimated that on a national level, 17.2 per cent of high school students had already contemplated taking their own lives one year prior to the study (24). Moreover, the survey found that an alarming 13,6 per cent of American high school pupils had already decided upon an actual plan on how to end their lives (*CDC YRSS* 25). Additionally, roughly 7,4 per cent of students "had actually attempted suicide one or more times during the 12 months before the survey" (*CDC YRSS* 26). Despite the fact that experts, as, for instance, Donald E. Greydanus (11), emphasise the preventability

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[1] Due to the long list of authors this source will be referred to as *CDC YRSS*: Kann, McManus, Harris, Shanklin, Flint, Queen, Lowry, Chyen, Whittle, Thornton, Lim, Bradford, Yamakawa, Leon, Brener and Ethier.

of suicide in youths, these high and stable numbers of young people taking their own lives each year suggest that it remains an urgent problem in the United States of America.

1.2. Representations of teenage suicide in 21st century American young adult fiction

The fact that suicidality and suicidal ideation are prevalent among America's youth is also reflected in young adult literature. Nowadays, real-life problems of young people who deal with suicidal thoughts are frequently merged into fictional narratives aimed at adolescents. The three young adult novels chosen as objects of analysis for this thesis, namely Ned Vizzini's *It's Kind of a Funny Story*[2] (2007); Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Place* [3] (2015); and Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why*[4] (2017), all evolve around teenage American protagonists who seriously consider and plan to take their own lives, as well as in the cases of Hannah (*TRW*) and Finch (*ABP*), actually commit suicide. The authors of these three books address the issue of adolescents susceptibility to being hurt in combination with additional hardships, emotional pain and a variety of other problems, which may be social or psychological in nature that surpass the teenage characters' personal "pain threshold beyond which they cannot function" (Maris 321). Thus, showing how unbearable suffering and despair can lead people, especially young and vulnerable ones, to consider suicide a possible and adequate solution to ending their agony. Theodore Finch (*ABP*), Hannah Baker (*TRW*) and Craig Gilner (*IKFS*) all display some form of suicidal ideation, which is defined by Gianluca Serafini, Paola Solano and Mario Amore as "any self-reported thoughts of engaging in suicide-related behavior" (1). Suicidal ideation as such does not necessarily culminate in the death of the individual that suffers from it, since the complex phenomenon of suicide is regarded as a continuum that "ranges from ideas to gestures, to risky lifestyles, suicide plans, suicide attempts, and, finally suicide completions" (Maris 319). Despite the fact that all three protagonists are highly susceptible to committing self-murder, and suffer from psychiatric disorders, Hannah, Finch and Craig differ greatly in how they cope with this burden, and in whether their contemplation of suicide actually evolves into the fatal act of ending their own lives. On

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[2] Ned Vizzini's *It's Kind of a Funny Story* will be referred to as *IKFS*
[3] Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places* will be referred to as *ABP*
[4] Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why* will be referred to as *TRW*

the one hand, the main characters' psychological predispositions - they all show signs of mental illnesses - as well as their social and family environments are among the reason their suicidal tendencies develop in the first place. On the other hand, these factors also largely influence their ability to cope with their severe conditions. Therefore, these three young adult novels offer readers an insight into the complexity and dynamics of factors that eventually lead young people to move beyond their individual manageable amount of pain and sombrely consider taking their own lives.

1.3. Suicide as a dispositive

Even though clinicians stress the correlation between severe psychiatric disorders and suicide (see, for example, Randell, Eggert and Pike 2001 and Wittchen and Hoyer 2011), not all three protagonists, who suffer either from major depression or bipolar disorder, actually die of suicide. This leads to the assumption of the involvement of other factors in the characters' developing suicidality. Donald E. Greydanus, Flora Bacopoulou and Emmanuel Tsalamanios state that "[s]uicidality itself […] is reflective of underlying conflicts that must be corrected to remove the youth's suicidal ideation and eventual suicidal attempt" (100). This supports the assumption that the act of taking one's own life is the result of a complex and multi-layered process. Commonly known risk factors, as, for example, clinical depression and intense feelings of hopelessness, in addition to protective factors, as, for instance, having "healthy and extensive social contacts, […] [and] access to effective treatments" strongly determine whether a suicidal individual actually takes his or her own life (Maris 320f). The fact that people with a high risk of committing suicide, like Hannah, Finch and Craig differ greatly in whether or not they are able to survive mirrors the complexity and multifaceted nature of suicidality. For that reason, each character's path towards experiencing a strong inclination towards suicide and ultimately, at least with Hannah and Finch, towards ending their own lives, will be regarded as a multi-layered network, namely a *suicide-dispositive*. A *dispositive*, one of Michel Foucault's philosophical concepts, is defined as a heterogeneous unity (Foucault qtd. in Ruoff 109), which according to Michael Ruoff, also entails an entirety of institutions, discourses and practices (109). It encompasses everything involved in a multifaceted process, the words that were uttered, as well as those left unsaid (Foucault qtd. in Agamben 8). The *dispositive* itself is the net that connects its individual constituents

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(Foucault qtd. in Agamben 8). If suicide is to be understood in the sense of a dispositive, it follows that being suicidal needs to be viewed as resulting from a multitude of determinants. The occurrence of certain aspects, such as suffering from major depression, in addition to being the victim of sexual violence and bullying, as well as their influence on each other, ultimately produce an individual's positioning within the *suicide-dispositive*. This can either be the position of a person able to recover from their strong susceptibility to self-murder, or of one actually committing suicide. For that reason, this diploma thesis aims at analysing exactly those elements that have led to the development and worsening of the three characters' suicidal tendencies.

1.4. The three areas of analysis – Mental illness, school and family environment

The chosen novel's protagonists all show a range of symptoms characteristic of certain psychiatric disorders, for instance, clinical depression or bipolar disorder. Besides suffering from commonly known mental illnesses, these characters' schools, as well as their family environments visibly reinforce the former and vice versa. Subsequently, the co-influence of these three factors also significantly contributes to the development of the *suicide-dispositive* of which they are a part. Therefore, the individual components of the aforementioned aspects, can serve either as protective or as risk factors that eventually determine their individual paths towards suicide. Taking into consideration that "[a]cute psychosocial crises and psychiatric disorders are commonly the proximal stressors leading to suicidal behaviour" (Hawton and van Heeringen 1374), it is necessary to gain a profound understanding of the characters' mental health and its impact on their portrayed suicidal tendencies. For that reason, Hannah, Finch and Craig's suffering from mental illnesses and its link to the development of the *suicide-dispositives* that these story worlds unfold, will be analysed in the first part of this thesis.

Schools as institutions of education and as social spaces are an essential and influential factor in young peoples' lives. Due to the fact that American teenagers attend school throughout approximately "three-quarters of the calendar year" (Hansen and Lang 850), the effect that the educational demands, as well as the social interactions with peers can have on the mental health of pupils needs to be considered. In their study "of state suicide rates between 1980 and 2004" (850) Benjamin Hansen and Matthew Lang explore the

interconnection between the increasing numbers of youth suicides and the academic calendar (see 850). Their findings suggest that "the increased stress that students face throughout the school year may exacerbate mental health issues and increase youth suicide" (851). Since Hannah, Finch and Craig either experience an enormous amount of pressure in their attempt to attain to the school system's seemingly high standards, or suffer from physical, as well as psychological abuse by their peers, the schools as such are an integral part of the *suicide-dispositives*. Bullying, sexism, sexual abuse, rape, the economisation of education, stigmas and stereotypes against psychiatric disorders and measures taken by authority figures concerning suicidal ideation displayed by the characters and the latter's open contemplation of suicide will be analysed in relation to their influence on the characters' represented mental well-being and their suicidal tendencies. For these reasons, the characters' school environment will be discussed in the second part of this thesis.

Owing to the fact that Hannah, Craig and Finch suffer from severe psychiatric disorders and suicidal ideation, their need for professional medical and psychiatric treatment is also addressed. Since none of the characters' authority figures at school provide them with the aforementioned help, the characters' family environments determine whether they receive such care or not. The importance of having medical professionals taking care of a person with strong suicidal tendencies is shown in *IKFS*, as Craig's stay at Six North facilitates his way to recovery. In contrast to Craig's family in *IKFS* and Violet's in *ABP*, Hannah's, as well as Finch's family fail to recognise the severity of both youth's represented conditions, thus preventing them from receiving the treatment and care they would have needed in order to stay alive. Moreover, Craig and Violet, who are both able to recover from suicidal ideation, both feel loved and accepted by their relatives. By contrast, neither Hannah, who feels neglected by her parents, nor Finch, who is abused by his father and lacks care and attention from his mother and sisters, receive the emotional support necessary for them to survive – both of them commit suicide in the end. This shows that the characters' situation at home is not only significant when it comes to having access to professional treatment, but also in terms of how they are treated by their relatives. Each character's family environment will be analysed in the third part of this thesis, as it significantly determines their positioning within the represented *suicide-dispositives*; hence, whether they eventually commit suicide or not.

As *IKFS*, *TRW* and *ABP* present stories and characters that resonate with young readers, they have all been major successes and enjoyed popularity, especially among teenagers. *IKFS* has not only received numerous awards, as, for instance, the *Young Adult Library Services Association*'s (*YALSA*) award for *Best Books for Young Adults* in 2007 (*ALA IKFS*)[5], but was also turned into a major motion picture movie in 2010 (IMDb *IKFS*)[6]. Similarly, *TRW* won *Best Books for Young Adults* the following year (*ALA TRW*)[7], and was adopted as a controversial (see, for instance, Stafford 2017), yet successful *Netflix* series, the third season of which has already been aired (IMDb *TRW*)[8]. Moreover, with 655 000 followers on Twitter[9] and 4.3 million subscribers on Instagram[10], the Netflix production's popularity cannot be denied. Enjoying a growing fan-base[11], as well as being adapted for the big screen[12] Niven's *ABP* also experiences widespread approval among America's youth. The fact that stories about young people struggling with severe psychological conditions, an often abusive and destructive social environment, and with suicidal behaviour, are so well received demonstrates that these appeal to young adult readers' interests (see, for instance, Rich 2009). The aforementioned large numbers of teenagers experiencing and struggling with suicidal ideation or suicidal behaviour, as well as the fact that Niven's, Asher's and Vizzini's works of fiction are either influenced by their own biographies or inspired by experiences of people close to them (see *Jennifer Niven*; Cohn 2015; Asher *Between the lines*) indicate that the themes addressed in these novels are of importance to their target audience.

In order to gain a profound understanding of these fictional representations of teenage suicide in *IKFS*, *TRW* and *ABP*, this diploma thesis focuses on the analysis of each character's unique development within the *suicide-dispositives*. Serafini, Solano and Amore stress the importance of adults working and engaging with teenagers, for instance, pedagogues, who may function as gatekeepers for suicidal young adults (22). They may benefit from the knowledge gained from this analysis, as it may increase their sensitivity

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[5] Source: *ALA It's Kind of a Funny Story* 1996.
[6] Source: *IMDB It's Kind of a Funny Story* 1990-2019.
[7] Source: *ALA Thirteen Reasons* Why 1996.
[8] Source: *IMDB 13 Reasons Why* 1990-2019.
[9] Source: Twitter - *13 Reasons Why* 2016.
[10] Source: Instagram – *13reasonswhy* 1026.
[11] Source: Instagram – j*enniferniven* 2012.
[12] Source: *IMDB All the Bright Places* 1990-2019.

to the complex and multi-layered process of suicidality, as well as enhance their ability to recognise warning signs of suicide in youths. Additionally, "[y]oung adult literature focused on issues considered sensitive, taboo, or provocative, such as bullying and suicide, may offer powerful reading experiences; however, it is necessary to offer a time and a safe place for readers to talk about these issues" (Pytash 477). Hence, teachers may use *IKFS*, *ABP* and *TRW* and the insights gained from this thesis in order to raise their students' awareness of these subject matters and aid them in transferring this knowledge into their own lives. Gaining a profound understanding of each protagonist's complex, dynamic and multi-faceted path towards either killing themselves, or towards healing, can be deemed important for young readers own real-life experiences and their personal development as responsible, social and empathetic members of society.

Several studies emphasise the importance and usefulness of young adult literature for their target audience, whether it concerns raising awareness of stigmata associated with psychiatric disorders; bullying, sexual abuse or preventing suicidality among the latter (see, for instance, Pytash 2013; Bushman and McNerny 2004; Groenke, Maples and Henderson 2010). More importantly, Anneke de Graaf's study on the influence of narratives on readers' personal notions of health provides further evidence for the impact fictional narratives can have on the lived reality of their readers (83-85). *IKFS*, *TRW* and *ABP* depict the stories of teenagers suffering due to mental issues, bullying, isolation, stigma, sexual assault and other cruelties that their life has in store for them. Hence, young adult novels, such as these three, offer their young and still developing audience the opportunity to experience the challenges, pain, despair and the moral and psychological dilemmas of suicidal teenagers through the fictional characters of Hannah, Finch and Craig. According to John H. Bushman and Shelley McNerny, "[r]eading young adult novels that feature realistic moral dilemmas and their consequences provides adolescents with a safe venue in which they can explore a variety of solutions to modern problems" (62). Additionally, Vera Nünning argues that while reading fiction and engaging with characters requires readers "to adopt the characters' perspectives in order to understand them", which, in turn, "can be [...] effective in reducing stereotypes and promoting altruistic behaviour" (236f). In *TRW* and *ABP*, for example, young adult readers can observe how Hannah and Finch, the victims of slut shaming and/- or bullying, are emotionally, mentally and physically affected by the maltreatment they receive from their

colleagues at school. In contrast to these portrayals of negative and destructive peer relationships, *IKFS*'s Craig shows readers the positive, and to some extent, life-saving impact of an empathetic, understanding and supportive social environment on a young suicidal and mentally ill individual. It follows that through the examination of these fictional characters and the multitude of factors involved in the development of the *suicide-dispositives* of which they form an integral part, "readers [are presented] with alternative methods to understand their own moral dilemmas and positively resolve conflicts in their own lives" (Bushman and McNerny 62). Hence, young adults may become more socially and morally aware, as reading fiction enhances their "experiences" which may turn into useful abilities in their everyday life (Nünning 247f). *IKFS*, *ABP* and *TRW* can serve as means to encourage teens to recognise and speak up against bullying, sexism, academic pressure, stigmas against mental illnesses, and social injustice.

Today's young adult readers live at a time in which the current President of the United States of America, Donald J. Trump, does not only face sexual assault allegations, but also, in one case, attempts to deny these serious accusations by claiming that the alleged victim is not his type (Zurcher n.p.). Accusations, ranging from sexual abuse to sex trafficking, against powerful and well connected men have mounted in recent years, and exposed how highly dangerous perpetrators, like magnate Jeffrey Epstein (Powell and Rising n.p.) and musician and producer R. Kelly (Fortin n.p.), were shielded from having to face the legal and moral consequences of their crimes for years. The me-too movement not only enabled the numerous alleged sexual assault victims of film tycoon Harvey Weinstein to speak out and to share their trauma, but also exposed how sexual violence is endemic to the film industry, and today's society in general (Shugerman n.p.). In the wake of this movement stories, such as *TRW* that address the link between the prevalence of sexism, sexual objectification of women, notions of toxic masculinity paired with male entitlement and sexually motivated violence against women are of utmost importance for America's youth. Therefore, making these issues the topics of discussion is necessary in order to raise awareness and to make teenagers understand the complexity and implications of sexism on the lived reality of women and girls in the United States.

Since the concept of the dispositive as the multi-facetted background to human behaviour provides the framework for this thesis, the literary analysis is developed in dialogue with

theories, concepts and approaches from various fields. Hence, despite the fact that three young adult novels are the subject of this work, they are not solely analysed in terms of literary theory. The focus of this diploma thesis is nourished by the scientific disciplines of clinical psychology, philosophy, education, feminism, gender studies and social sciences. This approach to analysing these works of fiction serves to demonstrate the complexity inherent in these different representations of suicide. Interpreting each character's path towards either attempting or committing suicide in the sense of a *suicide-dispositive* highlights how the interplay between a character's psychological disposition, his or her family and educational environment, and the positive and negative experiences he or she makes determines whether he or she eventually dies of self-murder. Bringing Foucault's concept of the dispositive into contact with these objects of analysis, namely the representations of suicidality, facilitates a better and deeper understanding of the complex, dynamic and multifaceted nature of a person's path towards suicide. The insights gained through this analysis may be used by those working with young adults to raise awareness of the issues addressed in the novels, in addition to fostering young readers' understanding of the characters' felt hopelessness, worthless and loneliness, as well as how empathy, acceptance and professional treatment may save lives. This again may indirectly serve as means of preventing youth suicide. This thesis further aims to demonstrate that each character's contemplation, planning and/ or act of committing suicide are the result of the co-occurance of a variety of factors. These in turn, lead the chosen protagonists to perceive taking their own life as their last available means of coping with the psychological, emotional, and physical pain these events and circumstances have caused them. Additionally, this analysis will show that the time shortly before Hannah, Craig and Finch either commit suicide or reach out for help, needs to be viewed as one of a social and psychological crisis. Since the despair and hopelessness they experience during these hours exceed their individual thresholds of pain, their perspective, mental stability and ways of coping are limited, which leads them to viewing suicide as an emergency exit.

2. Part I – Mental illness as part of the *suicide-dispositives*

In the first part of this thesis the representations of Hannah's, Craig's and Finch's mental condition and its role in the characters' positioning in the developing *suicide-dipositives* will be analysed. As already mentioned in the introduction, these three characters display a range of symptoms characteristic for at least one of these psychiatric disorders – clinical depression and bipolar disorder. Additionally, they all suffer from suicidal ideation and engage in suicidal behaviour. The correlation between mental illnesses and suicide is thoroughly researched, and the former is listed as a widely acknowledged risk factor for suicide (see, for example, Serafini, Solano and Amore 2015; Randell, Eggert and Pike 2001; Gençöz and Or 2006). In order to get an accurate account of the characters' final stance within the *suicide-dispositives*, it is necessary to analyse the symptoms of mental illnesses displayed by them. The fictional representations and the narrative techniques used to illustrate how the teenagers' psychiatric disorders facilitate the developing and worsening of their mental conditions will be analysed.

According to Gernot Sonneck, Nestor Kapusta, Gerald Tomandl and Martin Voracek, the most indubitable way to determine whether a person is in danger of contemplating suicide is through direct or indirect hints towards his or her suicidal ideation (23). Having access to a fictional character's private thoughts and feelings, as it is the case in all three novels, through first person narration, allows readers to detect hints towards the latter's suicidal tendencies, and, to their mental wellbeing in general. This enables a thorough analysis of how the protagonists' mental conditions contribute to the emergence of their suicidal ideation, and thus, increase their susceptibility to committing suicide. Having access to a suicidal protagonist's mind is especially important for readers who do not suffer from a similar condition or do not have sufficient knowledge of these disorders, as they are likely to perceive the way these teenage characters' minds work, as well as the problems they have to face, as, to some extent, deviating from their own experiences. Being exposed to the unique perceptions of mentally ill and suicidal characters may enhance readers' understanding of the symptomatology of certain psychiatric disorders and their implications for those affected by these illnesses. Since many readers are not familiar with the influence of severe suicidal ideation on a person's mind and perception of the world around him or her, the narrative situations in *ABP* and *TRW* can also be seen as "narrative

techniques [that] induc[e] perspective taking" (Nünning 254). Both young adult novels use two alternating figural narrators, one mentally stable and one mentally ill internal focaliser. They serve as "psychological centre[s] of orientation through whose perceptions the fictional events are filtered" (Nünning 255). Hence, readers may be able to determine whether the characters are at a great risk of committing self-murder, as well as the extent to which the latter's mental conditions facilitate the development of their suicidal behaviour.

Violet's (*ABP*) and Clay's (*TRW*) experiences are more likely to be relatable for readers who are not familiar with the mental conditions displayed by Finch (*ABP*) and Hannah (*TRW*), as their mental states are relatively stable despite the loss and the emotional hardships they experience. Thus, they function as reference points for these readers. Finch's (*ABP*) and Hannah's (*TRW*) losing the fight against their inner demons, deems the remaining narrative focalisations of Violet and Clay essential to illustrate the consequences their suicide has on other characters and to highlight the finality of self-murder. The narratives of characters like Finch (*ABP*), Craig (*IKFS*) and Hannah (*TRW*) may also have a validating function for readers struggling with or experiencing similar pain, discrimination, and/ or stereotyping. Hence, reading *ABP*, *TRW* and *IKFS* provides readers with "impressions [of] [...] characters' mental processes" (Nünning 255f) unavailable in real life situations. This, in turn, Nünning argues, leads readers to "refine their implicit personality theories and practice empathy and theory-of-mind abilities" (256). Ultimately young readers who read young adult novels, like *ABP*, *IKFS* and *TRW*, may be more apt to reduce their own stereotypes against other people, as well as engage in "altruistic behaviour" (Nünning 236). For these reasons, these three works of fiction are likely to contribute to raising awareness of the link between psychiatric disorders and suicidal ideation in teenagers, hence, indirectly contribute to the prevention of suicide among the latter.

2.1. Theodore Finch – Bipolar disorder in *ABP*

In Jennifer Niven's *All The Bright Places* (2015), one of the two main characters and narrators, Theodore Finch asks himself right at the beginning of the story: "*Is today a good day to die?* [...] *Is today the day? And if not today—when?*" (3). This blunt contemplation provides evidence for the teenage-boy's suicidal ideation, and serves to immediately raise the readers' awareness of the peculiarity and graveness of his current situation, and to his closeness to death. By posing these questions readers are indirectly addressed, which may foster their sympathy for Finch and their emotional involvement in his story. The last question he asks in the quote above further implies a sense of certainty concerning his own inevitable self-inflicted death, which also signals that the male protagonist of this story is in desperate need of help. Sonneck et al. explain that the direct or indirect proclamation of suicide, the attempt to take one's own life, as well as the contemplation of suicide, are all considered suicidal behaviour (160). Since Finch does not only attempt to take his own life a number of times, but actually commits suicide in the end (see, for instance, *ABP* 9 and 223f), he certainly displays suicidal behaviour. Moreover, the adolescent's obsessive way of reflecting on how and when to end his own life, his keeping a suicide journal (*ABP* 36), as well as his frequent mentioning of facts about suicide and people who commit self-murder, highlight the grave peril he is in (74). Further evidence for him being at high risk of taking his own life is provided by the fact that, in the very first chapter, he is standing on the ledge of the school bell tower without a recollection of how he arrived there (*ABP* 4).

Even though Finch's path that led him to take his own life can by no means be regarded as one-dimensional, his having to cope with being bipolar without receiving any help from medical professionals is indeed a major aspect of his being unable to survive within the *suicide-dispositive* that unfolds in *ABP*. This assumption is supported by the fact that being manic-depressive poses the highest risk of committing suicide among all other psychiatric illnesses (Baldessarini and Tondo qtd. in Wittchen and Hoyer 866). Giuseppe Marano, Gianandrea Traversi, Carola Nannarelli, Salvatore Mazza and Marianna Mazza define bipolar disorder as: "a psychiatric disease that involves profound changes in mood accompanied by severe changes in feelings, thoughts and behaviors: emotions can move quickly from a deep depression to excessive excitement, without some apparent reason"

(1). The distinctive alteration between manic phases, in which a patient displays a sublime and highly irritable mood, and depressive phases, which are characterised by prostration, is characteristic of this illness (Wittchen and Hoyer 859). Hence, it is often referred to as manic-depressive disorder. Finch himself is unaware of the fact that he suffers from this particular mental condition. The teenage boy displays a multitude of symptoms characteristic of bipolar disorder. For instance, his reduced need of sleep (*ABP* 78), his constant lack of appetite (*ABP* 39), his oftentimes racing thoughts (277f), as well as his occasional fearlessness and recklessness correspond with the emotional and physiological symptomatology listed by Hans-Ulrich Wittchen and Jürgen Hoyer (859). Only towards the end of the story does his counsellor, Mr. Embry, suggest that he might suffer from this psychiatric condition, not long before his condition deteriorates and ultimately, in combination with other factors, leads to his committing suicide. The following analysis will show how the teenage boy's psychological condition forms the foundation of his position of a person killing himself in this *suicide-dispositive*.

Right at the beginning of the novel, Finch offers a first glimpse of the particularity of his sufferings, when he says, "This happens every time—the blanking out, the waking up. […] Now you see me, now you don't" (*ABP* 4). Here, Finch's description of being in a state of transition, on a threshold, can be interpreted as representing the state of a "liminal entit[y]" (Turner 95). Ursula Wiest-Kellner describes liminality as a condition of instability and elusiveness, a staggering between two worlds, a certain duplicity, as well as representing a paradox and an ambivalence (33). Since Finch, Craig (*IKFS*) and Hannah (*TRW*) are torn between ending their sorrows by committing self-murder and summoning their last strengths to stay alive, a certain degree of liminality can be ascribed to all of them. The characteristics of beings on the threshold also apply to the instability inherent in the nature of Finch's suffering from manic-depressive disorder. Hence, the concept of liminality accentuates the male protagonist's mental condition and subsequently aids readers' understanding of Finch's character. Due to the duality inherent in the symptomatology of manic-depressive disorder, with alternations between manic and depressive phases, Finch's personality, like those of beings on the threshold, is "necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and th[is] person[…] elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space" (Turner 95). Victor Turner goes on to stress the connection between liminality and death,

as well as to the theme of darkness (95), which is also represented in the male protagonist's character development. It follows that this concept further illuminates the lethality of the teenage boy's untreated condition, as well as how his constant staggering between his desire to live and his strong inclination towards suicide contribute significantly to his act of self-murder in the end. Moreover, standing on the ledge of the school's bell tower, considering whether to stay alive or not, further exemplifies Finch's experience as a liminal entity, which contributes to his positioning within the *suicide-dispositive*. The fact that the teenage boy struggles with the intense repercussions of his last depressive episode, which he refers to as the *Asleep* (*ABP* 4), after which he is not able to find his way back into his everyday life, also classifies as a transitional phase. Finch's neither being able to return to the *Asleep*, nor being able to move forward, as he is not yet capable of ridding himself of the numbness and the destructive suicidal forces that consume him at that time, illustrates his state of liminality even further (Wiest-Kellner 39). In contrast to the *Asleep*, the adolescent uses the term *Awake* when referring to his manic phases. Wiest-Kellner argues that the you-pronoun's connotation of a text-intern recipient also indirectly addresses readers that are outside of the fictional world (73). This merging of the fictional world and the real world may serve to encourage readers to empathise with the male protagonist. Subsequently, readers are indirectly addressed and may feel compelled to emotionally respond to the narrator's despair when Finch states, "[n]ow you see me, no you don't" (*ABP* 4).

By diagnosing Finch as suffering from manic-depressive disorder, and providing him with a definition of this illness, Mr. Embry's words not only educate the former, but also young adult readers. Furthermore, the counsellor provides both, the character and the readers, with the professional psychological terminology necessary to get a profound understanding of this condition. Mr. Embry describes bipolar disorder as "[...] a brain disorder that causes extreme shifts in mood and energy" (*ABP* 271), which corresponds to the definition provided above by Marano et al. Finch's personal description of his suffering mirrors the episodic and liminal nature of this condition:

> You'd think I'd have gotten used to it, but this time was the worst yet because I wasn't asleep for a couple of days or a week or two—I was asleep for the holidays, meaning Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's. I can't tell you what was different this time around, only that when I woke up, I felt deader than usual.

Awake, yeah, but completely empty, like someone had been feasting on my blood. (*ABP* 4)

Evidently, Finch tries to explain himself, but lacks the vocabulary and the psychological knowledge to describe his condition. Although the young adult is familiar with the constant alternation between manic and depressive phases, he indicates that this particular depressive episode exceeds previous ones in its magnitude and duration. Standing on the ledge of a rooftop, unsure about whether he should take his own life or not, shortly after having awoken from a depressive phase which has left him feeling nothing but emptiness and loss, points to the link between Finch being bipolar disorder and his heightened suicidality. This again provides further proof for the assumption that the teenage boy's psychological condition is a significant part of the *suicide-dispositive* unfolding in *ABP*. Additionally, the fact that Finch has no recollection of the whole school winter holidays further highlights the severity of his current situation, and shows readers how his untreated illness prevents him from participating in everyday life. The dark and sad tone, as well as the graphical language used by Finch also serve to further stress the seeming hopelessness of his situation, and to foreshadow his self-inflicted death in the end. However, as the story progresses, the next manic episode slowly emerges as his behaviour becomes more eccentric and impulsive.

Although Finch is never able to fully rid himself from the magnitude of his last depressive episode, he openly displays a multitude of symptoms assigned to the manic phases characteristic of bipolar disorder. Marano et al. explain how mania frequently comes in the manifestations of "exasperated disinhibition" (1) and lists a variety of manic symptoms, such as "an euphoric or irritable mood, angry and reactive state of mind" (1), all of which Finch displays frequently. For example, a number of times Finch goes out running until he feels in control of the depressive forces that seem to linger inside his brain, and tries to outrun them at basically any time of the day or night. This can be seen when he and Violet visit the Bookmobile Park and, all of a sudden, he starts running towards the car, "Then I can't hold back anymore, and I take off running, and it feels good to break free from the slow, regular pace of everyone else" (*ABP* 132). Here, his urge to give way to his increased drive for activity, as well as his thrusting use of language are clearly visible, which according to Wittchen and Hoyer, are part of the behavioural and physical symptomatology of the manic-depressive disorder (859). Additionally, Finch

indicates that he considers himself as being different, since he feels as if he is never able to accommodate to the pace of the people around him, which can be ascribed to the extreme shifts between the *Asleep* and the *Awake*, and the liminality of the transitional phases occurring in between those two extremes. This also implies that his condition causes him to experience difficulties adhering to the expectations of his surroundings. The significant consequences of the constant presence of underlying depressive symptoms on the social functionality and integration of bipolar patients is also emphasised by Wittchen and Hoyer (865). This is evident in the teenage boy's inability to attend school, sessions with his counsellor, family dinners, and gatherings with his friends and girlfriend on a regular basis, which, in turn, points to the instability and liminality of his condition.

Finch's symptomatology ranges from almost bursting with energy and having difficulty restraining himself from emotional outbursts to being unable to take part in any form of social interaction when his depression forces him to hide in his closet. Another instance where his behaviour and reaction seem eccentric and impulsive occurs after a visit at his father's new home where an emotionally heated argument between him and his father takes place. At this point, Finch experiences heightened affectivity and irritability, and is thus not able to control his anger and hatred towards his father. Again, the behavioural and emotional symptoms of the manic-depressive disorder (Wittchen and Hoyer 859) are highlighted by his engaging in reckless and disinhibited behaviour as he drives off without having any idea of where he is going, until he "drive[s] too fast, but it doesn't feel fast enough" (*ABP* 260). Here, Finch tries to express the nervousness, precipitousness, tenseness and restlessness he experiences during these episodes, through the short and quick stringing together of descriptions (*ABP* 260). Throughout the whole passage the teenage boy refers to himself by using the first-person pronoun excessively, which indicates that the emotive and cognitive symptoms force him to solely focus on his racing thoughts. This, in turn, limit his perspective and abilities during such episodes. The following quote illustrates the moment he becomes aware of his physical location, "Suddenly I'm surrounded by farms again" (*ABP* 261). Eventually, driving at full speed is no longer sufficient for his increased urge to release his explosive feelings, which leads him to leave his car behind, in an area he is not familiar with, and again tries to outrun his emotions in the midst of winter, "I run like hell, [...]. I run so hard and fast, I feel like my lungs will explode, and then I go harder and faster" (*ABP* 260). Again, this shows his

tendency to engage in disinhibited and exaggerated behaviour, also listed by Sonneck et al. as characteristic of this condition (859). Even though Finch eventually sorts his own thoughts and manages to calm himself (see *ABP* 261f), the stress and anxiety one single manic episode causes him points to the interconnectedness of his mental condition and his heightened risk of committing suicide. Therefore, Finch's suffering from bipolar disorder is a determinant factor of his position of a person killing himself within the *suicide-dispositive*.

As the story continues and Finch and Violet's emotional bond starts to grow, the latter finds her way back to enjoying life, while Finch's manic phase slowly gives way to the depressive episode that step by step creeps its way back into his mind. The portrayal of this transition serves readers as an example of how this intense change from feeling extremely joyous and almost ecstatic to a depression that sometimes leaves those suffering from it, feeling completely empty, affects the perceived life-quality of bipolar patients. Throughout the story Finch's condition worsens and his suicidality grows, especially due to the increasing number of mixed episodes he suffers from (see, for instance, *ABP* 261f). According to Keith Hawton, Lesley Sutton, Camilla Haw, Julia Sinclair and Louise Harriss, "[r]isk factors for suicidal behaviour [in patients with bipolar disorder] include previous self-harm, [...], early onset and increasing severity of the disorder, depressive symptoms (including hopelessness), [and] mixed affective states [...]" (qtd. in Hawton and van Heeringen 1374). This provides additional support for the assumption that the adolescent's pathology contributes to his heightened risk to commit self-murder. In the following quote, Finch describes this alternation of episodes, this liminal state, "It feels a lot like the strain of trying to stay awake when I can feel the darkness sliding under my skin, trying to borrow my body without asking so that my hands become its hands, my legs its legs" (*ABP* 223). Here, Finch indicates that he experiences depressive phases as powerful forces that overwhelm him and, as he points out, take over his whole body, leaving him at the mercy of his mental condition. Finch's use of the third person pronoun, in this quote, adds emphasis to his being at the mercy of his illness and his strong suicidal tendencies. The representation of the complexity and the dynamic of Finch's illness can serve the didactic purpose of fostering young adult readers' understanding of bipolar disorder.

Finch's fascination with death, in general, is prominent throughout the novel, which can be seen in his keeping a journal in which he neatly documents when and how he attempted suicide, as well as facts about certain methods, numbers concerning suicide and about famous people that also employed a particular technique in taking their own lives (e.g. *ABP* 36 and 74). According to Franz Petermann, Andreas Maercker, Wolfgang Lutz and Ulrich Stangier, people suffering from bipolar disorder often experience reoccurring thoughts about death, including suicide (222). Further on in the story, at a point where Finch loses control over his psychomotor activity, the link between the constant presence of the theme of death and his suicidal tendencies is shown:

> As I sit across from him [Mr. Embry], telling my face to smile, my mind recites the suicide note of Vladimir Mayakovski, poet of the Russian Revolution, who shot himself at the age of thirty-six: [...] And suddenly Embryo is hunched over his desk staring at me with what could only be called alarm. Which means I must have said this out loud without meaning to. (*ABP* 270)

Here, the severity and intensity of the teenage boy's state is not only manifested in the topic of suicide that forms the content of his thoughts, but also in the hallow and flat tone of his narration that stands in direct contrast to his counsellor's alarmed reaction. Additionally, the teenager's loss of sanity is reflected in the duality of his, on the one hand, claiming to be in control of his facial expressions but, on the other hand, being at the mercy of his brain, as he implies that it is the latter reciting this note and not he himself. This can be interpreted as an implication of the fact that the illness has already taken over his brain, which is also evident in how he refers to his mind as an entity detached from himself. This shows how the young adult is, at this point, at the mercy of his condition and is about to lose his sense of self completely. As a result of the teenage boy's crumbling mental stability, his narration becomes unreliable, which may serve to raise young adult readers' awareness of the acuteness of the protagonist's situation and his need for professional help. The fact that he is no longer in command of the omnipresent thoughts about self-murder and his sudden realisation of his counsellor's shocked reaction also imply that at times, he is completely unaware of his surroundings. These symptoms point to his gradually declining sanity, which suggests that Finch is no longer capable of making rational and well thought of decisions anymore and that his drowning himself should be recognised as an act of desperation. As the young adult's suffering from bipolar disorder contributes significantly to his obsession with death and to his committing suicide in the

end, it follows that his mental condition significantly determines his position of a person who kills himself in the *suicide-dispositive* of which he is a part.

As the story continues, readers witness the struggles Finch faces in his attempt to stay alive and to fit into a society that has rejected him for not being able to adhere to its rules. The portrayal of a character that suffers from a manic-depressive disorder and does not receive the help and care he would need in order to adequately cope with his illness, can serve to raise awareness among readers concerning the severity and the need for professional treatment that such a disease demands. Moreover, the teenage boy's ordeal also puts emphasis on the need for an understanding and supportive environment that aids individuals, like Finch, in managing their condition, instead of contributing to the worsening of it. Guy Goodwin and Gary Sachs stress the need to "address the seriousness of the illness, the high risk of relapse and the benefit of active treatment" (54). Subsequently, Finch's suffering, as well as his giving way to his suicidal tendencies in the end, can be viewed as a chilling yet educational example concerning the severity of this particular disorder and its connection to suicide. Despite the fact that Finch's being bipolar is not the sole reason for his suicide, as a multitude of other factors also determine whether he stands a chance of surviving within the *suicide-dispositive*, this analysis clearly shows that his mental condition puts him at a greater risk of committing self-murder.

2.2. Hannah Baker – Clinical depression in *TRW*

In contrast to Theodore Finch in *ABP* and Craig Gilner in *IKFS*, Hannah Baker (*TRW*) is already dead at the starting point of the narration. Another feature of *TRW* that differs from the other two young adult novels is that readers only have access to Hannah's narrative voice during her last days alive. It follows that her recounting the events and reasons why she is about to commit self-murder is strongly shaped by her crumbling mental state and the emotional pain she experiences at that time. Like Craig, Hannah displays a variety of symptoms characteristic for clinical depression. The fact that the young adult repeatedly experiences traumatic events that increase her susceptibility to becoming clinically depressed provides further proof for her suffering from this particular mental condition (Nolen-Hoeksema 173). The reciprocal effect between the trauma the teenage girl sustains and her worsening mental condition nourishes her suicidal tendencies. Eventually, the young adult is no longer capable of coping with her sorrows, and thus, commits self-murder. Therefore, the teenage girl's mental disorder is part of the reason why she is not able to survive in the *suicide-dispositive* unfolding in *TRW*.

To begin with, the most prominent feature of Hannah's condition is that she repeatedly engages in thoughts of her own death, as eventually the mere contemplation of suicide culminates in her planning and subsequently executing her own death. Hannah's re-occurring suicidal thoughts serve as indicator for her suffering from clinical depression (Wittchen and Hoyer 881). Sonneck et al. state that an estimated 30 per cent of all suicides are committed by people who living with some form of depression (161), which supports the assumption that the female protagonist's death is inextricably linked with her suffering from this, in her case undiagnosed and untreated, psychiatric disorder. Throughout her narration, the teenage girl repeatedly emphasises that she had struggled with suicidal thoughts prior to her recording the tapes, thus implying that her suicidal tendencies have been developing over a long period of time. Once, she anonymously writes a note to her Peer Communications teacher, which says, "'*Suicide. It's something I've been thinking about. Not too seriously, but I have been thinking about it*'" (*TRW* 170). This note reveals not only that she understands the seriousness of the prevalence with which these thoughts occur, but also that she tries to fight her suicidal tendencies by reaching out for help. Since Hannah actually commits suicide in the end, readers may become

aware of the fact that warning signs, such as this one, need to be taken seriously. Afterwards, Hannah provides her listeners with the reasons behind her note, "*It* [the note] *was a lie. I hadn't been thinking about it. Not really. Not in great detail. The thought would come into my head and I'd push it away. But I pushed it away a lot*" (*TRW* 170). This quote reveals that Hannah's heightened risk of suicide is already present at an earlier stage of the story, and continuously worsens as her mental condition becomes more and more unstable due to the traumatic events she experiences. Later on, she explains how suicidal thoughts emerge from her mind, "*More and more, in very general terms, I'd been thinking about my own death*" (*TRW* 248). Here, her use of language highlights the growing intensity with which these thoughts occur, as well as her embracing her own death as a possible solution to her problems. Due to the fact that the teenage girl constantly contemplates whether she should take her own life, which according to Sonneck et al. is one of the first indications for the growing severity of a person's suicidality (176), the acuteness of her situation is stressed even further. Taking into account that due to the narratorial situation of the story readers already know that Hannah does indeed kill herself in the end, it can be assumed that they will be able to recognise her behaviour and her note as cries for help. This may lead young adult readers to take warning signs similar to those Hannah displays seriously.

Hannah's poem "*Soul Alone*" (*TRW* 190) provides readers with a different representation of her psychiatric illness and her growing suicidal tendencies:

> I meet your eyes
> you don't even see me
> You hardly respond
> when I whisper
> hello. (190)

It can be argued that Hannah herself is the addressee of her own poem, as she experiences a gradual loss of self at the time of writing. By addressing herself in the second person she conveys a sense of detachment from her own self, which suggests that she struggles to maintain a coherent and authentic sense of self. Here, Hannah reveals how the negative image her colleagues at school paint of her reinforces her own pessimistic thoughts, as well as her negative attitude towards herself, which are both cognitive symptoms of depression (Wittchen and Hoyer 880). Moreover, readers may infer that as a consequence of her loss of self, the teenage girl also experiences a loss of voice, as she is merely capable

of whispering. Hannah's losing her voice and the ability to recognise her own reflection, in turn, symbolise her growing desire to disappear - to commit suicide. Furthermore, the lack of emotions Hannah ascribes to herself in this poem illustrate the feelings of numbness and emptiness, which Wittchen and Hoyer list among the emotive symptoms of clinical depression (880). This poem can be interpreted as serving readers as another indicator for her worsening condition and her growing suicidal ideation, as it offers additional insights into her mind. In the following stanza, Hannah again hints at how she experiences her voice as fading away as she attempts to recognise herself:

> My own mother
> you carried me in you
> Now you see nothing
> but what I wear
> People ask you
> how I am doing
> You smile and nod
> don't let it end
> there. (*TRW* 190)

At the beginning of this stanza, Hannah directly addresses her mother, who, according to the teenage girl herself, has neglected her own daughter. The fact that Hannah's parents seem oblivious to their daughter's psychological and emotional crisis will be discussed in the third part of this thesis. Halfway through the poem her address shifts, as she again appears to be referring to herself in the second person, which can be interpreted as another attempt to get in touch with her own self. The penultimate line, thus, may be understood as her attempting to convince herself not to commit suicide. Therefore, revealing her growing suicidal ideation, which Wittchen and Hoyer list as belonging to the symptomatology of major depression (880). Since the teenage girl does try to gain control over her condition, it can be assumed that Hannah's death happens at a point when she perceives suicide as her only remaining way of coping with the unbearable pain she feels. Additionally, the emphasis on her mask-like behaviour that serves to cover the emptiness lingering inside of her, and the weak and feeble plea at the end, which assumes a lack of physical and psychological strength, provide further evidence for her suffering from clinical depression (Wittchen and Hoyer 880). It can be argued that Hannah employs poetry as a means to grasp her own emotions and thoughts, as she appears to not know herself anymore (*TRW* 175f), however, having to face the overwhelming sadness reflected

in her poems, forces her to stop writing poetry altogether. Hence, her former coping strategy eventually fails her, as her own emotions and thoughts become too hard to bear. This, in turn, further affirms her in considering suicide an adequate solution to her despair (Greydanus, Bacopoulou and Tsalamanios 98).

In addition to contemplating suicide on a regular basis, Hannah suffers an immense loss of self-worth. The young adult's lack of self-confidence and self-worth is clearly visible in her reaction towards Ryan Shaver's interpretation of her poem:

> You told me I wrote that poem because I was afraid of dealing with myself. And I used my mom as an excuse, accusing her of not appreciating or accepting me, when I should have been saying those words into a mirror. 'And the boy?' I asked. 'What does he represent?' [...] You told me that no boy was overlooking me more than I was overlooking myself. (*TRW* 188f)

Hannah's inability to cope with her depression becomes apparent through Ryan's interpretation of her poem, as her deepest fears manifest themselves in it. According to Wittchen and Hoyer, those suffering from clinical depression often display feelings of intense sadness, glumness, and fervent despair (880). Considering Hannah's fear of discovering her innermost thoughts, it can be assumed that she experiences similar thoughts and emotions, as described by the two authors above. The quote further highlights her lack of self-confidence and self-worth, as well as her feeling ashamed of herself, which Wittchen and Hoyer consider as cognitive symptoms of major depression (880). Moreover, this shows how "girls are more prone to internalize problems, resulting in anxiety and depressive symptoms" (Werbart Törnblom, Werbart and Rydelius 1100), as Hannah eventually turns her aggression towards her own self. Her tendency to direct these negative emotions inwards majorly determines her position of a person that does not survive the *suicide-dispositive* of which she is a part.

Another symptom displayed by Hannah that as Hermann Hobmair explains is frequently found with people suffering from depression is an extreme feeling of guilt (485). Even though Hannah mainly focuses on accusing other people of causing her pain, she states that she sees herself as being responsible for the car-accident caused by Jenny Kurtz (*TRW* 242-247). The teenage girl also holds herself accountable for not stopping Bryce Walker from raping the unconscious Jessica Davis at the party she and Clay attended, despite her being neither in the physical nor in the mental state to stand up to Jessica's perpetrator

(*TRW* 223 and 227). Shortly before Hannah stumbles and hides in a cupboard, where she witnesses the crime, she has a mental collapse. Nevertheless, she blames herself for Jessica being raped, "*And I could have stopped it. If I could have talked. If I could have seen. If I could have thought about anything, I would have opened those doors and stopped it. But I didn't. And it doesn't matter what my excuse was. That my mind was in a meltdown is no excuse. I could have stopped it—end of story*" (*TRW* 226f). Although Hannah's use of conditional clauses signals her attempt to find excuses for her lack of action, at the end of the quote, her firm and crisp wording implies that she feels a sense of responsibility for Bryce's crime. This quote reveals the severity of Hannah's symptomatology and the negative impact the trauma of witnessing her former friend's rape has on her mental health, as she again channels these negative and destructive feelings inwards. Moreover, the fact that Hannah chooses to tell this story and emphasises her particular part in it, serves as further proof of her heightened sense of guilt being one of the reasons why she killed herself. This again supports the assumption that her suffering from major depression is among the reasons why she is not able to escape the *suicide-dispositive* in the end.

Wittchen and Hoyer further emphasise that in order for a person to be diagnosed as clinically depressed it is essential that feelings of dejectedness, a depressive or sad mood, as well as loss of interest and enjoyment in almost every activity in life are present over at least two weeks' time (880). The fact that Hannah displays all of the aforementioned symptoms lends additional proof to the assumption that she suffers from major depression, which, in turn, facilitates the development of her suicidal tendencies. The teenage girl repeatedly mentions how she feels empty and lost, for instance, when she tries to reach out for help and visits the guidance counsellor Mr. Porter. When asked how she feels, she explicitly answers, "*Right now I feel lost, I guess. Sort of empty*" (*TRW* 271). Hannah's account of her feelings indicates her state of hopelessness and numbness, which are characteristic of a lack of emotional expressiveness and a restricted affect. This further highlights the severity of her situation, as well as her desperate need for professional help, as Sonneck et al. list those two characteristics among the risk factors for suicidal individuals (23). Since Hannah commits suicide shortly after her visit to Mr. Porter, his failure to recognise her condition as alarming and urgent can be regarded as highly problematic. Even more so, considering that young adult readers who struggle with

suicidal ideation or a mental illness of some sort, might reconsider seeking the help of professionals after reading Hannah's story.

In addition to feeling empty and lost, her thoughts are often caught in a downward spiral, similar to the rapid cycling Craig experiences in *IKFS*.

> Looking back, I stopped writing in my notebook when I stopped wanting to know myself anymore. [...] If you hear a song that makes you cry and you don't want to cry anymore, you don't listen to that song anymore. But you can't get away from yourself. You can't decide not to see yourself anymore. You can't decide to turn off the noise in your head. (*TRW* 178)

By comparing her own thoughts to a sad song that one cannot simply turn off, Hannah highlights the intensity and the persistence of the destructiveness and sorrowfulness of her innermost thoughts and feelings. The young adult's using a metaphor in order to illustrate the vicious cycle that her thoughts are caught in also serves the purpose of providing her listeners with an imagery they can relate to, thus making them more apt to sympathise with her. Similarly to Finch in *ABP*, Hannah lacks the psychological terminology and knowledge in order to refer to her suffering as a medical condition, and thus uses metaphors. Despite this similarity, Hannah does not refer to the suffocating depression she experiences with the third person pronoun *it*, instead she refers to herself as the source of her own pain. This again shows how she tends to locate her negative and suicidal thoughts within her own self. As the teenage girl receives neither professional help nor emotional support from her environment, she eventually concludes that she has to eliminate the source of her despair, namely herself. It follows that the metaphor and Hannah's explanation of the unbearableness of her current situation may aid readers in understanding the interrelatedness of her struggle with clinical depression and her committing suicide in the end.

Taking into account all of the above mentioned factors, it follows that Hannah's decision to take her own life is largely influenced by the symptomatology of clinical depression, which is represented in her actions, behaviour, in her thought processing, as well as in her narration. Even more so considering the long time-span Hannah suffers from her this medical condition, without having any means to cope with it, and lacking the professional care she needs in order to survive. Despite the fact that Hannah's mental state contributes to her death, the effect her peers and the situation at home have on her position in the

suicide-dispositive, will be analysed in order to gain a profound understanding of Hannah's suicide in the end. Therefore, these two factors will be analysed in the second and third part of this thesis.

2.3. Craig Gilner – Clinical depression in *IKFS*

In contrast to Finch and Hannah, Craig has been diagnosed by his psychopharmacologist Dr.Barney and his therapist Dr. Minerva as clinically depressed (*IKFS* 9ff and 100ff). In addition to being aware of the reason for his suffering, he has already received professional help before he considers committing suicide. These two factors are essential parts of Craig's position as someone who is able to survive the *suicide-dispositive* of which he is a part, as they largely influence his final decision not to take his own life. Opposed to *ABP* and *TRW*, *IKFS* depicts Craig's development from the time his depression and suicidal ideation had started to his struggling with the difficulties of his healing process. Hence, this novel presents a different perspective on how suffering from major depression can lead one to almost committing suicide. Additionally, *IKFS* shows how one can overcome a psychological crisis, when asking for and receiving professional help.

Due to the fact that clinical depression manifests itself in a typical but variable number of symptoms, Hannah and Craig, who both suffer from this condition, experience and struggle with their illness in different ways. Craig's descriptions of his condition correspond to a number of emotional, cognitive, behavioural and physiological symptoms typical for this particular psychiatric disorder (Wittchen and Hoyer 880). As Verena Eder (2016) has already presented a thorough assessment of Craig Gilner's depressive symptoms, these will not be analysed. Instead, the focus of this section will be the link between the onset of his depression and his starting term at Executive Pre-Professional, which will serve to further highlight the interconnectedness between the representation of Craig's mental predisposition and his suicidal tendencies.

In order to gain a profound understanding of the dynamics of Craig's gradually worsening suicidal ideation, the possible reasons that lead to the outbreak of his depression and to his developing a strong urge to commit self-murder, will also be analysed. According to Alfred Adler, founder of Individual Psychology, every child is faced with feelings of inferiority early on in its life, which he considers to be the driving force of all ambitions in

one's life, as they determine the goal-directedness of one's every act (66f). Adler argues that ideally one strives to calm these feelings of inferiority in order to achieve a feeling of safety and equality; however, it is possible that in case feelings of inferiority are too strong, intense and endured for too long, they can result in the desire to feel superior to one's surroundings (67). Subsequently, experiencing oppressing feelings of inferiority might lead a child to develop a tendency to overcompensate, out of fear of falling short, and of not being complacent with the mere compensation of these unpleasant emotions (72). Taking into account Craig's obsession with money and climbing up the social ladder, as well as his desire to become a person of importance and social recognition, and his constant fear of not being as intelligent as his best friend Aaron, it can be argued that the teenage boy tends to overcompensate his feelings of inferiority.

Although Craig cannot provide an explanation as to why he is depressed, he is aware of the chronology in which his sufferings occurred. Since Craig explicitly mentions his acceptance at the elite "Executive Pre-Professional High School" (*IKFS* 49) two years ago, it can be assumed that this event represents one of the major factors that lead to the development and to the worsening of his mental-health problems, including his strong inclination towards suicide. The idealised image he paints of the school, in addition to the prosperous future he pictures himself having after finishing it, nourish his desire to be superior to his social environment. Craig describes the future that awaits him as follows, "You can come out of Executive Pre-Professional High School and go right to Wall Street, although that's not what you *should* do; what you *should* do is come out and go to Harvard and then law school. That's how you end up being, like, President. I'll admit it: I kind of want to be President" (*IKFS* 49f). Evidently, Craig associates being accepted at this school with a guarantee to future financial success. Even though the teenage boy clearly exaggerates in his description of his presumably prosperous future, the fact that he does not merely aspire a respectable high position later on in his life, but the highest and most powerful position of all, provides evidence for his feelings of inferiority as the driving force behind his every action. The repeated use of the modal verb *should,* in the quote above, further illustrates how his compulsive longing for grandiosity manifests itself in the form of an inner imperative that he cannot escape.

The teenage boy's constant struggle to oppress these intense emotions is also represented in Chapter five when he describes an episode of his childhood and compares his family's old apartment to the current one:

> We live in an apartment—a much better one than the Manhattan one, but still not good enough, not something to be *proud* of—in Brooklyn. [...] But other than that, it's a pretty statusless place. It's a shame we moved out of Manhattan, where all the real people with power live. (*IKFS* 31)

Since the Gilners have moved into a presumably better apartment it can be assumed that they have been moving up the social ladder; however, Craig does not seem to be satisfied with his family's social and financial position. His negative and condescending tone, as well as his emphasis on "the real people with power" (31) hint at his longing for supremacy. Here, the use of the emotive words *proud* and *shame*, in connection with social status and affluence already, indicate his adherence to the notion of capitalism, which further nourishes his pathologic urge to be superior. Alice Miller explains that those who strive for grandiosity are in need of the admiration of others (68), which can be seen in Craig's fixation to acquire a high status in society. The aspiration to create enough social distance between oneself and others, as is the case with Craig, is also described by Adler as deriving from intense feelings of inferiority (72).

Miller argues that depression and grandiosity are two reciprocal phenomena, meaning that grandiosity is a form of resistance against depression, and the latter a defence against the deep pain felt over the loss of one's delusions of grandeur (68). She continues to describe perfectionism as one of the characteristics of a person who tries to avert depression through grandiosity (78). The obsessive behaviour displayed by Craig alludes to his predisposition for depression. Taking into account Miller's assumptions (68); his desire to be superior to those around him, his growing obsession with excelling in the entrance examination, as well as the sacrifices he is willing to make in order to achieve his goals, all symbolise Craig's desperate attempt to fight his underlying depression. The teenage boy's tendency towards perfectionism is manifested in his excessive preparation for the exam, "I mauled the practice exams and slept with the books under my pillow and turned my brain into a fierce machine, a buzz saw that could handle anything. I could feel myself getting smarter, under the light at my desk" (*IKFS* 51). By comparing himself to something more powerful and intelligent than human beings, he insinuates that he

perceives himself as superior to the people around him, and asserts an almost super-human quality to himself. Additionally, this quote depicts the contrast between his supposedly growing intellect and his diminishing social environment, as he spends most of his time in his room preparing for the test. As a consequence, his excessive studying eventually leads to his social isolation, which John L. Oliffe and Melanie J. Phillips list as one of the ways in which men express depression (197). This again shows how his quest for a future among society's elite nourishes his predisposition for depression and suicidal ideation. Craig confesses, "Now, I stopped hanging out with a lot of friends when I got into Executive Pre-Professional mode" (*IKFS* 51). Since Craig is aware of his lack of social engagement, the sacrifices he makes in order to gain access to the education of the elite also imply a certain degree of willingness to leave behind those he considers inferior to himself. Thus, Craig's compulsive way of studying not only compensates for his feelings of inferiority, but also enables him to experience himself as elevated to others, and thereby he is able to supress his underlying depressive symptoms.

When Aaron and Craig walk over the Brooklyn Bridge, after having celebrated their acceptance into Executive Pre-Professional high school, the protagonist cannot hide his desire to become someone exceptional. The euphoria Craig experiences because of his seemingly prosperous future is visible in his reckless and impulsive behaviour when he climbs up to the edge of the bridge, and screams out into the night (*IKFS* 89). He describes it as follows, "There wasn't anything to keep you from falling off, just your hands and your will. I [...] felt the wind whip and tug at me as I leaned myself over the water like ... well, like Christ, I guess" (*IKFS* 89). Here, religious symbolic is used to highlight his tendency to lose himself in his delusions of grandeur that, at this point, have already taken on a certain manic characteristic. Again, the symbolic magnitude of this comparison further highlights Craig's compulsive strive for grandiosity. Evidently, the prospect of becoming part of a social elite unleashes feelings of triumph in him, which bare a resemblance to the emotions Finch displays in his manic episode in *ABP*. The young adult's engaging in reckless behaviour already foreshadows his depression, as "risk-taking" behaviour is a common manifestation of depression in men (Oliffe and Phillips 197). The fact that Craig explicitly states that this particular day was his last good day, serves as further proof for the reciprocal relationship between depression and grandiosity as theorised by Miller.

Craig is not able to maintain his exhilarating feelings of superiority, since the arrival of the summer reading list is accompanied by the brutal realisation of the amount of work his desired education entails (*IKFS* 92). Moreover, the adolescent's reaction to the school's high demands clearly shows his struggle to compensate his emerging feelings of inferiority, "They gave me this insane reading list for the summer [...]. I tried to read them; I really did, but it wasn't like flash cards. It took *days*" (*IKFS* 92). Here, Craig's reaction can be viewed as a representation of, what Adler calls, a tendency to opposition (88), which is visible in his inability to apply his attention to school work, as this would imply having to face his own limitations. By emphasising the amount of time this task consumes, the protagonist indirectly accuses the school of having impossible expectations of its students. Thus, deflecting from his own intellectual limitations, which is necessary in order for him to maintain the illusion of his superior self. Craig goes on to state, "[...] I found myself jealous of the people who wrote the books. [...] I ended up not finishing any of the summer-reading-list books" (*IKFS* 93). This quote reveals the fragile nature of his perceived grandiosity, as he fears that his low self-esteem will show. A. Miller argues that people who consider themselves grandiose are always in danger of suffering from depression, because their sense of self-worth does not originate from their own true emotions, but from the possession of certain qualities (69). The teenage boy's reluctance to face the set task, as this would nourish his feelings of inferiority, is commonly referred to as "'acting in'", which in turn "often lead[s] to a build-up of negative emotions" (Oliffe and Phillips 196). Employing avoidance strategies may eventually result in extreme behaviour that can finally lead to "deliberate self-harm and suicide among men" (196). It follows that Craig's attempts to maintain his unrealistic and grandiose perception of himself contribute to the development of his depression and ultimately to his engaging in suicidal behaviour. Taking into account the above mentioned aspects, his inability to adhere to the expectations of the school, as well as the jealousy he feels when faced with the exceptional work of historical figures, all originate from his inner conflict to repel his underlying depression, which in turn furthers his suicidal ideation. Thus, Craig's strong feelings of inferiority contribute to his being part of the *suicide-dispositive*, as well as to his positioning in it in the beginning.

The moment Craig does not receive the outstanding score he expects, on the first test, his feelings of inferiority overwhelm him and, thus, provide the foundation for his depression

and his suicidal tendencies to flourish (*IKFS* 93f). The school's high expectations and demands further nourish Craig's feelings of inferiority, as his dream of becoming one of the most powerful people in the world, as well as his perception of himself as being one step closer to achieving this dream, stand in contrast to the reality he has to face. Craig's crumbling image of himself is clearly visible when he says, "I wasn't gifted. Mom was wrong. I was just smart and I worked hard. I had fooled myself into thinking that was something important to the rest of the world. Other people were complicit in this ruse. Nobody had told me I was common" (*IKFS* 96). Even though Craig's performance at school is far above average, his negative mind frame severely affects his perception of himself. Here, the teenage boy implies that his mother regards him as gifted, but at this moment, his point of view adheres to the negative schemata of depression. The teenage boy's appalled tone mirrors the tendency of depressive individuals to view themselves as utter failures (Miller 78). Craig's desire to feel superior to others reinforces his depression, as he sets himself goals that he is not able to achieve. Alice Miller states that people who perceive themselves as grandiose, like Craig, often measure themselves and their accomplishments against their ideal-self, and usually accept others as being average, but never themselves (77). Therefore, the fact that the fifteen-year-old is highly indignant to the notion of being normal can be interpreted as reflecting his deeply rooted struggle with depression and suicidality.

The reciprocal relationship between Craig's inherent struggle with intense feelings of inferiority and the binary pair of depression and grandiosity is also present when he reflects on the effect his suicide will have on others. Evidently, he experiences a sense of relief in the prospect of taking control, and therefore regaining a sense of might, by ending his own life, "I'm okay because I have a plan and a solution: I'm going to kill myself" (*IKFS* 126). The matter-of-fact tone in which the teenager proposes engaging in deliberate self-harm as an adequate solution to his sorrows, signals his flat affect and affective constriction, which is similar to Hannah's emotive state shortly before she commits suicide. This neutral use of language may also serve to disconcert readers as it opposes the acuteness of Craig's mental condition, which, in turn, might make them question the protagonist's reliability when it comes to his ability to take care of himself. The young adult then considers the effect his suicide will have on his family, his parents in particular, "They'll [his parents] blame themselves. It'll be the most important event in their lives,

the thing that gets whispered by other parents at parties when their backs are turned" (*IKFS* 126). The paradox between the seriousness of the actual meaning of Craig's words and the dramatic tone he uses when fantasising about the aftermath of his own death, shows that his obsessive and compulsive strive for supremacy is inextricably linked with his developing suicidal ideation. Moreover, Craig's thoughts reflect his need for the validation of others, as well as his desire to become someone who leaves behind a grand legacy, which he imagines to accomplish by not only actively ending his own life, but also by leaving essential questions unanswered. Hence, his need to be regarded as grandiose and special by others significantly contributes to the developing and worsening of his mental condition and his suicidal tendencies. Considering the fact that he expects people to discuss his behaviour and the event of his suicide, again highlights his inability to accept his true self, and his struggle with the false-self he has created in order to adhere to his desire to surpass others and to feel grandiose. As Craig is not able to cope with his inner struggle, he eventually utilises the idea of taking his own life as means to achieve the frail and unattainable goals of his false-self. It follows that his psychological predisposition majorly contributes to his susceptibility to committing self-murder. All of the aspects mentioned above partly constitute the male protagonist's position in the *suicide-dispositive* shortly before he reconsiders taking his own life. The fact that the entanglement of the notion of capitalism and Craig's school and the selective educational system, in general, facilitate the development and worsening of the teenager's clinical depression and suicidality, will be analysed in the next part of this thesis.

3. Part II – Schools as part of the *suicide-dispositives*

In addition to suffering from severe psychiatric disorders that nourish the development of their suicidal ideation, Hannah, Finch and Craig have to cope with school environments that further contribute to their heightened risk of committing self-murder. Here, school refers to the characters' educational and the social environment, thus, it does not solely make reference to the physical space of schools. The behaviour, actions and reactions displayed by the institutional figures (e.g. teachers, counsellors or principals) and the characters' fellow students, will also be regarded as representations of America's attitude towards people suffering from mental illnesses and suicidal ideation. The focus of this chapter will be the reciprocal relationship between the characters' educational and social surroundings, as well as their affliction with psychiatric disorders and suicidal tendencies. The contribution of stigmas and stereotypes against people suffering from mental illnesses held by other characters, and the growing demands of the gradual economisation of the United States' educational system, to the development and intensification of the characters' symptomatology, including their suicidal tendencies, will be looked at closely. Additionally, the negative effect bullying has on Finch's and Hannah's struggle with mental health related issues will be analysed within the scope of this chapter. Since the worsening of Hannah's condition is closely linked to the power inequality among the sexes in North America, the connection between sexism and the young adult's mental health will also be addressed. The measures taken by institutional figures after a character either sought help because of his or her growing suicidal ideation, or attempted suicide, will also be taken into account, as they mirror America's attitude towards youth suicide. Due to the fact that all the above mentioned elements of the characters' social and educational environments contribute to the intensification of their psychiatric disorders and their suicidality, they are regarded as integral parts of Hannah's, Finch's and Craig's development in the *suicide-dispositives* of which they are a part.

3.1. Economisation of education in *IKFS*

As already discussed in the first part, Craig's depressive symptoms start to develop with him being accepted into the elitist Executive Pre-Professional high school, and intensify as the pressure to attain to the high demands and the competitive nature of this institution grow steadily and culminate in his considering suicide. According to Konrad Paul Liessmann, today's society uses education as an imaginary space for the projection of their aspirations, as it holds the promise of social upward mobility, and at the same time seems to guarantee an even greater advantage for the privileged (*Bildung* 38). The fact that Craig views his entering an exclusive high school as a guarantee for future success shows that he has already internalised this capitalistic notion of education. He describes the school as follows, "It's a new school set up to create the leaders of tomorrow; corporate internships are mandatory; the higher-ups of Merrill Lynch come and speak to classes and distribute travel mugs and stuff" (*IKFS* 49). Here, the output-driven nature of the US American school system that views education as a mere instrument to secure the positions of the future, as described by Liessmann (*Bildung* 26-36), is clearly visible. The image created here suggests the mere acceptance into this school to be synonymous with a future among the most powerful people in the world. Thus, this educational institution promotes unrealistic goals and expectations among its students. The young adult's struggle to compensate for his feelings of inferiority makes him susceptible to the school's capitalistic strive for power and riches, because he tends to lose himself in delusions of grandeur in order to feel superior. The school's so-called mission to ensure that their pupils become "*well-rounded, liberally educated bearers of tomorrow's vision*" (*IKFS* 92) can be viewed as an attempt to deflect from their capitalistic and elitist agenda, which views its pupils as superior to those who do not receive an education designed to adhere to the current standards and needs of the global market. Hence, promoting an us-versus-them mentality among their students, who strive to become members of the successful and wealthy elite. This notion of education is likely to increase the teenager's feelings of inferiority, since despite his eventually entering the school's supposedly elitist circle, the constant threat of being excluded from it further nourishes his anxiety and depression. The capitalisation of the mind, as criticised by Liessmann (*Theorie* 10), manifests itself in the school's cooperation with the personification of capitalism in the form of the leaders of Merrill

Lynch. The fact that "corporate internships are mandatory; the higher-ups of Merrill Lynch come and speak to classes and distribute travel mugs and stuff", shows that capitalism has literally entered the educational domain in *IKFS* (49). Although Craig paints a picture of a school that provides young people with the opportunity to realise their full potential, at this point, he does not yet realise that their agenda is to recruit the 'brains' of the future to ensure their continuing future success, which also implies that they view their students as human capital.

The effect the school's approach to education has on the minds of adolescents is clearly visible when Craig and Aaron converse about their future aspirations:

> [Aaron announces] 'I'm going to be a lawyer.' [Craig replies] 'Oh, yeah?' 'Yeah. Screw my dad. He doesn't make any money. He's miserable. The only reason we even live where we do is because of my mom's brother is a lawyer [...] Everything good I have is due to lawyers.' 'I think I might want to be one too,' I [Craig] said. 'Why not? You make money!' 'Yeah.' (*IKFS* 58)

Evidently, Aaron associates happiness with being successful and wealthy, hence he assumes that his father's sorrows originate from his lack of riches. Neither of them consider the possibility of his father suffering from depressive symptoms because he adheres to the demands of the capitalistic society they live in. The competitive market is designed to produce winners, as well as those who are left unsuccessful in this competition (Liessmann *Bildung* 53). Due to the fact that Aaron's father is described as hard working, miserable, and constantly on medication, he can be regarded as representing the real-life consequences that this unhealthy approach towards education, wealth and success can have (see, for example, *IKFS* 59 and 396). In addition to suffering from the constant threat of failing his family, by not earning enormous sums of money, Aaron's father is regarded as being worth less than his brother in-law. Hence, the character of Aaron's father stands in direct contrast to the illusion of happiness and riches created by the school's officials and those who promote the notion of assigning people value due to their accomplishments and material status, as opposed to regarding individuals as worthy in themselves.

The adherence of Executive Pre-Professional high school to the notion of capitalism is also visible in its promotion of an image of education as a means to acquire knowledge and competencies, instead of as enabling a process of personal growth and development (see, for example, *IKFS* 98). Although the teenage boy's fears of a future in poverty and social

disgrace are exaggerated and largely influenced by his depressive symptoms, they reflect the dualistic structure of Corporate America, because not being accepted into an elitist school carries the potential threat of being denied the chance to attain a good education. Liessmann argues that solely a notion of education that values and respects something for its own sake, is to be regarded as the precondition for the reciprocal appreciation of humans in their dignity (*Geisterstunde* 180). Considering the fact that Craig, as a teenager, is still developing his distinct personality, he would require an education as proposed by Liessmann (*Geisterstunde* 180). However, Executive Pre-Professional high school does not foster the protagonist's regard and appreciation for his fellow students, instead reinforces his view of them as competition for the aspired positions of the future. The fact that the school itself encourages the rivalry among its students is clearly visible when a member of the Investment Bank Bear Stearns visits Craig's "Intro to Wall Street" (*IKFS* 97) class:

> He told us that if we were interested in getting into finance, we had better work hard and smart because a lot of machines were able to make investment decisions now, and in the future, computer programs would run everything. He asked the class how many of us were taking computer science, and everybody but me and this girl who didn't speak English raised their hands. 'Great, excellent,' the guy had said. 'You other people are out of a job! Heh heh. Learn comp sci.' (97f)

This quote again reveals the school's direct connection with capitalistic companies. The pupils are threatened and pressured to view themselves as human capital and to acquire certain skills for the sole purpose of being valuable and useable for the economic and financial market. It follows that being reduced to one's abilities and one's usefulness is the precondition for becoming a member of the exclusive elite personified by a member of Bear Stearns. Here, knowledge is no longer an integral part of the educational process of human beings, but regarded as an instrument in the fight for markets and industrial positions of the future (Liessmann *Theorie* 147). What is more, the man suggests that those who do not possess the competencies needed to be replaceable by machines and excluded from positions that are associated with power and money, and, thus, to be ridiculed by others. By referring to the subject area of computer sciences with the contraction *comp sci*, he underlines the exclusivity of his business, as only those who are familiar with this jargon will be able to follow his talk. The investment banker's use of this term may make those readers who are also unfamiliar with this terminology more apt to

sympathise with the protagonist, who at this point considers himself as neither knowledgeable nor competent enough. Evidently, the constant threat of not being able to fulfil the requirements of the market, of not being as valuable and intelligent as his peers intensifies his depression even further, as the fear of being excluded from this prestigious social circle intensifies his innermost feelings of inferiority. This can also be seen in Craig constantly comparing himself to the pupils around him:

> The other kids were geniuses. I thought I was a big deal for getting an 800 on the exam—like the entire entering class had gotten 800. It turned out the test had been 'broken' in my year; they were tweaking it to make it less formulaic—i.e., less likely to let in people like me. [...] Plus there were extracurriculars. Other kids did everything: they were on student government; they played sports; [...] I didn't do anything but school and Tae Bo, where I hit a plateau. (*IKFS* 95f)

Due to the fact that Craig's self-esteem and self-worth is built on his accomplishments and his belonging to the more intelligent, and - according to the norms of capitalism - more worthy members of society, his regard for himself is threatened by his fellow students who seem to surpass his abilities. This is further highlighted by his continuous use of the pronouns *I* and *they*, as well as his referring to his peers as the *other kids* (*IKFS* 95f), which shows that he has internalised the market's us-versus-them mentality, and, thus, defines himself solely in relation to his rivals. This, in turn, leads to the shattering of his delusions of grandeur, and builds the foundation for his depressive symptoms to flourish. Evidently, Craig's failing to adhere to the high standards predefined by the global market, which his peers seem to manage with ease, evokes his fears of falling down the social ladder.

Liessmann states that the different dimensions of societal developments, as, for instance, health, the ability to be happy, equality and the expansion of democratic rights, are not a direct consequence of economic prosperity (*Geisterstunde* 169). Similarly to Liessmann, John Ehrenreich stresses that those responsible for the profit made, namely the hard working employees, are not the recipients of it (35). On the contrary, those benefitting from the aforementioned economic prosperity are "those who succeed in using their power over government and private institutions to grab a greater share of the wealth that would have been produced in any circumstances" (35). As a consequence of the endless surge of corporations for profit "[t]he most human of relationships, such as educating children and caring for the sick and the aged, were turned into commodities, whose

availability and quality are subject to the vagaries of the market and the imperatives of profits" (Ehrenreich 20). Executive Pre-Professional is designed to ensure the capital growth of those who are already powerful and rich, which is manifested in its close relationship with major corporations. The school overwhelms its students with intense workloads and makes them acquire competencies that are deemed profitable. Moreover, by increasing their students' fears of falling off the social ladder, in case they do not succeed in school, they make sure that those who do excel within their school system later on work for large and mighty corporations. This mentality, in turn, contributes to Craig's worsening mental condition, because the anxiety of being excluded from this elitist circle resonates with his fundamental struggle with feelings of inferiority, which leads to the intensification of his depressive symptoms.

Craig's compulsive way of thinking about homework, e-mails and extra-curricular subjects shows the negative impact the economisation of the American school system has on the country's youth. For example, Craig describes the anxiety connected with not having access to his mobile phone for a few minutes, due to an assignment that requires him to do extensive research (*IKFS* 14). His strive to ensure that he excels in his performance at school already hints at the onset of his pathology. However, the pressure to succeed and to meet the requirements and expectations proposed by the school and the market, influence his daily life to such an extent that the mere thought of not being able to respond to an e-mail, send by a teacher, causes him to get caught in a downward spiral. These fears nurture his feelings of inferiority that largely contribute to his worsening symptomatology, which can be seen in the following:

> [...] I wasn't going to get into a Good College, which meant I wasn't going to have a Good Job, which meant I wasn't going to have health insurance, which meant I'd have to pay tremendous amounts of money for shrinks and drugs my brain needed, which meant I wasn't going to have enough money to pay for a Good Lifestyle, which meant I'd feel ashamed, which meant I'd get depressed, and that was the big one because I knew what that did to me [...]. (*IKFS* 14f)

In this quote, the omission of punctuation illustrates the cyclical nature, as well as the viciousness and rapidity of Craig's dark and oppressing thoughts. This may aid readers' understanding of how the ominous presence of negative schemata, caused by depression, can occupy and dominate one's mind, which again is essential in order to gain a profound knowledge of Craig's path towards contemplating suicide. Moreover, the seamless

succession of clauses signals the immediacy of the protagonist's inner disturbance and stress. It highlights how Craig loses control over his thoughts, which move quickly from his fears of not being able to respond to an e-mail fast enough, to his envisioning himself falling off the social ladder and being at the mercy of his disease. Although Craig's anxiety might appear irrational, as his family can be regarded as belonging to the middle class, the theme of it mirrors the divide between the poor and the wealthy created by America's obsession with capitalism. The United States adherence to the principles of corporate capitalism is linked to the widely accepted idea of a meritocratic America, which attributes a person's success to their resolution, their hard work, as well as their capability (Ehrenreich 106). Ehrenreich further explains that this belief of "a meritocratic society" serves as a legitimisation for those who own a disproportionate amount of wealth and power (106). Subsequently, obtaining a good education is reduced to the acquisition of competencies and skills to be used to gain competitive advantage, and not as an integral phase of a student's biography, in which they can obtain technical, social and socio-political insights (Liessmann *Geisterstunde* 104). Despite the fact that the protagonist's pathological fear is largely influenced by his disease, the effect that the increasing economisation of America' educational system has on him cannot be denied, as not being able to succeed within it, as well as failing to conform to the standards and to withstand the pressure of the global market comprise the content of his anxiety. Craig also implies that the out-put oriented, competitive school system that contributes largely to his depression, and requires him to dedicate his whole life to attaining money and status, is, at the same time, the only means to receive the professional help needed to cure the illness it has produced itself. This again highlights the real-life consequences the interconnectedness of powerful companies and educational institutions has on those who are not able to compete in a capitalistic society. Therefore, Craig's inner monologue may indirectly serve to raise young adult readers' awareness of the far-reaching consequences a nation's adherence to capitalism can have. This may lead American teenage readers to reflect on their own educational environment and how it shapes their own, as well as their friends' mental health.

Although it could be argued that the connection between Craig's depression and his educational environment solely applies to his particular situation, the fact that a multitude of other characters who attend the same school also struggle with this illness, suggests this

interconnectedness to be universal. When Craig confesses to his friend Nia that he struggles with clinical depression, he discovers that she too suffers from the same illness. In contrast to Craig, whose perspective is often limited by his mental condition, the teenage girl seems to be perfectly aware of the universality of their condition, "'We're just part of that messed-up generation of American kids who are on drugs all the time.' […] 'Craig, like eighty percent of the people I *know* are on medication. […]'" (*IKFS* 119). Here, Nia's focalisation provides readers with the additional information needed in order to gain a profound understanding of the complexity and extent of this problem that affects a whole generation. Nia's comment can be interpreted as an indirect critique on corporate America that is partly responsible for the increasing number of young people suffering from psychiatric illnesses. However, the teenage girl's apathetic and frank tone, as well as her use of the adverb *just* may also indicate her acceptance of the price she and her fellow peers pay in order to survive in this capitalistic world.

When Mr. Janowitz, Craig's principal, receives the information that one of his students has attempted suicide and is currently staying at a psychiatric hospital, his reaction provides further evidence for the assumed connection between the economisation of education and the worsening mental health of American teenagers, "'We don't pass judgment on our students for being in the *hospital*, my goodness, Craig.' 'No? But it's like, a psychiatric—' 'I know what kind of hospital it is. You think we don't have other kids in these situations? It's a *very* common problem among young people'" (*IKFS* 312). Evidently, the principal is aware of the large number of pupils struggling with clinical depression. However, he does not regard this matter as alarming, but as a common issue that simply needs to be dealt with. Although the school makes an effort to support Craig's recovery and re-entrance into the school system, it cannot be assumed that kindness and empathy for their student to be the sole motive for their attempts to help him. Executive Pre-Professional enjoys the reputation of an institution that produces the prosperous elite of the future, and thus, is very likely to lose some of its sponsors, in case this reputation is ruined. Considering the seemingly large number of pupils who struggle with psychiatric disorders to be damaging to the school's reputation, its attempt to enable their students to re-enter as soon as possible can be regarded as a means to counteract a possible defamation. Since Craig's condition improves significantly when he decides to transfer to a school that emphasises on furthering its students' creativity, the fact that his educational

environment largely contributes to his suffering from depression and suicidal ideation, and, is thus, partly responsible for his positioning in the *suicide-dispositive*, as a person at great risk of dying of self-murder, cannot be denied. Taking into account all of the above mentioned factors, it follows that the growing tendency to adjust the education of future generations to the needs of the economic market, has dire consequences for their mental well-being and their ability to respect and empathise with each other.

3.2. Bullying in *ABP* and *TRW*

Even though the economisation of education is not addressed in either *ABP* or *TRW*, the numerous instances of harassment that Hannah and Finch have to endure, as well as their fellow students' complete ignorance towards their feelings and problems, indicate that America's educational system does not fulfil its duty in educating young people to respect and care for one another. Although the connection between the high schools in *ABP* and *TRW* and the economic market is less clear than in *IKFS*, both schools fail to foster their students' social and moral sensitivity, which might originate from the assumed interconnectedness between the global market and the educational system (see, for instance, Liessmann *Geisterstunde* 180). Whenever Hannah and Finch have to endure physical and verbal abuse from their fellow students, their mental conditions significantly worsen. Hence, their educational, as well as their social environment have a negative impact on their mental health, and thus, contribute to their final decision to take their own lives. The link between bullying and psychiatric illnesses will to be analysed further, as they are a part of the reasons why Hannah and Finch are not able to escape the *suicide-dispositives* that unfold in those two novels.

Françoise D. Alsaker states that in case negative actions - physical, verbal or subtle attacks – regularly target the same person and the abuser receives support in their actions by others, one can speak of bullying (13f). According to Alsaker, bullying takes place repeatedly and over long periods of time (19), is regarded as aggressive behaviour that is systematically directed at one particular person (15f) and happens within groups (18). Further, harassment is considered a demonstration of power, is characterised by the imbalance of might (Alsaker 20f) and it can present itself in direct and indirect ways (25). In *ABP*, both forms are represented, as Finch's fellow pupils employ direct methods of

harassment, for instance, physical and verbal abuse, insulting gestures, as well as indirect ones, for example, social isolation and the spreading of rumours (Alsaker 26ff and 31ff). This is also the case in *TRW* since Hannah becomes the target of the school's gossip culture, and is later on abused and sexually harassed by some of her male peers.

Although Gabe Romero, also referred to as Roamer, has once been Finch's best friend, the former started Finch's reputation as "Theodore Freak", after Finch had told him about his inclination towards suicide and how he experienced colours and sounds in a unique way (*ABP* 141). From that moment onwards, Finch's former friend starts to abuse and bully the male protagonist on a regular basis. Despite the malicious nature of Roamer's attacks against Finch, the abuser receives support and encouragement from his friends. Roamer harasses Finch whenever he encounters the latter at school, for instance, he blocks Finch's way in the school hallways, repeatedly calls him "[f]aggot", throws his books on the floor and bumps into him on purpose (*ABP* 32). It appears to be the case that instances such as these intensify the symptoms of the particular episode Finch experiences at that moment. This is visible in the teenage boy's trail of thoughts after the aforementioned abuse had happened:

> I want to slam his head into a locker and then reach down his throat and pull his heart out through his mouth, because the thing about being Awake is that everything in you is alive and aching and making up for lost time. But instead I count all the way to sixty, a stupid smile plastered on my stupid face. I will not get detention. I will not get expelled. I will be good. I will be quiet. I will be still. (*ABP* 32f)

Evidently, suffering from bipolar disorder, as such, causes him to experience difficulties functioning within the school's social environment. The young adult's highly irritable and disinhibited mood, as well as the inner strength he needs to muster in order to refrain from engaging in impulsive and aggressive behaviour point to the symptomatology of a manic phase. The last five sentences of this quote mirror his efforts to resist his urges to meet his abuser's attacks with counter-violence. In the first sentence of this quote, the aggressive tone, as well as the extremely detailed, violent and cruel description of how he imagines causing Roamer pain in return highlights the negative effect the abuse has on his condition. The last five sentences stand in direct contrast to the first one, as the teenage boy talks to himself, which shows that controlling his heightened urge to hurt Roamer requires his full attention. Hence, the male protagonist's inner conflict illustrates how

being physically and mentally abused by his peers leads to the worsening of his symptoms, which eventually reach an intensity that exceeds his limited ways of coping with them. This further adds to his reputation as an aggressive and unmanageable outcast, which towards the end leads to his subsequent expulsion.

At a later point in the novel, Finch is the victim of Roamer's abuse again, when the latter calls him a freak and physically assaults him, the male protagonist struggles to suppress the urge to cause Roamer pain, "And then he [Roamer] slams me into the locker and, before I can even blink, punches me in the eye, and then again in the nose. It's all I can do to stay on my feet, and I am counting like hell now because I want to kill that son of a bitch" (*ABP* 207). In this situation, which happens in the boy's locker room, the four key aspects of bullying, listed by Alsaker (43ff), are present. First, Roamer humiliates Finch by labelling him a freak, which in turn affects the protagonist's already crumbling sense of self-worth (Alsaker 43). This is clearly visible in the young adult's desperate wish to go back in time: "[...] before they called [him] 'freak' and [he] was awake all the time and everything felt okay and somewhat normal [...]" (*ABP* 207). Clearly, the teenage boy suffers from being viewed as abnormal, and being left alone with his suffering, as these feelings shape his perception of himself and his situation negatively. Moreover, others calling him a freak on a daily basis fosters his negative perception of himself, especially when another depressive episode approaches, during which his mind adheres to dark and self-destructive thoughts. Second, even though Mr. Kappel witnesses the assault, he chooses to keep quiet. The sports teacher and Baseball coach supports Roamer, one of his best players, in his behaviour, by shielding him from having to face the consequences of his action (Alsaker 50f). The silence of a supposedly responsible adult, is directly linked to the third aspect, namely the actual and felt helplessness of the victim, in this case, the already socially isolated outcast Finch (53f). As the male protagonist has a history of violent behaviour and a reputation of a delinquent, which can largely be attributed to his illness, the fact that his teacher does not protect him in this situation indirectly confirms Finch in his belief that he deserves to be harassed and to feel this way. These negative experiences, in turn, limit the male protagonist's chances of receiving the professional treatment he desperately needs in order to survive, as he does not dare to confide his problems to the institutional figures at school. The fourth key aspect of bullying, namely isolation, can be viewed as a consequence of the second and third aspects, since the

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victim's experienced helplessness, and the silence of those who witness instances, such as these, are often linked to the social isolation of the victim (Alsaker 51f). Hence, suffering from an undiagnosed mental illness, in addition to being the victim of bullying on a daily basis, without receiving any support either from the school's staff or from his fellow students, makes it more difficult for the teenager to cope with his symptomatology. The adolescent becomes socially isolated as a consequence of Roamer's regular attacks on him, and because he does not dare to explain himself to others, as he fears further rejection. Although the teenage boy's struggle with feelings of worthlessness originate from the physical and psychological abuse he receives at home, which will be discussed in the third part of this thesis, his being ostracized at school nourishes these exact emotions even further. This again does not only prevent the young adult from seeking help and advice concerning his growing suicidal tendencies, but also to his difficulties in coping with the severe symptoms of his condition. Therefore, the constant physical and psychological abuse the teenage boy has to endure at school forms a significant part of the *suicide-dispositive* represented in *ABP*.

In addition to being the victim of Roamer's physical attacks, Finch has to endure psychological abuse, which severely affects his condition. Due to the fact that Finch's suicidal ideation worsens as the story continues, Roamer's telling him to go through with killing himself further contributes to the teenage boy's resorting to suicide as his last means to end his desperation. According to Alsaker, bullying can have severe repercussions for its victims, among these are loss of self-worth, depressive symptoms, as well as suicide (129-135). Roamer's influence on Finch's decision to take his own life cannot be denied, because even when Finch is spotted at the ledge of the school bell tower, Roamer completely ignores the seriousness of the situation and continues to harass Finch, "'Why don't you go ahead and get it over with, freak?' Gabe Romero, [...], yells from below. More laughter" (*ABP* 10). At this moment, Finch is in desperate need of a supportive environment; however, his fellow pupils seem to regard his sorrowfulness and hopelessness as entertaining, thereby validating his feelings of worthlessness and uselessness. Here, Finch's calm and emotionless tone stands in direct contrast to the emergency a suicidal teenager constitutes. The male protagonist's seemingly indifferent reaction to the abusive comments made by his colleague further emphasises his close proximity to suicide, as these can be interpreted as signalling affective constriction, which

frequently causes anxious-depressive behaviour, a lack of affective resonance, as well as reduced apperception and limited coping mechanisms (Sonneck et al. 178). Hence, the contrast between Finch's distant and unemotional way of narrating, and Roamer's serious, dangerous and hurtful remark may indicate his feelings of numbness, emptiness and of being lost, which are a consequence of his affective constriction (Sonneck et al. 178). This, in turn, may serve to make young adult readers aware of the seriousness of Finch's situation, as well as of the fatal consequences such forms of verbal abuse can have on a vulnerable individual like Finch. If it had not been for Violet trying to talk him off the ledge, Finch might have gone through with killing himself in front of his peers (*ABP* 9). Roamer's meanness does not stop there, as he continues to attack the suicidal teen, for example, by telling the latter to kill himself (*ABP* 87), or by miming hanging himself towards Finch (110). Additionally, Finch is named the number one top suicidal student of the school and has his suicidality made into a headline by its gossip platform (*ABP* 87 and 108). This website can be interpreted as representing American society's obsession with rumours and sensations that often come at the cost of someone's physical and mental well-being. Although the ranking of suicidal teenagers is an exaggerated representation of the abuse mentally ill pupils frequently face at school, it may lead readers to reflect upon their own experiences with gossip culture and bullying and the dire consequences they can have on their victims. Since Finch actually commits suicide in the end, Roamer's abusive comments and the gruesome headline of the school's website show how regular harassment can function as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Considering the above mentioned physical and mental abuse Finch endures, the school is by no means a save place for him, and largely contributes to the worsening of his condition. Thus, his educational environment needs to be recognised as an integral part of the *suicide-dispositive* and partly determines Finch's positioning within it.

3.3. Sexism as form of bullying in *TRW*

In contrast to Finch, who suffers from being labelled a freak by peers who abuse him on a daily basis, Hannah faces discrimination based on her gender, namely sexism. Even today, sexism is still a social and ethical problem that negatively affects the lives and well-beings of women and girls on a global scale. In *TRW*, Hannah is the victim of specific forms of sexism, namely the objectification of women, as well as sexual harassment and rape. The teenage girl's struggle with mental health issues is inextricably linked to the lack of equality among the sexes, as the aforementioned forms of sexism majorly contribute to the development and the worsening of her depressive symptoms and her suicidal ideation. The following analysis will show that sexism constitutes a major part of the *suicide-dispositive* in *TRW*.

According to the definition provided by Ann E. Cudd and Leslie E. Jones, "sexism is a systematic, pervasive, but often subtle, force that maintains the oppression of women, and that is at work through institutional structures, in interpersonal interactions and the attitudes that are expressed in them, and in cognitive, linguistic, and emotional processes of individual minds" (105f). Due to the omnipresence of sexism in women's and men's everyday lives, it shapes their perception of the world to a vast extent, and as a result disadvantages women and secures the social and political dominance of men (Cudd and Jones 104-106). In *TRW*, two levels of sexism are represented, namely *interpersonal* and *unconscious* sexism (Cudd and Jones 109f). The first one "comprises actions and other expressions between persons that create, constitute, promote, sustain, and/ or exploit invidious sexual inequalities" (Cudd and Jones 109). For instance, when Bryce Walker touches Hannah's bottom without her consent, his behaviour can be interpreted as representing the socially constructed notion of male entitlement (*TRW* 47f). The second "refers to the psychological mechanisms and tacit beliefs, emotions and attitudes that create, constitute, promote, sustain, and/ or exploit invidious sexual inequalities" (Cudd and Jones 110). This particular level of sexism is present, for example, when Clay's perception and behaviour towards certain female colleagues change (*TRW* 52) in response to Alex Standall's list titled "*FRESHMAN CLASS—WHO'S HOT/ WHO'S NOT*" (39). The title of Alex's list further reveals how sexist notions can be present in "patterns of language which mark and delimit appropriate activities and attitudes on the basis of sex" (Cudd and

Jones 105). The students' lack of resistance towards the notion of rating young women according to their appearances suggests that they accept the male perspective that has been imposed on them as the standard (Cudd and Jones 105). Due to their pervasiveness, both levels of sexism shape Hannah's perception of her social environment, her sense of self, as well as her role and position within a society that "finds women subsumed by masculine meanings and needs" (Kaschak 170). Hence, the reciprocal relationship between the teenage girl's depression, the traumata of being sexually abused and raped, and her heightened risk of attempting suicide, as represented in *TRW* illustrates how sexism predetermines Hannah's chances of surviving the *suicide-dispositive* of which she is a part. This sub-chapter will show how Hannah's identity as a young and developing woman in an educational environment that perpetuates discrimination based on gender, leads her to employ suicide as her only way of escaping the world that has hurt, abused and rejected her.

The instant Alex writes Hannah's name on his list, she becomes the victim of a specific "form of gender oppression", namely sexual objectification (Fredrickson and Roberts 174). The fact that Hannah's body is deemed desirable by her male peers increases her proneness to becoming the victim of sexually motivated violence, as various studies show that "how a woman's body appears to others can determine her life experiences" (178). According to the objectification theory proposed by Barbara L. Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts, all forms of sexual objectification have in common that the victim experiences herself as "being treated *as a body* (or collection of body parts) valued predominantly for its use to (or consumption by) others" (174). Hannah describes the ramifications of having her appearance evaluated by others "*It gives people—some people—the go-ahead to treat you like you're nothing but that specific body part*" (*TRW* 44). Here, Hannah addresses a problem that female readers are more likely to have experienced themselves, as opposed to male readers who might be completely unaware of the real-life repercussions of sexual objectification. Hanna's legacy exemplifies the female perspective within a cultural discourse dominated by men, and depicts the severe consequences sexual objectification can have on an individual's lived reality, since Hannah's condition significantly worsens the moment her male peers perceive her as an object of their desires and needs. Considering that American teenage readers' educational environments are supposedly similar to Hannah's and Clay's, the protagonists' perspectives on this issue might lead

readers to reflect upon and question their experiences with the sexual objectification of women and girls at their own school and how this form of sexism can alter women's lived reality profoundly. Even Clay, who is generally kind-hearted and sympathetic to the feelings of others, has to realise that he himself altered the way he looked at Hannah after having seen her name on the list. He confesses, "Later that day, passing Hannah in the halls, I took a look back as she walked by" (*TRW* 39). In that moment, Clay does not perceive Hannah as a person, but merely as a specific body part that he, as a member of the dominant sex has the right to evaluate. Hence, Clay sexually objectifies Hannah through his gaze and by visually inspecting her body, which is also known as the objectifying gaze (Kaschak 97).

As a consequence of being exposed to the judging and objectifying looks of her male peers, Hannah becomes the victim of sexual abuse by one of them, which ultimately causes the emergence of her clinical depression and suicidal ideation. Although Bryce is to be hold responsible for is behaviour, Hannah pointing out that if Alex had not put her name on the aforementioned list, she might not have become the victim of sexual assault, suggests that her being made the target of sexual objectification forms an integral aspect of her later on becoming the victim of sexual violence (Fredrickson and Roberts 183). Bryce slapping her bottom without her consent, and referring to her as "*Best Ass in the Freshman Class*" (*TRW* 48) illustrates how he denies Hannah the status of a person by sexually objectifying her, and what is more, insinuating that her bottom is "capable of representing her" (Bartky qtd. in Fredrickson and Roberts 175). The adolescent's actions and words can be viewed as reflecting the underlying patriarchal tendency of American society's perception of the female identity, since Bryce's male point of view defines Hannah's physicality according to what he considers "desirable, acceptable, feminine, or attractive" (Kaschak 97). The male perpetrator perceives this socially constructed male entitlement as his natural right, because when Hannah tries to leave, he forces her to stop by grabbing her wrist and even tells her to relax, as he is simply playing (*TRW* 50). In order to make her listeners understand the wrongness of his actions, the teenage girl dissects and interprets his words and actions, "*'I'm only playing, Hannah.' Translation: Your ass is my play-toy. You might think you have final say over what happens to your ass, but you don't. At least, not as long as 'I'm only playing'*" (*TRW* 51). Even though Hannah does not employ the term sexual objectification, her interpretation of his

utterance evidently shows how Bryce treats her like an object, existing merely for his use and pleasure (Fredrickson and Roberts 174). Here, Hannah's taking over Bryce's perspective, her addressing herself in the second person, as well as her shortly adopting Bryce's pattern of speech expose the underlying notion of male entitlement hidden in his comment. Hannah's focalisation of Bryce's thoughts enables her to make her listeners, as well as the readers understand the powerlessness she experiences in that particular situation. Hence, this quote highlights another aspect associated with sexual objectification, namely the denial of control over her own body (Kaschak 97). From the moment her name is on the list, she is exposed to the objectifying gaze of her male peers, which she can neither avoid nor control. When her male colleague denies the female protagonist the status as an individual who has the right to decide over who, when and how anyone is allowed to touch her, by unwantedly laying hands on her body, she further loses control over her own body. The effect that actions such as Bryce's have on an individual is described by Ellyn Kaschak:

> [i]n losing control of meanings of their own bodies, of the bodies themselves, women lose even more—the opportunity to develop a well-integrated sense of self that is more internally than externally defined, that is relatively stable rather than subject to redefinition based on changes in appearance or evaluations thereof, that is grounded in an accurate testing of abilities and skills rather than passive evaluation. (97)

The effect this loss of bodily autonomy has on her unstable and fragmented sense of self is also visible in the poem, which has already been analysed in the first part. Eventually, having been sexually harassed leads Hannah to question the amount of control she has over her whole life, which, in turn, contributes to the intensification of her suicidal ideation. According to Annelie Werbart Törnblom, Andrzej Werbart and Per-Anders Rydelius, experiencing a sense of powerlessness may cause girls to feel shame, which they have found to be an integral factor in young women's paths to suicide (1103-1105). Since Hannah stresses the link between her reoccurring suicidal tendencies and the lack of control she is able to exert over what happens to her and her body (*TRW* 163), the impact sexual objectification, as well as sexual abuse, which is represented as resulting from the former, have on her decision to commit suicide cannot be denied. Hence, being the target of the seemingly omnipresent objectifying male gaze leads to the development of emotions that put her at a greater risk of attempting suicide.

Although Hannah struggles to trust her environment and to establish close and intimate relationships with members of the opposite sex, she decides to meet with Marcus Cooley, one of her fellow students. Despite all her hopes, Hannah again becomes the victim of sexual assault (*TRW* 141-144). The teenage girl enjoys Marcus's company until he touches her knee without her consent and even continues moving his hand up her inner thigh until he reaches her vagina, despite her telling him to stop. This violation of the female protagonist's human rights is the direct consequence of sexual objectification, as he actually views her as a mere object that he may use to satisfy his own needs. According to Martha C. Nussbaum, there are seven ways in which one can treat another person as an object (218). Five of these are represented in Marcus's actions, namely, "[i]nstrumentality", "[d]enial of autonomy", "[i]nertness", "[v]iolability" and "[d]enial of subjectivity" (Nussbaum 218). First, Marcus uses and regards Hannah as a mere tool for his sexual pleasure (218), as he completely ignores her when she decidedly tells him to stop touching her. The teenage boy deliberately invades her privacy by laying hands on her genitals after she explicitly tells him not to; hence, solely displaying interest in his own desires. Second, instead of respecting Hannah's wishes and her right to decide over what happens to her body, he ignores her words, as well as her body language which clearly signal her discomfort, hence treating her "as lacking in autonomy and self-determination" (Nussbaum 218). Hannah describes her immediate reaction to the assault as follows, "*I stopped laughing. I nearly stopped breathing*" (*TRW* 141). The shortness, as well as the serious tone of these two sentences underline the abruptness with which his touch alters her mood and physical state. This further indicates that Marcus's disregarding her words precipitate an psychological and physical reaction on her side, as her mind goes blank, her body turns rigid and she becomes unresponsive (*TRW* 141). Considering Marcus' perceived entitlement to viewing and using Hannah as a mere object, her perspective and voice is of even greater importance, as it may not only serve to aid and educate young adult readers in empathising with and understanding the victim's point of view. Third, the aforementioned actions, in addition to his being offended by Hannah eventually pushing him off the diner booth, indicate that he thinks of her as lacking in agency. Fourth, by forcing his hand up Hannah's inner thigh, the teenage boy proves to be oblivious to her boundary integrity. It follows that he regards Hannah, a human being, as "something that is permissible to break up, smash, [and, or] break into" (Nussbaum 218). Fifth, his

aforementioned disregard for Hannah's desires, emotions and comfort evidently point to the fact that he views her as an object "whose experience and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account" (Nussbaum 218). This is also manifested in his calling Hannah a tease after he had been pushed off his seat, and then leaving her there (*TRW* 144). Thereby, he implies that due to her reputation as being easy and her enjoying herself in his company, he believes to possess the right to use her for his purposes. Furthermore, by using reversed psychology Marcus does not only suggest that Hannah is to blame for the situation, but also that she is the one who denied him his right to use her, thus, portraying himself as the victim. Being treated like an object, being sexually harassed and left alone after this traumatising experience, eventually foster the adolescent's perception of herself as powerless, isolated and worthless. Considering that these emotions form part of her symptomatology, it can be argued that this incident conduces the further development of her depressive symptoms.

Clay's encounter with Marcus reveals that the perpetrator does neither feel remorse for his actions, nor any sympathy for Hannah, who killed herself only a few weeks after the assault had happened. Marcus's lack of guilt for having caused Hannah inexplicable psychological pain shows when Clay questions Marcus about why he is on the tapes, "'Nothing. It's ridiculous,' […] 'I don't belong on those tapes. Hannah just wanted an excuse to kill herself.'" (*TRW* 110). Despite having already listened to the teenage girl's recordings, Marcus lacks empathy for the girl he sexually assaulted, and even attempts to victim-blame her. It follows that the character of Marcus can be interpreted as exemplifying the toxic combination of sexism, socially constructed and practiced male entitlement that allows men to disrespect and disregard women and their rights as human beings. Therefore, Marcus's "psychological disposition[…], desires, and self-concept[…]" mirror the United States' tendency to accept "activities, attitudes, and proclivities which are typically associated with men as 'normal' or 'standard' for human beings (i.e. the man standard)" (Cudd and Jones 105). Consequently, Marcus perceives Hannah's perspective as deviating from his own, which he regards as the socially accepted norm (105). Being able to understand the damaging effect this internalised acceptance of the male-standard has on girls and women is essential for teenage readers in order for them to be able to reflect on their own experiences with this form of sexism. In their study on gender-related differences in young people's paths to suicide, Werbart Törnblom et al. state that in

contrast to boys, who rarely become victims of sexual abuse, being sexually abused is "common for girls" (1108). According to Susan Nolen-Hoeksema, "[w]omen's lack of social power" deems them susceptible to sexual abuse, which subsequently increases their proneness to depression (173). This is also the case with Hannah, as the traumatic experience of the sexual assault intensifies her feelings of helplessness and the lack of control she is able to exert over her own life, which, in turn, fuel her depressive symptoms (Nolen-Hoeksema 173). In her article on Netflix's *13 Reasons Why*, Anna Silman (n.p.) argues that "the message the show really succeeds in conveying has to do with misogyny: how persistent objectification can erode a woman's self-worth, and the many ways we [society in general] fail young women by propagating a culture of silence". The United States' tendency to perpetuate a, as Silman (n.p.) calls it, "culture of silence" is also manifested in the novel, when Hannah tries to make eye-contact with anyone present in the diner, hoping someone might help her, but not one person dares to interfere. By keeping silent, those witnessing the assault indirectly support the perpetrator, Marcus, in his actions and foster Hannah's helplessness in this traumatic situation, thereby shaping her "experience of the world" in a negative way (Cudd and Jones 106). The harmful impact this has on her, as well as Hannah's explicitly mentioning that she is perfectly aware of the other diner customers' quiet acceptance of the abuse, may function to appeal to readers on an emotional level, as this exemplifies the importance of protecting and speaking up for victims like Hannah.

Helen Block Lewis states that the "*self*" forms the subject of evaluation, when one experiences the emotion of shame (30). Following Lewis' argument June Price Tangney, Rowland S. Miller, Laura Flicker and Deborah Hill Barlow conclude that shame impacts one's sense of self-worth and self-determination in a negative way, often leading to "feelings of worthlessness and powerlessness" (1257). Hence, shame often gives rise to the "desire to escape or to hide—to sink into the floor and disappear" (Tangney et al. 1257). Kaschak describes shame "as central a component of women's psychology as it is of depression" (181). The author further argues that "[w]omen in this society are not judged by, but identified with, their appearance in an involuntarily exhibitionistic way", which, in case of continuous exposure to the evaluation and judgment of others, can lead women to experience shame (181). It can be argued that Hannah experiences shame after being abused by Marcus, as she describes her feelings as follows, "*Like every nerve in my body*

was withering in, pulling away from my fingers and toes. Pulling back and disappearing" (*TRW* 160). The teenage girl's somatic symptoms mirror her desire to escape and to hide away from the outside world. These emotions can be regarded as the first manifestations of her suicidal ideation. Moreover, the development of her strong inclination towards suicide is indicated by her choice of words, since Hannah's using the word *wither* implies her experiencing herself as slowly receding, and as detached from her own self (160). This can also be interpreted as symbolising her loss of strength on her path towards suicide, and, thus, foreshadows the final surpassing of her pain-threshold. As readers already know that Hannah is not able to survive in the end, this may serve to highlight the direct connection between her death and her being the victim of sexually motivated violence. The young adult's description also signals that the assault has initiated the slow process of the loss of self, which points to her being at a heightened risk of committing suicide after the assault had happened. Therefore, the traumatising experience of the sexual abuse Hannah endures; in addition to continuously having her body exposed to the judging eyes of her male peers lead her to experience intense feelings of shame, which, in turn, nourish her depressive symptoms, including her strong suicidal tendencies. It follows that the school's misogynistic environment strongly influences Hannah's position of a person who kills herself in the *suicide-dispositive* of which she is a part.

Due to Western societies' tendency to objectify "the female body", women are presented with a constant threat of "anxiety-provoking experiences" that demands them to perpetuate an almost ceaseless alertness to protect their bodies from potential harm (Fredrickson and Roberts 183). Studies show that "this attentiveness is a chronic and daily source of anxiety for many women, affecting both their personal and work lives" (Gordon and Riger; Rozee qtd. in Fredrickson and Roberts 183). From the moment Alex evaluates and objectifies Hannah's bottom, the teenage girl is neither able to control nor to withdraw herself from the male gaze that follows her through the school hallways and beyond. Consequently, some of her male peers who perceive women as being of a lower status than themselves, and feel entitled to treat them as objects, pose a threat to Hannah's safety and force her to maintain constant vigilance. Nolen-Hoeksema explains that "[f]requent stressful experiences and reactivity to stress are likely to have reciprocal effects on each other" (173). The fact that she has been the victim of sexual objectification and assault

herself, and her having witnessed the rape of a fellow female student, warrant her apprehension. This effect is also visible when Hannah is house-sitting for a friend of her parents and the mere presence of a nearby party-scene triggers memories of the rape she witnessed and evokes feelings of terror in her:

> Then I hid myself in the bedroom with the TV blasting. [...] I shut my eyes, tight. I wasn't watching the TV anymore. I wasn't in that room anymore. I could only think back to that closet, hiding inside it with a pile of jackets surrounding me. And once again, I started rocking back and forth, back and forth. And once again, no one was around to hear me cry. (*TRW* 258)

Here, the concept of space serves to convey the female protagonist's emotional and psychological state shortly before she commits self-murder. Despite the fact that, at that time, Hannah is located within a safe space, namely a big locked house, the trauma the teenage girl experienced has already eroded any possibility of physical and psychological safety for her. This is further highlighted by her repeating the phrase "[*a*]*nd once again*", which illustrates the severe emotional and psychological repercussions of being a victim, as well as a witness of sexual assault (258). Moreover, Hannah's use of reiteration underlines how the mere indication of a party-scene causes her to repeatedly relive her trauma and experience intense anxiety, which, in turn, influences her already crumbling mental state negatively. The contrast between the close proximity of space represented in her thought process and the actual wide space of the bedroom she is in, mirrors her affective constriction, as well as the loneliness and emptiness she feels shortly before committing suicide. Hannah's feeling trapped within her own body, further supports the assumption that her committing suicide should be viewed as a decision made during a state of an emotional and psychological crisis.

The interconnectedness between Hannah's decision to end her own life, American society's tendency to sexually objectify women, and the traumatising experience of being sexually assaulted and eventually even raped, manifests itself in the literal objectification of Hannah in the end. Nathan A. Heflick and Jamie L. Goldenberg state that the constant emphasis of women's physical attributes within an interpersonal context generates the literal objectification of women by others (226). The two authors "define literal objectification as any outcome in which a person is perceived as, or behaves, objectlike, relative to humanlike" (225). As a consequence of being repeatedly treated like an object, the teenage girl displays object-like behaviour. According to Clay, others notice this

change in her character, and make fun of it, "Recently someone dared me to ask Hannah out. [...] He also knew that for the past few months, Hannah hardly spoke to anyone, making it a double challenge" (*TRW* 162). Clay's comment on the female protagonist's changed behaviour reveals how certain male characters perceive women as conquests, a view that Clay does not question at that time. This also shows that the majority of male characters in *TRW* do not only view women as objects of their desire and entertainment, they also degrade and dehumanise them in order to conform to society's notion of masculinity. This can also be referred to as toxic masculinity, which is defined as "the most extreme versions of hyper masculine communities of practice" (Kupers qtd. in Creighton and Oliffe 414f) "characterised by homophobia and the domination and subjugation of weaker men and women" (Creighton and Oliffe 414f). Throughout the story the male characters' adherence to this notion of masculinity poses a direct threat to Hannah's physical and psychological safety. Subsequently, the teenage girl becomes more passive and less talk-active, and, thus, more object-like (Heflick and Goldenberg 225). By viewing Hannah as a conquest, her social environment dehumanises her even further, which leads to the worsening of her depressive symptoms. According to Heflick and Goldenberg, the literal objectification of a human being can have severe consequences for the objectified individual (227f), which in Hannah's leads to her eventually viewing herself as an object that she is able to destroy.

Heflick and Goldenberg argue that one of the ramifications of literal objectification is that women "may encounter risks to their actual physical safety" (228). This connection to sexually motivated violence against women is shown when Hannah joins Bryce Walker and Courtney Crimson in the whirlpool the same night she is housesitting, and Bryce starts abusing her the minute her breast-holder becomes transparent (*TRW* 262f). Bryce's actions show that in Westerns societies "women's behavior is [often] defined by what it arouses in the indeterminate male observer" (Kaschak 134). It follows that "[i]f [a woman's] [...] appearance is deemed desirable, then so is she and she is treated accordingly" (Kaschak 96). Bryce's touching the teenage girl despite the fact that she does not say a single word to him, and despite her tense and dismissive body language, which clearly signal her disapproval of his actions, can be regarded as a direct consequence of the sexual objectification of women paired with the notion of toxic masculinity. Although Hannah claims to be fully in control of the situation in the whirlpool, she again displays

object-like characteristics, "*And then, just like that, I let go. My shoulders went limp. My legs fell apart. […] I let my reputation catch up with me—I let my reputation become me—with you*" (*TRW* 264f). Here, Hannah's transition from a human being that struggles with the symptoms of depression to a motionless, passive and mute *object* that can be used and destroyed is clearly visible. By forcing the image of an easy and promiscuous girl upon Hannah, her peers impact how Hannah is being treated by others, which may serve readers as an exemplification of how rumours and character defamation on the basis of sexism can function as self-fulfilling prophecies. Even though the first sentence of this quote gives the impression that Hannah is in command of herself and her body, the second and third sentences signal her passivity in this situation, as her directly referring to her body parts implies that she experiences herself as detached from them. Moreover, this also suggests that the teenage girl has internalised the underlying message of sexual objectification, namely that certain parts of her body are capable of representing her as a person. These symptoms mirror, what Dana Crowley Jack describes as "the inner split of depression, the condition of self-alienation and hopelessness" (168). The female protagonist's description of her feelings in that moment also signals her loss of self, which further contributes to her suicidal tendencies, since "successful silencing of the authentic self leads to an inner sense of defeat, the feeling of giving up and living in despairing resignation" (Jack 141). This is also evident in Hannah's account of the assault, as she repeatedly uses the word "let". She insinuates a lack of agency, as well as a complete resignation on her part, which nourish her suicidal tendencies, as she eventually turns the aggression that others have directed towards her her own self by taking her own life.

The teenage girl explicitly tells her audience that she did not want to be touched by Bryce:

> I was not attracted to you, Bryce. Ever. In fact, you disgusted me. […] For everyone listening, let me be clear. I did not say no or push his hand away. All I did was turn my head, clench my teeth, and fight back tears. And he saw that. He even told me to relax. 'Just relax,' he said. 'Everything will be okay.' As if letting him finger me was going to cure all my problems. But in the end, I never told you to get away … and you didn't. (*TRW* 265)

The fact that Hannah does not make her voice heard exemplifies the subsequent silencing of women through sexual and literal objectification. The perpetrator, Bryce, views her as a mere object that he has the right to exploit for the fulfilment of his sexual desires. In fact, it can be argued that the trauma caused by Bryce eventually generates the loss of her voice

and her inner self. Although Hannah's body language clearly shows that this sexual contact is unwanted, Bryce fully disregards her feelings and volition. By explicitly stating that she did not tell him to stop, which may insinuate that Bryce's violation of her human rights is partly her own fault, she seems to have internalised the notion of male entitlement, which can be regarded as highly problematic considering the novel's young target audience. Since the majority of young adult readers may still have to go through a process of moral and emotional maturation, Clay's disgusted, horrified and pained reaction to Bryce's actions, can be interpreted as functioning as a moral guideline for the former. The male protagonist indicates that Bryce is a predator whose crimes cannot be regarded as harmless, but need to be condemned. Without Clay's commentary and moral evaluation of Bryce's actions, readers could potentially be at risk to believe that Hannah's silence makes her accountable for her own rape.

Due to the fact that Hannah claims to use Bryce in order to be able to take her own life, it can be assumed that the traumatising experience of being raped heightens her susceptibility to committing suicide. Subsequently, Hannah experiences a complete loss of control over her body and life, which, in turn, leads to the intensification of her depressive symptoms that nourish her suicidal thoughts. Eventually, the abuse the teenage girl has suffered from causes her emotional, psychological and physical pain that exceed her pain-threshold. Since the female protagonist is not able to cope with the intense feelings of hopelessness, numbness and the loss of self, she considers suicide an adequate solution to her despair. Consequently, Hannah, who deems herself powerless, does not direct her hatred towards her aggressor Bryce, but towards the last remaining fragments of her own self by taking her own life. According to Jack, "[i]dentifying with the male gaze is a gender-specific form of what psychoanalytic writers have called 'identification with the aggressor,' and this phenomenon explains the fundamental aggression against the self" (135). Hence, Hannah's committing suicide can be interpreted as the last available defence mechanism of her represented psyche. It follows that her self-inflicted death can be regarded as a consequence of the notions of the objectification of women and toxic masculinity that are both endemic to her school environment. The teenage girl's narration serves as an exemplification of the fatal consequences of sexually motivated violence and the connection to clinical depression and suicides in American teenage girls. Considering all of the above-mentioned factors, the represented imbalance

of power among the sexes constitutes an integral part of the *suicide-dispositive* of which Hannah is also a part.

3.4. Rumours, gossip culture and stigma

All three novels address, at least to some extent, America's obsession with gossiping and its fatal consequences. The circulation of rumours about their person directly or indirectly contributes to the worsening of each protagonist's condition. In Craig's case, the mere thought of potential gossip about his stay at a psychiatric hospital causes him to experience anxiety, which momentarily prevents him from recuperation (*IKFS* 258). Hannah and Finch are both victims of an indirect form of bullying, namely defamation. Their social status is sabotaged by the rumours that are spread about them, which has a negative effect on their mental disorders and their strong suicidal ideation (Alsaker 31). Hannah becomes the victim of a specific kind of character assassination that is closely linked to sexism and commonly referred to as slut shaming. Both Craig and Finch are affected by the stigmas associated with people living with mental illnesses. While Craig's peers refrain from labelling him a freak or a crazy person most of the time, Finch's fellow students call him these names on a daily basis. The following analysis will show how these different forms of harassment, as well as the stigmatisation of people diagnosed as mentally ill affect the characters' positioning within the *suicide-dispositives* that are unfolding in the three young adult novels.

3.4.1. Slut shaming in *TRW*

In *TRW*, Hannah's social life dramatically changes after the story of her first kiss, with Justin Foley, is turned into a variety of sensational stories, spread by the latter (e.g. 29 and 204). The spreading of untrue rumours about the teenage girl's private life and her sexual activity serves Justin as means to enhance his own reputation. Subsequently, the teenage girl's first intimate encounter "becomes fodder for a rumor of male sexual conquest" (Jenney and Exner-Cortens 412). The content of the various stories he disseminates about being involved in some sort of sexual relationship with Hannah suggests that his identity as a young man is largely built on a notion of masculinity that requires him to be heterosexual and sexually active. Opposed to Justin, who receives social recognition and affirmation of his manliness through the spreading of these fabricated stories; the female protagonist is slut shamed and sexually objectified by the majority of her fellow high-school students. Elizabeth A. Armstrong, Laura T. Hamilton, Elizabeth M. Armstrong and J. Lotus Seeley define slut shaming as "the practice of maligning women for presumed sexual activity" (100). The discrepancy between the positive effect the rumours have on Justin's social status and the negative consequences they have on Hannah's reputation illustrates how "slut shaming is based on sexual double standards established and upheld by men, to women's disadvantage" (Armstrong et al. 100f). Furthermore, Western societies, America in particular, tend to regard promiscuous behaviour performed by men as "evidence of positive masculine traits" (Nack 480). In contrast to men, women who have a multitude of sexual partners often have to fear status loss (Marks and Fraley 29), as is the case with Hannah. Her fellow students seem to have accepted the male-standard as a given, since both are rumoured to having been involved with each other in a sexual way, but Hannah is the only one being judged. Clay even admits that his fear of Hannah's reputation hindered the deepening of their friendship, "It was so easy to laugh with her. But whenever people came around, I got shy. I backed off" (*TRW* 179). The change in the male protagonist's behaviour shows how Hannah being labelled as easy and promiscuous leads to her being socially ostracised, which, in turn, nourishes her depressive symptoms and increases her susceptibility to suicide. The teenage girl's inability to free herself from her reputation as an easy girl also gives rise to feelings of shame, which can function "as an effective barrier to seeking help from adults" (Törnblom,

Werbart and Rydelius 1105). It follows that Hannah's low social status at school that is founded in the represented sexist double standard, does not only facilitate her becoming the victim of sexually motivated violence in the first place, but also limits her chances of asking for and receiving professional treatment. After listening to Hannah's tapes, Clay realises that due to his previously unquestioned acceptance of Western society's sexual double standard, he too is partly responsible for her death, "I deserve to be on this list. Because if I hadn't been so afraid of everyone else, I might have told Hannah that someone cared. And Hannah might still be alive" (*TRW* 181). Craig's realisation and reflection on the prevalence of the socially constructed idea of what constitutes masculinity and femininity, as well as its dangerous and real-life consequences, may lead adolescent readers to reflect on their own experiences with slut shaming and the spreading of rumours. Considering the above-mentioned factors, it follows that the sexual double standard concerning notions of masculinity and femininity endemic to Hannah's social environment at school, builds the foundation of her depression and suicidality, and consequently contributes to the final positioning of the teenage girl as a person who commits suicide in the *suicide-dispositive*.

3.4.2. Stigma and mental illness in *ABP* and *IKFS*

The stigmatisation of people with psychiatric disorders is addressed in *IKFS* and *ABP*, as Finch suffers from being labelled "'Theodore Freak'" (*ABP* 9), and Craig fears the prospect of being stigmatised because he has been admitted to an adult psychiatric hospital. According to Bruce G. Link and Jo C. Phelan, "stigma exists when elements of labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination occur together in a power situation that allows them" (377). This is also described by Link and Phelan as the identification and selection of differences that affect the social position of a person, and that are often regarded as naturally given (367). When Roamer physically and verbally attacks Finch, the latter often struggles to control his anger towards his aggressor, which furthers his peers' fear of his reputation as mad and dangerous. Whenever Finch is no longer able to restrain himself from engaging in violent and eccentric behaviour, such as throwing a desk at a blackboard, igniting illegal fireworks and getting into violent fistfights with other students (*ABP* 12), he nourishes the rumours spread by Roamer and his supporters. By affixing Finch the label of a "[f]reak" (*ABP* 9), the behavioural differences displayed by him are linked with negative attributes (Link and Phelan 368). Every time Finch enters the school, his fellow students remind him of his status as a "[f]reak" (*ABP* 110), a "[w]eirdo" (10) and as the number one suicidal pupil (108); hence, as someone who is neither wanted nor accepted at school. Link and Phelan explain that "the linking of labels to undesirable attributes—become[s] the rationale for believing that negatively labeled persons are fundamentally different from those who do[...] [not] share the label" (370). Since the teenage boy is the target of Roamer's systematic abuse, other pupils either ignore or avoid his company in order to refrain from being associated with, as well as from being targeted themselves. His fellow students' negative opinions of him further his low self-esteem, his feelings of worthlessness and loneliness, which, in turn, conduce to the worsening of his condition. Due to the fact that the young adult is in desperate need of a supportive and sympathetic environment, the subsequent intensification of his violent and eccentric behaviour during manic phases and his regular absences from school during depressive phases, additionally contribute to his stigmatisation and social isolation at school. Finch is caught in a vicious cycle because of the reciprocal effect of his social stigmatisation, his symptomatology, as well as his being harassed on a regular basis (*ABP*

272f). Shortly after Mr. Embry diagnoses Finch as bipolar, Roamer insults the male protagonist again, who at this point, has completely lost his control over the symptomatology of his disease and violently attacks his aggressor (272f). Mr. Keppel's witnessing this incident leads to Finch's expulsion from school (272f and 310). As a consequence, the school's authority figures no longer have the opportunity to exert their roles as gate-keepers, who may ensure that the teenage boy receives professional treatment, which limits his chances of survival further. Moreover, being expelled might cause Finch to feel even greater rejection, and, thus, indirectly contribute to his viewing suicide as an escape from the world that has deserted him because of his condition. This pre-determines his position of a person that actually kills himself in the *suicide-dispositive* represented in *ABP*.

Hannah and Finch are the victims of physical and psychological abuse performed by some of their peers; however, the majority of pupils either ignore these instances of bullying or support the perpetrators. This points to the students' lacking of empathy and moral integrity. According to Alsaker, not being able to empathise and cooperate with others, as well as to help and console them is one of the main reasons for the development and maintenance of harassment (108-111). As the teenagers represented in the novels spend a lot of time at school, it can be argued that the gradual economisation of the United States' educational system, which focuses on profit and the notion of human beings as capital rather than teaching adolescents social skills, is partly responsible for the students' lack of empathy and moral sensitivity. It can be argued that by promoting a capitalistic mentality, corporate America produces a generation of young people who are merely concerned about their own matters, and are ignorant towards injustices and the pains of others. For example, in *ABP*, Amanda Monk struggles with an eating disorder and suicidal tendencies herself, but actively takes part in the harassment of the suicidal Finch. Thus, instead of being sympathetic and supportive towards a fellow student who faces similar hardships, she uses him as means to reduce her own despair by causing him pain. Due to the fact that Hannah's and Finch's social environment at school, with a few exceptions, shows no interest in or concern about the two protagonists' severe problems, it can be argued that their fellow peers represent this egoistic mentality promoted by a school system that adheres to a capitalistic notion of education.

In *ABP*, possible negative consequences of labelling are shown when Mr. Embry diagnoses Finch as bipolar, and the teenager starts to compulsively ruminate about the label that has been attached to him. According to Michelle L. West, Philip T. Yanos, Stephen M. Smith, David Roe and Paul H. Lysaker, the process of self-stigmatisation can lead to the erosion of "previously-held positive beliefs about" (54) oneself. This effect can also be observed with Finch. Since, the teenage boy struggles with low self-esteem, as well as with being labelled a supposedly dangerous freak, as someone who is of an unsound mind, the prospect of further stigmatisation leads to the intensification of these negative beliefs he has of himself (see, for instance, 277f). Jennifer Boyd Ritsher and Jo C. Phelan emphasise that "the harmful effects of stigma may work through the internal perceptions, beliefs and emotions of the stigmatized person, above and beyond the effects of direct discrimination by others" (258). The fact that Finch already suffers from alienation contributes to the nourishing of his fear of further discrimination and rejection. According to Ritsher and Phelan, "feeling different and divided from others may also be a powerful component of the stigma process as it works through the stigmatized individual" (262). Moreover, the two authors state that social isolation affects one's sense of self-respect and symptoms related to major depression negatively (262). Applying stereotypes to oneself induces emotions characteristic for suicidal individuals, as, for example, feeling hopeless, helpless and demoralised (262). Hence, the reciprocal effect of the adolescent's condition and stigma attached to it exacerbates Finch's chances to escape the vicious cycle he is caught in. All of the above mentioned effects can be observed right after Mr. Embry diagnoses the young adult as bipolar:

> [...] my brain and my heart are pounding out different rhythms; my hands are turning cold and the back of my neck is turning hot; my throat has gone completely dry. The thing I know about bipolar disorder is that it's a label. One you give crazy people. I know this because I've taken junior-year psychology and I've seen movies [...]. Labels like 'bipolar' say[:] This is why you are the way you are. This is who you are. They explain people away as illnesses. (*ABP* 271f)

The teenage boy's strong physical reaction to Mr. Embry's diagnosis illustrates how it directly affects his condition in a negative way. Evidently, Finch is aware of the stereotypes associated with illnesses of the mind, as he refers to people with psychiatric disorders as *crazy*. Similarly to Craig, the mere anticipation of potential stigmatisation causes Finch to experience anxiety, which intensifies his depressive symptoms, including his suicidal

ideation. Since his peers already pigeonhole the teenage boy as a dangerous, crazy freak; the additional label of being bipolar indirectly confirms his fears of a complete loss of his true sense of self. The prospect of being reduced to a diagnosis further destabilises his sense of self, thereby increasing his feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. This spike in destructive emotions subsequently causes him to contemplate suicide as his last remaining means to escape this emotional and psychological crisis.

The fact that the fear of being labelled as mentally ill contributes to the worsening of Finch's pathology is shown shortly after the counselling session with Mr. Embry. The protagonist tries to cope with the darkness which is about to consume him and that intensifies his fear of dying:

A string of thoughts runs through my head like a song I can't get rid of, over and over in the same order: I am broken. I am a fraud. I am impossible to love. It's only a matter of time until Violet figures it out. You warned her. What does she want from you? You told her how it was. Bipolar disorder, my mind says, labelling itself. Bipolar, bipolar, bipolar. (*ABP* 277f)

Like Hannah, Finch compares the repetitive nature in which he experiences his destructive thoughts to a song. Similarly to music that is able to evoke an intense emotional response from its listeners, the self-destructive force inherent in Finch's symptomatology emotionally and psychologically affects the male protagonist. The metaphorical use of language, in combination with the alternation of the way in which Finch addresses himself, once in the first and then in the second person address, facilitate a better understanding of the complexity of the character's psychological pain and despair on the side of the readers. Here, Finch's negative view of himself and his intense feelings of worthlessness are a direct consequence of the anxiety he experiences due to his fear of being stigmatised by others. This produces a sense of instability and confusion, which symbolises the narrator's deteriorating sense of self and lack of mental stability. In addition to Finch's internalising society's negative perspective on people who suffer from mental illnesses, the young adult withdraws himself from the only person who supports him, namely Violet, since he fears her rejecting him due to his disorder. The theme of rejection is pervasive to Finch's suffering and originates from his upbringing and his situation at home, which will be addressed in the third part of this thesis. Taking into account that Finch labels himself as bipolar and addresses himself in the second person, it can be argued that the fear of stigmatisation gradually leads to the actual loss of self that

he experiences shortly before his death. Hence, the intensification of his depressive symptoms, including his strong suicidal ideation, which manifests itself in his attempting to take his own life shortly after Mr. Embry's diagnosis, can be regarded as resulting from the stigma attached to mental illnesses.

James D. Livingston and Jennifer E. Boyd stress the link between self-stigma and "psychiatric symptom severity", as well as patients' inability to adhere to professional treatment (2157). This connection is also shown when Finch hospitalises himself after swallowing a whole bottle of sleeping pills, but leaves the hospital the minute he is awake again, as he fears being transferred to a mental ward because of his illness. Furthermore, the fact that Finch and Amanda Monk both attend a meeting of a support group for at risk young adults, far away from their hometown and use different identities, in order to avoid the possible stigmatisation by their peers, shows the negative impact of labels (*ABP* 281ff). Additionally, the character of Amanda Monk can be interpreted as serving an educational function by illustrating how mental illnesses can affect everybody regardless of social background and status, as she popular and seemingly self-confident (e.g. *ABP* 6). The only group therapy session the male protagonist attends triggers the intensification of Finch's fear of losing his sense of self, since according to him, the majority of clients appear to have internalised and completely identified with the labels of their disorders (*ABP* 284f). Consequently, Finch does not attend any more meetings of the support group, which, at this point, is his only chance of survival. When Amanda asks the teenage boy why he attempted suicide in the past, the latter reveals his struggle to maintain control over his sense of self, "'I do it because it reminds me to be here, that I'm still here and I have a say in the matter" (*ABP* 286). This implies that the young adult battles feelings of helplessness, as he is neither able to control the dark forces that seem to take over his entire represented body and mind, nor has he any power over how others perceive and react to him, now that another label has been attached to him. Hence, it can be argued that Finch, similarly to Hannah, attempts to regain control of his life by determining how and when his life will end. Therefore, the adolescent's final struggle to resist the internalisation of the stigma concerning his condition, illustrates the severe consequences labelling people as mentally ill and rejecting them in response to their condition can have for such an individual. In Finch's case, the stigmatisation and stereotyping of people who

suffer from psychiatric disorders majorly contributes to his final position as a person who commits self-murder in the *suicide-dispositive*.

Although Craig is not labelled a freak like Finch, he also fears the stigma attached to psychiatric hospitals and people living with mental illnesses (see, for example, *IKFS* 258). Hence, it can be argued that he is afraid of the "*symbolic interaction stigma*", which is defined as the "processes involving the anticipation of reactions of others that are potentially harmful even if internalization of stereotypes does not occur" (Link, Wells, Phelan and Yang 118). Bruce G. Link, Jennifer Wells, Jo C. Phelan and Lawrence Wang argue that people who are diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder often anticipate being rejected by their social environment, which can lead them to become socially isolated and to experience lower self-esteem (122). This affect can also be observed in the cases of Finch and Craig. When Aaron discovers that the male protagonist has been admitted to Six North, Craig fears his social environment's reaction, as he is convinced that his friend's knowledge of his whereabouts will have severe consequences for his future, "I was afraid before, but I'm afraid even more now that I'm a public joke. The teachers are going to hear from the students. They'll think I'm trying to make an excuse for bad work. […] I feel the Cycling starting again" (*IKFS* 259). Evidently, Craig is aware of the stereotypes concerning major depression, indicating that people associate mental health facilities with people who deviate from the norm, and are often regarded as insane. What is more, the teenage boy assumes that suffering from depression is viewed as an excuse for being lazy and "being a prima donna" (*IKFS* 302). In contrast to physical illnesses, which others tend to recognise and relate to, psychiatric disorders are not visible to the naked eye and people, like Finch in *ABP* (15f), often face difficulties explaining their condition to others. For this reason, Craig immediately fears that his fellow students will ridicule him for struggling with depression. This suggests that he partly agrees with society's stereotypes against people who need to stay at a psychiatric hospital, thereby making it more difficult for himself to accept and cope with his condition. In addition to causing the teenage boy to dread his future encounters with his peers, the conversation with Aaron leads to the activation of negative schemata in his mind. This, in turn, causes him to be caught in a downward spiral, which subsequently worsens his depressive symptoms, and interferes with his healing process (*IKFS* 259). Additionally, it can be argued that the portrayal of stigmas about psychiatric disorders and their effect on Craig's well-being, as well as the fact that

the teenage boy encounters a multitude of different characters who have to face their individual struggle with psychiatric disorders, are essential for the education of young adult readers. Craig's story may encourage them to reflect upon their own stereotypes about people with mental illnesses and psychiatric facilities.

Even though Craig expects his peers and authority figures at school to reject and to think less of him due to his struggle with depression and strong suicidal tendencies, the opposite is the case. Having been admitted at Six North, as well as being diagnosed with clinical depression and suicidal ideation opens a new channel of communication for Craig, since some of his fellow pupils feel more comfortable disclosing their own struggles with mental health to him (see, for instance, *IKFS* 297f and 299). This can aid teenage readers in understanding that anybody can be affected by a mental illness, and that receiving encouragement and support from others can have a life-affirming effect on a suicidal individual like Craig. When Aaron first calls Craig at the hospital, he refers to stereotypes concerning living with psychiatric disorders, such as accusing Craig of using depression as means to receive sympathy and attention from others (*IKFS* 257); however, he later on apologises to Craig. Aaron admits that he himself might struggle with depressive symptoms, as well as that he projected his own fears and feelings of despair onto Craig (297f). It follows that his peers' support and his being able to name and talk about his illness with others positively influences his positioning within the *suicide-dispositive* of which he is a part. In contrast to Finch, Craig receives encouragement and support from the school's principal and one of his teachers (312). This shows that the authority figures at this educational facility apprehend the seriousness of their students' problems with mental disorders, thus, providing them with the necessary support needed for them to re-enter the educational system. However, as already mentioned before, the fact remains that elite schools, such as Executive Pre-Professional high school, depend on the financial support of their donors. Considering the fact that a multitude of their pupils face problems concerning their mental health, could potentially be defamatory to the school's status. Nevertheless, the positive and supportive reactions Craig receives from his environment might encourage young adult readers who also suffer from major depression and/ or suicidal ideation to seek help despite their fear of being stigmatised by others.

3.5. Measures taken by school officials

Although Craig, Finch and Hannah display their struggle with suicidality and mental health issues during school hours, the majority of institutional figures fail to provide them with the help needed to forestall the worsening of their condition. In the United States of America, school counsellors are not necessarily mental health professionals; however, they "are often on the forefront of identifying behaviors that could signal something more serious" (*ASCA* n.p.). As already mentioned in the introduction, Serafini, Solano and Amore emphasise the importance of training and sensitising "specific community figures, such as teachers, [...] [and school counsellors] in suicide prevention so that they could help in the identification and referral of at risk subjects" (22). In case a school counsellor does not refer a student in desperate need of treatment to mental health professionals, the latter's chances of receiving such help may be limited. This is especially true for pupils like Hannah and Finch coming from an unsupportive and neglecting family background. For example, when Hannah decides to reach out for help and visits her counsellor, as she is not able to confide in her parents, she voices her feelings of emptiness and her desire to make her life stop, and Mr. Porter fails to recognise these warning signs (*TRW* 271f). Hannah's counsellor shows interest in Hannah's well-being, but he does not take any measures to ensure that the teenage girl sees either a therapist or a psychiatrist (*TRW* 277ff). Due to the fact that at this point, Hannah is at a high risk of committing suicide, which is shown through her recording her suicide-tapes during their counselling session, Mr. Porter's suggestion to move on from her trauma has an even greater impact on her (277f). It follows that the female protagonist perceives her counsellor's words as a validation of her plan to end her pain by taking her own life. Hence, Mr. Porter's lack of action, as well as his inability to comprehend the severity and acuteness of his student's situation not only limit Hannah's chances of getting help, but also puts her at a higher risk of committing suicide.

In contrast to Hannah, Finch has to attend counselling sessions with his counsellor, Mr. Embry, since his sophomore year; however, the latter is only able to diagnose Finch as bipolar towards the end of his senior year (*ABP* 13 and 271). Since Finch's parents both neglect and most of the time ignore their suicidal son, Mr. Embry's attempts to co-operate with them in order to help his student eventually fail, and the teenage boy is able to evade

psychiatric treatment (see, for example, *ABP* 277). Despite the male protagonist's trying to hide his symptoms from his counsellor, as he is afraid of being diagnosed as mentally ill and referred to a mental health facility, he does value these counselling sessions, "Maybe it's because he's worried and he means well, and he is one of the few adults in my life who pay attention" (*ABP* 144). Here, the young adult already insinuates that he feels neglected by his parents, which is manifested in his struggle with feelings of worthlessness and low self-esteem, as well as in his constant fear of being rejected for his true self. Hence, the counselling sessions are of even greater importance to the mentally unstable teenager. As soon as Mr. Embry realises that his student is in actual danger of committing suicide, he tries to reassure Finch of his support (*ABP* 272). What is more, the counsellor tries to contact Finch's mother, but his attempts to provide his student with the psychiatric treatment he would have needed eventually fail, as Finch himself delates the messages the counsellor leaves for his mother (277). In the end, the adolescent is fully absorbed in thoughts concerning the possible negative effects of his diagnosis, and, thus, only attends one therapy session shortly before he drowns himself. This demonstrates that Finch's pathology has reached a level of severity and emergency that warrants a stay at a psychiatric hospital in order for him to survive within the *suicide-dispositive*. In contrast to Mr. Embry, the authority figures of Executive Pre-Professional high school, in *IKFS*, only become aware of Craig's struggle with clinical depression after he had been admitted to Six North. Despite the fact that the schools represented in the three novels either offer their mentally ill and suicidal students counselling sessions (see, for instance, *ABP* 12 and *TRW* 269f) or try to help them re-enter the educational system (see, for example, *IKFS* 437), they are not able to ensure that students, like Finch and Hannah, receive treatment by mental health professionals. For these reasons, the school's authority figures form part of each character's positioning in the *suicide-dispositives* of which they are a part. However, the importance of the characters' family environment will also be addressed, as whether a suicidal character receives psychiatric treatment largely depends on his or her situation at home.

4. Part III – Family environment as part of the *suicide-dispositives*

The mentally ill and suicidal protagonists' situations at home form another part of the *suicide-dispositives* in two ways. First, being ignored and/ or neglected by their parents negatively affects Finch's and Hannah's depressive symptoms and nourishes their suicidal thoughts. By contrast, the Gilner's loving and accepting way of parenting does not alleviate the burden of Craig's condition. Second, Hannah's, as well as Craig's school officials fail to recognise their growing suicidal ideation and fail to refer them to a mental health professionals, hence, whether they are eventually provided with such care largely depends on the measures taken by their parents. Although Mr. Embry reaches out to Finch's parents on numerous occasions, their lack of concern for their son and their inability to recognise the acuteness of his situation diminish his chances of receiving psychiatric treatment. Additionally, Mr. Finch's abusive behaviour towards his teenage son directly contributes to the worsening of Finch's symptomatology and puts him at a higher risk of committing self-murder. In *TRW*, Hannah indicates that her parents' being oblivious to their daughter's severe mental condition and her strong inclination towards suicide validate her feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness. Moreover, the Baker's inattentiveness towards their daughter, not only leads to the worsening of her psychiatric disorder and growing suicidality, but also indirectly limits her chances of getting the treatment she needs.

4.1. Craig's supportive family environment as protective factor in *IKFS*

According to Brooke P. Randell, Leona L. Eggert and Kenneth C. Pike, suicidal adolescents benefit from supportive and well-connected family environments, as these can be considered "protective factors" (45). In *IKFS*, Craig's family exemplifies such a positive and nurturing family environment that significantly contributes to his decision to seek help, despite his urge to end his despair by taking his own life (e.g. 168f). Even though the Gilners are not able to prevent the worsening of their son's condition, Craig is able to reach out for help when he experiences a life-threatening psychosocial crisis, because they support their son throughout his struggle with depression and suicidality. Even at the point when his symptoms have become almost unbearable, he is able to cope with them

due to his parents' succour. For instance, his mother attends to him during a depressive episode and allows him to sleep in her bed (*IKFS* 39 and 128). Throughout the story, Mrs. Gilner is represented as a caring, supportive and affectionate parent, "I hug her. She's taken such good care of me since I got bad; I owe her everything and I love her and I tell her these days, [...]" (*IKFS* 37). Here, the importance of a stable and trusting parent-child relationship is shown, as Craig recognises that his mother's love is a source of comfort and indirectly aids him in coping with his condition during these difficult times. Moreover, Mrs. Gilner plans to contact Dr. Barney, Craig's psychopharmacologist, the night his depressive symptoms worsen (*IKFS* 130), which implies that she is aware of the seriousness of her son's condition. The fact that the young adult's parents express their concern regarding his unstable mental state can be regarded as a positive example for readers of how certain family environments can function as a protective factor for a suicidal individual parental support. Considering that at this point, Craig struggles with intense feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness, his mother's loving and accepting way of taking care of him can be regarded as having a life-affirming effect on the boy (*IKFS* 135ff). Teenage readers may face difficulties opening up to adults about their worries and concerns, as they may fear not being taken seriously by them. Hence, Mrs. Gilner's genuine regard for her son's struggle with depression can serve to encourage young readers to seek the advice and support of adults around them. Additionally, the fact that Craig's mother owns a psychological self-guidance book that provides advice for people who consider themselves suicidal (*IKFS* 141), indicates that she takes these matters seriously and knows where and how to seek help. It follows that the teenage boy's family environment provides Craig with the tools necessary in order to seek and receive help. The Gilners stand in direct contrast to Finch's parents in *ABP*, who punish their son for opening up about his suicidal tendencies (139). Opposed to Finch, Craig is able to confide in his mother. When Craig calls his mother after he checked himself into a nearby hospital, he is able to tell her about his strong suicidal ideation without having to fear rejection or punishment, which, in turn, points to a strong and stable bond between parent and child. In response to these shocking news Mrs. Gilner expresses her worries about him, and affirms her teenage son in his decision to seek help, "'This is the bravest thing you've ever done.' 'I ... thank you.' 'This is the most life-affirming thing you've ever done. You made the right decision. I love you. You're my only son and I love you. Please remember.'" (*IKFS*

169). Here, Craig's mother continuously addresses her suicidal son with the second-person pronoun *you*, which can be interpreted as her attempt to increase his feelings of being valued, loved and important. Thus, she directly appeals to Craig's fragile will to stay alive. Mrs. Gilner shows her affection towards her son, which is of great importance as he is in need of comfort and reassurance for his decision to stay alive, due to the fact that his heightened risk for suicide still remains (173). What is more, Mrs. Gilner's focalisation may also serve readers as a means to evaluate the teenage boy's credibility concerning his perspective of himself, since his negative self-image is largely influenced by the symptoms of his illness. Therefore, Mrs. Gilner's comment stands in direct contrast to the boy's negative self-evaluation, which illustrates the effect clinical depression can have on one's concept of self. This may be of great importance for readers who suffer from depression and/ or suicidal ideation, as they might also struggle with low self-esteem, and, thus, benefit from these contrasting points of views.

Although Craig is aware of the familial support he receives, he is only able to fully appreciate his family during his healing process. Again, this shows how the anxiety and despair he experiences during depressive phases limit his outlook on life and his surroundings. Being in a psychiatric hospital, away from his Tentacles serves him as an opportunity to focus on his recovery. This is evident in his reflecting on the re-occurring theme of falling off the social ladder that surfaces during episodes of rapid cycling. For example, when he witnesses Bobby's heartfelt joy after the fellow patient had been accepted to an adult home, "This guy just got a place to *live*. Me? I have one. I'll always have one. I don't have any reason to worry about it. My stupid fantasies about ending up homeless are just that—the fact is that my parents will take me in anytime, anywhere" (*IKFS* 317). Here, the teenage boy's realisation regarding his familial support system marks a turning point in his young life. Due to the fact that Craig is the only narrator of the story, this contrast between his outlook on his future before he had been admitted to Six North and during his stay there, illustrates the importance of receiving and adhering to professional treatment in order to survive. Furthermore, the difference in the content and pace of his thoughts during depressive episodes and towards the end of the story further highlight the link between his mental condition and his strong suicidal ideation at the beginning. The teenage boy's reflection on himself and his previous mind set can be interpreted as means to educate young adult readers to re-evaluate their own negative

schemata. Additionally, this quote illustrates the influence other patients, their struggles and stories have on Craig's perception of his own life and future. After having met a multitude of fellow patients at Six North, some of whom do not even have a place to live, Craig is able to recognise the importance and the value of having an emotionally supportive and economically stable family environment, and, thus, is able to appreciate his family even more.

The tragic faiths of some of Craig's fellow patients, as, for example, Bobby's, reveal the serious consequences the United States of America's adherence to the notion of capitalism has on the lived reality of those who lose in this competition, namely homelessness, lack of social support and a lower chance to recover from mental illnesses (see, for instance, *IKFS* 317). The repercussions of the complete absence of a safe and resourceful environment, such as Craig's, are shown, for instance, when the trans-women Jessica, also known as Charles, engages with Craig and his family during their visit at Six North. She tells them about her struggle with bipolar disorder and the lack of support she receives from her social environment, "'Of course'—J/C gestures to us—'it's a lot better when you have family support. They want to make sure they discharge you into a safe environment. I don't have that.' He shakes his head. 'Craig, you're very lucky.' I look at them: my safe environment" (*IKFS* 221f). The contrast between Jessica's situation and Craig's shows that receiving professional care for a short period of time, alone, cannot be regarded as a guarantee for coping with and recovering from a severe psychiatric disorder. The Gilners' support for their son's mental well-being, as well as their secure economic position, enable Craig to focus on himself and his recovery at Six North. Thus, the teenage boy's resourceful and supportive family can be regarded as a protective factor, as it is partly responsible for Craig's final position of a person able to heal and survive within the *suicide-dispositive*. In contrast to Craig, other patients at the adult psychiatric hospital have to face an uncertain future when their admittance comes to an end, while also struggling with severe mental illnesses. Opposed to Craig and Violet, Finch's as well as Hannah's family environment, to a certain extent, as they not only lead to the worsening of the two protagonist's symptomatology, but also prohibit them from receiving the adequate treatment that would have altered their position in the *suicide-dipositives*.

4.2. Parent-child relationship as risk factor in *TRW*

Since Hannah only briefly reflects on her relationship with her parents, and Clay does not interact with them while listening to her tapes, a detailed analysis concerning the connection between the young adult's suicide and their parent-child relationship cannot be made. However, the teenage girl does mention her parents in a few comments, in which she reveals that they did not provide her with emotional support and care during her last months alive. When Mr. and Mrs. Baker face financial difficulties due to lack of profit, they start focusing their time and energy on their business affairs, and become oblivious to their daughter's worsening mental condition (*TRW* 169f). Hence, Hannah feels neglected by her parents, "*When that happened, my parents became distant. There was suddenly a lot for them to think about. A lot of pressure to make ends meet. I mean, they talked to me, but not like before*" (*TRW* 169). Here, the female protagonist implies that her relationship with her parents used to be satisfying, but is not anymore. The Baker's financial problems affect their parents-child relationship to the extent of Hannah experiencing herself as unimportant to them. When Hannah's depressive symptoms evolve and her suicidal ideation intensifies, she becomes socially isolated at school and at her own home. This, in turn, nourishes feelings of worthlessness and loneliness that are directly linked to the trauma she experienced and to her growing suicidal tendencies. According to Chris Hollis's findings, "family relationship difficulties make an independent contribution to the risk of suicidal behavior beyond the effect of depression" (629). It follows that the troubled and negative atmosphere at home further increases her risk of committing suicide. Moreover, regarding herself as irrelevant to her family environment may prohibit her from confiding in her parents, thus narrowing her chances of receiving professional treatment. Even though Hannah provides a seemingly rational explanation for the weakening bond between her parents and herself, following Hollis's argument, the fact that she explicitly mentions their altered relationship, indicates that the loss of affection and support from them negatively shapes her perception of herself and her outlook on life in general.

Nevertheless, Hannah claims to be aware of her parents' affectionate feelings towards her, "*My parents love me. I know they do. But things have not been easy recently. Not for about a year*" (*TRW* 169). Despite the fact that Hannah tells her story to the thirteen

recipients of her tapes, she seems to direct the affirmative statement: "*I know they do*" to herself, as she explicitly uses the pronoun "*I*" (*TRW* 169). Considering her struggle with intense feelings of worthlessness and loneliness shortly before she commits suicide, it can be assumed that she attempts to comfort herself with the thought of being loved by her parents. However, her trying to reassure herself of her parents' unconditional love for her is followed by the conjunction *but*, which implies that a contrast follows. This suggests that for a whole calendar year the teenage girl has not received the affection and attention she would have needed. This is shown in Hannah indirectly accusing her mother of neglecting her during a time in which she experiences heightened vulnerability, "*When I cut my hair, my mom didn't even notice*" (*TRW* 169). Here, the adolescent insinuates that she is using the radical change in her appearance as means to make her social environment aware of her increasing desperation. Despite the teenage girl not explicitly holding her mother accountable for her self-inflicted death, the accusative tone she uses here, in addition to her employing the adverb *even* to emphasise her disappointment, reveal Hannah's true feelings. She views her mother's inattentiveness towards the worsening of her condition as validating her feelings of worthlessness. According to Peter M. Lewinsohn, Paul Rohde and John R. Seeley, young adults who are considered at high risk of contemplating suicide have "psychopathology [...], depression-related cognitions, current suicidal ideation, low self-esteem, [and] low perceived social support from family members [...]" (302). The female protagonist displays all of these risk factors, since she suffers from depression, suicidal ideation, and experiences intense feelings of worthlessness, which further intensify due to her parents' obliviousness towards her. Hence, the Baker's inability to recognise their daughter's represented struggle with suicidality and clinical depression, in combination with various other factors, contribute to Hannah's viewing suicide as a way of ending her pain. It follows that Hannah's family environment is part of the *suicide-dispositive*.

4.3. Finch's destructive and abusive family environment as risk factor in *ABP*

4.3.1. Abusive father-son relationship

Among all the parent-child relationships represented in the three young adult novels Finch's relationship with his father is the most destructive and toxic. Mr. Finch, a former hockey player, is portrayed as a violent, abusive and neglecting father, who left his wife and children for another woman, whose son could potentially be Finch's half-brother (*ABP* 67f and 105). When the teenage boy reflects on his childhood, he indicates that he has suffered from his father's violent outbursts from an early age onwards, "I hold up my hands and they're shaking, because my hands, like the rest of me, would like to kill my father. Ever since I was ten and he sent Mom to the hospital with a busted chin, and then a year later when it was my turn" (*ABP* 160). The traumatising physical and emotional abuse Finch has endured at the hand of his father since he was eleven can be assumed to have fostered the emergence of the bipolar disorder. Whenever Mr. Finch violently attacks his son, Finch experiences intense feelings of hatred and anger towards his aggressor, which, in turn, negatively affect his unstable mental condition. What is more, the way Mr. Finch torments and harasses his son is similar to how Roamer targets Finch at school. Both perpetrators make it more difficult for Finch to manage his symptoms, as emotionally stressful and painful events impact the adolescent's represented psychiatric disorder in a negative way. Hollis emphasises the correlation between suicidal behaviour among adolescents and the lack of satisfying family relationships (628). The scholar further argues that "familial lack of warmth, poor relationships with parents, and family discord all result in limited opportunities for learning social problem-solving skills may create an environment where an adolescent lacks the necessary support to buffer him or her against the effects of stressful life events and for depression" (629). This connection between an unsupportive and destructive family environment and a lack of effective and adequate coping behaviour is manifested in Finch's inability to manage the intensity of his alternating depressive and manic moods, as well as in his difficulties to communicate his problems to other people in general. Although Finch does employ his unique ways of managing the pre-dominantly negative happenings of his every-day life and with his

severe symptomatology (see, for instance, *ABP* 116f and 245f), in the end, his coping strategies are not sufficient for the acuteness of his condition. Finch's being rejected and abused for being different by his own father and his fellow students, explains his fear of even further labelling through mental health professionals. For example, he refrains from phoning Mr. Embry when he experiences an urge to take his own life (*ABP* 185) and flees from the hospital in fear of getting transferred into a mental ward (280). Thus, Finch's anxiety of being stigmatised for being bipolar, leads him to reject the professional help he needs. It can be argued that this deeply rooted fear of being abandoned originates from this abusive father-son relationship.

Besides causing the male protagonist physical pain, Mr. Finch is largely responsible for his son's struggle with low self-esteem, as well as for his fear of not being accepted for his true self, which is manifested in his frequent alternations of his identity. During a visit at his father's new home Finch imagines himself as '*80s Finch*, "Before I can stop him, 80's Finch says, 'There are different ways to die. There's jumping off a roof and there's slowly poisoning yourself with the flesh of another every single day'" (*ABP* 71). Despite the fact that Finch himself is the one uttering these words, his referring to his alter ego with a distinct name implies that he experiences a certain degree of distance between himself and his persona, which symbolises his mental instability and the gradual loss of self he experiences. It can be argued that Finch uses these fictional masks in order to shield himself from further rejection, since he does not dare to show people, especially his father, his true self. The impact his father's continual bullying has on the adolescent's depressive symptoms, as well as on his strong inclination towards suicide is shown when Finch uses one of his coping strategies, namely running, to avoid the activation of negative and destructive thoughts that could potentially lead to the rapid cycling of his thoughts:

> Worthless. Stupid. These are the words I grew up hearing. They're the words I try to outrun, because if I let them in, they might stay there and grow and fill me up, until the only thing left of me is worthless stupid worthless stupid worthless stupid freak. And then there's nothing to do but run harder and fill myself with other words: This time will be different. This time, I will stay awake. (*ABP* 63)

This quote exemplifies the lasting effect of psychological abuse on Finch's sense of self, which further indicates that in case his coping strategies, such as hiding behind different imagined versions of himself or trying to outrun his inner daemons fail, he is at risk of losing his sense of self completely. The repetition of these negative adjectives insinuates

that every time something bad happens, the teenage boy is forced to re-live his childhood traumas on an emotional level, which, in turn, contributes to the intensification of his depressive and manic symptoms. Hence, every encounter with his father is followed by Finch's attempt to run away from the words that reinforce his urge to kill himself. This shows the effect these early negative experiences have on his condition. The adolescent's lack of self-worth and confidence, as well as his crumbling sense of self, which at least partly originate from being physically and mentally assaulted, as well as rejected by his father, further intensify the teenage boy's urge to take his own life. Therefore, Mr. Finch's can be regarded as a significant contributor to his son's suicide. The fact that Finch reflects on his childhood, and stresses how the wounds caused by his own father still affect his daily-life, provides young adult readers with a holistic illustration of how Finch's father, as well as his past adverse experiences influence the worsening of his condition and his resorting to suicide as his last means of escaping. Hence, readers may gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of a person's path to suicide, and the multifaceted and complex nature of the *suicide-dispositive* of which Finch is an integral part.

Serafini, Solano and Amore stress that research has shown "a significant interplay between childhood and adolescent stressful life events occurring in the months before the development of suicidality" (14). The adverse influence Mr. Finch has on his son's suicidal tendencies manifests itself in the teenage boy's intense feelings of self-hatred, worthlessness and anger, as well as in his intensified urge to commit suicide immediately after these meetings. What is more, fighting these destructive and negative emotions consumes a lot of his psychical energy, which causes him further difficulty to manage his symptoms, including his growing suicidal tendencies. When the adolescent boldly reminds his father of his family's presence on one of their routine Sunday visits to the latter's house, Mr. Finch's inability to restrain himself from impulsive violent behaviour towards his son is shown:

> And then he's off the couch and lunging for me, and he catches me by the arm and *wham*, slams me into the wall. I hear the crack as my skull makes contact, and for a minute the room spins. But then it rights itself, and I say, 'I have you to thank for the fact that my skull is pretty tough now.' [...] He doesn't look at me or speak to me the rest of the time we're there. (*ABP* 159f)

Finch's rather unimpressed and indifferent reaction to this brutal attack indicates the high frequency with which instances, such as this, occur. This in turn, serves as further proof for their weak and destructive father-son relationship. Following this visit to his father's new home, Finch displays high suicidal ideation, as his thoughts circle around facts concerning suicide, which result in his contemplating suicide (*ABP* 161). Eventually, he reconsiders killing himself, as he reminds himself of his mother and sisters. After having escaped death, Finch feels ecstatic; however, his euphoria does not last long, as once again his mind adheres to the negative schemata of the suicidal forces within him, "But then a voice in me says, *You're no hero. You're a coward. You only saved them from yourself*" (*ABP* 161). Finch's addressing himself in the second person signals that at this point, he identifies with his aggressors, namely his father and the bullies at school, and directs his aggression towards his own self. This again shows the long lasting consequences physical and psychological abuse has on his mental well-being, as it fosters the teenage boy's suicidal tendency. Mr. Finch significantly contributes to the worsening of his own son's represented mental condition, as well as to his decision to commit suicide, and is thus part of Finch's position of a person that does not survive the *suicide-dispositive*.

4.3.2. Mrs. Finch – fragile, distant and neglectful

The multiperspectivity inherent in the text's narrative structure further highlights the connection between Finch's gradually worsening symptomatology, which includes his strong inclination towards suicide, and his environment, since the Markey's supportive and caring approach to parenting stands in direct contrast to the abuse and neglect Finch has to endure from his parents. Opposed to the negative impact that being neglected by a parent can have on one's mental health, which is shown in the gradual worsening of Finch's represented psychiatric disorder and growing suicidality, Violet's parents' concern for their daughter's mental well-being illustrates the positive effect of a healthy and stable family environment. It can be argued that Mrs. Finch exemplifies the exact opposite of Mrs. Markey. Violet's mother actively tries to work on her relationship with her daughter, and aids her in coping with her grief (*ABP* 188ff), opposed to Mrs. Finch, whose selfishness and disregard for her son's condition, contribute to the intensification of Finch's suicidal tendencies (39f). Although Mrs. Finch neither physically nor verbally harasses her son, her regular absences at home, as well as her emotional unresponsiveness also have a

damaging impact on her son's symptomatology (*ABP* 105). In contrast to Finch's father, who is said to live in an expensive house in a wealthy neighbourhood, Mrs. Finch has to work as a real estate agent, while simultaneously working as a salesperson at a bookshop in order to earn enough money for her family (*ABP* 67f and 105). Consequently, she is tired and overworked whenever she is at home, which might explain her inability to provide her children with the emotional stability and support they need. However, it can also be argued that the physical and psychological abuse she endured during her marriage to Mr. Finch has had a severe effect on her mental health, which in turn impacts her ability to attend to the needs of her children (160). The young adult's descriptions of his mother and her interactions with him and his sisters point to her struggling with symptoms characteristic for depression, "She [Decca] has been swearing more often lately, trying to get a reaction out of Mom, to see if she's really listening. 'Decca,' Mom says mildly, but she is only half paying attention. [...] Mom is suddenly listening. 'Decca.' She shakes her head. This is the extent of her parenting" (*ABP* 38). Here, Finch's observation indicates that Decca has to display eccentric behaviour in order to receive her mother's attention, which is also reflected in the girl's social behavioural problems at school (*ABP* 40). In this scene, Mrs. Finch appears to be lost in her own thoughts, absentminded and unreachable for her children. Her behaviour can be interpreted as a manifestation of major depression, since emptiness, numbness, listlessness and a low rate of activity are listed among the various symptoms of this illness as described by Wittchen and Hoyer (880). Due to Finch's sensitivity towards other people's feelings, he refrains from demanding his mother's love and attention, in order to shield her from further emotional hardships (*ABP* 39). Considering that Finch finds it difficult to reach out for help, his fear of adding to his mother's burden may also contribute to his keeping his problems to himself. Despite the teenage boy's attempts to conceal his condition from her, here, Mrs. Finch's commentary suggests that she does take notice of his episodic absences during depressive phases:

> When dinner is over, Mom lays a hand on my arm, fingertips barely touching the skin, and says, 'Isn't it nice to have your brother back, Decca?' She says it as if I'm in danger of disappearing again, right in front of her eyes. [...] Even though she tries to forgive my sadness, she wants to count on me as man of the house, and even though she thinks I was in school for most of that four-almost-five-week period, I did miss a lot of family dinners. (*ABP* 40)

The way Mrs. Finch only faintly touches her son symbolises the weak connection between them. Despite the fact that she has to work long hours, she notices Finch's absences and, as the latter insinuates, seems to be aware of his inclination towards suicide. However, his mother neither asks him about the reasons behind his regular and long disappearances from home, nor does she express any concerns about his well-being. She merely indicates that she appreciates his presence. By stating that his mother "tries to forgive [his] sadness", he implies that his mental condition is perceived as something bad or as wrong (*ABP* 40). Therefore, Finch considers himself responsible for his impaired social functioning during depressive phases. The labelling of his severe depressive symptoms as sadness, further minimises and delegitimises his severe condition. Hence, his mother's inaccurate perception of her son's struggle further confirms the teenager in his assumption that he is a burden to his family and that his death will be a relief to his family.

Even though Finch usually attempts not to impose his problems on his family, in some cases his actions can be interpreted as a means to attract their attention. For example, he once re-arranges the furniture in his room, in order to adapt it to his needs during depressive phases, but not one person takes notice of the noise he makes:

> No one comes up to ask me what the hell I'm doing, although I know my mom and Decca and Kate, if she is home, must hear the pulling and scraping across the floor. I wonder what would have to happen for them to come in here—a bomb blast? A nuclear explosion? I try to remember the last time any of them were in my room, and the only thing I can come up with is a time four years ago when I really did have the flu. Even then, Kate was the one who took care of me. (*ABP* 142)

The fact that his mother has not entered his room in over four years shows the extent to which she has neglected her son. The underlying message of the fact that his family only takes notice of him when he is physically ill is that his sole existence is not enough for them to care for and to take notice of him. The loneliness and sadness reflected in his tone further highlight his social isolation at home. In contrast to Craig in *IKFS*, whose family actively tries to ease his pain, Finch's family environment only nourishes his feelings of worthlessness and unimportance. At this point in the story, the teenage boy knows that the *Asleep* is about to set in, which is why he is in desperate need of positive, understanding and supportive surroundings. His longing for positivity manifests itself at a later stage in the story when he puts post-it's on the walls of his closet and literally surrounds himself with the words "[*n*]*ecessary*, [*l*]*oved*, [*u*]*nderstood*, [and]

[**f**]*orgiven*" (*ABP* 292). This can be regarded as one of his last attempts to cope with the illness that pulls him towards suicide, as he drowns himself shortly afterwards (337). Despite the fact that he lives in a house with three other family members, he is forced to manage his symptoms by living in the narrow confinement of his closet, as the acuteness of his condition goes unnoticed. These four words reflect the ways in which his family has failed him. The rearrangement of his room might not only serve to suit his desire for small spaces, during the *Asleep*, but it could also be interpreted as an indirect cry for help, as means to reach out for help. However, adolescent's realisation that he feels alone despite living in a house full of people furthers the emptiness he experiences, as well as his feelings of worthlessness, which, in turn, increase his suicidal ideation. Mrs. Finch's aloofness confirms her son in his belief that his existence is of no significance to her, thus furthering his inclination towards taking his own life. Even though Finch often attempts to hide his struggle with bipolar disorder from his mother, for instance, when he deletes Mr. Embry's voicemail (*ABP* 277), by not entering his room for years, she robs herself of the opportunity to realise that he periodically has to live in his closet as his condition makes him incapable of leading a normal life. Therefore, Finch's mother herself is to be held accountable for her ignorance of her son's helplessness and desperation during the psycho-emotional crisis he experiences. Since she does not pay attention to the various symptoms displayed by Finch, she fails to provide her son with the professional help he would have needed to survive.

As the story progresses and Finch's condition impairs his ability to guide the readers through his and Violet's story in a cohesive and reliable way, the female protagonist's narrative voice gains importance. Felicitas Menhard argues that fictional characters can display psychological abnormalities, as manifestations of their represented psychological and emotional instability (42). However, the author further states that the abnormal psychological disposition of a character as such cannot be regarded as the sole indication for a character's unreliability (43). Whether or not a character is deemed unreliable depends on a combination of textual signals, on the perspective and mentality of the reader, as well as on the text-intern motivation for unreliability (43). The male protagonist's slowly deteriorating state of mind is reflected in the decreasing number of pages his narrative voice occupies. In the first part of the text, Finch functions as the narrator for 104 pages in total, and Violet for only 66 pages, whereas in the second part,

Violet's narration covers 73 pages and Finch's 71. In the final part, Finch's narrative voice is gone completely. The amount of textual space both protagonists occupy serves as an indicator for their opposing character developments. Due to the fact that Finch experiences a manic phase in the beginning of the story, his strong desire to be active and declare himself to the world is reflected in the high number of pages his character narrates. Moreover, the dominance of Finch's narratorial voice may also symbolise his need to tell his story, as he already anticipates that he will not have enough time to finish it. In contrast to Finch, Violet struggles to cope with her grieving process in this first part of the story, but regains her strength and is able to move on during the second part of the text. Moreover, the teenage boy's symptomatology, his suicidal ideation in particular, eventually becomes unbearable, and impairs his functioning as narrator to such an extent that he is no longer capable of telling his story. Hence, Violet's emotional and psychological stability is mirrored in her ability to serve readers as a reliable guidance through the story, particularly in the last part of the novel, when she retraces Finch's last steps alive. Since Finch at times displays signs of memory loss (see, for instance, *ABP* 171), as well as a lack of control over his actions (see, for example, 202, 266 and 270), an inability to feel the physiology of his own body (264) and difficulties focusing during lessons at school (266f), readers are bound to question his credibility as a narrator. The teenage boy's decreasing reliability in turn may serve to raise readers' awareness concerning his need for professional care. This is also evident in the penultimate chapter narrated by Finch, consisting merely of two sentences, shortly before his narrative voice is gone completely:

> *'The cadence of suffering has begun.'*—Cesare Pavese
>
> I
> am
> in
> pieces. (*ABP* 297)

Here, Finch again refers to the Italian writer who committed suicide (*ABP* 56). The intertextuality employed at a point in the story, when the teenage boy is about to lose his fight against his inclination towards suicide, functions to foreshadow the former's death and to highlight the emergency of his situation. The positioning of the second sentence

can further be interpreted as a manifestation of the young adult's diminishing physical and mental strength. The vertical order in which the words are aligned suggests long pauses in between them, as the uttering of every single word causes him a lot of effort. Moreover, the content of these two sentences also mirrors the severity of his condition, and points to Finch being in desperate need of help. Hence, the structure, as well as the content of this chapter serve to raise readers' concern for Finch's safety and to make them aware of the threat he poses to himself. His need for a positive and supportive environment is manifested shortly afterwards, when Violet visits him on his birthday and her company helps him cope with his condition, until she addresses her concerns for him and they get in an argument with each other. In contrast to Finch's mother and sisters, who despite living with him do not notice the urgency of his situation, Violet is aware of its seriousness, but also recognises that she alone is not capable of providing Finch with the help he needs. The fact that the teenage girl is able to reach out to her parents for help and receives their advice and support, despite having lied to them before, highlights the difference between the two households. Even though Finch has been living in his closet, disappears and cannot be reached by anyone, Violet and her parents are the only people, who consider these instances alarming, which again points to the fact that Finch's family fails to support him in coping with his despair, and merely adds to his burden. It follows that Mrs. Finch and Kate both contribute to the adolescent's final positioning of a person unable to survive within the *suicide-dispositive*.

Later on, Violet's reaction to Mrs. Finch's indifference to her son's trouble at school and his being in a bad mental state may aid readers to recognise the mother's behaviour as inappropriate, "She shakes my hand and says, 'Of course, Violet. Yes. He should be home from school by now.' *She doesn't know he's been expelled.* [...] There's a kind of faded, weary prettiness to her. [...] They [Kate and Mrs. Finch] chat with me like everything is normal, like he hasn't been expelled [...]" (*ABP* 289). Here, Violet's puzzled and appalled reaction to Kate's and Mrs. Finch's disinterest and lack of concern for Finch highlights the difference between the protagonists' family environments. The teenage girl's parents even express their worries about her missing a few lessons at school, as opposed to Mrs. Finch, who is neither aware of her son's absences and disciplinary problems at school, nor of him eventually being expelled from Bartlet High School. Violet's narrative voice may also serve readers as a moral guideline, since her concern for Finch's well-being reveals the other

characters' lack of empathy for his suffering, as well as their inattentiveness to the symptoms he displays. At one point, Violet reflects on how different her parents would act if she was the one missing, as Mrs. Finch reassures them that her son is not actually absent:

> 'Did he say where he went?' As I ask it, I suddenly can see that my mom looks worried and tired, and I try to imagine what would be happening right now if it was me and not Finch who'd disappeared. My parents would have every cop within five states out looking. '[...] If the parents aren't even worried . . . well. I guess we need to trust that Finch means what he says and that he's alright.' But I can hear all the things she isn't saying: If it were my child, I'd be out there myself, bringing him home. (*ABP* 317)

Here, Violet's observation of her mother's emotional state indicates the inadequacy of Mrs. Finch's behaviour. Even though Finch is not Mrs. Markey's son, her concern for his safety is clearly shown, whereas Mrs. Finch does not worry about her son's whereabouts. Despite the fact that Violet exaggerates when she envisions her parents' reaction, the contrast between her imagined scenario and the bleakness at Finch's home demonstrates how Finch's family environment is partly responsible for his death, as they do not even consider searching for him. Since Mrs. Markey is characterised as an emotionally stable and available mother, and disapproves of Mrs. Finch's behaviour and lack of action, the former can be regarded as a positive counter-model to Finch's mother. Hence, Violet's narration may lead readers to compare and contrast the two mothers, and their impact on their children's represented mental and physical well-being, and their role in the *suicide-dispositive*.

When Finch has been absent for a number of days, and all of a sudden sends mysterious text messages to the people in his small social circle; his family, Charlie and Brenda eventually take Violet's worries seriously. Despite Mrs. Finch's and Kate's being alarmed by these messages, Violet remains the only character actively searching for Finch's whereabouts. Since the female protagonist finally manages to discover a hint towards Finch's location, she urges Mrs. Finch to her son's room. The teenage girl's description of Mrs. Finch's reaction at entering her son's room, highlights the extent to which the mother has been neglecting her son, "She follows me into his room and stands for a moment, looking around as if she's seeing it for the first time. 'When did he paint everything blue?' [...] We stand in his closet, and she covers her mouth at how bare it is, how much is gone.

I crouch in front of the wall and show her the Post-its" (*ABP* 333). When Mrs. Finch finally enters her son's bedroom, its strong resemblance to the Blue Hole, the small clear blue pond in which, once, Finch has attempted to take his own life, foreshadows the teenage boy's death. Here, the concept of space may function to highlight the role the Finch family has played in the young adult's suicide, because his home mirrors the place in which, eventually, Finch loses his fight against bipolar disorder and the strong suicidal forces within him. Moreover, the bareness of his room symbolises the lack of empathy, love and acceptance he received at home, as well as the suicidal protagonist's emotional state shortly before he dies. Since his staying at home intensifies his feelings of loneliness, worthlessness and hopelessness, Finch leaves his family behind in order to cope with his condition by himself. However, at this point in the story, the teenage boy is already in a psycho-social crisis and has, thus, no chance of staying alive without the help and close monitoring of mental health professionals. Eventually, Finch has no means of coping with the intensity of the depressive episode, which leads him to consider suicide an adequate solution to end his despair. Mrs. Finch's obliviousness of the fact that her mentally ill teenage son has been living in his closet, in addition to her realisation of the seriousness and severity of his condition, which comes at a point when he can no longer be reached, highlight the real-life consequences of parental lack of care for and attention to one's child. Moreover, the absence of Finch's narratorial voice at the time in which his own mother finally starts to worry about him foreshadows the teenage boy's death. The male protagonist's silence in the third and last part of the story can be interpreted as representing the finality and irreversibility of suicide, as like his voice, he is gone forever. Although Mrs. Finch is aware of the fact that her son is in mortal danger, her remaining motionless and her leaving the burden of searching for him to Violet highlights her involvement in Finch's path towards suicide.

Following the argumentation and the analysis presented in these two sub-chapters, it can be concluded that Mr. Finch's physical and psychological abuse does not only worsen the adolescent's symptomatology, but also limits his means of coping with it, and Mrs. Finch's neglecting Finch and ignoring every single one of his attempts to make her see his pain, demonstrate their involvement in his self-inflicted death in the end. Therefore, both, Mr. and Mrs. Finch, majorly contribute to Finch's last attempt to relief his pain by ending his life, and, thus form an essential part of the *suicide-dispositive*.

5. The insights gained from the analysis of *suicide-dispositives* in *IKFS*, *ABP* and *TRW*

My analysis aimed to show that despite the unique nature of each character's development and positioning in the *suicide-dispositives*, Hannah's, Craig's and Finch's suicidal tendencies develop with the onset of their psychiatric disorders and become more severe and intense as their pathology worsens. Although Hannah and Craig struggle with major depression in different ways, these two protagonists both exhibit depressive symptoms related to death and suicide in particular. Despite Finch's suffering from a different illness, namely bipolar disorder, some of his emotional, behavioural, physical and cognitive symptoms during depressive phases bare a resemblance to Hannah's and Craig's symptomatology. All three characters experience low self-esteem, intense feelings of sadness, worthlessness, hopelessness, as well as a sense of being at the mercy of their disease and their surroundings. Moreover, they have an overall negative and pessimistic outlook on life in general and, most importantly, they mention reoccurring thoughts about their own death. Thus, their suffering from psychiatric disorders builds the foundation of their individual positions in the *suicide-dispositives*, as it also leads to the gradual intensification of their suicidal tendencies. It follows that their mental conditions are a determining factor for their heightened risk of committing suicide.

As demonstrated through this analysis, the three main characters' illnesses of the mind majorly facilitate the emergence and the further development of the *suicide-dispositives* of which they are a part. However, Hannah's, Finch's, and Craig's school environments influence their mental condition negatively, and, thus, largely affect the characters' growing suicidality. This diploma thesis shows the impact peer relationships, and the largely elite American educational system have on these teenage characters' worsening mental conditions within the *suicide-dispositives*. In *IKFS*, Craig's struggle to repress and compensate for his intense feelings of inferiority increase his susceptibility for major depression; however, the private school's high demands and its capitalistic philosophy nourish his strive for grandiosity, which ultimately facilitates the outbreak of his suffering from major depression and the rapid worsening of his suicidal symptoms. This diploma thesis highlights the effect the growing economisation and capitalisation of the American school system has on its youth. In order to compete in the school's hostile and competitive

environment that aims to prepare its students for their future in corporate America, Craig sacrifices his mental and physical health in his quest for a membership among the United States' elite. When Craig experiences depressive symptoms that prohibit him from managing and performing the tasks set for him, the school's hostile climate and its high expectations eventually exceed Craig's abilities to cope with his negative thoughts and intense feelings of hopelessness. As the protagonist fears the public humiliation of not being able to compete and excel at Executive Pre-Professional high school, he considers suicide a valid and appropriate solution to his problems. Even during his process of healing at Six North, Craig recognises that his attaining an education in such an unhealthy environment forms the content of his depressive thoughts and fuels his suicidal ideation. Hence, the adolescent's decision to transfer to another school largely contributes to his recovery in the end. It follows that the American school system, as represented in *IKFS*, forms a significant part of the *suicide-dipositive*.

Not only a student's ambition to excel in their academic achievements can affect their development in the *suicide-dispositives* that they are part of, but also the social interactions between a young adult character and their fellow peers significantly contribute to the former's suicidal tendencies, which can be seen in *TRW* and *ABP*. In *TRW*, the school enables the prevalence of sexism in the forms of toxic masculinity, sexual objectification of women, rape culture and slut shaming which shape Hannah's lived-reality, her perception of herself and sense of self-worth profoundly. The traumatising experiences of being the target of her male colleagues' objectifying gaze, of being sexually harassed and raped, induce and worsen the female protagonist's suffering from clinical depression and strong suicidal ideation. Therefore, this thesis illustrates how a young person's hostile school environment can become a daily source of anxiety and depression, and, in turn, lead to the development of their suicidal tendencies. Additionally, the analysis demonstrates how Hannah's ordeal and her development within the *suicide-dispositive* can be deemed exemplary for the link between women's proneness to depression, sexual violence and their tendency to direct their aggression inwards. In *ABP*, Finch's untreated condition is the reason for his impaired social functioning at school, and contributes to his reputation as an outcast that deviates from the norm. The hostility with which Finch is met at school, as well as the physical and psychological abuse Finch endures at school contribute to the rapid alternations between manic and depressive

episodes, as well as to the continuously growing intensity of these phases. Thus, instead of lessening the male protagonist's pain by accepting and supporting him in his struggle to cope with a severe mental illness, Finch's fellow classmates' behaviour towards him nourish his destructive and negative thoughts and perception of himself. This, in turn, leads the adolescent to believe that his presence at school is neither accepted, nor wanted, which ultimately fosters his perception of suicide as an escape from the world that has rejected him, and, thus, influences his positioning in the *suicide-dispositive*.

Finch and Craig both face additional hardships in their process of coping with their rapidly developing suicidal tendencies, namely the social stigmatisation of and the stereotypes associated with people living with mental health issues. Both protagonists fear being regarded as crazy, lazy and abnormal, as well as being rejected by their surroundings on the basis of their mental condition and their need for psychiatric treatment. The analysis proves how the mere anticipation of future labelling can hinder a patient's willingness to seek help and to adhere to treatment, as it is the case with Finch in *ABP*. The mere thought of being known as someone who has been admitted at a mental health facility makes it more difficult for Craig to regain mental stability and to free himself of his strong inclination towards killing himself. The different stances on people with psychiatric disorders manifested in these two young adult novels highlight how stigmatisation and stereotyping can affect the probability of a person's suicide, as well as mirror America's underlying prejudices of people suffering from diseases of the mind.

The protective measures taken by, as well as the help and support given to suicidal or mentally unstable pupils by the school's institutional figures also significantly influence the story worlds' unfolding *suicide-dispositives* and the characters' positioning within them. Despite the fact that in *IKFS*, Craig's principal expresses his sympathy for the main character and ensures his re-entering school by providing him with additional support, Mr. Janowitz only takes action after Craig had already been in serious danger of committing self-murder. It is Craig himself, who recognises the emergency of his situation and takes the appropriate measures to ensure that he receives professional treatment by phoning a suicide hotline. When it comes to Finch in *ABP*, the analysis shows that although Finch's counsellor, Mr. Embry, does indeed attempt to communicate the acuteness of the adolescent's condition to his mother, and provides Finch with

information on different options for treatment, all of his efforts are eventually fruitless. The exact opposite is the case in *TRW* because instead of identifying the behaviour displayed by Hannah as manifestations of depressive and suicidal symptoms, Mr. Porter neither refers her to any sort of medical professional, nor does he offer her enough options as to how she may be able to cope with the trauma of being raped. Even though the impact these institutional figures have on the three suicidal characters' chances of survival within the *suicide-dispositives* is rather small in comparison with other factors, their behaviour, as well as the protective measures taken by them, or the lack of such actions can either add to the protagonists' suicidal ideation or serve to moderate them.

Although in *IKFS* and *ABP*, the schools' officials, in certain ways, aid Finch and Craig in their struggle against suicide, they are not able to supplant the familial support needed in order to prevent these characters from killing themselves in the end. As this thesis demonstrates the Gilner family forms an essential part of Craig's eventual status of a person who is able to recover from his inclination towards suicide, within this *suicide-dispositive*. Their love, support and acceptance of his struggle with depression and strong suicidality are among the reasons why Craig is able to make the conscious decision to seek help and to check himself into a hospital despite experiencing a psycho-emotional crisis. Moreover, throughout the teenage boy's stay at Six North they encourage and accompany him through the difficult but life-affirming process of recovery. The fact that Hannah's and Finch's family environments prove to be crucial determinants of the two protagonists' strong suicidal tendencies and bad mental health highlights the impact a character's situation at home has on their limited chances of surviving the *suicide-dispositives* of which they are a part. On her tapes, Hannah focuses on the role her peers play in her path towards suicide; however, the teenage girl's mentioning her parents' detachment from her, as well as her experiencing herself as unimportant to them point to a lack of love, attention and to a weak bond between parents and child in general. Due the female protagonist's unstable and serious mental condition, the Baker's parental succour and care would have been essential for Hannah to have a chance of recovering from the medical emergency she is at the time of recording the tapes. Furthermore, the fact remains that her parents' inattentiveness towards her prohibit Hannah from receiving the psychiatric treatment necessary for her to survive. The Bakers indirectly further and nourish her feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness, and are, thus, part of the aspects

that lead to her suicide in the end. Of all three character's family-environments, Finch's has proven to be the most destructive. In addition to being neglected and ignored by his depressed mother, he is physically and mentally assaulted by his own father, who has abandoned Finch, his sisters and his mother for a new family. Similarly to Hannah's parents, Mrs. Finch's coldness and aloofness towards her son's physical and mental well-being indirectly increase his suicidal tendencies, as well as limit his chances of receiving adequate and immediate help from mental health professionals. Every visit to his father's new home is followed by the intensification of Finch's depressive and suicidal symptoms that, in turn, consume the protagonist's mental and physical strength and make it more difficult for him to cope with his serious condition. Mr. Finch's behaviour towards his son is an exemplification of the serious and negative impact a violent, destructive and apathetic up-bringing and family environment can have on a suicidal and mentally ill individual.

The conceptualisation and analysis of suicidality represented in fictional teenage characters in terms of a dispositive has served to capture and highlight the complexity and the multifaceted nature of young individuals' paths towards suicide. This diploma thesis demonstrates how the development and the positioning of each character within the *suicide-disopsitives* in terms of their chances of survival, are inextricably linked to, and determined by their psychological condition, their social and educational environments at school, their situations at home, and whether they have endured some form of trauma. This shows the impact peer, as well as parent-child relationships and interactions have on an individual's mental health, on young, vulnerable and still developing people in particular. Moreover, the analysis demonstrates that Hannah, Finch and Craig all perceive their own death as their last remaining means of coping with their desperation, sorrows and problems that at a certain point exceed their individual pain thresholds. All of these characters struggle to stay alive and fight against the growing suicidal forces within them. Craig does actually not only receive parental support, but also psychiatric treatment at a mental health facility, and can, thus, be regarded as a positive example on how to manage such a crisis. In contrast to Craig, Hannah and Finch eventually are no longer able to withstand the emotional and psychological torment they experience, as they lack the necessary personal and social resources to survive and, thus, resort to their last coping method available to them, namely suicide. Therefore, in these novels, suicide is not

represented as a deliberate and well thought of choice instead they reflect the reality of suicidality among young people as acute medical emergencies.

Since the numbers of youth suicide in America are still alarmingly high, raising awareness of this issue through young adult literature, a medium young people are familiar with and can relate to, can be regarded as an important contribution to the prevention of self-inflicted deaths in adolescents. For that reason, these findings can be deemed useful for people working or engaging with young people on a regular basis. Pedagogues, teachers in particular may guide their pupils through their reading process or use any of the three young adult novels in class to analyse and interpret these books together with their students. Thereby the concept of *suicide-dispositives* may be used to aid students in their understanding of an individual's path towards suicide, as well as in how to recognise warning signs displayed by people at risk of committing suicide. As this thesis highlights the repercussions of bullying and the importance and impact of peer relationships, these findings can be implemented within a school context. Pedagogues may use the content of this thesis to challenge and enable young people to take over the perspective of mentally ill and suicidal characters, and subsequently foster their altruistic behaviour. When guided through their reading process, teenagers may not only be able to learn how to identify risk factors that contribute to the positioning of a person that commits suicide, within a *suicide-dipositive*, but also those protective ones that aid them in coping with their strong inclination towards self-murder. Moreover, the concept of the *suicide-dispositive* facilitates a better understanding of the individuality and uniqueness of an individual's suicidality and it will help adolescents to understand the worthlessness, hopelessness, despair and loneliness these characters experience, as well as raise their awareness on how crucial empathy, acceptance, love, understanding and professional treatment are for people like Hannah, Craig and Finch. Being exposed to fictional characters and environments that resemble their own will serve American teenagers as means to reflect on and to apply the knowledge gained from the analysis of these three young adult novels onto their own lives. The readers of *IKFS*, *ABP* and *TRW* may be more apt to recognise the warning signs of people at risk of contemplating and/ or committing suicide, and they may not only be more sympathetic towards them, but also encourage them to seek help. This knowledge can also be deemed beneficial for adolescents' own mental health, since being aware of the symptomatology of clinical depression, bipolar

disorder and suicidality may aid them in better monitoring their own mental health, and may increase the probability of them turning to medical professionals in case they experience symptoms similar to Hannah, Finch and Craig. Hence, these findings may be used as means of preventing suicide in American teenagers.

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7. Appendix

7.1. Summary IKFS

In *It's Kind of a Funny Story* (2006) the main character Craig Gilner tells his story of how having to spent five days at Six North, an adult psychiatric hospital, after calling a suicide hotline, has changed his life profoundly. Long before 15-year-old Craig is admitted to Six North he struggles with clinical depression, which eventually impacts his life to such an extent that he is no longer able to sleep and eat properly, to function normally within the company of his friends, as well as to keep up with the high demands of his school. Craig insinuates that his entering the prestigious Executive Pre-Professional high school is the reason for his depression, as his demands on himself to succeed in school and to eventually become a wealthy man, as well as, the pressure and the enormous amount of schoolwork becomes unmanageable. Even though for a short period of time Craig feels as if his depression does no longer linger over him, his condition severely worsens not long after he stops taking his medication. Eventually his situation becomes unbearable and he plans to take his own life by throwing himself off Brooklyn Bridge, however, he then decides to reach out for help instead and calls the local suicide number. During his time at Six North, Craig experiences the highs and lows of the process of healing, and encounters a multitude of interesting people who all suffer from some sort of psychiatric disorder. Towards the end of the story Craig has become more positive and realistic regarding his future, since he is aware of the fact that he still cannot be regarded as mentally healthy, but that he will be able to cope with his condition. The teenage boy decides to transfer to a school that allows him to explore and further his creativity, which he has rediscovered at the psychiatric facility and is now using as a coping strategy. Additionally, he distanced himself from the group of friends who were neither supportive nor a good influence, and instead made friends with most of the patients at Six North.

7.2. Summary *ABP*

In Jennifer Niven's *All The Bright Places* (2015) the two seventeen-year-old main characters and narrators of the story, Violet Markey and Theodore Finch, meet at the roof top of their school's bell tower. Neither of them is able to cope with their current situations

in life, and without knowing how they even got there, they find themselves only inches away from taking their own lives. Having lost her older sister in a car accident, Violet seems to be overwhelmed with grief, while Finch, who suffers from an undiagnosed bipolar disorder, struggles with the repercussions of his last depressive episode, as it has an enormous influence on his well-being and nourishes thoughts about his own death. At the roof top Finch is able to save Violet and himself from their own self-destructive forces.

Having to work with each other on a school project, they slowly become friends and eventually find themselves in a relationship with one another. Even though Finch is able to help Violet find her way back into life due to his forceful and magnificent personality which he is able to maintain during his manic episode, in the end neither Finch himself nor Violet can save him from another depressive episode so powerful that he eventually takes his own life. In the last part of the book, Violet retraces Finch's last steps, which lead her to the deep blue pond in which he had drowned himself. In the end, the impact both have had on each other's lives is clearly visible. Although Finch's untreated illness did not allow him to shake off his reoccurring suicidal tendencies, his unique way of looking at the world has left Violet with the ability to allow herself to feel the pain of her losses, but also to move on with her life.

7.3. Summary *TRW*

When Clay Jensen, one of the two main characters and narrators in Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why* (2017), receives a package, containing seven cassettes that serve to explain why Hannah Baker decided to take her own life, his life changed forever. On these tapes Hannah lists thirteen reasons for her suicide, more specifically, she tells the story of her contact with eleven people whom she blames for her death. Since Hannah tells her listeners that everyone who receives that particular package is on her list, thus in part responsible for how her life ended, Clay is constantly trying to think about what he had done to her, and is afraid of what he will have to hear. Although Hannah eventually admits that Clay does not belong on her list, the feelings of guilt never fully leave Clay. Hannah explains why he received the tapes anyway, claiming that she wanted Clay to know and understand why she took her own life. Towards the end of Clay's tape the teenage girl apologises to him for having been overcome with her emotions when they kissed at a party;

however, the feelings of guilt never fully leave Clay. Throughout the story the teenage boy is torn between feeling partly responsible for not having recognised the seriousness of her condition, being too shy to stand up for her, and thinking that Hannah alone is to blame for her death, because she tried to hide her suicidal tendencies. Clay has to endure listening to the horrendous things that happened to Hannah, which include - untrue rumours spread about her sexual activities, being sexually objectified, abused and eventually even raped by some male pupils at her school. However, Hannah's list does not stop there, as she becomes the target of a male peer's voyeuristic gaze, as well as repeatedly disappointed and used by former friends. When the female protagonist eventually does reach out for help and does not receive it, she decides to end her sufferings by committing self-murder.

Due to the fact that Hannah is already dead when Clay is about to understand her motivation for committing suicide, he does not have any other choice but to try and cope with the loss of a person dear to him. Moreover, he has to learn from his previous mistakes, meaning that after having listened to Hannah's story Clay is determined to take a stand for others and to be more sensitive towards other people's feelings.

7.4. Abstract

The consistently high numbers of Amercian teenagers who commit self-murder every year (see, for example, Greydanus 13) are reflective of the hardships, the physical and psychological pain young people often go through nowadays. As adolescence as such is a time of heightened vulnerability for teens (Rahmandar and Biro 30f), they may be left to view suicide as an emergency exit, when they find themselves in an emotional and psychological crisis (Hawton and van Heeringen 1374). This issue is also mirrored in many 21st century American young adult novels, three of those have been chosen as the objects of analysis for this thesis, namely, Ned Vizzini's *It's Kind of a Funny Story* (2007); Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places* (2015); and Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why* (2017). These stories are united by the fact that they focus on protagonists, who display a heightened risk of taking their own lives, and, as it is the case with Hannah and Finch, who actually die of suicide. The portrayals of the characters' struggle with suicidality reflect the complexity and involvement of several different factors in their individual paths towards suicide. In order to capture the complex and multi-layered phenomenon of suicidality in young adults, the representations of adolescent suicide in the novels are analysed in terms of dispositives, as a dispositive, one of Michel Foucault's philosophical concepts, is discursive and heterogeneous in its nature (Foucault qtd. in Ruoff 109f). These three main characters live with severe psychiatric disorders, face additional hardships at school, which either result from the enormous pressure they feel to adhere to the uncompromising demands of the United States' capitalistic educational system, or from hostile and abusive peer interactions. Moreover, their situations at home significantly influence these protagonists' pathology. Craig's nourishing, accepting and supportive family environment lessens the teenager's burden of his mental condition, including his suicidal ideation. The exact opposite is the case with Hannah and Finch's family surroundings, as they do not only contribute to the worsening of their symptomatology, but also limit their chances of receiving the professional treatment necessary for them to survive within the *suicide-dispositives*. These stories illustrate how the gradual economisation of the educational system, direct and indirect forms of bullying, sexism, slut shaming, the sexual objectification of women, sexual abuse, rape, stigmas and stereotyping against people suffering from mental illnesses, and measures taken by

authority figures at school affect young and suicidal individuals' symptoms and their abilities to cope with their diseases. By bringing Foucault's idea of the dispositive into contact with other academic fields, such as literary theory, clinical psychology, feminist theories, and social studies, this thesis is able to show that Hannah's, Finch's and Craig's final positioning in the *suicide-dispositives* in terms of their chances of survival, is determined by a the occurance of multiple factors. These are their psychological disposition, their social and educational environments at school, their situations at home, as well as whether they have endured some form of trauma. Moreover, this thesis succeeds in showing that the three characters' consideration of suicide as a possible solution to ending their despair to be the result of their individual pain thresholds being exceeded.

7.5. Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Die konstant hohe Anzahl an junger Menschen, die sich in den vergangenen Jahren selbst das Leben genommen haben (siehe Greydanus 13), spiegeln die psychischen, emotionalen und physischen Nöte wider, denen Jugendliche heutzutage oftmals ausgesetzt sind. Junge Menschen leben in einer Zeit, in der der Kapitalismus in Bildungsinstitutionen eingezogen ist, Sexismus, Mobbing und fehlende Empathie oft bereits zu ihrem Alltag gehören, und immer mehr von ihnen an psychischen Störungen leiden. Da das Jugendalter generell von einer erhöhten Vulnerabilität geprägt ist (Rahmandar and Biro 30f), ist es nicht überraschend, dass Teenager, welche sich in einer psychosozialen Krise befinden, oftmals den Suizid als letzten möglichen Ausweg aus dieser ansehen (e.g. Hawton and van Heeringen 1374). Diese traurige und problematische Tendenz wird auch in einigen zeitgenössischen amerikanischen Jugendromanen thematisiert, drei dieser bilden den Gegenstand dieser Arbeit: Ned Vizzinis *It's Kind of a Funny Story* (2007); Jennifer Nivens *All the Bright Places* (2015); und Jay Ashers *Thirteen Reasons Why* (2017). Im Zentrum ebendieser Romane stehen drei Protagonisten und -innen, welche alle ein erhöhtes Suizidrisiko aufweisen, und im Falle von Hannah und Finch, den Kampf gegen die selbstzerstörerischen Kräfte die sie nicht mehr los lassen, verlieren und sich somit selbst das Leben nehmen. Der suizidale Prozess den Hannah, Finch und Craig durchlaufen ist dynamisch und komplex, und sein Ausgang ist bestimmt durch das Auftreten und die Wechselwirkung von einer Vielzahl von Faktoren. Um die Komplexität und Vielschichtigkeit des Phänomens des Suizids im Jugendalter einzufangen und dementsprechend analysieren zu können, werden die fiktionalen Darstellungen von selbstmordgefährdeten jugendlichen Charakteren im Sinne eines Dispositives gesehen. Das Dispositiv ist eines von Michel Foucaults philosophischen Konzepten, welches durch seinen diskursiven und heteronomen Charakter (zit. nach Ruoff 109f) eine ebensolche Analyse und Interpretation ermöglicht.

Die drei Hauptcharaktere leiden alle an psychischen Störungen, welche mitunter für das Entstehen und die Verstärkung ihrer suizidalen Symptome mitverantwortlich sind. Diese Tatsache allein jedoch bestimmt die endgültige Positionierung von Hannah, Finch und Craig in den jeweiligen Suiziddispositiven nicht. Ihr schulisches sowie ihr familiäres Umfeld tragen entweder zur Intensivierung und Verschlechterung der Symptomatologie

ihrer jeweiligen psychischen Krankheit bei, oder zur Linderung und Verringerung dieser. Der enorme Druck des elitären und kapitalistischen amerikanischen Schulsystems fungiert in *IKFS* nicht nur als Auslöser von Craigs Depression, sondern führt zusätzlich zur Intensivierung seiner suizidalen Symptome. Durch sein stabiles, unterstützendes, akzeptierendes und liebevolles Umfeld zu Hause, ist er in der Lage in einer psycho-emotionalen Krise um Hilfe zu bitten. Hinzu kommt, dass der Teenager die nötige medizinische und psychiatrische Behandlung erhält, um am Ende im Suizid-dispositiv, von dem er ein Teil ist, zu überleben. Im Falle von Hannah und Finch ist das genaue Gegenteil der Fall, ihre Familien tragen zur Not und zum Leid dieser beiden suizidalen Charaktere maßgeblich bei. Hinzu kommt, dass durch die Ignoranz ihrer Eltern, Finchs und Hannahs Optionen auf adäquate professionelle Behandlung limitiert wird, was ihre Chancen am Leben zu bleiben im Suizid-Dispositiv erheblich verringert.

Die Analyse dieser drei Jugendromane zeigt deutlich, wie die zunehmende Ökonomisierung des Bildungswesens, Mobbing, Sexismus und das daraus resultierende Slut-Shaming, die Objektivierung der Frau, sexueller Missbrauch und Vergewaltigung ausschlaggebend sind für die Symptome psychisch kranker und stark suizidgefährdeter junger Protagonisten. Zusätzlich beeinflussen die Stigmata und Vorurteile gegenüber Menschen mit Depression oder bipolarer Störung, sowie die Maßnahmen, welche schulische Autoritätspersonen setzten oder verfehlen zu setzen, die jeweilige familiäre Situation die Pathologie von Hannah, Finch und Craig und ihre Fähigkeit und Möglichkeiten mit diesen umzugehen. Diese Diplomarbeit hat aufgezeigt, dass alle diese Faktoren, sowie die Tatsache, ob notwendige und adäquate Behandlung von Psychologen und Medizinern erfolgt, die Bestandteile der jeweiligen Suizid-Dispositive bilden, und sind maßgeblich für die finale Positionierung der drei Charaktere darin verantwortlich. Außerdem, konnte die Analyse zeigen, dass Hannah, Finch und Craig Suizidversuche und Erwägungen daraus resultieren, dass ihre individuellen Belastbarkeitsgrenzen überschritten wurden, und sie keinen anderen Ausweg aus ihrem Leid wussten. Die aus dieser Arbeit erlangten Erkenntnisse könnten im Zuge pädagogischer Arbeit mit jungen Menschen zur Suizidprävention genutzt werden.