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Capital Distress: Productive Citizenship and Mental Health in Adolescent Literature

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Abstract

     This dissertation explores the complexities of adolescent mental health under neoliberal capitalism in twentieth- and twenty-first-century U.S. fiction about and for adolescents. Drawn on research that defines youth citizenship as responsibilities-based in nature, this project outlines the ways contemporary young adult (YA) novels of mental distress reveal an inextricable link between adolescent mental health and the conditions of what I term *productive citizenship*. Constituting my theorization of productive citizenship are three distinct tenets adolescents must adhere to: (1) displaying the motivation to achieve specific goals; (2) showing a propensity for self-reliance and individuality; and (3) accepting the translation of political concerns into personal, psychological issues and resolving those issues through individual treatments. Should an adolescent refuse or be unable to uphold any of these tenets, they become a risk to society and must be tamed. I contend that contemporary YA novels of mental distress detail this taming process. My introduction reviews the relevant research to this discussion, which includes but is not limited to Marxist and Youth criticism, as well as contemporary YA scholarship. Chapter one considers how the history of productive citizenship threads together with the literary roots of adolescent mental distress in novels by J.D. Salinger, Joanne Greenberg, John Neufeld, and Virginia Hamilton. In Chapter two, I interpret therapeutic treatment as a contemporary disciplinary practice of femininity in novels by Julie Halpern, Laurie Halse Anderson, and Meg Haston, while in chapter three I examine how masculine silence informs adolescent mental health in novels by Stephen Chobksy, Michael Thomas Ford, and Adib Khorram. Lastly, chapter four explores the use of psychiatric spaces in novels by Ned Vizzini and Francisco X. Stork to argue how the depiction of these facilities undermines the neoliberal definitions of "health" by replicating the living conditions of a pre-industrial society. Collectively, these novels inevitably urge the

acceptance of broader political concerns as individual issues by centring the symptoms of distress rather than its root causes. As a result, the model of young adulthood encouraged within the neoliberal capitalism of many recent YA novels of mental distress is productive citizenship.

Keywords

Summary for Lay Audience

This dissertation is about adolescent mental health in the contemporary United States, and how teenagers struggling with mental illness or mental distress are pressured to be active contributors to society. They are pressured, for instance, by parents, therapists, medical professionals, family, and friends, to work through their mental health issues, as they have a responsibility to become productive adults in the workforce. As a result of this pressure, the mental health support these teenagers receive is designed with specific outcomes in mind. This support is considered successful when the teenagers receiving it display three important characteristics: (1) the motivation to achieve specific goals; (2) a sense of independence and a self-reliant attitude; and (3) the acceptance that they need personal therapy or medication to treat their mental health concerns. On the surface, these outcomes appear to be noble and positive. However, these outcomes focus solely on how individual adolescents *respond* to distress. These treatments, therefore, are not designed to address the external factors *causing* adolescent mental distress.

By considering a range of contemporary young adult (YA) novels, I examine the mental health treatments offered to characters with mental illness or who experience mental distress. By examining the cultural narratives and stories written about this issue, I glean insight into what is considered a "happy ending" for adolescents with mental illness. I specifically explore how the mental health treatments designed to secure these happy endings are constructed differently depending on an adolescent's gender. Ultimately, however, all of the adolescent protagonists I discuss are inevitably encouraged to become what I call *productive citizens*. In other words, they must display the characteristics that illustrate their potential to be productive workers in society. At the same time, they must accept the sole responsibility for their mental health, while the broader social, political, and economic

pressures they face, which contribute to their distress, remain unchanged. Thus, this

dissertation considers the relationship between adolescent mental health and the system of

neoliberal capitalism, and how the mental health treatments available within that system are

insufficient in truly addressing the root causes of our current mental health crisis.

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Introduction

Mental health is a growing concern for many authors of Young Adult (YA)

fiction.[1] In her 2015 article for *The Guardian* titled "Why YA Fiction Needs to Tell

Stories of Mental Illness," Imogen Russel Williams writes, "Against a background of

exam-related stress, parental anxiety, and under-resourced outside support for troubled

teens, mental health issues, perhaps unsurprisingly, have featured in a lot of recent YA

fiction" ("Why YA"). Kelly Jensen, whose 2018 article for *Book Riot* notes how YA

novels of mental illness are not only "helping teens better understand their mental life"

they are "fostering the language" for adolescents to talk about it as well, concurs ("50

Must-Read"). More specifically, adds Kia Jane Richmond, such novels "help high school

and college students investigate vocabulary associated with mental illness and explore

how characters with psychological problems are treated by peers, bullies, and community

members" ("Using Literature" 24). These comments spotlight how language and

literariness attend to the growing numbers of adolescents experiencing mental distress.[2]

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[1] This proliferation stems from a few sources. First, Mary Jean DeMarr and Jane S. Bakerman's *The Adolescent in the American Novel Since 1960* (1986), which provides an annotated chart of roughly 600 novels about and for adolescents from 1961-1982. My own analysis of their annotations revealed roughly two-dozen novels (twenty-seven, to be precise) were about mental "illness," mental "disorder," mental "trauma," or "suicide." Second, as Diane Scrofano notes in her own study, "A subject search of the readers' advisory database NoveList Plus on 'mental illness' with the 'teen audience' and 'fiction' limiters reveals only forty-one results for the years 1969 to 1997, but 394 results for the years 1998 to 2019" (8). Lastly, a pull from *Goodreads* titled "YA involving mental health issues (2000-present)" lists 387 novels, reinforcing a jump from double-digit to triple-digit publication numbers within the last two decades.

[2] While several critics and authors I discuss use the term "mental illness" and I likewise use the term when referencing their work, I prefer to use the term "mental distress" when possible. Mental health issues are complex, involving biological, social, and political components. As such, I find the term "mental illness" reductive in its centering of the "biomedical model" and its viewing of experiences such as anxiety or depression as originating in the brain, which I discuss further in chapter one. Thus, I find the term "mental

Still, vital to our discussion of mental health is not just the words we use but the kinds of

stories we tell. Suppose YA literature is to position itself at the forefront of empathetic

and progressive mental health discussions in the twenty-first century. In that case,

grappling with the narrative tendencies of these novels is equally paramount.

Many YA authors writing and publishing in the United States, for example,

appear narratively concerned with how adolescents experiencing mental distress strive to

live a normal life. How characters come to comprehend or achieve this sense of normalcy

depends on the novel, but overall, these narratives tend to follow a few set patterns. Diane

Scrofano usefully outlines these patterns in her pivotal mixed-methods analysis for *The

Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults*. In her article titled "Disability

Narrative Theory and Young Adult Fiction of Mental Illness," Scrofano categorizes a

sample of fifty YA novels of mental illness published between 1998 and 2017 based on

their narrative structures. Building on the work of disability narrative theorist Arthur

Frank, Scrofano concludes that YA novels of mental illness generally fall into one of

Frank's three narrative categories: the "restitution" narrative, the "chaos" narrative, or the

"quest" narrative (Scrofano 1).[3] Put briefly, (1) restitution narratives "focus on getting

back the abilities a person had before the illness struck"; (2) chaos narratives "focus on

the unpredictability of life with an illness"; and (3) quest narratives "focus on living a

meaningful life with the illness and using knowledge of the illness to advocate for others

who are similarly suffering" (5-6). However, of the novels adhering to these categories,

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distress" more suitable for accounting for the range of mental health issues, their severities, and the
interaction between the biological and socio-political experience.

[3] See Frank (1995) for more information on his discussion of narrative structures. See also Couser (2009)
and Karp (2017), who figure prominently in Scrofano's analysis.

Scrofano argues, few depict teens who are managing their illnesses well: "If so many

novels show the chaotic phase of mental illness, teen readers may be left wondering if

and how recovery can be achieved" (26). Scrofano's conclusion regarding the lack of YA

fiction depicting recovery is a valid and critical concern. If YA novels are to help readers

understand mental health complexities, then depicting more stories with adolescents

keeping their distress under control would be a positive development within the field. But

while these novels may not always illustrate recovery in practice, they often indicate what

constitutes recovery and what it means to live a normal life: that is, to be productive. In

turn, many contemporary U.S. novels of adolescent mental distress reveal a preferred

model of young adulthood that I term *productive citizenship*—in other words, a model of

participation in society that accepts the existence of one's mental distress as long as they

remain active agents in a neoliberal capitalist society.[4]

My theorization of productive citizenship centers on three distinct features. First,

adolescents must succeed in school, form short- and long-term goals, display motivation

for those goals, and aim for employment to obtain financial independence. These are the

markers of "normal" life encouraged in much of the realistic YA novels of mental

distress I discuss, though to varying degrees. Second, adolescents must illustrate a

propensity for self-reliance and future planning. The progression of all that makes life

worth living starts and stops with the individual. Finally, and most crucially, adolescents

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[4] Several Youth and Girlhood Studies scholars have recently critiqued the politics of youth citizenship in
the new neoliberal economy, specifically in North America and throughout western Europe, which I engage
with more deeply in chapter one. Nevertheless, the depth and nuances of their respective analyses make it
challenging to pin down a term or model that entirely encapsulates their arguments. It is also the case that
not all of their insights about youth citizenship under neoliberal capitalism are relevant to the productive
citizenship model I argue permeates YA novels of mental distress.

must accept both the translation of political concerns into psychological issues and the responsibility of resolving those issues through personal, psychological treatments.[5] I argue these three features, taken together, form the distinct model of productive citizenship adolescents in YA novels of mental distress are encouraged to aspire towards, embrace, and exhibit.

Grounding my argument are three core premises, which I will overview in this introduction: (1) how the current economic, social, and political apparatuses of the United States—where the YA novels of mental distress I discuss are published and set—are primarily informed by neoliberal capitalism; (2) experiences of mental distress in the U.S., specifically for adolescents, is a growing public health crisis dating back to the turn of the twenty-first century; and (3) the proliferation of YA fiction of mental distress since that time attends to this crisis through the "problem novel" narrative structure. Contemporary YA fiction arises as a site where experiencing mental distress is a problem to be solved. Additionally, I contend that such solutions—or, to borrow the language of psychiatric medicine, treatments—to this problem contain crucial gendered differences while also illuminating inherent contradictions within capitalist logic. In essence, YA novels of mental distress not only reveal how the forces of neoliberal capitalism contribute and respond to such distress, they indicate the insufficient limits of the mental health treatments possible within a capitalist system.

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[5] By "political concerns," I mean social, political, and economic roots of crisis (i.e., overwork, academic pressures, gendered expectations, employment opportunities) which are displaced onto individuals to resolve through personal efforts.

Capitalist Realism and Neoliberal Ideology

Key to my project is understanding the ways capitalism and capitalist logic dictates the lives of twenty-first-century adolescents. After the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, political economist Francis Fukuyama declared the end of history. He claimed the end of the Cold War was not just the closing of one historical period but "the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government" (4). Channelling the works of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Karl Marx— nineteenth-century philosophers who respectively envisioned history's end, albeit with different conclusions—Fukuyama's claim is controversial as it is assertive. But it reflects the growing sentiment in places such as the United States and Europe towards the end of the twentieth century: that liberal democracy, grounded in the tenets of capitalist economics, is the supreme organizing principle of society and government. As the former United Kingdom Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher notably concluded when considering the merits of capitalism against other economic systems: "There is no alternative" (qtd. in Crines et al. 122).

In the nearly thirty years since Fukuyama published *The End of History and The Last Man* (1992), an entire generation of youth have been instilled with the idea that capitalist logic is not only how the world works, it is the only way the world works. Mark Fisher refers to this phenomenon as capitalist realism, the idea that capitalism's all-pervasive presence is taken for granted as the bedrock of our social and economic structures. Unlike the 1970s and 80s, when alternative governing systems such as socialism and communism had a more extensive global presence, today capitalism is

considered the only option. "For most people under twenty in Europe and North America," Fisher argues, "the lack of alternatives to capitalism is no longer even an issue. Capitalism seamlessly occupies the horizons of the thinkable" (8). While theorists such as Fredric Jameson once speculated about the dangers of capitalist logic gripping society's political unconscious, such thinking is now commonplace by today's youth and for many adults as well.[6] Fisher finds a notable example of capitalism's co-optation of anything once considered independent, rebellious, or alternative to itself in the band Nirvana. With its prolific lead singer Kurt Cobain, Nirvana seemingly gave voice to the first generation to watch itself be bought and sold at every turn. The band's grungy rebellious aesthetic became wildly popular throughout the early-1990s, and not just with youth. No one was more aware of this than Cobain himself, as Fisher notes: "Cobain knew that he was just another piece of spectacle, that nothing runs better on MTV than a protest against MTV; knew that his every move was a cliché scripted in advance, knew that even realizing it is cliché" (9). Fisher cites Cobain's death by suicide as the confirmation of rock's "defeat" and complete "incorporation" into the capitalist machine: "Here, even success meant failure, since to succeed would only mean that you were new meat on which the system could feed" (9-10).[7] I find the example of Nirvana useful because it encapsulates capitalism's evolution at the end of the twentieth century to something inhabiting all areas of life; nothing is off-limits, including anti-capitalist rage and rebellion, as long as it generates profits. We see this continue today in how companies increasingly incorporate

[6] See Fredric' Jameson's *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (2002).

[7] Notably, Fisher is presenting only part of the story behind Cobain's untimely death by suicide. See Charles R. Cross' *Heavier Than Heaven: A Biography of Kurt Cobain* (2001) for plenty of other personal and complex reasons to account for Cobain's mental health and death by suicide.

broader social or societal movements into their marketing campaigns. While some may think it positive to see Gillette, for example, run commercials critiquing dangerous expressions of masculinity, we cannot ignore its priority to generate profit when running such a campaign.[8] Moreover, Cobain's complicated mental health and history of physical illness, culminating in his death at the tragically early age of twenty-seven, speaks to the distress felt by many youths maturing in a society consumed in corporate culture.

On a theoretical level, the inescapability of Fisher's capitalist realism builds upon the legacy of Lacanian psychoanalysis and the distinction it makes between the Real and reality. According to Jacques Lacan, the human psyche develops through one's engagement with the symbolic order, which is constituted by three realms: the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real.[9] In short, the Imaginary realm is the space or dimension of images one perceives or imagines, while the Symbolic realm involves the formation of language and signifiers, which inevitably become the "determining order of the subject"; in fact, "the subject...is himself an effect of the symbolic" (Sheridan ix). The Real stands in for all that is unrepresentable. For Lacan, it is the "reality principle" that constructs the "outside world," the realm beyond the Real: "In this reality, which the subject must compose according to the well-tempered scale of his objects, the real—as that which is excised from the primordial symbolization—is already there" (389). In other words, the Real is that which is outside the realm of symbolism. It exists outside the realm of values

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[8] See Gillette's "We Believe: The Best Men Can Be | Gillette (Short Film)."

[9] See Lacan's *Écrtis: The First Complete Edition in English* (2002), particularly the essays, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the / Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" (75-81), "The Situation of Psychoanalysis and the Training of Psychoanalysts in 1956" (384-411), and "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud" (412-444).

or interpretation because it is unknowable; it resists representation. In a Lacanian sense, then, "reality" is what presents itself as real or true, which is where ideology operates. As psychoanalytic philosopher Alenka Zupančič explains,

> The reality principle itself is ideologically mediated; one could even claim that it constitutes the highest form of ideology, the ideology that presents itself as empirical fact or (biological, economic . . .) necessity (and that we tend to perceive as nonideological). It is precisely here that we should be most alert to the functioning of ideology. (77)

This presentation of capitalism is what Fisher thrusts into the spotlight, a presentation of capitalism's presence as inherent to reality itself. Thus, while Fisher readily acknowledges the ways capitalistic logic influences our social relations and behaviours— essentially how we both see and operate within the world—he reminds us that such influence is not inevitable or everlasting but contingent.

The current iteration of capitalist logic influencing U.S. politics, economics, and culture is neoliberalism, the belief that market exchanges, and the logic of free-market capitalism, is a practical guide for all human action. In *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005), geographer David Harvey traces neoliberalism's emergence from the 1970s to Ronald Reagan's and Margaret Thatcher's economic visions through the 1980s. He defines it as "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedom and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (*A Brief* 2). For this dissertation, I primarily focus on Harvey's signalling of neoliberalism's connection to "human well-being" (*A Brief* 2). In theory,

neoliberal policies are designed to improve human well-being by empowering individuals and limiting the government's role to protecting individual freedoms through military, police, and legal structures. However, Harvey notes that by extension of guaranteeing personal freedoms within the market, "each individual is held responsible and accountable for his or her own actions and well-being," and "Individual success or failure are interpreted in terms of entrepreneurial virtues or personal failings…rather than being attributed to any systemic property" (*A Brief* 65-66). In other words, when people experience hardship or distress in a neoliberal capitalist society, they must assume personal responsibility for absolving their suffering. The causes of such suffering are likewise displaced onto individuals or families, protecting systemic problems—issues inherent to society's organization—from deep interrogation. Ultimately, if the system of neoliberal capitalism is for advancing human wellness, then any indication of its detriment to human well-being would expose a crucial contradiction built into the system itself. I find YA novels of mental distress particularly well-suited to explore this tension between neoliberal capitalism and human well-being, especially as adolescent mental health becomes a growing public matter.

Mental Health as a Public Health Crisis

The global mental health crisis is one of the twenty-first century's largest public health concerns. Researchers have been issuing mental health surveys since World War II, but as recently as the 1990s, their methods have faced considerable limitations.[10]

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[10] See Leighton, Langner and Michael, and Hagnell for examples of mid-twentieth century studies investigating the prevalence of psychiatric illnesses and their connection to social, political, and economic

These limitations include only addressing the prevalence and not the severity of mental illness, the failure to use standardized questionnaires, and the fact that researchers mainly did their work in only developed countries (Demyttenaere et al., 2581). In 1998, the World Health Organization (WHO) addressed these limitations by setting up the World Mental Health Survey Consortium to standardize the research process as best as possible. As Kate Pickett and Richard G. Wilkinson point out, while these new "methods don't entirely overcome worries about cultural differences in interpreting and responding to such questions, at least the same questions are being asked, in the same way, in different places" (66). Data collection has thus vastly improved since the late-1990s, and the number of individuals experiencing mental distress is staggering. According to the WHO, today, depression affects roughly 264 million people, making it "a leading cause of disability worldwide" and "a major contributor to the overall global burden of disease" ("Depression"). Adolescents across the globe are not exempt from this experience. The WHO reports, "Mental health conditions account for 16% of the global burden of disease and injury in people aged 10-19," with depression particularly being "one of the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents," and suicide is "the third leading cause of death in 15-19-year-olds" ("Adolescent"). The numbers are no better in the United States. The National Institute of Mental Health reports that 20.6% or one in five of all adults in the U.S. experience at least one form of mental illness ("Mental Illness"), while the national rate for youth aged six to seventeen is 16.5% or a ratio of one in six (Whitney and Peterson 389). According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, only

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factors in places such as Canada (Leighton), New York City (Langner and Michael), and Swenden (Hagnell).

50.6% of those youth in the U.S. receive treatment of some kind ("Mental Health").

These numbers indicate that millions of adolescents across the United States are reporting

or being diagnosed with mental illness or experiences of severe mental distress, and

roughly half of them are not being treated or addressed. Considering these numbers do

not account for the cases that go unreported, the numbers are likely to be higher.

Regardless, the evidence illustrates a pressing need to examine why so many adolescents

in the U.S. are experiencing mental health concerns.

One theory posits that such growing mental health concerns are inextricably

linked to capitalism. Psychologist Oliver James argues in *The Selfish Capitalist: Origins

of Affluenza* (2008) that there is, in fact, a direct correlation between what he terms

"Selfish Capitalism" and the increasing rates of mental distress in capitalist countries

such as the U.S. For James, Selfish Capitalism is a mode of political economy that

"encourages social, economic, political and cultural forms and contents that maximise it,

and works against those which impede it, especially if they might improve the emotional

well-being of the population" (120-121). It is a form of capitalism that must operate on

the dissatisfaction of a consumer population. I should note that James considers Selfish

Capitalism a close relative to the neoliberalism outlined by Harvey in that they share

much of the same foundational features. But while neoliberal policies theoretically allow

the market to dictate outcomes, whatever they may be, Selfish Capitalism is not "the sole

preserve of any form of governance, political persuasion or single nation"; instead,

"social forms and contents will be selected by Selfish Capitalism if they support it and

will disappear if they do not" (James 123-124). In other words, James likens Selfish

Capitalism to the process of evolution by natural selection, deliberately using his term to

echo Richard Dawkins' work on genetic evolution.[11] This terminology also allows James

to distinguish between "Selfish" and "Unselfish" capitalism to persuade readers towards

a form of capitalism that does account for population health and well-being, which

likewise separates him from Harvey, a noted anti-capitalist.[12] Regardless of this

distinction in terms, James' work remains useful for its analysis of mental health in

capitalist countries like the United States, which he refers to as "The epitome of Selfish

Capitalism" (124).

Building upon recent studies from the WHO, James compellingly concludes that

the environmental conditions created by Selfish Capitalism increase rates of mental and

emotional distress:

My principal conclusion is that distress is best conceived as principally

environmental in origin, that it is caused by early childhood care, membership of

groups within societies (class, gender, ethnicity) and, ultimately, by differences in

national culture, economics, politics, social structure and, of course, values—

relative materialism being critical in the case of English-speaking nations. In

particular, Selfish Capitalism is presented as having been a major cause of

increased distress in the English-speaking world since the 1970s. The

consequence of this form of political governance has been very different from

those claimed by its progenitors. Far from having been for the good of all, it has

simply made the rich richer. Whether that was always its true purpose, as David

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[11] See Dawkins' *The Selfish Gene* (2006).

[12] See Harvey's *The Anti-Capitalist Chronicles* (2020).

Harvey maintains, is debatable, but there is little basis for doubting that it was the

consequence. (229-230)

Here, James implies that the differences between his terms and Harvey's are less

significant than the conclusion upon which they both arrive: the political governance of

capitalist countries (i.e., the United States) since the 1970s has negatively impacted the

mental health of entire populations. And while James does not attribute any conscious

malice to this governance, he readily concedes that governments must abandon certain

forms of capitalism for the sake of public health.

Notably, James' assertion does not preclude alternative forms of reorganizing

society from generating distress or making mental health worse. Experiencing distress is

part of the human condition. That said, notes Iain Ferguson, "there are good grounds for

arguing that such painful experiences would be far less likely to develop into serious

mental distress in a society without exploitation and oppression" (26). Indeed, as Fisher

asserts, while we must not ignore biology entirely, chemistry alone is insufficient: "It

goes without saying that all mental illnesses are neurologically instantiated, but this says

nothing about their causation. If it is true, for instance, that depression is constituted by

low serotonin levels, what still needs to be explained is why particular individuals have

low levels of serotonin. This requires a social and political explanation" (37). A brief

intersectional examination of mental health statistics confirms how the nuances of factors

such as racism and sexism shape individual experiences. Women, for example,

experience depression ("Depression") and anxiety ("Any Anxiety") at higher rates than

men; Black men are disproportionately diagnosed with schizophrenia (Metzl); and

LGBTQA+ youth are "4x more likely to commit suicide than straight youth" ("Mental

Health"). Recent studies also indicate the link between income inequality and mental distress, specifically in children, where their mental health is "significantly correlated with state levels of inequality" (Pickett and Wilkinson 68). If, as Fisher argues, capitalism is so ingrained into the essence of contemporary U.S. political and social life, and its presence is actively harming the mental health of the population, I contend that it is imperative to reflect upon how youth are maturing in such conditions. We must also examine how society encourages them to navigate such distress and participate in the social obligations that worsen their mental health. Understanding today's mental health crisis requires an analysis of the relationship between systemic factors and personal biography, and an understanding of how they shape one another.

Young Adult Literature, the Problem Novel, and Mental Health

I assert that YA literature is useful for this analysis because a variety of systemic pressures are made explicit in adolescents' lives. Scholars including Roberta Seelinger Trites have long argued that a defining characteristic of adolescent literature is its connection to power, and teenagers mature by experiencing "gradations between power and powerlessness" (x). These experiences are typically depicted through adolescents navigating the institutions that shape them: schools, the family, romantic relationships, the government, among other social distinctions such as gender, race, and class (x). Trites builds upon the analyses of power completed by Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Lacan, and Marilyn French, pulling on each to theorize how power functions in adolescent texts, namely as a force that operates both "within the subject" and "upon the subject" (7). For Trites, adolescent literature is about both repressive (social) and liberating (personal) forms of power: "Much of the genre is…dedicated to depicting how potentially out-of-

control adolescents can learn to exist within institutional structures" (7). Through the lens of mental health treatment in YA novels of mental distress, the productive citizenship model encouraged within the institutional structure of neoliberal capitalism becomes clear. Adolescent protagonists confronted with the expectations before them must then decide how to move forward with their distress and lives. This process of determining how to handle distress is particularly relevant, for example, in novels that feature characters experiencing suicidal ideation. If the learning Trites refers to is about existing in specific organizational structures, then adolescents experiencing suicidal ideation are forcing themselves, and therefore readers, to confront why one should exist within those structures at all.

Another reason I find YA novels of mental distress useful for this analysis is due to the "problem" novel narrative structure, a narrative approach tied up with the history of adolescence itself. Historically, the adolescent figure is a twentieth-century invention primarily concerned with the problem of a growing youth population and the responsibilities they should carry in the modern world. As critic Derritt Mason points out, youth scholars such as Nancy Lesko and Kent Baxter frequently cite the works of early twentieth-century theorists G. Stanley Hall and Margaret Mead as helping define the category of adolescence as we know it today (10-11).[13] As Lesko explains, Hall is notable for being "dubbed 'the father of adolescence'" whose foundational multi-volume *Adolescence* (1907) "popularized...a romantic idea of youth potential and problems that mandated increasing supervision of young lives" (42). As a result of this framing,

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[13] See Hall's *Adolescence* (1907) and Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilization* (1928).

Lesko's own comprehensive and compelling study nearly a century later interprets

modern adolescence "as a site to worry over and on which to work on new citizens for a

new social order" (42). Indeed, Baxter adds, Hall and Mead "were both responding to a

cultural need to define a (seemingly) new and growing segment of population, a new

theory of human development spawned by the works of Sigmund Freud, and a host of

other anxieties related to the movement into the 'modern world'" (4-5). Like Lesko,

Baxter concludes that "the process of inventing adolescence was a process of taming a

threat" (20). The implication here is that the category of adolescence is constructed

through and made a solution for the problems of increasingly industrial and modern

societies. The adolescent figure, then, is at once a twentieth-century problem to be solved

and a signal of citizenship in a new and changing political economy.

The category of the "young adult," however, and the field of YA literature itself,

did not arise until around the mid-twentieth century. Michael Cart traces the emergence

of *young adulthood* within the vocabulary of adolescence to the influence of

organizations such as the American Library Association and its formation of "the Young

Adult Services Division (YASD) (7). Such a division became necessary from the

increasing number of novels and writing published about and for adolescents or

"teenagers"—a term born in the 1940s by advertisers and merchandisers noticing a new

segment of the population with money to spend. "Although it would take a few years for

the term 'teenager' to catch on in the popular mind," argues Grace Palladino, "the

concept was spreading rapidly, particularly as a marketing tool" (52). With the politics of

adolescence tied to citizenship in a modern industrial world, it is no surprise that YA

fiction's birth stems from its growing capacity as a marketable body of literature. Still, the

term "young adult" also conjures a particular model of identity. Critic Kenneth B. Kidd likewise links the term to librarians and publishers, acknowledging the significant overlap with its "adolescent" and "teenager" counterparts while highlighting that the term signals a particular form of citizenship. "The young adult," Kidd argues, "is associated with education, civic training, and cultural literacy—such that 'young adult' has become shorthand for pedagogical programs and materials" (167). More crudely, the young adult "works to repudiate the chaos and perils of adolescence—the young adult is what we hope the adolescent or teenager will become" (Kidd 167). The young adult identity, therefore, figures prominently as a site of cultural expectation. Through the model of the young adult and the body of literature depicting such modelling, the cultural expectations, norms, and political determinations of society are laid bare. If the chaos of adolescence and teenage rebellion are problems, the model of young adulthood is the solution.

With literature for young adults becoming more commonplace by the 1940s and 50s, the problem novel narrative structure finds its emergence in the 1960s. As Brian W. Strum and Karin Michel argue, "Realistic fiction for young adults changed in the late 1960s, when publishers felt that the social and educational values had changed enough to allow them to publish more edgy stories for this market" (40). These edgy stories typically focused on what Kidd refers to as a tension between social and psychological concerns. "Evident in the history of literary adolescence," Kidd contends, "is a dialectic of the social and the psychological, a vacillation between realist-natural modes of discourse and psychological modes" (156). In a sense, as life for the young adult age group, which Lesko posits is generally assumed to be twelve to eighteen (6), became more complex, and their experiences varied as active agents in the changing political

economy, so too did the problems they faced. In 1981, Sheila Egoff provided a useful

description of the problem novel. She asserts problem novels are recognizable for several

features, most notable being: (1) "a protagonist is laden with grievances, and anxieties

that grow out of some alienation from the adult world, to which he or she is usually

hostile"; (2) "the narrative is almost always in the first-person and its confessional tone is

rigorously self-centred"; and (3) "locutions are colloquial and the language is flat,

without nuance, and often emotionally numb" (67). Although I would argue Egoff's third

point has undoubtedly developed in the forty years since this description, the other two

remain relevant. YA novels of mental distress often feature protagonists with severe

psychological concerns and who feel alienated from their society. Moreover, the first-

person confessional style of narration provides an empathetic approach to understanding

mental health's difficulties and complexities. Fortunately, YA scholars are increasingly

paying attention to these depictions of adolescence, and it is their work to which I am

indebted.

Indeed, the scholarship of YA fiction of mental distress is a burgeoning area of

study. Sharon A. Stringer's *Conflict and Connection: The Psychology of Young Adult*

Literature (1997) is notable as the first work to deeply engage the topic; however, her

overview of suicide and "emotional illness" is only one chapter of her text (xiv). Since

then, several YA scholars have written articles on self-harm, eating disorders, bullying

and suicide, and in 2014 the *Language Arts Journal of Michigan* published a special issue

entirely about depictions of mental illness in YA literature.[14] Further, in the 2015 issue of *Study and Scrutiny*, Sarah Thaller's "Troubled Teens and Monstrous Others: Problematic Depictions of Characters with Mental Illness in Young Adult Literature" interrogates problematic examples of mental illness in *Go Ask Alice* (1971) by Anonymous and *Liar* (2009) by Justine Larbalestier. Louise M. Freeman also examines mental health in the same issue for her article, "Harry Potter and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual: Muggle Disorders in the Wizarding World." Most recently, Kia Jane Richmond's *Mental Illness in Young Adult Literature: Exploring Real Struggles Through Fictional Characters* (2019) is the first comprehensive engagement with this body of literature since Stringer's book, which is notable in that there are only two books published on this subject over the last twenty years. Richmond's work is invaluable to my own, with its "categorizing and explaining how mental disorders (and the characters who have them) are portrayed in 21st-century young adult literature, specifically in fiction texts aimed at high-school readers" (7). Aside from Scrofano's aforementioned study of narrative structures, much of this scholarship concerns itself with language, the symptomatology of mental illness, and the accuracy of depicting such experiences. Analyzing the implications of recurring narrative structures is thus a gap in scholarship I aim to address.

I opened my introduction by flagging recent critics' commentary on how YA novels provide readers with a growing vocabulary of terms to discuss mental illness and distress. While important, this dissertation stems from a desire to push beyond vocabulary

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[14] See Miskec and McGee (self-harm); Younger (eating disorders); Pytash (bullying and suicide); and Eckert and Rozema (2014 special issue of *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*).

choices and towards the narrative structure underpinning these stories. Specifically, I explore both how the adolescent figure and experiences of mental distress are problems to be solved, as well as the nature of the solutions provided within a neoliberal capitalist system. Building on Kidd's contention that the dialectical relationship between the broadly social and the deeply psychological informs the history of literary adolescence, I parallel such literature with my own dialectical analysis.

Methodology and the Structure of *Capital Distress*

My interrogation of literary depictions of adolescent mental distress, neoliberal capitalism, and the dialectical connection between society and the individual, makes this dissertation decidedly Marxist. Karl Marx's writings, some of the earliest and most prominent criticisms of capitalism, have long been intertwined with developments in literary theory.[15] And while Marxism is generally considered "a method of socioeconomic analysis" and "a call for social transformation," as Barbara Foley asserts, "It is also an interpretative framework indispensable to an understanding of the relationship between literature and society—and thus, more generally, of the connection between ideas, attitudes, and emotions on one hand and their grounding in historical forces on the other" (x). In other words, a Marxist literary analysis can reveal the material rootedness of our thoughts and ideas, as well as the stories we write. Any introductory literature course will inevitably lead one to questions about the kinds of people we read about, who gets represented and who does not, the words we use to describe those people and their experiences, and how we choose to tell their stories. A Marxist analysis, thus,

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[15] See Marx's multi-volume *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (1867-1894) and Foley's *Marxist Literary Criticism Today* (2019).

provides a connection between the ideas and material realities of our time. And, with care, it can "heighten our sensitivity to the ways in which language functions to bind people to the status quo, as well as imagine alternatives to the way we live now" (Foley xviii).

This project is likewise informed by additional fields such as Disability Studies, Girlhood and Masculinity Studies, and contemporary Children's and YA scholarship, though there are a couple of notable limitations. Unlike Stringer's or Richmond's work, this project does not concern itself much with questions about the symptomology of illnesses, disorders, or forms of distress, nor does it critique the accuracy of such depictions. Consequently, this project does not engage too deeply with the fields of Psychology or Mad Studies. The reason for this is twofold. As I previously suggested, while I agree that this work is vital to our discussions of mental health, much of the current scholarship on YA fiction of mental distress already picks up those questions. Richmond's work is especially a new and comprehensive analysis of such writing and provides a more than suitable resource when required.

Additionally, focusing on the narrative tendencies allows me to take up an entirely different set of issues. For example, by centring the narrative function of psychiatric facilities in these novels, as I do in chapter four, I can thread the consequences of this function into a more extensive critique of productive citizenship and neoliberal capitalism without losing those threads in a secondary discussion of aesthetics. This limitation also means discussing the accuracy and aesthetics of mental distress and psychiatry in these novels remains open for future projects. I will place an asterisk on Mad Studies in that I will refer to scholarship on Madness and mental health throughout

the body of this work. That said, the project of Mad Studies, as I understand it, is to give a voice back to survivors of horrific psychiatric treatment, mental health services users, and those who identify as mad, particularly against the power and influence of the pharmaceutical industry. Admittedly, while such research is just as important as research into aesthetics or narrative and is therefore deserving of the utmost respect and attention, it inevitably falls outside this project's scope.

Another limitation of this project is that when working with Children's or YA literature, it is difficult to avoid the predominance of white, cis-, middle-class male and female characters, though this predominance is changing rapidly. In this dissertation, the notable exceptions here are Virginia Hamilton's *The Planet of Junior Brown* (1971), Franscio X. Stork's *The Memory of Light* (2016), and Adib Khorram's *Darius the Great Is Not Okay* (2018). However, there has been a shift over the last five years as I have been working on this project and my arguments, with more and more YA novels of mental distress centering Black and Latinx characters, as well as other characters of colour. This body of literature is also continuing to not just feature but focus on more LGBTQA+ stories. As a result, a comprehensive analysis of them remains open for future projects. Still, I readily acknowledge the shortcomings of this project in that its future iterations will benefit from a fuller breadth of representation in several areas.

Each chapter of this dissertation explores the problems, solutions, and expectations of adolescents experiencing mental distress. For example, the opening chapter includes an analysis of the historical threads connecting capitalist logic to adolescent mental health in literature for or about adolescents published between 1951-1971. Beginning with an overview of how recent youth scholars have written on the

politics of adolescence in the new neoliberal economy, I trace their insights through a sample of texts about and for adolescents published before the advent of neoliberalism in the United States through the late-1970s and 80s. In these texts, our current discussions about adolescent mental health in literature begin and where my theorization of the productive citizen emerges. There are four novels, in particular, that provide a useful starting point: J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), Joanne Greenberg's *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* (published under the pen name Hannah Green, 1964), John Neufeld's *Lisa, Bright and Dark* (1969), and Virginia Hamilton's *The Planet of Junior Brown* (1971). Each text reflects what I argue are problem novel narrative structures that position adolescent mental distress as a problem requiring a solution. In turn, they implicitly, and occasionally explicitly, illustrate how productive citizenship is the model solution to mental distress and the standard to which adolescents should hold themselves.

After tracing this body of literature's historical foundation, I turn to more recent novels to illustrate how they pick up those historical threads and signal the gender-based responses to adolescent mental distress. In chapter two, I investigate the mobilization of therapeutic treatment as the impetus for changing how adolescent girls with disordered eating behaviours view themselves within three young adult novels: Julie Halpern's *Get Well Soon* (2007), Laurie Halse Anderson's *Wintergirls* (2009), and Meg Haston's *Paperweight* (2014). I argue that while a positive discursive shift occurs within the novels, leading characters from talking about body-image to focusing on body-health, the deployment of therapeutic treatment as a mechanism for change actively reinforces the social systems of power that these texts ostensibly seek to critique. By situating therapy as a contemporary disciplinary practice of femininity, these novels demonstrate how

clinical treatment functionally perpetuates the ideological notion that women are inherently lacking. Additionally, these books each reinforce the model image of productive citizenship, with unique nuances, of course. In sum, these novels provide a lens through which to view therapy's increasingly necessary place in the lives of adolescent girls growing up under neoliberal capitalism.

In chapter three, I consider how adolescent boys in contemporary U.S. fiction engage with their mental and emotional distress when they are socialized to be silent about their struggles. I trace this discussion of masculine-conditioning and emotionally expressive boy protagonists through a small sample of recent YA fiction: Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999), Michael Thomas Ford's *Suicide Notes* (2008), and Adib Khorram's *Darius the Great Is Not Okay* (2018). Effectively, these texts illustrate the ways adolescent boys learn to internalize or repress their distress (unless in life-threatening scenarios) to model productive citizenship. However, I argue that the adolescent boy protagonists I discuss here implicitly critique the traditionally masculine notion of repressing one's distress by resisting the codes of silence that constitute this image of masculinity as such. Despite such resistances to masculine silences, however, these adolescent boys inevitably remain committed to upholding the tenets of productive citizenship.

Finally, in chapter four, I bring adolescent girls' and boys' experiences together through texts set in psychiatric hospitals to illustrate how such settings expose an inherent contradiction within neoliberal capitalism. Specifically, I examine YA fiction's use of psychiatric spaces to argue how the depiction of these facilities undermines the neoliberal insistence on defining a "healthy" and "meaningful" life via capitalist terms by

replicating the living conditions of a pre-industrial communal society. I consider Ned Vizzini's *It's Kind of a Funny Story* (2006) and Francisco X. Stork's *The Memory of Light* (2016), both of which feature adolescents experiencing distress who inevitably thrive in pre-industrial conditions stripped of their capitalist pressures. My contention is the protagonists' respective therapeutic journeys reveal the inextricable link between distress and capitalist expectations, and how having their basic needs met in therapeutic environments better fosters their desires to live. Consequently, these novels profoundly illustrate the insufficient limits of mental health support possible under neoliberal capitalism when the conditions of their protagonists' well-being and growth are decidedly un-capitalist.

I conclude this dissertation with a brief consideration of the roles hope and happy endings play in the novels I analyze and how hope may continue to inform our broader discussions of adolescent mental health moving forward. That these novels all end with a sign of hope for their protagonists, often by having those characters accept that they need help, comes with significant implications. For example, I examine how hope and happy endings connect to the material costs of mental healthcare in these texts, as well as the notion that mental distress is permissible and that mental health discussions are acceptable in so far as adolescents continue to act as productive citizens. Thus, I examine what these characters consider hopeful, whether such aspirations are enough, and how they, and we as readers, can hope for more.

Chapter 1 : The Literary Roots of Productive Citizenship

My theorization of the productive citizen stems from recent changes to youth citizenship in the new neoliberal economy. The encouragement of adolescents' active participation in consumer culture, for example, is one such change since the Second World War, as youth now play vital economic roles as both producers and consumers. However, I am primarily concerned with the shift for youth from rights-based citizenship to responsibilities-based citizenship. As a reminder, constituting the model of productive citizenship I find encouraged in contemporary YA fiction of mental distress are three distinct tents adolescents must adhere to: (1) displaying the motivation to achieve specific goals (i.e., do well in school, earn employment); (2) showing a propensity for self-reliance and individuality; and (3) accepting the translation of political concerns into personal, psychological issues and resolving those issues through individual treatments. Binding these three features together is that they are all active. Rather than focusing on the passive accumulation of rights such as the ability to drive, enlist in the military, or vote—all things a U.S. citizen of age can do but is not required to do—these expectations are grounded in active consistency. Should an adolescent refuse or be unable to uphold any of these tenets, they become a risk to society or, worse, as Kent Baxter reminds us, "a threat" to be tamed (20). I contend that contemporary YA novels of mental distress detail this taming process. In particular, many such novels depict how mental distress inhibits adolescents from long-term participation in a capitalist economy. This inhibition forces adolescents, then, to either repress or therapeutically treat their distress. Thus, such novels inevitably encourage the acceptance of broader political concerns as individual

issues. As a result, the model of young adulthood within the neoliberal capitalism of many recent YA novels of mental distress is productive citizenship.

Following the Marxist critic Fredric Jameson's call to "Always historicize" (ix), this chapter's concerns are twofold. First, I parse out the origins and features of productive citizenship. Such an examination involves threading together the foundations of neoliberalism in the U.S., the constitution of youth citizenship around responsibilities, and therapeutic treatment's function under capitalism. In Foucauldian terms, the adolescent productive citizen exists within an episteme, a set of conditions that allow for the formation of certain discourses within a given period.[16] I bring these histories together to inform the contours of productive citizenship adolescents are encouraged to model today. Second, I trace the literary roots of adolescent mental distress by examining a selection of novels from the 1950s, 60s, and early-70s. These novels include J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), Joanne Greenberg's *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* (published under the pen name Hannah Green, 1964), John Neufeld's *Lisa, Bright and Dark* (1969), and Virginia Hamilton's *The Planet of Junior Brown* (1971). I focus on these novels because, although they pre-date the productive citizen model I argue emerges in YA fiction around the turn of the twenty-first century, they notably explore many of the same themes. Specifically, they remain tethered to the notions of individual exceptionalism, ambition, and self-reliance, all of which are threaded into the

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[16] Michel Foucault discusses the term episteme in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966), which he describes as a set of conditions that make certain discourses within a certain historical period possible: "In any given culture and at any given moment, there is always only one episteme that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice" (183). For more, see Foucault's *The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969).

social and political fabric of U.S. culture.[17] They also provide a history of literary

engagements with adolescent mental distress, mainly through the problem novel narrative

structure. Thus, these novels serve as literary foundations for the explicit pronouncements

of productive citizenship present in recent YA novels of mental distress.

Forming the Productive Citizen

Citizenship itself can be a nebulous concept to pin down, but the English

sociologist T.H. Marshall provides a useful starting point by historicizing citizenship

around three core rights. For Marshall, these include civil rights (i.e., entitlements to free

speech), political rights (the right to exercise political power, such as voting), and social

rights (ideally, these include some level of economic security).[18] In practice, the tenets of

citizenship determine the relationship between an individual and their society. In theory,

it is the state's responsibility to protect those rights to allow for full participation from its

citizenry. The validity of these rights, however, is dubious for many people throughout

U.S. history. One example comes right from the opening of "The Declaration of

Independence" (1776), one of the nation's founding documents. For "all men are created

equal," the declaration stipulates, and "endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable

rights" such as "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness" (5). At the same time, much

of the U.S. economy during the Declaration's writing relied on the enslavement of

African and African Americans. The politics of citizenship are, therefore, imbued with a

tension between power and freedom. Thomas Jefferson, for example, the primary author

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[17] For more on U.S. exceptionalism, see Sirvent and Haiphong (2019). For more on the promotion of self-reliant individualism and ambitious work ethic throughout U.S. history, see Franklin (1791), Emerson, Carnegie, and Weber (1930).

[18] See Marshall, pg. 78.

of the declaration, enslaved nearly two hundred people.[19] And for wealthy white

colonists such as Jefferson, Ibram X. Kendi argues, "Power came before freedom.

Indeed, power creates freedom, not the other way around—as the powerless are taught"

(105). Marshall's analysis of citizenship affirms the generation of freedom from power,

as he views the development of citizenship rights as historically contingent. Beginning

with the growth of civil rights (for certain people) throughout Western Europe and North

America in the eighteenth century, Marshall explores how political rights in the same

regions were increasingly won throughout the nineteenth century, while social rights did

not feature prominently until later. He cites the expansion of "public elementary

education" as a crucial factor in legitimizing the necessity for social rights, but, Marshall

contends, "it was not until the twentieth century that they attained equal partnership with

the other two elements of citizenship" (91). A notable example of the push for further

social rights in the U.S. is President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "New Deal" policies through

the 1930s. These policies were designed to counter the devastating economic effects of

the Great Depression, provide public supports for the unemployed, and institute extensive

financial reforms.[20]

The implementation of neoliberal policies a few decades later, however, undid

many of these public supports and reconstituted a new framework of citizenship. The

state provisions emerging through and beyond the Depression and Second World War

eventually gave way to deindustrialization and privatization in the 1970s and 80s, as the

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[19] See Kendi, pg. 105.
[20] See Hiltzik.

Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan administrations either heavily reduced government investment in services such as welfare programs or they contracted out services such as social housing to private, for-profit companies.[21] David Harvey cites the years 1978-1980 as especially pertinent, with Paul Volcker's command of the U.S. Federal Reserve and Reagan's election taking place during this period. For Harvey, Reagan "set the US on course to revitalize its economy by supporting Volcker's moves at the Fed and adding his own particular blend of policies to curb the power of labour, deregulate industry, agriculture, and resource extraction, and liberate the powers of finance both internally and on the world's stage" (1). As a result of these changes, the state abdicated responsibility to protect its citizenry's economic security. In fact, Harvey adds, the state should do little else than guaranteeing "the quality and integrity of money" and setting up "those military, defence, police, and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets" (2). Instead, neoliberalism's free-market ethos would enable individuals to secure their own economic standing through hyper-competitive engagements within the labour market. A second implication is that reducing public supports also made paid labour a more explicit obligation for one's livelihood. To earn a living, one must rely either on themselves, the assistance of other individuals, or the leverage of private companies with equity. Thus, the economic security of the "social rights" Marshall outlines as central to citizenship was eroded during this period and replaced with an orientation towards individual responsibility.

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[21] See Harvey.

Emphasizing responsibilities over rights also introduces a moral layer to the construction of citizenship. As JoAnne Myers argues in *The Good Citizen: The Markers of Privilege in America* (2020),

> American citizenship is considered an equal status, but norms, policies, and laws mark some citizens as others…The goal of our democracy is to be a nation of good productive citizens. But citizen is not just a binary status: citizen or noncitizen; some are second-class (othered) citizens, and still others, failed citizens—the incarcerated—and others are aspirational citizens, those who will be transitioning to citizen either as they age (children) or if they are successful in the naturalization process. If we think of the othered citizens, we see them as deserving their unequal status. We practice democratic Calvinism: if citizens are not virtuous good citizens, we tolerate them, treating them differently; their status becomes entrenched. (4)

Myers' categorical breakdown of citizenship is useful to my theorization of productive citizenship for several reasons. First, she connects the obligatory labour practices of neoliberal policy to morality and virtue. There is a hierarchy of citizenship and, at the top, are the fully participatory workers within a nation's economy. These are the "good" citizens, the ideals of society. Second, Myers positions moral goodness as an outcome of productive effort. Whereas many workers may view their jobs as a means of earning a living or merely surviving, Myers suggests they must also obtain their moral virtue through work. These are the stakes of contemporary citizenship: contribute productively to the growth of the economy or risk losing your house and your ability to eat or provide for any potential dependents. You also risk being labelled a bad person. These initial two

connections echo the writings of Benjamin Franklin and Mark Weber, whose respective

works also discuss labour's associations with moral or religious virtue.[22] Finally, Myers

uses the term "aspirational citizens" to denote those transitioning to full citizenship status

and where she refers specifically to adolescents. This term places the youth population

outside the realm of good citizenship, though not entirely for reasons in their control,

such as their age. Instead, they must work towards good citizenship, which Myers asserts

is constituted by five markers: "property, productivity, participation, patriotism, and

reproduction" (4). Myers' project ultimately explores how the people who do not uphold

these markers are then regulated and subjugated uniquely as second-class citizens.

Myers' pointing to "the naturalization process" of citizenship, though, is worth

addressing further. The process itself is in reference to immigration. To be "naturalized"

is to complete the requirements of citizenship as outlined by government mandates.

Myers cites the Naturalization Acts of 1790 and 1795 as the first two U.S. laws

concerning citizenship, which, she argues, limited the possibility of citizenship to "free

white men (and their children), if they were of good moral character, non-criminals, and

non-drunkards who had resided in the country for two years in the 1790 version and

revised to five years residency in 1795. Indigenous people, women, free black men,

slaves, and indentured servants were excluded" (31). Coupled with this blatant political

inequality is the symbolic language of nature. If being a U.S. citizen is natural, then non-

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[22] See Franklin, one of the "Founding Fathers" of the United States, whose autobiography outlines thirteen virtues one must develop to achieve moral perfection. These virtues include "industry," the effort to "Lose no time" and to "Be always employ'd in something useful" (81). For Franklin, there is a direction connection between deliberate work and one's moral virtue. Also see Weber, who argues in *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism* that the Protestant work ethic—the idea that hard work is a reflection of having been elected or chosen by God—played a crucial contribution to the birth of capitalism.

citizens must be unnatural. Those who are unnatural, if allowed by law, must then act and

follow what is deemed by government authority to be natural, inherent to being a U.S.

citizen. This process, therefore, normalizes a specific mode of being in the U.S. and a

specific way of life, which birthright and naturalized citizens materialize through

repetitive actions and behaviours. These repetitions are one way dominate ideologies

reproduce themselves as inherent facts of life, which, in this instance, is defining what it

means to be U.S. citizen.[23] For Mark Fisher, the naturalization process is vital to ruling

class politics as ideological positions require naturalization to be successful; they must be

considered facts and not the subject of values. Since the 1980s, Fisher argues:

"Neoliberalism has sought to eliminate the very category of values in the ethical sense,"

and "capitalist realism has successfully installed a 'business ontology' in which it is

simply obvious that everything in society, including healthcare and education, should be

run as a business" (16-17). I would bridge Fisher's and Myers' respective arguments by

contending that what it means to be a natural U.S. citizen in the twenty-first century is to

be a productive, neoliberal capitalist subject. Not only does the market (supposedly)

provide a suitable guide for all human action, and following that guide makes one

morally superior, but both of these notions are now primarily understood by U.S.

policymakers and citizens alike as the only way to live.[24]

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[23] Barbara Foley provides a helpful overview of Marxist thought when she contends that dominant
ideology is "what Marx and Engels called the 'ruling ideas' serving the needs of the class with property and
power. Codified in belief and emotion and materialized in action, dominant ideology can take a variety of
forms, from doctrines disseminated by ruling elites for crudely manipulative purposes to largely
unconscious systems of belief that spring spontaneously from the way we live" (62-63).

[24] I say "largely" here to qualify that there are hints of this reality changing. From the Occupy Wall Street
movement (2011) to Bernie Sander's 2016 and 2020 presidential campaigns, and to the increasing

My theorization of productive citizenship as unique for adolescents departs from Myers' analysis for two important reasons. First, although I concur with the "aspirational" status Myers offers, I contend that adolescents must do more than merely learn to be good citizens. Indeed, they may not hold property and they are not supposed to reproduce due to their age; nevertheless, they must participate in society in active ways: by demonstrating motivation for specific goals, by displaying self-resiliency, and by assuming responsibility for any adversity and seeking personal solutions. These deliberate moves are in addition to participating in the "learning" process since adolescents are expected to both know and perform them without obtaining adult or full citizenship status. As a result, it is the adolescent period where one must learn some expectations of citizenship while simultaneously embodying others. I contend that these embodied set of expectations, the active demonstrations of citizenship, constitute the adolescent productive citizen. Moreover, since adolescents in the U.S. cannot actively participate in other civic duties such as enlisting in the military or voting, I read the expectations of productive citizenship as featuring more acutely in their lives. I do not mean to suggest that adults are not burdened by these expectations, as they most certainly are. But with limited alternatives for adolescents to demonstrate civic participation, there is a heightened sense of encouragement for them to model productive citizenship as active agents within a neoliberal capitalist society.

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popularity of Democratic Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, among others, who (along with Sanders) openly identifies with the "socialist" label, a new generation of progressives are learning about and being drawn to more socialist ideas. There are other progressive political figures, who, along with Ocasio-Cortez, have formed what is known as "The Squad" of United States Congress. They include Ilhan Omar, Ayanna Pressley, Rashida Tlaib, Jamaal Bowman, and Cori Bush. While these political figures do not signal the end of capitalism, they do indicate a yearning in the U.S. for something different than neoliberalism. For more, see Robinson.

Second, my use of the word "productive" differs from Myers' application in that I do not view adolescents as unproductive if they do not generate profit within a capitalist economy. The concept of production, an essential component of Karl Marx's materialist analysis of social formations, is often conflated today with terms such as "productivity," which carries negative connotations about valuing profit more than human life.[25] U.S. economist Joseph E. Stiglitz refers to this as "marginal productivity theory," which posits that people today are valued by their earnings. As Stiglitz asserts, "Those with higher productivities earned higher incomes that reflected their greater contribution to society. Competitive markets, working through the laws of supply and demand, determine the value of each individual's contributions" (30). For Marx, however, production involves any activity that contributes towards one's social existence. As he writes in *The German Ideology* (1845): "Production must not be viewed simply as reproduction of the physical existence of individuals. Rather it is a definite form of their activity, a definite way of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life*. As individuals express their life, so they are" (37). In this manner, production is a value-neutral term that describes activities that only become positive or negative within an economic system (capitalism) where money is the only measure of value. Indeed, Barbara Foley argues, "At the heart of Marx's emphasis upon production is, simply, his understanding of the centrality of socially organized labor to the definition of what it means to be human" (8). Hence, in a Marxist sense, I consider

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[25] The positive connotations of "productivity" today constitute what is now known as "Hustle Culture": the obsession with continuous "striving," being "relentlessly positive," and a point of view where "not only does one never stop hustling — one never exits a kind of work rapture, in which the chief purpose of exercising or attending a concert is to get inspiration that leads back to the desk" (Griffith). For more, see Griffith.

adolescent citizens' activities as productive, even if they do not generate a profit within capitalist economics.

To briefly return to Myers' assertion about the learning process, though, it is readily apparent that adolescents learn to earn their citizenship through activities mainly set by the new neoliberal economy. For example, Youth researchers Sinikka Aapola, Tuula Gordon, and Elina Lahelma argue that textbooks in the U.S. indicate that specific milestones, rather than merely age, now confer adult or full citizenship status. The implication here is that "having a grown up body does not bring the social rights of an adult citizen; they are linked to heterosexual relationships, family and economic independence, having a job and becoming a parent" (Aapola et al. 395). In addition, "Alternative routes to adulthood and citizenship are either not discussed at length" in these textbooks or "are presented as problematic" (Aapola et al. 395). In other words, the education and constitution of youth citizenship in the U.S. goes beyond deliberate actions and involves the preservation and reproduction of hegemonic social norms such as heteronormativity and ableism. Individuals must be capable of pursuing and embodying the ideals of citizenship expected from them by society as constituted by those in power, lest they require taming.

The preservation of certain social norms brings me to the final component of productive citizenship as I define it. Coupled with the emergence of neoliberalism and responsibilities-based citizenship is the encouraged translation of political concerns into personal, psychological issues. That many YA novels of mental distress feature the management of adolescent lives by encouraging the acceptance of political problems as individual, psychological concerns reflect the troubling reality of what philosopher

Michel Foucault called biopower or biopolitics.[26] For Foucault, if the power of sovereign rule historically centred upon death—namely, the killing of subjects who transgress a sovereign's laws or threaten their reign—today's governmental power is about managing biological life. This power over life, as Foucault argues in *The History of Sexuality* (1976), evolved into two poles of the same "cluster of relations":

> One of these poles…centered on the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls, all this was ensured by the procedures of power that characterized the *disciplines*: an *anatomo-politics of the human body*. The second…focused on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary. Their supervision was effected through an entire series of interventions and *regulatory controls: a biopolitics of the population*. (139)

Foucault's analysis distinguishes the individual from the political body (i.e., general population) and how each is regulated. The first pole outlines the disciplining of individuals to behave in particular ways. The second pole, the "biopolitics of the population," is about keeping the sovereign entity alive and growing. To put it crudely, the biopolitics of modern neoliberal governance is about keeping a self-motivated, self-reliant, disease-free population that can show up to work and participate in capital

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[26] See Foucault's *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978-79* (1979) or *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction* (1976).

production and accumulation. If people resist the biopolitical order by being unwilling or

unable to participate as productive citizens, something must tame them. Historically,

those who behaved unreasonably were deemed criminals or mad and subject to

confinement. This confinement, Foucault explains in *Madness and Civilization* (1965),

was a grave "economic mistake" for which the solution was "To restore this entire

population to the circuit of production…To utilize the poor, vagabonds, exiles, and

émigrés of all kinds, was one of the secrets of wealth" (232). The restoration Foucault

describes resonates with Myers' "naturalization process," as both entail reforming those

who threaten the biopolitical order and integrating them into society.

Therapeutic treatment is a relatively recent method of reformation and biopolitical

management. Notably, several historians have long documented the links between

capitalism and the emergence of therapeutic practices and discourses.[27] Today, however,

we are living in an era of "disaffected" youth, argues Dana L. Cloud, "whose members

will be the first in American history to be worse off than their parents," and it is

"'therapeutic persuasions' [that] have become the prevailing strategy of crisis

management, offered by politicians, managers, and entertainers as ways of coping with

the crisis" (xii). I do not think Cloud is hyperbolic. With the dismally high and growing

rates of mental and emotional distress outlined in my introduction, entire swaths of the

U.S. population are needlessly suffering. And it is not just suffering that is on the rise but

deaths as well. For the first time since 1918, the life expectancy of white working-class

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[27] See Cushman's *Constructing the Self, Constructing America: A Cultural History of Psychotherapy* (1995), Foucault's *Madness & Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1965), and Whitaker's *Mad in America: Bad Science, Bad Medicine, and the Enduring Mistreatment of the Mentally Ill* (2002).

people without a bachelor's degree in the U.S. is declining due to massive increases in

deaths related to alcoholism, drug overdose, and suicide.[28] Anne Case and Angus Deaton

refer to these occurrences as "deaths of despair," reflecting the brutal reality of a growing

segment of the U.S. population.[29] For all capitalist economics has done to lift certain

people out of poverty, it is now demonstrably destroying the lives of many working-class

Americans, as Case and Deaton make clear: "The economic forces that are harming labor

are common to all working-class Americans, regardless of race or ethnicity" (4). But, as

Cloud argues, rather than supporting collective action against such experiences,

politicians and other influential figures are backing individual therapeutic treatments as

the solution. A recent example of this strategy in the U.S. stems from the post-Vietnam

War period, a time of considerable public agitation and political opposition. Indeed,

Cloud contends:

> The crises in capitalism generating the political upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s
>
> led to a need for the system to recuperate itself. The themes and motifs of therapy,
>
> when articulated in the context of political oppression, have worked historically to
>
> blunt radical politics in the United States. In the pseudopolitics of the therapeutic,
>
> in the individualism of the self-help explosion, and in the translation of outrage

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[28] See Anne Case and Angus Deaton, who note that "Black mortality rates remain above those for whites but, in the past three decades, the gap in mortality rates between blacks and whites with less than a bachelor's degree fell markedly. Black rates, which were more than twice those of whites as late as the early 1990s, fell as white rates rose, closing the distance between them to 20 percent. Since 2013 the opioid epidemic has spread to black communities, but until then, the epidemic of deaths of despair was white" (6). Case and Deaton point to alternative sources, such as William Julius Wilson's *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (1987) for a more comprehensive analysis of the relationship between race and poverty in the U.S., as their project specifically concerns the rising mortality rates among white working-class Americans without a bachelor's degree.

[29] See Case and Deaton.

over political or economic roots of crisis (e.g., unemployment, poverty, war, and overwork) into interpersonal rage and of collective structural problems into personal work, this recovery was partially accomplished and is ongoing in society today. (xxi)

Therefore, the clinical practice of therapy is more than a historical phenomenon; it is part of a political strategy to privatize distress and undermine collective dissent against shared traumas and crises. As a result, coinciding with the fading away of alternative economic systems is the emergence of the "self-help" generation (Nagel and Wallace 52), a period in history where capitalism safeguards itself by displacing the burden of its failures onto the resiliency of individual people.

Ultimately, what occurs through the 1970s and into the 1980s is a nexus of political moments and movements: (1) the neoliberalization of U.S. capitalism, with its instance on individual accomplishments within a hyper-competitive labour market; (2) the reconstitution of youth citizenship premised upon responsibilities over rights, along with the privatization of those responsibilities; and (3) the intervention of self-help and therapeutic treatments as suitable responses to personal distress, regardless of that distress' connection to broader political and social issues. The convergence of these three features forms the model of product citizenship as I conceive of it. And at the center of my analysis of this model is the literary adolescent, simultaneously a symbol of crisis and a beacon of hope for the future. Through the depiction of literary adolescence, many of today's political expectations and problems in the U.S. come into focus, with the productive citizen emerging as the twenty-first century model of young adulthood.

Literary Adolescence and Mental Distress

Therapeutic treatments, mental distress, and literary adolescence are as intertwined as the field of adolescent literature. In *Freud in Oz: At the Intersections of Psychoanalysis and Children's Literature* (2011), Kenneth Kidd compellingly details the historical connections between the field of psychoanalysis and two off-shoots of children's literature: the picture book and the adolescent novel. As Kidd contends, since the picture book and the adolescent novel were decidedly "psychological…in form and function," then it was partly through and around these narrative forms that "psychoanalysis underwent dissemination and adaptation" (viii). Turning to the adolescent novel, specifically, Kidd locates the emergence of the problem novel narrative structure in a midcentury shift from the novel of adolescence to the adolescent novel or "the psychological novel, organized around the hypersensitive and anxious character" (155). In essence, problem novels typically depict adolescents as they navigate many of life's more complicated issues. As Kenneth L. Donelson and Alleen Pace Nilsen argue, "The books on the Honor List from the 1960s and 1970s were new and interesting because they vividly demonstrated that young people worried about sex, drugs, money, peer pressure, and health problems" (118). My concern in this project is with adolescents and their mental health. Thus, I interpret recent YA novels of mental distress as primarily problem novels for their engagement with severe and difficult subjects such as depression, anxiety, trauma, and suicide.

Nonetheless, these novels do contain similarities with another narrative form: the adolescent reform novel. Roberta Seelinger Trites provides a useful definition of the reform novel and its connection to social justice in *Twain, Alcott, and the Birth of the Adolescent Reform Novel* (2007). For Trites, such novels share the following features:

The protagonist is an ethical character who transcends his or her society by some form of self-reliance. He or she lives in a society that is demonstrably less ethical than s/he. That society's need to improve its values is made evident either by directly depicted flaws in the culture or by the character being falsely repressed by it. If the protagonist experiences growth—and s/he usually does—that growth provides a commentary as to how the society itself might also 'grow' (i.e., improve). And the character's growth is a sign that the society can, indeed, potentially change. (*Twain* 143-144)

In a sense, YA novels of mental distress contain many, if not all, of these characteristics. Their protagonists either demonstrate self-reliance or learn to demonstrate it; the societies they live in contain questionable ethics and cultural flaws, and their protagonists do grow in ways that indicate a desired social outcome. I contend there are some crucial nuances worth considering that align YA novels of mental distress more closely with the problem novel. First, while protagonists experiencing mental distress do call attention to cultural flaws or problematic ethics, they also inevitably adhere to personal responsibility and change. For example, Trites argues that adolescent reform novels send readers the message that "with self-improvement, you can improve the world" (*Twain* 144). I argue that YA novels of mental distress send readers the message that "with self-improvement, you can change your quality of life." There is no question that the protagonists in these novels grow and develop. That said, literary adolescents experiencing mental distress are more concerned with feeling less distressed than representing broader social changes. Second, while YA novels of mental distress may acknowledge social or cultural areas requiring reform, these acknowledgments rarely (if at all) connect to a protagonist's

personal growth and are thus kept from any meaningful critique or, worse still, actively concealed by this separation. This concealment brings me to my third and final point of nuance. YA novels of mental distress typically feature their protagonists acquiescing to socially acceptable outcomes. The clearest example of this nuance comes in accepting therapeutic treatment as the resolution for mental distress. While these texts may suggest more young adults would benefit from therapeutic practices, such practices are already accepted and embedded within these novels' societies. In other words, I do not interpret a protagonist's acceptance of therapy—which often reflects their growth—as akin to signaling that society can change since admitting to therapeutic treatment is already encouraged through the biopolitical order of neoliberal capitalism. Thus, I assert that YA novels of mental distress merely imply social changes while keeping their focus on personal development (i.e., through the model of productive citizenship), drawing them closer in line with the problem novel form, and, therefore, less transgressive than the social reform novel.

The novels discussed in this chapter provide useful insights into productive citizenship's literary roots, even though the model is not nearly as pronounced in these texts, nor are they all considered YA. Still, these novels do explore adolescence, along with a range of responses to mental distress. For these reasons, they all serve as important foundations for this project. Beginning chronologically, the earliest depiction of adolescent mental health I examine is in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951). From the 1960s, I unpack two novels centring the experiences of young women: Joanne Greenberg's *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* (1964), published under the pen name Hannah Green, and John Neufeld's *Lisa, Bright and Dark* (1969). Finally, I examine

Virginia Hamilton's *The Planet of Junior Brown* (1971), a novel immersed in the politics

of race, class, adolescence, and mental health. While I consider these specific novels for

sharing a commitment to exploring adolescent mental distress, they are also all published

before the advent of neoliberalism. Significantly, each demonstrates how the field of

literary adolescence has concerned itself with attending to mental distress right from its

earliest texts. Moreover, these novels offer deliberate examples of the gendered responses

to mental distress that I elaborate on further in chapters two and three. Admittedly, other

novels would equally serve these purposes. The most notable being Sylvia Plath's *The

Bell Jar* (1963) and Judith Guest's *Ordinary People* (1976), and, to a lesser extent, Ivan

T. Ross' *Requiem for a Schoolgirl* (1961), Garet Rogers' *The Jumping Off Place* (1962),

David W. Elliot's *Listen to the Silence* (1969), and Patricia Gallagher's *Summer of Sighs*

(1971). However, despite my omission of more thoroughly unpacking these additional

novels, I contend that my selection of texts serves as more than adequate in informing the

emergence of productive citizenship featured in recent YA fiction. Salinger's novel is one

of the first major works of literary adolescence, and Hamilton's text is a Newbery Honor

Book and among the first to deal with mental distress and children of colour.

Additionally, Greenberg's bestselling novel reflects a vital cultural touchpoint,

particularly serving as the basis for an Academy Award nominated film of the same

name, while Neufeld's novel has sold more than two million copies and was nominated

by the New York Times for Outstanding Book of the Year.[30] Collectively, these novels

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[30] See *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*, directed by Anthony Page and nominated for Best Adapted Screenplay at the 50th Academy Awards. See also "Lisa, Bright and Dark" for an overview by Penguin Random House of the novel's success with the New York Times.

provide an effective cultural snapshot of the key literary engagements with adolescent

mental distress leading up to the neoliberal shift in the United States.

I begin with *The Catcher in the Rye* because literary scholars frequently discuss it

as a foundational text in adolescent literature.[31] A novel of adolescence, *The Catcher in*

the Rye follows sixteen-year-old Holden Caulfield as he tells his story of a three-day

stroll through New York City from an unnamed treatment facility. Informing Holden's

experiences are intensive episodes of depression and the waves of traumatic grief brought

on by the unexpected death of his younger brother, Allie, who died from cancer at age

eleven.[32] Holden begins his three-day journey by leaving Pencey, his boarding school,

and doing everything he can to avoid telling his parents of his school expulsion. He gets a

hotel room, shops, drinks at bars, meets up with a range of people, stops outside the

Museum of Natural History, and spends some time with his younger sister, Phoebe.

Throughout this period, Holden frequently muses in isolation about a range of subjects

such as death, life, women and sex, consumer culture, school, growing up, and his fragile

mental and emotional state. While Holden struggles to connect with anyone throughout

the novel, especially male figures, he eventually finds a moment of clarity and peace

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[31] There is no apparent consensus on the first YA novel, but as Trites contends in *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature* (2000), "Literary historians frequently cite one of three dates as turning points for YA literature: 1942, when *Seventeenth Summer* appeared; 1951, *The Catcher in the Rye* was published; and 1967, when *The Outsiders* was published" (9). On the subject of mental health, I follow Kenneth Kidd's contention that "Most historians of the adolescent or young adult novel begin with the 1950s, and usually with *The Catcher in the Rye*, both a psychological and literary work" (156).

[32] Holden's depression comes up frequently in the novel. The "phoniness" of the people and places around him make him depressed (Salinger 19); he feels so "lonesome" and he almost "[wishes he] was dead" (62); and he contemplates suicide multiple times, once by "jumping out the window" (136), and after watching a war movie he desires to do anything to join Allie in death: "Anyway, I'm sort of glad they've got the atomic bomb invented. If there's ever another war, I'm going to sit right the hell on top of it. I'll volunteer for it, I swear to God I will" (183).

while spending time with sister. Phoebe makes an effort not just to lecture Holden but to understand his struggle. After this moment of understanding, the novel ends abruptly, with Holden returning home and ultimately receiving treatment for an undetermined sickness.

Interestingly, Trites cites *The Catcher in the Rye* as fitting the adolescent reform novel's pattern. She notes how Holden's story echoes many aspects of Mark Twain's Huck Finn, a pivotal character and text in the reform novel genre, though she acknowledges some key differences. Most notable of these differences, Trites contends, is that while Huck "is trying to save someone else—and who, in the process, creates a social commentary on U.S. race relations—Holden often seems as though he is only trying to save himself" (*Twain* 145). Moreover, Trites adds, "Holden does not really have a cause, other than perhaps rejecting his parents' shallow values, also the conformist values of post-World War II America" (*Twain* 145). Still, it is Holden's "narcissism" that "creates a critique of postwar American culture, especially of its superficiality (i.e., its 'phoniness')"; thus, Trites concludes, "[*Catcher*'s] greatest similarity with *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is its reliance on a well-meaning and basically decent adolescent to depict the flaws, not in the adolescent, but in the culture in which he lives" (*Twain* 145).

While I agree with much of what Trites contends here, I want to extend her analysis to consider masculine nuance. First, I concur that Holden's insights often skew the 'phoniness' of consumer culture, but I am not convinced that doing so is his biggest cause, let alone his only one. I suggest that another of Holden's causes is finding ways for young boys to talk about their distress in ways traditional masculine conditioning does

not allow them.[33] For example, Holden routinely seeks connection with others, and they fail to listen to him. Mr. Spencer, his history teacher, is only interested in lecturing him; his cab driver gets irritated when Holden talks too much about the ducks from the Central Park lagoon; Holden frequently assesses the differences between nice or lousy conversations; and Carl Luce, a former student mentor who attends Columbia University, agrees to meet Holden on the grounds they do not have "a typical Caulfield conversation" (Salinger 188). Holden does not help himself to be understood, of course, with his misogynistic and standoffish attitudes. Still, his continuous attempts to converse with others, especially men, about his distress illustrates his yearning to talk with others. Notably, *The Catcher and the Rye* exists in part from Salinger's efforts to do the same. Salinger carried the novel's first few chapters with him through the Second World War and during his time in a psychiatric facility. As Salinger's biographers David Shields and Shane Salerno describe, "Salinger didn't write a book about a soldier at war with an enemy; he wrote a book about an adolescent at war with society and with himself. And like Salinger, Holden could not find the help he needed to heal" (261). Moreover, Andy Rogers adds, the mental health professionals helping Salinger did not listen to "his recounting of the horrors he witnessed and endured…Salinger then return[s] home having learned to remain outside of mental institutions and witnesses the pageantry of a society overjoyed to see [him] hide his symptoms" (qtd. in Shields and Salerno 261). The learning process Salinger experiences echoes Myers' "naturalization process," with

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[33] See Bronner (2005), Ducat (2004), or hooks (2004). As hooks argues, "The first act of violence that patriarchy demands of males is not violence toward women. Instead patriarchy demands of all males that they engage in acts of psychic self-mutilation, that they kill off the emotional parts of themselves" (66).

Salinger, and inevitably Holden, normalized into repressing their distress. Thus, Holden is not only born out of an effort by Salinger to give voice to trauma, but he also spends much of the novel himself begging to be heard.

I also challenge Trites' framing of Holden as someone who is "only trying to save himself." Rather, I see Holden as advocating for an entire generation of youth, including his sister, Phoebe. In fact, the phrase "the catcher in the rye" refers precisely to this advocacy. After Phoebe presses him on what he wants to do with his life, Holden responds with a clear intention:

> I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids, and nobody's around—nobody big, I mean—except me. And I'm standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff—I mean if they're running and they don't look where they're going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. That's all I'd do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all. I know it's crazy, but that's the only thing I'd really like to be. I know it's crazy. (Salinger 225)

Here, Holden envisions himself as a protector of children, including Phoebe. He imagines standing by the edge of a cliff and keeping the children from going over the edge, either to their literal death or into the symbolic world of adulthood. Ironically, Holden becomes the saviour of those at risk of disappearing beyond an edge, a position he associates with

Allie later in the novel.[34] As Dale Jacquette argues, "Holden would save those children, innocents like Phoebe, if only he could, where he was powerless to save Allie" (123). He assumes the responsibility for those children's futures partly due to the guilt he feels about Allie's death, how he could do nothing to stop it, and the way he treated his brother when he was alive.[35] Jan Whitt writes that Holden's aspiration to protect other children implies that he "is at heart a person invested in the lives of others" (146). However, regardless of Holden's motivation, his desired future is dangerous and burdensome. He positions himself on edge at all times and accepts the responsibility for others' safety. He even concedes that this desire is "crazy" because it goes against everything expected of him. But crossing over the edge means entering into the phony monotony of adulthood or facing the same fate as Allie. To Holden, either outcome means disappearing, and his unique position as an adolescent symbolizes a final opportunity for a different future. There are no adults in Holden's vision. Neither is he is running around playing with the kids, yet he is still young enough to be present. He can be seen simultaneously as the symbol of a potential crisis and the solution. Holden's desire to protect future generations of children, however, is not an idea he grows to hold; instead, it is the mentality he

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[34] While walking up Fifth Avenue, Holden thinks: "Every time I came to the end of a block and stepped off the goddam curb, I had this feeling that I'd never get to the other side of the street. I thought I'd just go down, down, down, and nobody'd ever see me again. Boy, did it scare me. You can't imagine" (Salinger 256). This event causes Holden to think of Allie as his saviour, as he explains: "Every time I'd get to the end of a block I'd make believe I was talking to my brother Allie. I'd say to him, 'Allie, don't let me disappear…Please, Allie'. And then when I'd reach the other side of the street without disappearing, I'd thank him" (Salinger 257).

[35] After Allie's death, Holden thinks, "So once in a while now, when I get very depressed, I keep saying to him, 'Okay. Go home and get your bike and meet me in front of Bobby's house. Hurry up'…I keep thinking about it, anyway, when I get very depressed" (Salinger 129-130). This attempt to reimagine the past suggests Holden feels guilty for how he treated his younger brother, and how he no longer has a chance to act differently.

spends the novel growing away from and towards a less "crazy" and expected future. For this reason, along with Holden's attempts to express his distress, I align *The Catcher in the Rye* as more of a problem novel than a reform novel.

Ultimately, I contend that the crisis of adulthood Holden seeks to protect the children from is grounded in productive citizenship. Holden's parents expect him to do well in school, for example, and secure a healthy financial and employment future. The son of wealthy parents, Holden is acutely aware of the pressures they place upon him to go to a good school and get a good job: "My father wants me to go to Yale, or maybe Princeton, but I swear, I wouldn't go to one of those Ivy League colleges if I was *dying*, for God's sake" (Salinger 112). The refusal to adhere to his parent's academic expectations is part of what fuels Holden's rebellious attitude. Even Phoebe pushes Holden to show interest in corporate life, such as being a lawyer like their father, which irritates him for an important reason:

> Even if you *did* go around saving guys' lives and all, how would you know if you did it because you really *wanted* to save guys' lives, or because you did it because what you *really* wanted to do was be a terrific lawyer, with everybody slapping you on the back and congratulating you in court when the goddam trial was over…How would you know you weren't being a phony? The trouble is, you *wouldn't*. (223-224)

Aside from Holden's preoccupation with saving lives, the difference between being a catcher in the rye and a corporate adult is that Holden believes that he would lose his sense of purpose in adulthood. Yes, he could go through the motions, but he would be no different than anyone else, skewing his ability to understand what he was doing or why

he is doing it in the first place. As a result, his life would become about financial and employment successes more than anything else, and such a life does not appeal to him. As Holden notes midway through the novel, "Goddamn money. It always ends up making you blue as hell" (147).

However, Holden's growth is inextricably linked to his letting go of the responsibility for others and the fact that he requires personal therapeutic treatment. Towards the novel's end, Holden watches Phoebe reach for a golden ring as she rides a carousel in Central Park, and he is afraid she will fall. Nevertheless, he represses his urge to protect her and notes, "The thing with kids is, if they want to grab the gold ring, you have to let them do it, and not say anything. If they fall off, they fall off, but it's bad if you say anything to them" (274). Here, Holden advocates explicitly for a model of self-reliance that he understands Phoebe must also learn. Gone are his desires to protect Phoebe from going over the edge or hurting herself. Moreover, the word "bad" attaches a moral layer to any intervening on Phoebe's behalf. He not only drops his former desire to be a 'catcher in the rye' in this instant, but he also accepts that to act on that desire would make him a bad person.

The novel ends abruptly within a few pages of this scene, and Holden remains at a hospital, though the type of hospital is not made explicit. In the novel's opening chapter, Holden informs readers that he is only going to talk about "all this madman stuff that happened to [him] last Christmas," which left him "run-down" and forced him to "come out here and take it easy" (3). It is important that the "here" at the novel's beginning and its end is never clearly defined. Holden is writing about his experiences from a place where he can, presumably, rest and get healthy, but that could be any number of medical

facilities. Critic Dennis Vail describes the idea of Holden resting in a mental hospital as

"dubious" at best (117). At the same time, Richard Locke claims that Holden is not in an

"insane asylum" but "in a sanatorium that's testing him for tuberculosis" (142). Holden

certainly offers no clarity on his whereabouts beyond stating in the final chapter that

getting sick brought him to where he is, and while he could "tell you…what school I'm

supposed to go to next fall, after I get out of here," he decides instead to end his story

(Salinger 276). The phrase "after I get out of here" suggests Holden's lack of agency in

the experience, be it via quarantine or involuntary admission, but his only other clue is

noting how "one psychoanalyst guy they have here" keeps asking him if he plans on

applying himself when he returns to school (276). Regardless of his location, Holden

makes it clear that he is at once receiving treatment for a sickness and is talking to a

psychoanalyst, whose primary concern is Holden's ability to get back on track and apply

himself in school. If the trauma, grief, and depression brought on by Allie's death are

hindering Holden's ability to behave as expected by those around him—which, I argue, is

the case—then relieving Holden's distress is a problem to be solved. Thus, while the

novel ends abruptly, it draws readers towards a solution built upon Holden's refusal to

accept the responsibilities of others' health, as well as his receiving psychoanalytic

treatment to correct his academic and personal future. For these reasons, *The Catcher in

the Rye* helps demonstrate the lingering features of productive citizenship thread

throughout some of the earliest examples of literary adolescence.

Joanne Greenberg's semi-autobiographical novel *I Never Promised You a Rose

Garden* relies on many of the same tenets of productive citizenship. This novel of

adolescence follows sixteen-year-old Deborah Blau during her three years of treatment in

a psychiatric facility for schizophrenia. After Deborah attempts suicide by cutting her wrists, her parents, Esther and Jacob Blau, admit her to a mental hospital in rural Illinois to learn to live a normal life. One of the novel's central questions, of course, is: what is normal or sane as opposed to what is crazy or mad? At the center of these questions is Deborah and her psychotherapist, Dr. Carla Fried, whose compassionate approach to therapy helps Deborah navigate between the "real" world and a fantasy world named Yr. For Deborah, Yr is a haven from a more frightening reality, one in which a childhood surgery left her traumatized and where her antisemitic peers torment her.

Yr is initially a place of comfort and love, containing a colourful cast of people such as Anterrabae, The Censor, and Lactamaon, all of whom Deborah interacts with throughout the novel. However, as Deborah matures, Yr becomes less safe and begins contributing actively to her distress, as she explains: "To escape engulfment there was only Here, with its ice-cold doctor and his notebook, or Yr with its golden meadows and gods. But Yr also held its regions of horror and lostness, and she no longer knew which kingdom in Yr there was passage. Doctors were supposed to help with this" (Greenberg 16). As a result of the mental distress she experiences, even Deborah's imagined reality becomes tainted. Over her three years of treatment, Deborah works diligently with Dr. Fried to uncover her childhood trauma and prepare herself for the future. She rents an apartment, earns her GED with a high enough examination score to get into her choice of colleges, and eventually decides to separate from Yr after coming to understand its truly fantastic nature. Deborah's journey is not without its setbacks. But throughout these setbacks, she demonstrates her resiliency, ambition, and achieves many of the goals expected of her.

I consider *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* a problem novel for its thematic engagements with Deborah's mental distress, her childhood trauma, and the many references to suicide. Each of these engagements speaks to Deborah's desire to escape from her world to somewhere else, be it through Yr or death. For example, there is no question that the "real" world has been hostile to Deborah, and much of this hostility is because Deborah is a girl. As a child, Deborah had surgery to remove a tumour in her urethra: "She had been five, old enough to be ashamed when the doctors shook their heads about the wrongness inside her, in the feminine, secret part. They had gone in with their probes and needles as if the entire reality of her body were concentrated in the secret evil inside that forbidden place" (49). Such a horrifying invasion of her body and mind generates a yearning in Deborah for somewhere safe she can rest. This yearning culminates in Yr's creation after Deborah recalls her attempt to kill her younger sister, Suzy, when she was a baby. Filled with jealousy and with a "monster-girl" burgeoning within her, Deborah informs Dr. Fried, "I tried to kill my sister when she was born…I tried to throw her out the window. I was almost ready to throw her when mother came in and stopped me" (95-96). In recollecting this event, Deborah believes that she is poisonous and will eventually destroy all who have contact with her. For these reasons, she deserves to be punished. However, when Yr's refuge is not enough to absolve Deborah's pain and guilt, she harms herself physically. Deborah's first attempt at suicide by cutting her wrists is what convinces her parents to seek professional help, and later in treatment, she attempts again to slash her wrists with a piece of tin (57-58). Her view of herself as poisonous and deserving of harsh physical torment is what Dr. Fried seeks to understand in Deborah's sessions. Dr. Fried believes Deborah is strong, but Deborah must

find the will and confidence in herself to tap into that strength and begin the fight towards

a normal life.

The normal life Deborah should aspire towards, of course, is made abundantly

clear throughout the novel. References to self-reliance and financial strength as the model

of citizenship are communicated most clearly through Deborah's parents and grandfather.

Her maternal grandfather, specifically, exemplifies the epitome of one's naturalization

into U.S. citizenship, as the narrator describes: "Pop had come from Latvia. He had a

clubfoot…He had come to America a young man, poor and foreign and lame, and he had

borne down on his new life as if it were enemy. In anger he had educated himself; in

anger he had gone into business, failed, succeeded, and made a fortune" (38). In this

passage, we learn that Pop not only immigrated to the U.S., but he did so with little

money, with an accent, and with a physical disability. Against these difficulties, though,

he channelled his anger for this experience into a successful business career and amassing

himself a fortune. From this description, Pop seemingly models the mythical 'American

Dream.' However, even with such success, life was difficult. His neighbours "despised

his religion, his accent, and his style"; thus, "The true conquest, he knew, would not be

for him, but for his seed, educated and accentless and gently conditioned" (38). In other

words, the pressures of not only achieving but surpassing the model of American

citizenship are woven into the fabric of Deborah's family history. There are expectations

of citizenship for Deborah stemming directly from her grandfather's immigration to the

country.

As Pop's daughter, Esther similarly carries these expectations, and she worries

about how Deborah's distress and treatment reflect on her as a mother. Indeed, while

Esther is the advocate for Deborah's treatment when Jacob Blau wishes to pretend nothing is wrong, her confidence wavers when Deborah struggles in the hospital. Riding home after learning of Deborah's second suicide attempt, Esther questions her decision to send Deborah to treatment. This moment of doubt is exacerbated when she opts to distract herself with a magazine full of happy and confident looking college-aged models:

> There were forget-me-nots scattered all over the page, and Esther set her jaw hard against those flowers, waiting for the tears to stop filling in her eyes. Deborah's classmates would be looking at these pages, substituting their own faces in place of the models, as they looked forward to graduation and college. Friends of Esther's with daughters were already giving and taking the names of colleges like calling cards. They were getting the lovely outfits ready to be worn, and the diaries to be filled…but would [Esther] ever come back to a world like theirs?
>
> (94)

Esther spirals at this moment and imagines the future as she thinks it should be for Deborah. She thinks of graduation and Deborah going off to college with her friends, wearing new outfits, and finding her place and independence in the world. The idea of Deborah missing such opportunities brings Esther to tears, and she cannot help but reflect upon the other mothers she knows who must be happy to see their daughters going off to succeed in the world. Conversely, Esther is left to wonder if such a future is even possible for Deborah or if she is destined for what Esther defines as an abnormal life. By raising these considerations, the novel reinforces the legitimacy of such expectations. Esther never imagines a world more accepting of Deborah's condition. She can only hope that Deborah will find her way back to their world.

Fortunately for Esther, Deborah manages to find her way through hard work and therapeutic treatments with Dr. Fried. The most important therapeutic intervention occurs when Dr. Fried informs Deborah that she could not have tried to toss Suzy out the window because Deborah was five years old. Yes, Deborah recalls hating Suzy so profoundly and wanting to commit such an act. Still, after Dr. Fried walks her through the event's physical impossibility, she realizes that this desire was never more than a want. In actuality, the reason her parents acted as though it never happened is that it never did— Deborah did not attempt to throw Suzy out of the window. At this moment, Deborah begins to understand that her memory of it felt so real that she thought it genuinely occurred. With this realization, she starts seeing herself differently, as something not poisonous and prone to destroying others: "Deborah understood now that the very same very early happiness was proof that she was not damned genetically—damned bone and fiber. There had been a time when she suffered, yet shone with life. She began to cry in full earnest" (239). Having the feeling of being damned lifted, Deborah feels less reliant upon Yr. She reconsiders how much she needs it, thinking, "Now the choice was to be made again, but this time the scale that weighed the earth's virtues had a new quantity to add to the rest—hope, the little, little Maybe" (248). The desire to stay within the "reality" of earth instead of Yr gets stronger and stronger, growing through hope every day. Deborah still experiences setbacks, such as panicking about never finding romantic love (295), but she eventually leaves the hospital and rents an apartment. She additionally earns her high school diploma and is expected to attend college. Most importantly, though, she affirms the idea that responding to mental distress with a combination of self-

resiliency, ambition, and therapeutic treatment is how one returns to normal life. As the

narrator explains during one of Deborah's final visits to the hospital:

> She looked again at the faces on the ward. Her presence was making them
> struggle with Maybes. Suddenly she realized she was a Doris Rivera, a living
> symbol of hope and failure and the terror they all felt of their own resiliency and
> hers, reeling punch-drunk from beating after beating, yet, at the secret bell, up
> again for more. She saw why she could never explain the nature of her failures to
> these people who so needed to understand it, and why she could never justify
> scraping together her face and strength to go out again…and again. In some ways
> reality was as private a kingdom as Yr. (298).

This passage signifies Deborah's new-found conclusion that she is at once a symbol of

hope and fear for the other patients. She realizes that she can never truly explain her shift

to normalcy because that requires a particular kind of challenging work, and those

patients must want it for themselves. It is solely their own resiliency that will offer them a

future. Deborah carries this perspective with her, putting her "Full weight" into the real

world and leaving Yr behind her for good (300). I contend that such an ending wraps up

Deborah's story a little too neatly, but this conclusion's probability is less important than

the goal the novel aims to legitimize. In the end, Deborah becomes what her grandfather

wishes for his family: a model of productive citizenship. She champions the idea that no

amount of mental distress is too great, as long as one assumes responsibility and develops

the fortitude to overcome it.

John Neufeld's *Lisa, Bright and Dark* communicates much the same message

regarding productive citizenship, though it approaches the topic of adolescent mental

distress through a different lens than Salinger's and Greenberg's novels. Neufeld's text is narrated by sixteen-year-old Betsy Goodman and follows her efforts to see classmate Lisa Shilling get the help she needs for her mental distress. Betsy and two other classmates, Mary Nell Fickett (M.N.) and Elizabeth Frazer, spend their days trying to "therapize" Lisa until the situation grows beyond their control. Lisa, described as having a "dangerous state of mind" in the novel's prologue, oscillates between good and bad days at school, symbolically illustrated through her either "bright" or "depressed" attitude and attire (i). The therapy sessions coordinated by the three teens, however, do nothing for Lisa. The novel's climax occurs when Lisa stands up during one of their sessions and walks right through a glass window. This event triggers a more severe response from the story's adult characters, and Lisa's parents finally decide to send her away for more professional treatment. The novel then concludes with Betsy, Mary Nell, and Elizabeth at peace for doing everything they could for Lisa and that her treatment will help her return to normal.

I consider *Lisa, Bright and Dark* a problem novel because it follows many of the same patterns. Although the novel centers around Lisa, Betsy is an anxious protagonist who guides the novel with her deep concern for helping a psychologically distressed classmate. In the novel's first chapter, Neufeld offers a first-person perspective of life inside the Shillings' home, depicting a scene in which Mary Nell is also present. When Lisa tries explaining to her parents that she thinks she is losing her mind, her parents almost dismiss her outright before her father tries pacifying her by promising to look into a psychiatrist. Immediately following this moment, the narrative switches to Betsy's perspective, who narrates the girls' various efforts to help Lisa, whom she describes as

"crazy," "out of her skull," "sick, psychologically," and "Insane" (Neufeld 17). Neufeld

does not interrogate the language of mental distress as it arises and opts to run with

Betsy's assessment that Lisa is a problem to be solved. Further, because the novel is

primarily told through Betsy's voice, we gain little insight into Lisa's distress. Instead,

we only view Lisa from the outside as someone exhibiting concerning behaviour. This

narrative framing reinforces Lisa and her health as the novel's primary issue, with Betsy

and her friends being adamant about finding a solution.

The trio of friends is also the novel's most explicit depiction of self-reliant and

independent characters. Betsy sees her "ambition" as her best quality, and she describes

Mary Nell in positively glowing terms: "She's very fast, very smart (she'd like to be the

first woman justice on the Supreme Court)…She has a great laugh and eyes that make

you smile back without thinking. And she's fantastically popular with boys" (14-15).

Betsy is equally as boastful of Elizabeth, who she describes as "regal, cool, far off,

blonde and slim, and with clothes you wouldn't believe. And Intelligent. [Mary Nell] is

smart and studies. Elizabeth is intelligent. She never raises a hand in class, but if a

teacher calls on her, she has the right answer as though it were something everyone

automatically knew" (16). These descriptors signal the model of citizenship adolescents

should aspire towards in their lives. Even though Betsy is less kind when describing

herself, she does acknowledge that her best asset is her ambition. Such an

acknowledgment suggests that even if you are not the smartest or most attractive person

in school, you remain valuable as a person if you demonstrate the right work ethic. Mary

Nell demonstrates this ethic in her studies and employment ambitions, while Elizabeth

demonstrates her ethic whenever she is called upon by others. She never does more than she needs to, but it is always enough.

They all channel their respective ambitions and studiousness in their efforts to help Lisa. Betsy and Mary Nell, for example, discuss what little they know about illnesses such as paranoia and schizophrenia, so they turn to all the resources available to them to learn what signs to look for in Lisa's actions. As Mary Nell informs Betsy, "Tell you what. We'll start researching with the encyclopedia. That'll give us the big picture, and later we can go deeper with other books…you take *P* for paranoia. I'll take *S* for schizophrenia. If you find something that screams Lisa at you, read it aloud and we can discuss it" (49). Their approach is almost mathematical in its execution. They see an issue (Lisa's mental instability), they prepare a formula to solve it (by reading up on how to assess and treat different illnesses), and then they push for the best solution (by trying to therapize Lisa's return to "normal" health). Eventually, Lisa's parents relent, allowing Lisa to receive treatment after she walks through a glass window. As Betsy describes, "Lisa stayed at the hospital for another week…Not that she needed to be watched so much as it was to give her a chance to rest before going up to the hospital where Dr. Donovan worked…For Mr. and Mrs. Shilling had, at last, been beaten down. Their resistance, their objections, their fears had all given way finally to concern" (122). Notably, psychotherapy or psychiatric treatment remains the de facto answer to Lisa's mental distress. For those who agree that Lisa's distress is concerning, the response is never in question: psychiatric intervention. Thus, a crucial obstacle within the novel comes via Lisa's parents, who must accept that there is an issue. Even though Betsy, Mary Nell, and Elizabeth never quite understand the depth of Lisa's struggle, they

recognize that Lisa requires medical attention, even if the only support they can offer is their learned therapeutic techniques.

What should not be lost in this analysis is Lisa's advocacy for herself. In one of the novel's rare moments of sharing Lisa's thoughts, she not only expresses her distress but her need for assistance. As she informs her family during breakfast one morning, "I think I'm going crazy…I think I'm going out of my mind. Could we get some help or something?" (11). In a sense, Lisa demonstrates productive citizenship right from the opening page. Betsy describes how Lisa, a notably good student, and her boyfriend Brian were the epitome of high school excellence before Lisa started acting differently: "[Brian] and Lisa were *the* couple in school: bright, popular, organized" (22). And on Lisa's better days, she would act like her old self: "Confident, clever, open with everyone…On good days, she was beautiful. She carried herself well and moved like an older woman who knew what moving one particular way could do to someone watching" (22-23). Coupled with the dated sexism lingering within Neufeld's descriptions of what constitutes "good" girls is the notion that, aside from her episodes of distress, Lisa has it all together. Like the other three adolescents, she is the model of what other high school girls ought to aspire towards in their lives. It would seem, then, that her only character "flaw" is the distress she experiences, and she demonstrates a level of autonomy and personal respect by demanding her parents get her professional help.

When Lisa cannot convince her parents through discussion, she tries convincing them through her behaviour. We never find out if Lisa thinks therapeutic treatment is terrible or something to be ashamed of, while her parents' routine avoidance of the subject implies they do. Still, her motives and intentions suggest she views therapeutic

support as a vital and helpful option. Her self-advocacy at the start of the novel is justified as the right thing to do all along. This justification is partly why *Lisa, Bright and Dark* is more of a problem novel than a reform novel. Every other central character sees Lisa's distress and agrees she needs professional treatment; her parents need to grow in this regard. Yet what they grow to acknowledge is already accepted by everyone else in the novel, which implies that it is not society that needs to grow—psychiatric treatment is readily available and advocated for by many—but certain people. Lisa's actions illustrate her attempts to use what little control she has in her life to fight for what she needs, and it works. The novel's message here is to be more like Betsy, Mary Nell, and Elizabeth. And if you're feeling distressed like Lisa, then seeking professional treatment is a good thing and a way to become more like the others.

Ultimately, both Neufeld and Greenberg imply that a return to normalcy from madness is possible no matter the extent of an adolescent's distress. However, as Mary Jean DeMarr and Jane S. Bakerman note, there are other underlying reasons for these messages: "Both Lisa (*Lisa, Bright and Dark*) and Deborah (*I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*) are fortunate in having the help of sympathetic and loving people as well as financial resources which makes possible the very special care they need" (128). The material cost of treatment is not discussed in these select novels, and it rarely comes up in many others. Such supports are not always available, especially for Black, Indigenous, and other people of colour. DeMarr and Bakerman point to Pecola Breedlove, the protagonist of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), as an example of a "less fortunate" character, "Who has the burdens of poverty and a racist society to contend with and no advantages to set against those burdens" (128). For Pecola, they argue,

"Madness is the ultimate—and the only—refuge," for her life is subject to factors such as her class, her race, and the abusive trauma she endures: "The result of these factors is Pecola's total isolation, and insanity becomes her only option. But even that alternative is ironic, for Pecola's final, pitiful delusion not only symbolizes her complete alienation but also intensifies it" (DeMarr and Bakerman 128). As a result, while my selected novels demonstrate how productive citizenship's roots are present throughout the history of literary adolescence, they are also intensely limited in their scope. The expectations of productive citizenship may suggest a common goal for adolescents, but those expectations do not always manifest the same for people who do not share the privileges of Holden, Deborah, or Lisa.

One such novel that examines how medical treatment is not available or preferred by everyone experiencing distress is Virginia Hamilton's *The Planet of Junior Brown*. Published and set in the 1970s, this middle-grade novel tells the story of two marginalized Black adolescents, Junior Brown and Buddy Clark. In several ways, they actively resist conforming to social expectations and the institutions, specifically school and family, that enforce such expectations. In fact, Junior and Buddy skip most of the eighth grade by joining former-teacher-turned-janitor Mr. Pool in reconstructing a model solar system located in a secret cellar room within the school. Much of Hamilton's critique of society's ableist expectations are presented through Junior, a three-hundred-pound musical prodigy who experiences severe anxiety and whose emotional troubles reflect what Hamilton refers to as "mental dissociation" (16). Throughout the novel, Buddy, Junior's homeless friend and staunch protector, attempts to release Junior from, first, the pressures of his smothering mother, Junella Brown, and then, the delusions of

Junior's music teacher, Mrs. Peebs. Buddy, whose actions drive much of the novel, is a leading member of the "Tomorrow Billys," a city-wide network of homeless youth who care for one another in underground locations called "planets." When Buddy eventually discovers the extent of Junior's mental distress, signified through Junior's and Mrs. Peebs' shared delusion of someone who does not exist, he takes personal responsibility for Junior's safety. He brings him into an underground location and formally proclaims it "the planet of Junior Brown" (*The Planet* 210).

I contend this text is a problem novel because it primarily examines a range of challenging topics, such as homelessness, racial politics, and mental health. As I interpret the novel, a central point is Junior's mental health and what to do about it and him. Part of Junior's growing distress and feelings of alienation are directly related to his mother, Junella. Described by Hamilton as suffering from intense asthma attacks, which typically occur if she gets excited or upset, Junella conditions Junior to stay close. This conditioning stems from her fear that if he is not around to give her a shot when she has an asthma attack, she could die. As Hamilton writes, "Maybe she is sickly, the way she likes to say, thought Buddy. She still uses that asthma of hers to keep Junior as close to home as she can" (25). The implication of Buddy's comments is that Junella is controlling and limits Junior's ability to become his own person. Buddy's skepticism of Junella's relationship with Junior intensifies when he learns that she removed the piano wires from Junior's piano. Junior can still play the piano, of course, but with no sound. This news infuriates Buddy: "He felt empty of himself but outraged at the damage done to Junior. Taking away his sound from him, Buddy thought. How could she do that to her own son?" (115). As a result, Junior's growing distress becomes a problem to solve,

much like Lisa's distress was for Betsy and the others. Buddy knows that Junior's life is not too awful, at least in comparison to his own, since he has plenty of food, clothes, and shelter. But Junior's one passion is playing the piano, and Junella denies him the thing he wants most to do in life. Thus, Buddy takes it upon himself to solve Junior's misery and growing distress by finding him an alternative environment.

Buddy's take-charge efforts to protect and save Junior also reflect the novel's examination of individualism and self-development, cornerstone characteristics in the shift towards productive citizenship. For example, much of the novel's interrogation of racial politics concerns the self-reliant features of the racial uplift movement, a term used to describe certain efforts within African American communities to educate Black citizens and improve their social and political standing amidst a deeply white-supremacist society.[36] Black progress within the movement, argues Historian and African American scholar Kevin K. Gaines, was inextricably linked to "bourgeois morality, patriarchal authority, and a culture of self-improvement," establishing a precedent for normative family values (3). Moreover, Gaines suggests: "So thoroughly did disenfranchisement and Jim Crow contaminate the public sphere that many black reformers focused on those private areas perceived to be in their control…This was fundamentally a moral vision of racial uplift, centering on self-help" (78). And the ethic of self-help or self-improvement is explored throughout much of Hamilton's novel. Junior's and Buddy's Black homeroom teacher, for instance, had "come too far and had worked too hard" to let their antics disrupt her class (*The Planet* 144). So too had Mr. Roundtree, the boys' vice-

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[36] See Gaines.

principal, who connotes a specific model of citizenship for the boys to follow. Naomi

Lesley argues that Mr. Roundtree, grounded in the images of professional development

and success, internalizes and presents "the desires framed as valuable within a white,

middle-class, capitalist system" (131-132). Even Buddy and the system of the

"Tomorrow Billys" is caught in the tension between communal support and

individualism, as one Tomorrow Billy explains, "If you stay with us, you'll do as I say to

do. There's no parents here. We are together only to survive. Each one of us must live,

not for the other…The highest law is to learn to live for yourself" (*The Planet* 72-73).

Notably, this declaration is revolutionary for a young Black boy who has been told that

his life must be lived only according to the terms of a white supremacist society. At the

same time, the Tomorrow Billys' network is not entirely a social service; rather, it is also

a form of private innovation designed to propel its constituents towards self-mastery.

Living for anyone but oneself is antithetical to its central tenet. Incidentally, a framework

of individualism is internalized, reinforced, and perpetuated within the doctrine of a

group mainly suffering from the social, political, and economic inequalities of capitalism.

At the novel's climax, Buddy discovers Junior's and Mrs. Peebs' shared delusion

of a non-existent "relative," and he is left to contemplate the reality of Junior's safety

amidst the racial politics of medical treatment (184). Concerned for Junior's

psychological state, Buddy takes Junior to Mr. Pool for help, for he distrusts medical

support. As Buddy pleads to Mr. Pool: "You put Junior in a hospital and he won't never

come out. They'll lose him in one of those wards…They'll hit on how fat he is…they'll

say that's it, we got to get him skinny…They'll see how black he is…and they'll say that's

the problem, we got to get to the white inside" (187-188). Buddy worries that the hospital

will see Junior's mental distress and attempt to "fix" his weight, erase his Blackness, and mould him psychologically into a proper "white" citizen. For Buddy, the social structures in place—school, his family, the medical communities—are not set to accommodate Junior as he is. Instead, those structures will try to change him into who they believe he should be.

Buddy's concern is unsurprising considering the U.S. medical system's historical mistreatment of African Americans.[37] Moreover, the medical community in the U.S. has also long prioritized what Mad Studies scholars and Disability Studies scholars refer to as the "medical model" of disability, a model of disability that "focuses wholly on the individual and their situation" (Preston 15).[38] Rather than examining the environmental factors of mental health, adds Bradley Lewis, the medical community typically demands "evidence that mental and emotional distress results from 'chemical imbalances' in the brain; a view that underpins the biopsychiatric medical model and which currently dominates mental health treatment in the West" (103). In essence, it is the erasure of environmental factors that contributes to so many doctors misdiagnosing Black patients as experiencing schizophrenia when they exhibit varying distress levels.[39] Such histories within the medical community provide insight into why Buddy does not trust Junior's care in doctors' hands.

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[37] See "The Tuskegee Timeline" for more on the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment. See also Bell and Mehta for their analysis of "Misdiagnosis of Black Patients with Manic Depressive Illness," as well as Bloche's article "American Medicine and the Politics of Race," which examines the politics of health care disparity between races in the United States.

[38] See Lewis, Preston, and Shakespeare.

[39] See Metzl.

Ultimately, Junior's not receiving medical treatment—a different conclusion from the other three novels I discuss—introduces an important question about this novel's role in my discussion. Generally speaking, I highlight it because it examines many of the same themes as the other novels: individualism, self-reliance, a hard work ethic, and adolescent experiences of mental distress. Moreover, it speaks to the tensions between personal psychology and environmental factors that inform such distress. That said, there is a third reason I include it in my discussion. This novel concludes with a profound sense of communal support and interdependence, a sentiment that is all but lost through the advent of neoliberal capitalism merely a decade later. When Buddy brings Junior into one of his underground planets, he shifts his stance on the Tomorrow Billys' core tenets, moving from hyper-individualism to community-based living: "'We are together,' Buddy told them, 'because we have to learn to live for each other,'" and "'If you stay here, you each have a voice in what you will do here. But the highest law for us is to live for one another'" (*The Planet* 210). This egalitarian and democratic vision of society is noble, but it also depicts Junior's acceptance without attempts to change him. In fact, Junior is welcome regardless of his distress, and Buddy labels their hideout in Junior's name to signal his importance. Thus, this novel's conclusion offers two important implications, both of which inform this basis for this project. First, the acceptance of Junior and his distress into "the planet of Junior Brown" aligns with the other novels in that he is not shamed or cast aside for his condition, especially while he gets the help he needs from Buddy. In a sense, Buddy functions as a stand-in for the understanding and concerned doctors in the other texts. And second, it illustrates that alternatives to the hyper-

individualism of neoliberal capitalism are possible, even if authors do not always write about them or aware of them.

As the works discussed in this chapter indicate, the productive citizenship model I see emerging in more recent YA fiction of mental distress has its literary roots in some of the earliest U.S. novels about and for adolescents. Namely, these earlier texts examine the nature of adolescent individualism and self-reliance, displaying motivation for specific goals, and exploring the relationship between adolescent mental distress and the medical community, typically depicted through psychiatric or therapeutic treatment. The characters in these novels also reflect the importance of assuming personal responsibility for attending to and managing distress. As a result, they absolve broader social or political issues from any wrongdoing by forgoing the necessity for systemic changes. Hamilton's text comes the closest to suggesting such changes, as Junior's and Buddy's decision to live together in "the planet of Junior Brown" is less hopeful than the other novels. It is not entirely without hope, though, as Junior inevitably ends up in a place that finally accepts him for who he is and does not try to change him into someone else. In a sense, that is a positive ending. However, Buddy, the Tomorrow Billys, and now Junior are all still homeless adolescents left to fend for themselves in a society that does little to protect them.

While Hamilton's ending does differ from the other novels by acknowledging how medical treatment is not welcoming or accommodating for everyone, and particularly people of colour, all four texts reveal new implications when interpreted through a gendered lens. Specifically, Holden's and Junior's experiences as adolescent boys are similar in that their initial responses to distress are to repress it until they can no

longer contain it. For example, Holden thinks and behaves as if he can handle his own grief until Phoebe provides him with an outlet to connect. The novel ends immediately afterwards with him receiving treatment and speaking with a psychoanalyst. Similarly, Junior does little to address his distress, and it is not until Buddy personally witnesses Junior's delusions that he steps in to support his friend. Conversely, both Deborah's and Lisa's stories reflect their experiences receiving or fighting to receive psychiatric treatment right from the beginning of their narratives. Both *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* and *Lisa, Bright and Dark* center on the importance of therapeutic intervention in adolescent girls' lives, and their respective conclusions affirm this importance. The only characters skeptical about therapy in both novels are Deborah's and Lisa's parents, all of whom come to accept the necessity of therapeutic treatment in their daughters' lives. Thus, my selection of novels reveals how responses to adolescent distress exist within a network of gender dynamics.

I opened this chapter by expressing its two core aims: 1) to outline my theorization of productive citizenship as a model of contemporary young adulthood, and 2) to examine the literary roots of this model in some of the earliest novels of mental distress about and for adolescence. However, my examination ultimately invites a more in-depth investigation into the role gender plays in attending to adolescent distress. In effect, although my productive citizenship model hinges upon three features—displaying motivation, self-reliant individualism, and accepting social or political distress as personal matters to treat—the approaches to such "treatment" often look different for adolescent girls and boys. Thus, this project moves its exploration forward by shifting

towards more recent YA fiction of mental distress and attending to the gendered

differences in responding to distress in such literature.

Chapter 2 : "Maybe I am Fixed": Thinness, Discipline, and Therapeutic Treatment in Young Adult Fiction[40]

"My ballet teacher pinched the extra inches…told me to stop eating maple-walnut ice cream."
Wintergirls, Laurie Halse Anderson

Young women in the early twenty-first century are caught in an intricate network of disciplinary practices that govern their bodies. In Western culture specifically, they must routinely attend to their hair, makeup, styles of dress, exercise regimens, and bodies, all in service of preserving a particular socially constructed beauty standard that privileges the white, the cis-gendered, the able-bodied, and the middle-class.[41] Entrenched within these practices is young women's relationship to food—when they eat, what they eat, and how much they eat—which often results in the development of body dysmorphia or, in more extreme situations, eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa or bulimia.[42] While biology and psychology play important roles, Emma Dunn notes that "the critical feminist paradigm views culture as being central to the formation of these disorders" (109). Social apparatuses including friends, family, the media, and the medical community all contribute to the cultural conditions that shape disordered eating practices, specifically through the ideological suggestion that female bodies are inherently lacking.

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[40] A version of this chapter was published in the Fall 2019 issue of *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*. See Johnston.

[41] I define "Western culture" in this context as a collection of values, ethics, social norms, political systems, and shared beliefs originating in European or Mediterranean traditions.

[42] For early theorizations of a critical feminist framework examining eating disorders and the female body, see Bordo; Heywood; and Malson.

Literary studies, particularly in regard to young adult literature, offers a valuable opportunity not only to investigate how young white women learn to embody these extreme disciplinary practices from the social systems around them, but also how those systems respond to such behaviour. Dana L. Cloud argues that therapeutic persuasions "have become the prevailing strategy of crisis management" (xii), which I note is a growing force in the lives of young women. I observe this sentiment in the proliferation of young adult novels that feature characters working directly with a therapist as integral to combating disordered eating behaviours in young, white, middle-class women. In this chapter, I investigate the mobilization of therapeutic treatment as an impetus for changing how adolescent women with eating disorders view themselves within three young adult novels: Laurie Halse Anderson's *Wintergirls* (2009), Meg Haston's *Paperweight* (2014), and Julie Halpern's *Get Well Soon* (2007). I argue that while a positive discursive shift occurs within the novels, leading characters from talking about body-image to focusing on body-health, the deployment of therapeutic treatment as a mechanism for change actively reinforces the very social systems of power that these texts ostensibly seek to critique. By situating therapy as a contemporary disciplinary practice of femininity, these novels demonstrate how clinical treatment functionally perpetuates the ideological notion that women are inherently lacking. Moreover, the optimistic tone with which these novels end demonstrates how productive citizenship is the desired model of young adulthood for young women experiencing disordered eating behaviours.

I consider *Wintergirls*, *Paperweight*, and *Get Well Soon* to be useful examples here for two reasons. First, they specifically explore eating disorders or anxiety over weight and body image at their most extreme, depicting a range of ways in which young

white women are encouraged to police their bodies. Second, they focus on young female

characters learning to cope with eating disorders through the rhetoric of therapeutic

discourse. Such responses to eating disorders are not based on changes to the social

apparatuses that shape these protagonists' bodies and minds but are inextricably linked to

how well those characters accept and commit to therapeutic treatment. That these

characters accept private therapy as the solution to social problems, a positive outcome

within these novels, affirms productive citizenship as the ideal model of young adulthood

for young women with similar experiences. In turn, these literary representations suggest

that seeking clinical aid is not only imperative but sufficient for improving one's mental

health, allowing for movement from a position of self-loathing to one of self-acceptance.

On the surface, this message appears empowering and is a positive development in the

genre. However, such a message masks a more insidious suggestion: that eating disorders

are not the norm but the reflection of a psychological failure to operate within hegemonic

social networks. Characters with eating disorders, then, are viewed as participating in

self-abnegation and are responsible for reconfiguring the psychic abnormalities that

restrict their entry into socially accepted circles. Thus, while these texts offer insight into

the relationship between bodies and culture, they also expose implicit assumptions about

normative mental health states that conceal and reinforce the social ideologies that shape

illness in the first place.

　　　　While *Paperweight* and *Get Well Soon* have not received much scholarly

attention, their themes fit neatly with those found in *Wintergirls*, whose current

scholarship centers around thinness, food, and the socializing aspects of weight control.

Hsin-Chun Tsai, for example, investigates how *Wintergirls* and Meg Rosoff's *How I Live*

Now (2004) encourage their readers to "reappraise continuously the taken-for-granted and familiar experiences of food and to interrogate and challenge the prevailing views of thinness that are broadly accepted in contemporary societies of abundance" (53). Conversely, Dorothy Karlin argues that adult-authored novels such as *Wintergirls* actually further the "prevalent culture messages valorizing thinness and equating larger bodies with moral transgression" by guiding readers "through a policing of their bodies, intervening between a girl and her appetites" (72). I build upon these discussions of how society figures the female body by examining the ways that therapeutic treatment functions as a contemporary disciplinary practice within the socializing process.

Recognizing my role as a male scholar, I understand that my exploration of these practices can only go so far. I do not claim as my own any of the experiences reflected in these narratives, nor do I wish to imply a complete understanding of the experiences and expectations that young women face. My contention is that therapeutic treatments within these texts not only are substitutes for genuine social change, but that they also actively participate in the ideological social pressures forcing these characters into disordered eating behaviours in the first place. To illustrate this participation, I interrogate the social expectations that young women face, the disciplinary practices they develop to meet such expectations, and how therapeutic treatments also act as disciplinary practices.

Socializing the Female Body

The heteronormative nature of twenty-first century-Western culture means that young women are consistently scrutinized, by themselves and by others, regarding their physical attractiveness, particularly to men. The implication here, argues Liz Frost, is that female bodies are "inferiorised (sic)" in relation to men, generating the patriarchal conditions that force women to inhabit "a negative perspective on their embodiment" (2–

3). The types of female figures considered attractive, however, vary depending on specific cultural and historical contexts. In "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," Sandra Lee Bartky investigates how the female body remains a site of cultural contention within this patriarchal framework and why "massiveness, power, or abundance in a woman's body" are today met with "distaste" (132). Instead, Bartky contends, "the current body of fashion is taut, small-breasted, narrow-hipped, and of a slimness bordering on emaciation" (132). Of course, the demand to meet these beauty ideals is practically impossible to fulfill, which is what pushes young women to extreme behaviour in policing their bodies.[43]

Notably, the conditions for eating disorders such as anorexia or bulimia, behaviours exemplified in the aforementioned novels, apply uniquely to middle- and upper-class white women. Anorexia and disordered eating can look different in women of color and working-class women. Becky Wangsgaard Thompson, for example, concludes that such women tend to use anorexia or other forms of disordered eating as a way to cope with traumas such as "sexual abuse, racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and poverty" (547). Such differences, though, do not stop these beauty standards from being "highly problematic," according to Sinikka Aapola, Marnina Gonick, and Anita Harris, because "they are still deeply affected by, and continue to reproduce, Eurocentric, imperialist notions of beauty, portraying predominately (sic) only white women as attractive" (134). As a result, hegemonic beauty ideals actively exclude girls and women

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[43] See Frost.

of color.[44] However, this exclusion does not exempt young women of nonwhite

ethnicities and cultures from facing the social pressure to be thin. As Beth Younger notes

in her article "Pleasure, Pain, and the Power of Being Thin," the assumption that Black or

Latinx cultures "desire bigger women" is a stereotype debunked by recent studies

indicating that "the Western standard is becoming the norm" (48).[45] Still, I should note

that any reference to social expectations facing "young women" or "female bodies"

throughout the remainder of this chapter relate uniquely to the experiences of white, cis-

gendered, middle-class women such as the protagonists of my selected texts.

Normalizing this pervasive beauty standard is a constellation of social forces such

as friends, family, media, medical communities, and even the arts. In fact, the history of

young adult fiction plays an important role in reinforcing this perception in the minds of

adolescent women. Younger contends that while print texts published between 1975 and

1999 "valorize the contemporary ultrathin standard of beauty" (46), literature for young

adults has helped foster this ideology: "Just as magazines, televisions, and films

perpetuate . . . an idealized standard of beauty, popular Young Adult literature of the last

twenty-five years has often perpetuated an unrealistic beauty ideal" (54). Indeed, as

Catherine S. Quick argues, describing characters as both "fat" and "beautiful" is rare in

young adult literature: "The protagonist may accept herself/himself in the fat state and go

on to live a happy life. But the protagonists love themselves in spite of their fat" (54;

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[44] See the chapter on "Redefining black womanhood" in Heidi Safia Mirza's *Young, Female and Black* (145–64).

[45] Younger cites Ruth Striegel-Moore and Linda Smolak's chapter in *The Developmental Psychopathology of Eating Disorders* (1996), which indicates that young women of color's dissatisfaction with their bodies increases at roughly the same rate, and at roughly the same age, as that of young white women.

orig. emphasis).[46] Thus, Quick determines, "Thin is still represented as the absolute ideal

for body image, and the fat person, although willing to accept fat as integral to identity,

undoubtedly prefers thin" (54–55).

While much of young adult fiction continues to focus on figuring the female

body, Younger notes a shift in such literature toward viewing body images not merely as

character descriptions but as central plot conflicts. For Younger, contemporary authors

are beginning to portray characters who "literally embody the struggles of young women

who must try to conform in a society that condemns them for not being thin" (54). This

conclusion parallels work done by Jennifer Miskec and Chris McGee, who examine

representations of cutting in early young adult novels next to more recent depictions.

They note that the latter deploy acts of self-harm not for melodramatic purposes but to

"turn their gaze towards social constructions of gender and in particular towards what the

body means in a given culture" (174). This analysis of cutting is useful in relation to

examining disordered eating behaviours because both acts represent, albeit in different

ways, not just forms of self-harm that endanger the physical functionality of the body, but

also forms of self-expression and bodily control. While such means of "body

modification" are largely different from tattoos or cosmetic surgery, they likewise exist

on a spectrum of acts that engage with questions of body ownership and agency within

the context of pervasive social norms. Although Miskec and McGee do not investigate

gendered expectations or eating disorders specifically, their research (along with

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[46] In recent years, there has been a movement by authors of young adult literature toward texts focusing on the experiences of "fat" girls, such as *The Summer of Jordi Perez (And the Best Burger in Los Angeles)* by Amy Spalding (2018), *Leah on the Offbeat* by Becky Albertalli (2018), and *Dumplin'* by Julie Murphy (2015).

Younger's) helps to situate *Wintergirls*, *Paperweight*, and *Get Well Soon* within a larger

trend of authors exploring not just the psychological but also the cultural conditions of

disordered eating behaviours in young adult texts.

Social pressures inform much of Anderson's *Wintergirls*, which follows the

eighteen-year-old narrator Lia Overbrook's struggles with anorexia and self-harm after

discovering that her best friend Cassie has died as a result of her bulimia. The novel's

prologue, "The Pact," demonstrates how efforts to meet the unrealistic beauty ideals of

which Bartky and Younger speak are normalized. Lia cuts the palm of her hand with a

knife while reciting, "I swear to be the skinniest girl in school, skinnier than you." Cassie

responds to Lia's act by grabbing the knife and slashing her own hand, stating, "I bet I'll

be skinnier than you." The passage ends with Lia pleading that they "be skinniest

together," to which Cassie replies, "Okay, but I'll be skinnier" (Anderson iii). With the

prologue, Anderson reifies the expectations of femininity in three distinct ways. First, the

title suggests an agreement, a code between people—who we learn are adolescent

women—that sanctions certain acts as necessary, no matter how severe. To break a pact

is to be deviant; to enter one implies that non-compliance risks social repercussions.

Second, the opening line is a direct example of the bodily manipulation necessary to

fulfill such an agreement. Lia and Cassie both literally cut into their skin, participating in

an open act of self-mutilation that signals a mutual acknowledgment that their respective

bodies are means to an ideological end. Finally, their verbal back-and-forth regarding the

quest to be skinniest not only constitutes the competitive nature of their agreement, but

also their desire to achieve the ideal physical condition emblematic of their position as

young women. By verbalizing such disciplinary customs, Cassie and Lia aspire to

produce bodies of a particular size and configuration. Thus it is through "the pact" that they illustrate how young women are led to affectively—both intellectually and physically—submit to the reproduction of beauty ideals.

Lia's body throughout the narrative remains a site of social expectations, with shame operating as a primary motivator. As Elspeth Probyn notes, shame "works over the body in certain ways. It does this experientially—the body feels very different in shame than in enjoyment—but it also reworks how we understand the body and its relation to other bodies or . . . to the social" (74). Lia routinely talks of bodily shame, embracing the winter season because it is easier to hide under "layers of long underwear and turtlenecks," "bulky sweatshirts," and "puffy down padding," just so others "don't look at the girl behind the curtain" (Anderson 188). She also faces professional shame when her ballet teacher grabs her waist, pinches "the extra inches" and tells her "to stop eating maple-walnut ice cream" (165). These experiences are coupled with familial shame, most pronouncedly when Lia cuts herself and her eight-year-old stepsister Emma finds her lying in a pool of blood. Lia asks for Emma while going in and out of consciousness on the way to the hospital, but her father refuses: "You will not be seeing Emma until you're better. Maybe that will give you some incentive. If you won't try for yourself, try for her" (229).

While it is reasonable for Lia's father and stepmother, Jennifer, to protect Emma from the trauma that Emma has endured, the ways in which they unconsciously shame Lia reframe her behaviour and isolate her. Lying in bed at her mother's house, Lia falls into severe mental distress:

> Thinking about Emma makes me want to pull out my stitches with a pair of pliers.
> They should burn me at the stake for what I did to her. Set me adrift on an ice
> floe. I wish there was a way to make her forget what she saw, to wipe that
> memory clean. There's not enough soap and bleach in the world. (239)

This passage is packed with corporeal imagery. First, Lia's shame manifests itself upon her body, keeping her awake and clouding her thoughts with visceral depictions of the violent punishments that she feels she deserves. Second, her shame reproduces her position as Other when she states that "they" should burn "me" or "set me adrift." The final statement of the passage is also violently coded, implying an endless and rough scrubbing action. This relationship between violence and shame constitutes Lia's self-harming behaviour.

What is considered most shameful, however, depends on the context of the act. Lia, attending a Japanimation matinee in a nearly vacant theater, heads to the empty back row and opens a box of razor blades to cut herself. Juxtaposed on the screen in front of her is a progressively violent altercation between "robot monsters destroying a village" and "fox-people who shoot fire from their paws," with the robots throwing trucks and tossing the fox-people into mountains, all while the theater speakers "vibrate thunderechoes" (60). As Lia describes taking the box of razors from the drugstore bag, opening the box and sliding the razors out—matching the escalation of violence on-screen—she contextualizes her rationale for cutting herself at the movies:

> When I moved to jenniferland, my father made one condition. A daughter who
> forgets how to eat, well that was bad, but it was just a phase and I was over it. But
> a daughter who opens her own skin bag, wanting to let her shell fall to the ground

so she can dance? That was just sick. No Cutting . . . Not under Daddy's roof.

Bottom line. Deal breaker. (61)

Lia calls attention to her body as a paradoxical figure, containing both a "shell" that she finds abhorrent and a person wishing to dance. In this respect, the "shell" Lia outlines acts as a metaphorical configuration of her skin and of her eating disorder, illustrating how attuned she is to her body. All she wants is to rid herself of her feeling of lack—signified for her as a young woman on a corporeal level—which results in the self-mutilation that works to whittle her body away literally piece by piece, calorie by calorie.

This desire to emerge from her proverbial shell reinforces Miskec and McGee's suggestion that cutting situates itself on a spectrum of self-expression: just as Lia's eating habits reflect her desire to be thin, her cutting stems from her wish to separate her sense of "self" from her body. Still, Lia recognizes that, for her dad, one act of self-harm is more shameful than the other: Lia's eating habits could improve, and a little patience will get her through this "phase," whereas the act of cutting is reprehensible. He believes that both acts are negative, deviating from normative standards, but one is considerably worse. Moreover, the movie theater setting in which Lia offers this contextualization signals the cultural irony underpinning the reproduction of the ideological stigma that surrounds self-harm. Her decision to cut is considered so shameful that it forces her into a theater, a notably dark and secluded setting that affords her the ability to act in isolation without social repercussions. Simultaneously, the Japanimation movie illustrates the normalization of violence that permeates Western culture, further reinforced by the presence of children in the theater. Two representations of violence occur here: one is

desired, even worthy of monetary compensation, while the other is repulsive, culturally stigmatized as unacceptably shameful.

While in *Wintergirls* the pressure from Lia's friends, teacher, and family push her toward anorexic behaviour, Haston's *Paperweight* details seventeen-year-old Stephanie "Stevie" Deslisle's experience with bulimia. The narrative, which follows Stevie's time at an eating disorder treatment facility in New Mexico, links her social conditioning directly to her mother, a lawyer with "a long, thin dancer's body and cherry lips that never faded" (Haston 21). Stevie's entire relationship with her mother is fraught with guilt, shame, and conflict. Her earliest memories, for example, are of her mother's law office; recalling the foil-wrapped truffles kept on the desk, Stevie notes: "Even as a little girl, I knew better than to take the candy from that dish. There were six truffles there, always six. Chocolate was for clients only, against the rules for little girls like me. So much was against the rules" (20–21). This observation not only highlights Stevie's negative relationship with food, but it also illustrates her awareness of the systemic categorization of female bodies. While the chocolates are for clients, Stevie makes it clear that they are not for girls like her. She also shows complete understanding, mixed with a tone of frustration, of the rules that govern women. It is in relation to these rules that Stevie develops her unique set of disciplinary practices by which to judge her success not only as a daughter but as a female. This is why she is so hard on herself when her mother walks out on the family: "I convinced myself that maybe when I stepped into the hallway she'd be back. Maybe if I washed my hair just right or made my legs the kind of smooth you see in magazines. Maybe if I could mold myself into the perfect girl, the kind of girl who didn't sneak chocolates or beg for sugary cereal. Maybe then" (40). Although

Stevie is the child in this relationship, she assumes responsibility for her mother's actions by citing her body as her mom's reason for leaving. She openly compares herself to the idealistic standards not only of being a daughter—one who listens and does not steal truffles—but also of feminine beauty. Given the examples set by her mother and the models shown in magazines, Stevie comes to view her body as inherently lacking and thus requiring external maintenance to receive acceptance. She does not feel that she deserves her mother's love simply because she is her daughter; rather, her sense of love and acceptance is intrinsically linked to her ability to integrate into the social frameworks that construct feminine ideals.

While Lia oscillates through hospital visits, Stevie begins her story on the first day of her hospitalization—twenty-seven days before the anniversary of her brother Josh's accidental death—remaining there until the narrative culminates. Stevie feels responsible for Josh's death, which, while not the cause of her bulimic behaviour, accelerates its intensity. On her first day of treatment, Stevie demonstrates her internalization of society's beauty ideals by memorizing the facility's eating schedule. Entering the cafeteria during "evening snack," she promptly refuses her food while examining the adolescent women around her. Stevie defines one patient by how quickly she eats, certain she has "too much flesh to be an anorexic"; she marks another girl for her feeding tube, but Stevie feels that the girl's bony shoulders are like "exquisite carved marble"; while the final patient she notices at her table is "the least worthy," "chunky," "desperate," and "not strong enough" to resist the demands of hunger (17–18). Her language is noticeably laced with the tension between idealized standards of femininity and the positionality of the characters, whom Stevie organizes according to how their

bodies reflect their commitment to feminine ideals. She evaluates the worthiness of others based on how much flesh is on their bodies, deeming any physique containing noticeable weight between bone and skin as a reflection of weakness. Such language not only exemplifies the degree of Stevie's ideological submission, it also illustrates her awareness of the disciplinary practices of others, as she believes that any weight higher than her own reflects a failure to regulate one's hunger.

The variable that situates itself most prominently between Stevie and her relationships with femininity and food is, once again, shame. One night, when she and some other girls sneak out of the center, the chlorinated smell of a swimming pool jogs her memory:

> The chemicals sting the inside of my nose and remind me of a million things at once: me at six, standing hunched in a department store dressing room in a two-piece that didn't quite fit while mother made a clicking sound with her tongue. Me at eleven, wearing a one-piece to the community pool . . . watching the sunlight stream between other girls' thighs. Me at twelve, me at fourteen, and now, me at seventeen: It doesn't matter. The feeling is always the same. (220)

As Stevie reminisces, her bathing suit covering more of her body with each memory, she roots her feelings of shame as far back as early childhood. Whether in response to her mother's tongue-clicking or the comparisons to the slenderness of other girls' thighs, Stevie's shame is located in her body through the normalizing force of others' perception of her. Even Josh, who Stevie boasts loves and cares for her, contributes to normalizing her bodily shame. During one particularly heated exchange, he holds nothing back: "You look like shit, by the way. Everybody thinks so and Dad's too scared to say it. This whole

food thing—it's selfish and crazy and you look like . . . shit" (188). In response to Stevie's physical condition he repeatedly chastises her and her choices, shaming her incessantly for selfishly not taking care of herself. Josh—a male—others Stevie not just in relation to himself or to their father (another male), but literally to "everybody." This exchange both reinforces the normative standards that Stevie exhaustingly attempts to achieve and reproduces the patriarchal sense of femininity as lacking in relation to masculinity. Ultimately, Josh's words render Stevie infantile: "I was a baby, reduced to a few simple, meaningless expressions" (188).

Sixteen-year-old Anna Bloom in Halpern's *Get Well Soon* is equally accustomed to such socializing pressures, as questions of femininity inform much of her thoughts and actions. After her parents place her in a treatment center called Lakeland for her depression and anxiety, Anna begins interacting with several new peers who embody a variety of psychological states, and she must learn a new set of rules that govern her daily practices. Notably, unlike Lia and Stevie, Anna does not experience extreme forms of disordered eating such as anorexia or bulimia, but her anxiety is inextricably linked to her body, her weight, and others' perceptions of both. However, this nuance in *Get Well Soon* still factors into Anna's disciplinary practices, as her process of socialization is much like those of the other two protagonists. The text itself progresses through a collection of letters that Anna intends to send to her friend, Tracy, so that she does not have to "look back and see how pathetic I once was" (Halpern 1). On the first page of the narrative Anna declares, "I will write letters and I won't feel so bad. I won't feel so bad that I'm depressed. I won't feel so bad that I'm fat" (1). We are introduced here to an important marker of Anna's positionality: she locates for Tracy the convergence of affect (the way

she feels), idealized norms (her weight), and psychology (her depression). Together, these topics form the basis of Anna's narration and the focus of her stay at Lakeland.

The intersection of these subjects through Anna's body, however, is hardly their only level of convergence, as they inform her actions as well. She explains to Tracy that she will not hide where she is since Tracy will soon call her house and Anna's mom will explain everything—unless, of course, her mom lies. The idea of her mother lying invokes immediate panic: "Shit. Did she tell you I went to a fat farm? I'll be pissed if that's what she's telling people. I'd rather be crazy than fat any day" (3). Anna's psyche begins to unravel in these first few sentences. Essential to her fear is the specific idea that Tracy, a female friend, will hear this false news of Anna's attending a "fat farm." This comment not only reveals her concern with others' perceptions of her body, it also highlights a social pathology that she employs to position herself within a hierarchy. In relation to being "fat," Anna deems being "crazy" acceptable. What does not occur to her, though, is that the social, cultural, and historical contexts that define her as overweight are the same contextual frameworks that define what is deemed crazy.[47] Regardless, Anna's affective responses highlight an underlying spectrum of experience: in her mind, she feels that it is better to be crazy than fat. Influencing these emotions is the idea of attending a "fat farm," a concept popularized in the twenty-first century by shows such as *Fat Camp*, a 2006 MTV documentary series, or *The Biggest Loser*, a nationally broadcast television show that turns extreme weight-loss efforts into a literal

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[47] See Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* for an analysis of how "madness" as a concept develops through particular historical and cultural contexts.

social competition. These references to historically marked culture contribute to Anna's social anxiety over her weight.

Such anxiety is further fueled, of course, by the politics of shame. After Anna arrives at Lakeland already ashamed of her body, her doctor—to whom she refers as "Dr. Asshole"—tells her during their initial meeting to stop "being such a baby" and that she could "stand to lose a few pounds," knocking her down to the "rock bottom of the humiliation ladder" (19). This exchange leads to further shame when she cries during a group therapy session, symbolizing for Anna that showing her feelings even when one is meant to talk about them is a bad thing. She also feels shame while she eats. During one lunchbreak she orders the same meal as Justin, a guy who becomes Anna's first crush in a long time. This decision makes her worry that if she eats the same meal as a guy then the other patients will look at her and think, "No wonder she looks like that" (40). Moreover, Anna is even ashamed of her feelings for Justin and refrains from telling anyone about them, worried that she will be seen as "some crushing dork" (48). Notably, of the examples offered thus far, and of the vast majority within all three narratives, Anna's shame is explicitly linked to men and their perceptions of her body. Staying at Lakeland uncovers a nexus of shame that positions Anna's perception of her body, her eating habits, her emotions, and her psychology all in relation to the men in her life. Unsurprisingly, Anna views herself as less than or lacking in every instance, illustrating the pervasive nature of the patriarchal ideology that shapes her experiences as a young woman.

What Anna's shame does not do is to stop her from making pointed observations regarding gendered expectations. For example, she immediately calls attention to the fact

that her doctor at Lakeland is male: "It's so weird that they just hook me up with some random guy shrink and I'm expected to be OK with that. What if I don't want to tell him anything?" (33). Considering the distress that he instigates during their first encounter, as well as the fact that her shame appears to be tied to the perceptions of men, it is not surprising that Anna finds it difficult to open up to him about her thoughts and feelings. Later, when considering whether or not a girl in her therapy group could beat her up, she notes the irony of girls in high school "learning self-defense in gym class" while the boys "were in a different room learning wrestling" (34). Here, Anna makes a subtle but pertinent observation about the social conditioning of adolescents, and how girls are taught to be defensive while boys are taught to be aggressive. Questions of this nature eventually lead to a heated discussion between Anna and Justin about unrealistic gendered expectations. Justin, pointing to the Victoria's Secret models on TV, asks, "How's anybody supposed to be compared to that?" to which Anna responds, "*Why* is anybody supposed to be compared to that?" (129; orig. emphasis). These are two equally important but separate questions worthy of closer examination. Unfortunately, both remain unresolved in the text.

After engaging in a page's worth of miscommunication about the kinds of bodies that Justin finds attractive, he makes a comment about being with only one other girl before Lakeland—a girl whose body type is similar to Anna's— which immediately takes precedence in Anna's mind, effectively ending the conversation and turning the narration to her excitement over the "Boy of My Dreams" (130). Thus, not only do the questions of gendered expectations remain unresolved, but the text also reinforces the socializing processes by which young women are conditioned when Anna's feminist inquiries

dissolve upon hearing that a boy might find her attractive. Moreover, Anna herself aids in this reinforcement when she refers to the Victoria's Secret models as "absurd," "gross," "whores," "skanks," and "sluts," perpetuating the notion that those women should be ashamed of their bodies as well (124–29). As all three of the texts examined here make clear, under the twenty-first-century socializing frameworks through/by which Lia, Stevie, and Anna are conditioned, young women are taught to accommodate themselves to men not only by scrutinizing their own bodies, thoughts, and actions, but also those of other women.

Disciplinary Practices

The scrutiny to which young women are subjected manifests itself through the observance of several disciplinary practices and behaviours. Social pressures force women to view their bodies as lacking and, in turn, to deploy certain practices to make up for their bodies' insufficiencies. In *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture*, and the Body, Susan Bordo maintains that "Through the exacting and normalizing disciplines of diet, make-up, and dress—central organizing principles of time and space in the day of many women—[women] are rendered less socially oriented and more centripetally focused on self-modification" (166). On the one hand, some of these practices are explicit: dieting or rigid eating habits, wearing particular clothes, applying make-up, keeping up hairstyles, or developing comprehensive exercise regimens. In fact, Bartky notes, while men and women both work out, there are exercise classes specifically for women that are "designed not to firm or reduce the body's size overall, but to resculpture its various parts on the current model" (134). Again, women are taught self-maintenance over self-acceptance. On the other hand, some practices are milder: "covering parts of the body," "frequently checking mirrors," "picking your skin," or "adopting body positions

to hide parts of yourself" (Frost 12). Even women's facial expressions are under scrutiny for possibly counteracting their disciplinary habits. As Bartky observes, "If women are unable to suppress strong emotions, they can at least learn to inhibit the tendency of the face to register them" (134). In their extreme form, Bordo concludes, "the practices of femininity may lead us to utter demoralization, debilitation, and death" (166). Such an analysis reinforces how novels about disordered eating behaviours in young women are useful for investigating contemporary disciplinary practices. Their plots tend to explore the various ways that young women attempt to embody their ideological expectations, particularly in the extreme forms that either threaten or directly involve a character's death.

Lia's awareness of these disciplinary practices is ingrained in her psyche long before adolescence. She recalls being eleven and watching her friend Cassie puke on purpose during a Labor Day party "so she wouldn't get fat" (Anderson 147). Cassie's vomiting initially confuses Lia, until Cassie explains her reasoning: "Buried in our sleeping bags later, she told me that every girl in her cabin at drama camp puked. When I asked why, she said it was because they were all fat-fat-fatties and something had to be done. Camp taught Cassie way more than school" (147). Here Lia offers valuable insight into the process of ideological submission and reproduction, starting with the sense that puking as a practice is a necessary aspect of girlhood: all girls do it. Lia's initial naïveté about this practice also illustrates that it is largely a learned behaviour. Further, Cassie's answer as to why this practice must occur highlights two strands of ideological reproduction. First, the girls call each other "fat-fat-fatties," forming an identifiable linguistic position. Second, stating that "something had to be done" about the people in

that position others them. Whether at a Labor Day party or at camp, the process of social

conditioning eventually guides both Cassie and Lia toward adhering to the disciplinary

practices in which young women participate every day. Moreover, as she gets older, Lia

uses her computer to read blogs and join chat rooms where other young women

encourage disordered eating behaviours such as dieting, fasting, and fervent exercise.

Notably, Karlin argues, "The novel rejects this online community, suggesting that,

instead of allowing for connection, it represents a conglomeration of lonely individuals"

(78). This explanation precisely captures the nature of disciplinary practices: acts that,

through the illusion of community, manifest themselves uniquely at the individual level;

social ideals enacted through single bodies.

Anderson often locates Lia's disciplinary practices through the linguistic structure

of her thoughts. Sometimes Lia crosses out her desires as they arise, actively producing

and resisting the ideological tenets of her social conditioning. For example, she

demonstrates her mental discipline early in the narrative when her stepmother asks if she

will eat a muffin, responding: "~~Because I can't let myself want them~~ because I don't need

a muffin (410 [calories]), I don't want an orange (75) or toast (87), and waffles (180)

make me gag" (5). This passage illustrates how aware Lia is of both her eating habits and

feminine ideals. The stricken phrase reflects the initial thought entering Lia's mind: the

desire for food that she feels she should not possess. Instead, Lia resists her thoughts by

changing the language from "I can't let myself" to "I don't want," taking control of her

social conditioning while reinforcing the disciplinary practice that such conditioning

encourages. Further shaping Lia's resistance are the calorie counts made visible in the

parenthetical number after each food item.[48] Bordo argues that the tension between desire

and resistance comes from the pathologies of femininity that, paradoxically, protest and

reinforce the cultural conditions that shape them (177). When young women with

anorexia take control of their diets, they often feel a sense of autonomous power; yet this

power is illusory, as the efforts to control their eating are initiated to meet external

standards and conditions, revealing the tragically self-defeating nature of this protest.

Stevie shares Lia's commitment to number crunching, as Haston offers readers

another depiction of the compulsive nature of disordered eating behaviour. During her

first night of treatment, Stevie contemplates her refusal to eat throughout the day: "The

untouched calories etched in my consciousness like complex equations. I've done the

math and know approximately how much weight I'll have to lose" (Haston 17). While

Stevie does not detail the numbers as Lia does, the disciplinary practice of calorie-

counting shapes her behaviour, similarly situating her historically. Stevie refers to

calories as "complex equations" that are "etched into [her] consciousness" and allows

herself a certain number of calories per day. This constant attendance to her intrusive

food-related thoughts requires such discipline, in fact, that only sleep offers a break. As

Stevie explains, "For girls like us, escape from consciousness is our only reprieve" (84).

When Stevie is conscious, her two methods of post-meal discipline are throwing

up and exercise. Describing an early effort to purge herself, she details the act's initial

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[48] Historically, the Fair Packaging and Labeling Act requiring that "all 'consumer commodities' be labeled
to disclose net contents" was not passed until 1967, and the Nutritional Labeling and Education Act was
passed in 1990; both provide the framework for outlining the details of food production (Federal Trade
Commission). While access to such nutritional information is a recent phenomenon, it is also an evolving
one. The nutritional value of food is not inherently stable. The production of food changes as technology
advances, different ingredients are utilized, or new experimental combinations are marketed, requiring
constant monitoring by those who "count calories" as Lia does.

difficulty: "My thick tongue kept obstructing my index finger. My body prayed, Please, girl, please. Don't. But it didn't take long for my body to submit to my will. With deft fingers, I pulled the strings, commanding my body to empty" (68). The interaction between her tongue and finger here are symbolic of the desire/resistance tension that Bordo locates in disordered eating behaviour. Even Stevie's body develops its own awareness, represented in italics, that resists Stevie's desire to vomit, furthering this symbolism. Moreover, similarly to Lia's sense of linguistic control, Stevie envisions "pulling the strings" in command of her body and forcing it to submit to her will. Such puppet imagery not only gives her a sense of power; it also reinforces the distinction between her desire and her body, echoing Lia's descriptions of slipping out of her "skin bag." Stevie not only finds this event "satisfying," her description of the incident is fraught with religious imagery. The vomit itself forms a "grassy altar" from which she crawls away, flipping onto her back in "a moment of peace" and feeling "holy" as she extends her arms against the earth to make "an angel in the grass" (68). The divine essence of this experience calls attention to the relationship between heavenly ideals and the practices enacted to ascend to such perfection. For Stevie, disciplining herself to throw up after each meal becomes more than a religious experience—it draws her body closer to heavenly perfection.

Even Stevie's other method of disciplining her body—working out—carries religious connotations. She exercises to "atone" for eating even salad, and if she misses any workouts, she assigns herself "triple the reps" before going to bed in hopes of forgiving herself for the sins of her day (43). Most importantly, however, Stevie's obsessive exercising also figures her body as a site of desire and resistance. During

"reflection time" with her therapist, Anna, Stevie describes the literal internalization of her exercise regimen: "I'll have to be more careful now that [Anna's] here. If staff catch you exercising, they chart it and keep you inside the rest of the day. But the committed among the committed always find a way. I am clenching and releasing every muscle in my body, from my shoulders to my calves. Secret penance" (35). Not only is Stevie positioned here within an observational hierarchy that normalizes her comparison to external metrics, but such dedication to exercise also reflects her level of submission to feminine ideals. Even during "reflection time," a period of rest in her most private moments, Stevie desires to work and maneuver her body toward weight loss. This act is not only a rebellion against the rules of her treatment center, but also a reinforcement of her social conditioning—a penance for having eaten at all. Examples of this nature demonstrate the extreme actions that some young women are willing to engage in to meet the external pressures they encounter. With every thought and movement, Stevie, like many other young women in her position, scrutinizes her body under the guise of disciplinary practice, control, and commitment to self-modification.

Anna's disciplinary practices in *Get Well Soon* do not reach the extreme forms of Lia's or Stevie's, but the novel offers a nuanced perspective of the milder practices enacted by many young women. These practices are still mechanisms for reinforcing traditional feminine ideals, and, for Anna, they often relate to the scatalogical topics of "farting" or "pooping." While it is no secret that women, in fact, do both, they trigger Anna's anxiety in a pronounced manner: "Sometimes I worry that my stomach will make a grumbly noise, and some jerk guy will say something like, 'Looks like it's time for your ten o'clock feeding, Fat Ass.' I even start thinking about what would happen if . . . I fart

in class . . . I would be mortified" (Halpern 4–5). Anna clearly strikes a defensive posture

here in relation to her body. She is ashamed of its size, what it symbolizes, and of what it

could do to embarrass her. More importantly, her anxiety is not simply linked to the idea

of farting but to the idea of farting in front of a guy. It is the second half of that scenario

that truly scares Anna into panic attacks that "are the reasons why [she's] never in class

anymore" (5). She carries this anxiety into Lakeland: "As long as I'm left alone in my

room, then there's not much fear of pooping or farting. God, I sound gross. Of course

those aren't my only fears, but if no one's around to hear (or smell!) then it's one less

thing to worry about" (24–25).

Aside from her meta-interjections, Anna clearly wishes to fit in with her peers,

and humor is the key to achieving this goal. During a group session Anna's chair makes a

ripping sound when she sits in it, and she immediately seeks validation: "I looked around

to see if anyone else thought it was funny. No one did. I glanced up at a few people, but

no one looked at me. I must have really looked like ass . . . I wonder if they thought I was

crazy" (26). Anna considers her body here to be an obstacle that hinders her attempts at

humor. She does not consider the possibility that the incident may not have been funny or

that maybe nobody heard the rip. Instead, she immediately begins to self-deprecate. This

leads her straight into a discourse of othering herself, as she worries about both her

weight *and* being considered crazy. While this may not appear as a regular disciplinary

practice, it informs Anna's commitment to validation. Her hyper-observance of her body

and the space that it occupies renders all of her actions, even those as minor as sitting in a

chair, as either helping or hindering her pursuit of acceptance. She perceives all acts as if

they could, and likely will, prove detrimental to her efforts to fit in with her peers.

Get Well Soon's most symbolic examination of disciplinary practices occurs during dinner on Anna's fifth day of treatment. Talking and laughing with some of the boy patients, she feels good that they include her in their conversation, cuing her "in on a bunch of rules and tricks of the mental hospital" (41). Lakeland thus reflects a microcosm of the external world and the ideology that fuels the social pressures facing young women. Anna, a young woman, is forced from the onset to merge herself into a male-dominated space. She does this through cracking jokes, laughing at the boys' humor, and listening when they speak. To survive Lakeland, there is an unwritten code of conduct among the patients, and the boys have access to this code while the girls do not. This brief exchange is amplified further after Anna lists a few of the unwritten rules. According to the boys, there are two hours each day when the patients outnumber the staff, which is the best time to "mess around." But, as Anna notes, "I'm not sure if 'mess around' meant goof off or something else. Seeing as I was the only female at the table, I didn't want to ask" (42). The mechanics of disciplinary practices reveal themselves here. Not only are the unofficial rules of the center observed by males, but they are also *written* by males, and females are isolated from this process. Feeling outnumbered, Anna decides not to get clarification because it is safer for her to avoid topics related to sex, especially in a scenario in which the "benefit" of those two hours is the absence of adult supervision. She has been conditioned to act in accordance with the men around her and therefore chooses her words and actions in careful consideration of the context and space that she inhabits. This brief passage connects the expectations that figure young women's subjectivity within these social, cultural, and historical contexts, and the efforts that they must make to meet such expectations.

Therapeutic Treatment as a Disciplinary Practice

Ultimately, although these texts generatively open spaces of critical investigation into the social systems that shape femininity as well as the disciplinary practices that enforce those ideals, the deployment of therapeutic treatment effectively undermines such an initiative. That is to say, therapeutic treatment within these texts paradoxically acts as a site of conflict against and restoration of the dominant ideology by functioning as a disciplinary practice. Cloud argues that the mobilization of therapeutic discourse is largely responsible for the shift, particularly in US culture, from advocating for social change to seeking personal development. While many critics applaud clinical frameworks that favor a "near-exclusive emphasis on individual initiative and personal responsibility," Cloud insists on "acknowledging the collective and structural features of an unequal social reality in which individuals are embedded and out of which our personal experience, in large part, derives" (xv). In these terms, Cloud reads therapy not only as a historical practice but also as a set of politically motivated initiatives. Referring to therapeutic practices as "a set of political and cultural discourses that have adopted psychotherapy's lexicon," Cloud contends that the function of such discourses "is to encourage audiences to focus on themselves and the elaboration of their private lives rather than to address and attempt to reform systems of social power in which they are embedded" (xvi). The productive citizenship model encouraged within these texts is grounded by this emphasis on private development over public reform, along with clear displays of motivation and a propensity for self-reliant individuality. Although these texts acknowledge the social mechanisms that shape young women's experiences with disordered eating behaviours, they simultaneously reinforce those mechanisms through a therapeutic treatment that burdens individuals with the management of their illnesses, the

regulation of their bodies, and the adjustment of their subjectivities in relation to the social forces that pathologize their existence. Just as young women engage in the physical labor of disciplinary practice by monitoring their diet, wearing makeup, and watching their posture, so too must they participate in the affective labor of therapeutic treatments suggesting that their efforts to embody social ideals are not the norm but a psychological state that requires conscious work to correct.

Considering temporality is a useful tool for reading therapy as a disciplinary practice. Much like putting on makeup or attending to one's dress or posture, therapeutic treatment requires consistent (sometimes daily) attention, making personal choices while simultaneously seeking external validation. Young women attending therapy for disordered eating behaviours then become what Bartky refers to as "self-policing [subjects]," and such "self-surveillance is a form of obedience to the patriarchy" (149), reinforcing the central pressures that drives them to such behaviour in the first place. For Lia in *Wintergirls*, an eventual overdose of sleeping pills triggers her will to live and submission to clinical treatment. The final pages of the novel detail tidbits of this experience—how Lia stops lying to the nurses and secretly exercising at midnight, how she no longer dumps her food when others are turned away—while she continually repeats the mantra "*Food is life*" (Anderson 275; orig. emphasis). In fact, much of Lia's ending narration details a positive discursive shift in her relationship to food. Although caloric numbers still occasionally jump out at her, she asks for more food to eat. Aesthetically speaking, stricken phrases are entirely absent once Lia is admitted to New Seasons, suggesting that her psychic struggle is waning with treatment. Lia's third visit to New Seasons may be "the longest one yet, a marathon, not a sprint to the exit," but as her

therapist, Dr. Parker, makes clear to her, "You haven't cut yourself since you got here. You're talking. You're eating. You're blooming" (274–76). Lia clearly demonstrates positive growth under therapeutic treatment, and the optimism associated with such growth is described primarily through her personal choices. But Lia's treatment is not a band-aid solution or a one-off experience. Therapy is something that must be endured over long periods of time, perhaps for the rest of her life.

Lia's narrative progress culminates in a fashion identical to that of its beginning: with a comparison to Cassie. "We leaned on each other," she explains, "lost in the dark and wandering in endless circles. She got too tired and went to sleep. Somehow, I dragged myself out of the dark and asked for help" (277). Evident in this narration is Cassie's failing on an individual level, as she never found a way to seek help. Conversely, while it took a long time and created much trauma, Lia positions herself as strong in relation to Cassie's weakness, almost priding herself on having the initiative to seek help and improve her well-being. This depiction of Lia's development is the crux of the therapeutic model that Cloud argues "can admit to the existence of suffering in modern society without having to transform the society publicly or structurally" (xvii). By calling attention to the mobilization of therapeutic practices, I am not suggesting that seeking clinical treatment is negative or shameful. I find therapy a useful, generative aid for negotiating disordered eating behaviours, just as Lia comes to negotiate her relationship with food. However, Lia's personal development—her "blooming"—is regulated precisely at the individual level, carrying the subtle but insidious implication that her disordered eating behaviour is the result of her inability to correctly situate herself within hegemonic social systems. Moreover, her motivation and individual efforts

to overcome such behaviour signal her embodying productive citizenship to the fullest extent. Lia accepts the social pressures in her life as a private matter to solve and she demonstrates a desire to solve it, ending the novel with a hopeful tone and confirming productive citizenship as the desired model of young adulthood for young women like Lia. *Wintergirls* offers a critical examination of the problematic constructions of femininity, but the deployment of therapeutic treatment as a disciplinary practice reinforces the patriarchal suggestion that women's bodies and minds must be regulated to compensate for their inherent lack.

Temporality is also important for Stevie's treatment in *Paperweight*. On the anniversary of her brother's death, she and her therapist, Anna, have a heart-to-heart about how this event is an opportunity for Stevie to honor Josh's death by choosing to live. Although Anna acknowledges that "it will take time to heal," she believes that human beings are "oriented toward health" (Haston 284). When Stevie asks what she means, Anna replies, "Meaning, your body wants to heal. Your mind wants to heal. If you can get to a place where you let your mind and body do what they want to do, you will start to move towards health" (284). There are notably two ways of reading this answer. First, this is tremendously helpful advice for Stevie, whose corporeal reality during their conversation is one of pain and struggle. So, rather than willing her body to do as she commands, Stevie is advised to let go of the strings that she desperately feels she needs to control. However, a second reading of this passage suggests that Stevie's body and mind are, in their current state, less than or lacking in significant ways, and she should try to move both toward a healthier foundation. This healthier position, of course, is ambiguously defined, producing a model of development in which Stevie is once again

positioning her body and mind external to and toward loose, abstract ideals. Such a suggestion forces her to admit to an overall deficiency while reinforcing the requirement that she attempt to transcend her natural state.

This final exchange of the novel culminates in her therapist's statement that Stevie appears to have reached a point of acceptance: "Acceptance of the fact that your brother is dead. Acceptance of your eating disorder, of needing to be in this place for a little while. Acceptance doesn't mean you like something, doesn't mean you're comfortable with it. But it does mean you acknowledge it for what it is" (286). Unfortunately, Stevie's acknowledgment of her eating disorder is left incomplete under this therapeutic model. Her disorder does play an essential role in how she thinks and acts in the world, but the compulsive nature of the behaviour itself is more of an organizing principle than anything else. Stevie cannot help the shape or form of her thoughts, but the content of those thoughts remains uninterrogated within the text. Like Lia, Stevie undergoes a shift in her thinking from body-image to body-health. However, Stevie's learning to manage her behaviour—echoing her therapist's earlier comment that she "can't fix" Stevie's experiences but that she can help her manage the guilt (191)—is a reinforcement of therapy as a disciplinary practice. It implies that her current physical and mental condition is a result of her failure to manage her disorder and act according to social norms. Similarly, the novel ends with an optimistic tone, implying that Stevie's thoughts and actions are finally acceptable to those around her. Her acknowledgement (and acceptance) of life "for what it is" affirms the novel's suggesting that therapy is enough, while the status quo of Stevie's broader social environment remains unchallenged.

Anna's experience of treatment in *Get Well Soon* reflects much of Stevie's development. For all the work that this novel does to interrogate social pressures, those criticisms remain unresolved in favor of therapeutic success. Anna sees "treatment" as a sickly word, but she comes to realize that her experiences at Lakeland have given her a new perspective on life. During her stay, she purposely gets into trouble so that she can go to the "quiet room" to sing loudly; she befriends people she never would have talked to before, mostly due to her insecurities; and she crushes on a boy, truly believing that he likes her in return, which leads to her kissing him before she leaves treatment. Anna is beginning to make active choices in her life. She sits with these experiences and wonders: "Maybe I am fixed" (Halpern 165). It is at this point that the therapeutic treatment underpinning Anna's experiences, her guidance from therapists and professionals, absolves the patriarchal ideology from any real responsibility. Yes, the text raises many questions about what produces such ideology, but by emphasizing "successful" therapeutic treatment it demonstrates how individual disciplinary practices become normalized.

For Anna, this normalization eventually comforts her during treatment. Enjoying her time making friends, discovering a new sense of self, she begins to feel accepted in her environment, which raises new questions: "I can see a lot of us are 'better' . . . but will this apply in the real world? . . . Maybe I'd be better off living here forever" (145). Participating in treatment allows Anna to see how others are improving, but she worries that those improvements will not help or continue once they reenter the outside world. Unfortunately, she is partially correct. Anna's comfort at Lakeland is very real, but successful therapeutic treatment is a long-term process that does not solve personal

behaviours, let alone social pressures, in a few weeks. Anna's discovery of what

therapeutic practices work for her gives her a sense of peace, and her feeling that she may

be better off living at Lakeland forever is astute precisely because she would then be

participating in daily therapeutic practice. Thus, Anna's desire to stay in therapy and

continue her personal development echoes the novels in their encouragement of

productive citizenship. Like Lia and Stevie, Anna's growth culminates with her accepting

personal responsibility over life, acting positively and motivated, and desiring to attend

therapy regularly. *Get Well Soon* may not explicitly articulate that therapy is necessary

for healthy living, but heavily implies that this is the case.[49]

By examining how Lia, Stevie, and Anna respectively show marked development

in *Wintergirls*, *Paperweight*, and *Get Well Soon*, we see that for some young women,

therapeutic treatment begins to function as a contemporary disciplinary practice of

femininity. As it stands, therapeutic treatment certainly has value, particularly for its

ability to facilitate an open dialogue about deeply personal subjects, but it alone cannot

correct the pervasive disciplinary practices that girls are expected to follow. Whether

expressed through Anna's metaphorically charged commentary about guys knowing

Lakeland's rules, or through Stevie's discovery of the recovery slogan "Bite Me, Ed"—

turning the common abbreviation for "eating disorder" into a man's name (Haston 58)—

the social pressures on the young women in these texts are rendered overt. To combat

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[49] In 2012, Halpern published a sequel to *Get Well Soon* titled *Have a Nice Day*, which continues Anna's reflections on her weight and her experiences with an outpatient therapy group, though these threads are not as central to the narrative as they are in *Get Well Soon*. For that reason, I've chosen to focus specifically on the latter in this chapter. Still, it is worth noting that in *Have a Nice Day* Halpern further reinforces the notion that therapeutic treatment is necessary to both Anna's healthy living and her self-image. For example, following a positive group session, she states that "There was more to me than crazy and depressed. Even if I did need a therapy group to prove it" (186).

these expectations, they must continue to perform maintenance on their bodies and minds. They subject themselves to a variety of disciplinary acts to exert control, even if such control is illusory. With these efforts in mind, therapeutic treatments function as the foremost useful practices for both resisting and perpetuating the normalization of feminine ideals. And although such treatments give the impression of being beneficial, and in some ways they do deliver, I read therapeutic practices in these texts as imposing on young women the same societal pressures to conform to normative standards that these treatments purport to counter. By telling young women that they are acceptable as they are while simultaneously telling them to develop healthier habits, diets, and thoughts, therapists and therapy groups become precisely that which they seek to help their clients address: external agents to whom these young women look for validation.

The privileged side of the healthy/sick binary implies that there is a standard of "health" that is achievable through certain acts, and by acknowledging that disordered eating behaviours and body image are socially conditioned, these texts weave therapeutic treatment into the social conditioning process. On the surface, this reinforces the patriarchal suggestion that women's bodies and minds are deficient, but the more insidious implication is that therapeutic treatment is self-justifying. When a young woman feels that she is physically or mentally incapable of meeting certain social expectations, she is recommended therapy to help her reach healthier states. By partaking in such treatment she admits, on some level, that this insufficiency is true. Going to therapy validates the personal desire to improve. Thus therapeutic treatment, in this manner, functions paradoxically as both an aid against the prevailing ideology and a reinforcement of it. The optimistic tone with which these three narratives end validates

therapeutic treatment as a mechanism for improved living; it signals how important and beneficial it is for young women to embody productive citizenship. To that end, attending therapy becomes just one more disciplinary practice in which young women must participate if they are to live healthily in a patriarchal world.

Chapter 3 : Adolescent Mental Distress and the Politics of Masculine Silence

> The first act of violence that patriarchy demands of
> males is not violence toward women. Instead
> patriarchy demands all males that they engage in acts
> of psychic self-mutilation, that they kill off the
> emotional parts of themselves.
> bell hooks, *The Will to Change* (2004)

Much like adolescent girls, adolescent boys in the twenty-first century are also caught in a network of gendered expectations that inform their responses to mental distress. Unlike the female protagonists I discussed in the previous chapter, however, who are swiftly encouraged into therapeutic treatments upon first signs of distress, adolescent boys are rarely presented with therapeutic support unless they face extreme, life-threatening circumstances. Instead, young men are encouraged to treat their mental distress by internalizing it and displaying warrior-like stoicism. They must dispel any semblance of weakness or fragility to demonstrate their masculinity through dominance and control, particularly in the United States, where the concept of masculinity has been entangled with military imperialism since the turn of the twentieth century.[50] As a result of this conditioning, adolescent boys' experiences with mental distress are particularly isolating because they are rarely encouraged to discuss their difficulties, emotions, or

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[50] As Aaron Belkin argues in *Bring Me Men: Military Masculinity and the Benign Façade of American Empire 1898-2001* (2012), "While reverence for American warriors is a longstanding tradition, military masculinity did not emerge as a dominant paradigm until the end of the nineteenth century, when imperialists advocated American involvement in the 1898 war against Spain as an opportunity to remedy the nation's feminization. That war marked a turning point in how soldiers and soldiering were represented in popular culture such as literature for juvenile audiences. Before the turn of the twentieth century, magazines and books written for juvenile audiences did not epitomize soldiering as the most privileged demonstration of masculinity. After the Spanish-American War, however, the literature changed, as authors began representing soldiering as paradigmatic of what it meant to be a real man" (7).

traumas. And even when they are encouraged to talk about their distress, many adolescent boys find it difficult to open up about their experiences due to how engrained such conditioning is upon their psyche. Effectively, while adolescent boys must model productive citizenship by accepting the privatization of their distress through individual treatments, just as young women are, such treatments frequently begin not with therapy but with silence.

In this chapter, I examine how adolescent boys in YA fiction published in the U.S. engage with their emotions and mental distress against a backdrop of socializing forces that pressure young boys into unfeeling and stoic bodies. I trace this discussion of masculinity and mental health through a small sample of contemporary YA novels published over a twenty-year period: Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999), Michael Thomas Ford's *Suicide Notes* (2008), and Adib Khorram's *Darius the Great Is Not Okay* (2018). I argue that the adolescent boy protagonists in these novels implicitly critique their masculine expectations by resisting the codes of silence that constitute this image of boyhood as such. Helping to mobilize this resistance are often secondary characters who go out of their way to listen attentively, enabling a pathway for boy protagonists to transform their internal affective monologues into external dialogues with others regarding their thoughts, feelings, and emotional psychology. As a result of these vulnerable experiences, the boy protagonists in these novels rebel against traditional masculine ideals by demonstrating how the capacities for both distress and expressiveness are interwoven into the fabric of their boyhood. Thus, while these boy protagonists struggle to handle their emotions and distress, they also

indicate an innate desire to talk about their feelings and a hyper-awareness of when, where, and with whom they can speak.

I add, however, that while these protagonists' respective rebellions against masculine silence are progressive in that they explicitly demonstrate healthier ways for young boys to connect to others and their mental health, these outcomes still carry broader implications worth considering. Namely, these novels' protagonists still fit within the model of productive citizenship. How these boys respond to their distress—be it through silence or therapeutic, open discussion—remains their responsibility as individuals. Just as the adolescent girls I discussed previously exist within particular social conditions that contribute to their mental distress, which they respond to through personal therapeutic treatments, the adolescent boys I examine in this chapter are essentially only shifting their responses from personal silence to personal medical or therapeutic treatments. In other words, the results of their respective rebellions—boys talking openly about their mental health—are designed to situate them in parallel with the young women who are already openly encouraged to go to therapy to discuss and work through their mental distress. These texts, therefore, are undoubtedly important in their advocating for boys to talk openly about their mental health. Still, they remain embedded within the current neoliberal expectation that addressing mental distress occurs at the individual, rather than systemic, level.

I focus on these specific texts for several reasons. The first is that Chbosky, Ford, and Khorram each pick up on exploring the intersections of masculinity and mental health initiated in texts such as *The Catcher in the Rye* and *The Planet of Junior Brown*, which I explored in chapter one. They do so, however, with adolescent boy protagonists

living closer to and within twenty-first-century contexts. Although there is a roughly

fifty-year gap between Salinger's and Chboksy's texts, for example, the socialization of

masculine ideals adolescent boys face in America largely remains unchanged. Second, all

three novels interrogate how father figures reinforce and perpetuate cultural norms of

masculinity in the rearing of their male children. Codifying each relationship with their

fathers are silences that each protagonist must overcome. The third reason is that these

texts also concern themselves with how masculine silence informs queer relationships,

which signals an additional layer of complexity through the intersections of masculinity,

queer identity, and mental health. And lastly, this selection of novels explicitly revolves

around adolescent grief. Chbosky's protagonist, Charlie, mourns his friend Michael and

his aunt Helen, his favourite person in the whole world. Ford's protagonist, Jeff,

experiences the death of a friend and fellow patient, Sadie, in the same psychiatric

hospital. And Khorram's Darius spends much of the novel mourning the grandfather he

hardly knows but who is about to die. Together, these three novels typify the emotionally

expressive adolescent boy and how such a figure complicates, critiques, and skews the

concept of silent, stoic masculinity rampant within the traditional social framing of

boyhood in contemporary U.S. culture. Contemporary literary scholarship increasingly

considers how stoic manhood and masculine pain are central to several canonical U.S.

texts and authors.[51] However, what largely remains absent from these discussions is how

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[51] Literary scholar Jennifer Travis notes that contemporary scholarship is finally beginning to "[reframe] the 'repressive hypothesis' of masculine emotion to propose that affect is not banished from the male experience but constitutive of some of its most characteristic manifestations: flight, competition, and bonding among them" (7-8). She begins her analysis in the nineteenth century with Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, whose Reverend Dimmesdale longs to purge his emotional distress in a chapter titled "The Interior of a Heart," and then continues to trace a discourse of masculine emotion and pain through

the nurturing of productive citizenship through masculine silence shapes adolescent boy subjectivity. I contend that by situating adolescent narratives within the expanding scholarship of masculine distress, we uncover both new forms of teenage rebellion and, perhaps more importantly, a deeper perspective of masculinity that does not start with men but with boys.

Before proceeding with my analysis of masculine silence and mental distress in these select YA novels, I begin by offering an overview of the conditions from which masculine silence and the internalization of distress that emerged within the U.S., particularly following the Second World War. The next section thus examines how the concept of masculinity has evolved and been studied by scholars in recent decades in the wake of several significant cultural moments, including, but not limited to, multiple wars, the women's liberation movement, the Civil Rights movement, the queer rights movement, and shifting local and global economies. After this examination, I interrogate how the YA texts upon which I focus consider the intersections of masculine silence, distress, and mental health, in the lives of literary adolescents, paying particular attention to how silence informs the queer relationships in these novels. In the chapter's final section, I analyze how the boy protagonists break through the silences around them by speaking out about their mental health, their distress, and their emotions. In so doing, they explicitly rebel against a damaging construction of masculinity that conditions boys into living as if their mental distress does not exist.

Stephen Crane, William Dean Howells, Willa Cather, Henry James, and Edith Wharton. Ryan Schneider picks up these threads in W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, followed by Thomas Strychacz in Ernest Hemingway, and Stephen Davenport in Jack Kerouac. See also Susan Brook, Jon Robert Adams, and the collections *Sentimental Men* (1999), edited by Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler, and *Boys Don't Cry?* (2002), edited by Milette Shamir and Jennifer Travis.

Shaping Masculine Silence

Gender Theory scholars have long regarded both masculinity and femininity as

socially constructed and historically contingent.[52] The observation that what constitutes

gender does not arise from our biology as much as our historically marked cultural

practices comes with significant implications, two of which are worth noting here. First,

social constructionism implies that what it means to be "manly" or "masculine" fluctuates

between historical periods, so much, in fact, that, as Michael Kimmel notes, "The search

for a transcendent, timeless definition of manhood is itself a sociological phenomenon"

(4). Second, the lack of a single, transcendent masculine ideal opens the possibility of

multiple masculinities. R.W. Connell is most prominently known for discussing the

various configurations of masculinity in her book *Masculinities* (1995). She outlines how

there are conceptual differences between hegemonic masculinity, subordinated

masculinity, complicit masculinity, and marginalized masculinity.[53] This list is by no

means exhaustive. Scholars such as J.A. Mangan have also written on additional concepts

such as imperial masculinity while Aaron Belkin considers military or soldier

masculinity.[54] Even within these categorical breakdowns, such as within marginalized

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[52] See Simon J. Bronner, Tim Edwards, and C.J. Pascoe and Tristan Bridges' texts for in-depth explorations of the historically contingent features of masculinity, and Sandra Lee Bartky, Susan Bordo, and Judith Butler for discussions of cultural femininity.

[53] See Connell's *Masculinities* for more on these configurations of masculinity.

[54] See J.A. Mangan's *'Manufactured' Masculinity: Making Imperial Manliness, Morality and Militarism* (2012), who outlines the relationship between imperialism and masculinity as follows: "It is surely now accepted that, as I have long asserted, middle-class Britain in the age of the 'new' imperialism was unquestionably militaristic in attitude and actions…But there was more to it than this. The truth of the matter certainly was that many influential members of society viewed war as essential to both the demonstration of masculinity and the fulfillment of the nation's destiny" (14-15). See also Aaron Belkin's *Bring Me Men: Military Masculinity and the Benign Façade of American Empire 1898-2001* (2012) for more on military masculinity in the U.S. context.

masculinity, there are further nuances to manhood unique to different races, ethnicities, the LBGTQ+, or disabled communities. The roots of these various configurations are in scholars' efforts to track the 'positive' traits of masculinity, the traits of masculinity defined by affirmative qualities over negative ones. As the sociologists C.J. Pascoe and Tristan Bridges note, there is a difference between the concepts "man" (which is a state of being) and "masculinity" (which is an identity), and defining what features of masculinity "[make] one a man" is not simple: "Most of us casually use a sort of 'I know it when I see it' approach or think of masculinity as a series of 'nots' (e.g., not feminine, not 'gay,' not interested in interior design, cooking, or clothing)" (3). Each of the configurations of masculinity listed above contains uniquely positive traits that shape its conceptualization.

While it is not within the scope of this chapter to engage directly with each configuration, I do take aim at the kind of masculine conditioning that encourages boys and men, particularly in the U.S., to respond to their distress through silent stoicism. Since the turn of the twentieth century, this form of masculinity traditionally describes a warrior-like personality; it is the ability to not just fight against but cope with physical and emotional distress. Demonstrating this ability is precisely where masculinity and mental health intersect. Stephen Wicks calls the warrior the "foremost of among male archetypes" and "the epitome of masculinity in many societies," such as those with a strong military presence (29).[55] Within these militarized societies, Sam Keen argues,

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[55] Wicks qualifies his statement by unpacking the differences between the "warrior" and the "hunter," and that the warrior archetype has been "the epitome of masculinity in many societies not dependent on hunting" (29). Essentially, the development of agricultural-based societies no longer necessitated the hunter

boys and men are taught to "value what is tough and to despise what is 'feminine' and tenderhearted" (37). Historian George L. Mosse concurs, adding: "A soldier in full control of himself, of strong power of will, would be able to cope with the experiences of battle and become accustomed to the terrible sights which surrounded him in the trenches, indifferent to death" (95-96). In *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa*, political scientist Joshua Goldstein documents the ways military ideals and practices shape masculine identity, and he argues, "If a man is to carry out manly deeds, he cannot be slowed down by taking the time to psychologically heal himself after the terrible things he has witnessed and endured. He must strap down his armor and press on, willing debilitating emotions out of his mind" (267). This suppression of emotions and distress positions stoicism as the ideal masculine quality. "Warriors become stoic," Belkin adds, "via practices which harden them through the disavowal of anything associated with femininity and softness," and that "Military training reinforces typical civilian socialization patterns in which boys are shamed if they cry or exhibit any signs of tenderness" (28).

The paradox of this silent and stoic form of masculinity is that the tougher one appears, the more emotions they are likely suppressing. If a boy is only mildly distressed, he needs only be mildly tough to cover those emotions in a stoic exterior. However, if he is highly distressed, the more challenging it becomes to present himself as resilient. In response to such distress, Kimmel notes, "Men try to *control themselves*…and when feeling too pressured, they attempt an *escape*" (6). This escape can be literal, through

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role as prominently, so the warrior role—a military-like position—developed out of a need to protect societies as they developed. Some remnants of this masculine role remain today, however, and particularly in heavily militarized societies such as the United States.

physical relocation, or symbolic, such as withdrawing emotionally from others. These efforts are primarily defined by emotional isolation and an "I don't need anyone else" attitude.

The development of this iteration of masculinity occurs particularly in the U.S. through the twentieth century for several complex reasons. The first, of course, is due to the U.S.'s extensive military engagements throughout the twentieth century. From two World Wars to the Cold War, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, the war in Afghanistan, the Iraq War, among several other wars and military interventions and occupations, the U.S.'s military-industrial complex has become both an economic fixture and a reflection of its national image and its global reputation.[56] With such a steadily expansive military presence, even civilian men are susceptible to military masculinity's socio-political influence, ideals, and culture. John Ibson, for example, argues that men's relationships with one another in the U.S. changed considerably in the aftermath of the Second World War, where "A marked increase in the space between men—literal and figurative, physical and emotional—occurred during the 1950s" (xvii). It is in this new space where Ibson locates how "male relationships of many sorts, not just homosexual unions, were dealt a painful, damaging blow in 1950s America, a blow from which they have not recovered even yet" (xvi). Men found it increasingly difficult to develop a desire for emotionally intimate relationships and a vocabulary necessary to sustain those connections. The loss of so many men, Ibson adds, "made some returning veterans even

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[56] James Ledbetter's *Unwarranted Influence: Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Military Industrial Complex* (2011), which examines how the U.S. did not abandon its wartime economy after World War II; rather, military spending continued to escalate to a level that continues to shape the U.S.'s national politics and the global political landscape.

more isolated, hesitant to risk yet additional loss, hence avoiding intimate attachments to other males with a renewed resolve" (143). In other words, men were so traumatized from WWII that it became quite difficult to foster relationships and emotional connections with one another.

Those relationships were additionally difficult to foster, Jonathan Rutherford argues, due to a changing cultural landscape wherein men in the U.S. struggled to construct "a language of affective relations," which is not to justify such silences (9). Instead, Rutherford describes how men turned their lack of inter-personal relationships into intra-subjective attacks upon themselves: "Men and masculinity always seemed to be exempt from the process of change…It was always with someone else or somewhere else that the problem or issues was located" (8). This disconnection between men's personal and public selves—particularly for white men—would be further intensified with the rise of the Civil Rights and women's liberation movements, which focused the public spotlight on personal injustices and experiences. The rise of feminism through the 1960s and 1970s, for example, altered relationships between men and women, as men were collaborating with women more frequently in "their working, academic, political or personal lives" (Edwards 22). Additionally, both the shifting U.S. and global economies through the neoliberal policies of the 1970s and 1980s aided in transforming masculinity into something territorial, guarded, and competitive.[57] With the rise of neoliberalism, and its hyper-competitive labour markets designed for individuals to prosper, also came

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[57] See David Harvey's *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005), which argues that, under neoliberalism, "Competition—between individuals, between firms, between territorial entities (cities, regions, nations, regional groupings)—is held to be a primary virtue" (65).

decreases in the one-job-for-life employment model and depreciating wages.[58] As

Barbara Ehrenreich asserts, "Patriarchal power based on breadwinning is now only an

option for very wealthy mean, and this is a striking change" (288). These significant

cultural changes help make sense of a masculine identity in the U.S. based on guarding

oneself against other men and women. In this identity, any semblance of emotional or

mental fragility not only jeopardizes one's masculinity but hinders an already

increasingly difficult path to economic success.

Ultimately, the emergence of such self-reflexive politics forced men to account

for their own masculine identities. However, as bell hooks contends, despite men's

overall prominence in the public sphere, the direct interrogation of their private identity

was confusing: "Women demanded of men that they give more emotionally, but most

men really could not understand what was being asked of them…They simply could not

give more emotionally or even grasp the problem without reconnecting, reuniting the

severed parts" (66). In the face of such confusion, interrogation, and emotional

uncertainty, the first line of masculine defence is to retreat from one's emotions—either

externally, internally, or both. Such responses to mental distress form the conditions in

which the adolescent boys in my selected novels find themselves.

Masculine Distress and Silence in YA Fiction

Masculine silence is particularly prevalent in Stephen Chboksy's epistolary novel

titled *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. *Perks* tells the story of fifteen-year-old

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[58] See Harvey's *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005) for more on neoliberalism, and Louis Hyman's *Temp: The Real Story of What Happened to Your Salary, Benefits, and Job Security* (2018) for more on changes to employment wages in the U.S. through the twenty and twenty-first centuries.

protagonist Charlie, who writes to an unknown narratee as he works through his grief,

trauma, and emotional difficulties during his first year in high school. Charlie cries often,

feels lonely, and spends much of the novel mourning the death of his best friend Michael,

who died by suicide the year before, as well as his Aunt Helen, his "favorite person in the

whole world" (Chbosky 5). His ability to articulate his grief deteriorates when he begins

writing that she died in a car accident while driving to get him a birthday gift: "And I

know that my Aunt Helen would still be alive today if she just bought me one present like

everybody else. She would be alive if I were born on a day that didn't snow…I miss her

terribly. I have to stop writing now because I am too sad" (92). Overcome with guilt,

Charlie blames himself to the point where he can no longer speak. Circling within him is

a range of affectively charged memories and traumas, none of which he can cope with for

extended periods, that signal his desire for death: "I don't know if you've ever felt like

that. That you wanted to sleep for a thousand years. Or just not exist. Or just not be aware

that you do exist…That's why I try not to think. I just want it all to stop spinning" (94).

This passage isolates the lack of control that Charlie feels. He seeks assurance from the

reader by asking them if they have ever felt the way he does, which illustrates his desire

to connect to someone. Charlie knows that being alone with his thoughts is difficult for

reasons he cannot consciously explain, so he uses what little agency he feels he has to

establish a connection to anyone who will listen. The subtle desperation of this act is in

the fact that he does not address a particular person. In this instance, Charlie is not trying

to connect with a specific person he knows. He opens up to anyone willing to hear him.

Even though Charlie does not ask a specific person for help, his cry out to the ether

suffices. He writes because language is connective tissue. If there are words on the page,

as there are in his letters, those words can crystalize his emotions, albeit imperfectly, and once his emotions are tangible, they can be read and understood. He can share his pain with others. Unfortunately, Charlie is often encouraged by those around him to suppress his emotions and distress.

The encouragement Charlie receives to suppress his grief and distress is explicit in the aftermath of his friend Michael's death. The students are informed over the loudspeaker that Michael had "passed on," a heavily sanitized version of the truth (that he died by suicide). Charlie's older brother then picks him up from school and tells him to stop crying, buys him McDonald's French fries, and takes him to play pinball before letting Charlie help him work on his Camaro, all activities that serve as distractions from Michael's death. Moreover, Charlie notes that "Michael's funeral was strange because [Michael's] father didn't cry" (3-4). In the novel's first few pages, Chbosky crystalizes how Charlie is not only dealing with immediate distress, but that he is socially conditioned, specifically by men, to bury those emotions under sanitized language, frivolous acts of distraction, and intensive self-restraint. Charlie learns that emotional suppression occurs on both linguistic and physical levels, as maintaining a tough exterior is integral for adolescent boys as they become men.

Charlie's family and his friends teach him to be silent about his feelings or anything that bothers him. His sister instructs him not to tell anyone about her pregnancy and that getting an abortion is their "little secret" (121). And when Charlie notices his grandfather crying during Thanksgiving, he observes that it was "The kind of crying that is quiet and a secret. The kind of crying that only I noticed" (59). But Charlie especially learns to keep quiet from his dad, who drinks in silence during Thanksgiving; who never

cries at the end of *It's a Wonderful Life*, even when the rest of the family does; and who

does not allow Charlie to watch hockey with him unless he does not ask questions.

Lastly, but most importantly, Charlie's socialization reveals itself when he describes his

experience watching the last episode of *M*A*S*H* with his family:

> My mom was crying. My sister was crying. My brother was using every ounce of
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> his strength not to cry. And my dad left during one of the final moments to make a
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> sandwich…I walked to the kitchen, and I saw my dad making a sandwich…and
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> crying. He was crying harder than my mom. And I couldn't believe it. When he
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> finished making his sandwich, he put away the things in the refrigerator and
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> stopped crying and wiped his eyes and saw me. Then, he walked up, patted my
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> shoulder, and said, 'This is our little secret, okay, champ?' (16-17)

These are but a sampling of experiences from the novel that condition Charlie into silence

and secrecy. When his brother, grandfather, and father all get emotional, Charlie watches

them either struggle to maintain their stoic appearance or hide their feelings. Every

instance of intimacy may trigger affective responses, but none of the men in Charlie's life

can cope with such expression. Charlie's dad struggles so profoundly that he must

physically leave the room to avoid seeming emotional, even when every other family

member is distraught. As a result of such conditioning, Charlie is pegged by friend

Patrick as a wallflower, as he notes to Charlie, "You see things. You keep quiet about

them. And you understand" (37). Incidentally, the "perks" of being a wallflower keep

Charlie from learning about healthy forms of emotional expression, causing him to

suppress his grief and sadness to the point where he begins to self-harm. He not only

internalizes his sadness so deeply that he risks his health to appear as well and put together as he can, but he earns praise and affection for these efforts.

Learning about queer relationships additionally shapes Charlie's image of masculinity. With the novel set in the early 1990s, Charlie's entire life also coincides with the heart of the HIV and AIDS epidemic in the U.S.[59] While Charlie himself does not express attraction to boys, he learns early in life that his father thinks unfavourably of such relationships. One day, as he talks to his dad about sex with girls, Charlie notes, "I think he was especially happy because I used to kiss this boy in the neighborhood a lot when I was very little, and even though a psychiatrist said that it was very natural for little boys and girls to explore things like that, I think my father was afraid anyway. I guess that's natural, but I'm not sure why" (124). This passage carries a couple of crucial implications regarding normalization. The fact that Charlie's father takes him to see a psychiatrist for kissing another boy suggests that such an act requires a medical response, making it unhealthy (and, therefore, unacceptable). It also positions the psychiatrist as someone Charlie should not want to see. If Charlie sees the psychiatrist, it is because his dad thinks he is doing something wrong or there is something wrong with him, teaching Charlie that psychiatry is something to avoid. Additionally, Charlie speaks to a direct tension between what the psychiatrist says is normal—for children to explore and experiment—and what he thinks is a normal way for fathers to act (i.e., fear their son

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[59] See "A Timeline of HIV and AIDS" for an outline by the U.S. government. For journalist and academic coverage, see Randy Shilts' *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* (1987) and Susan Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (2001).

may be gay). This tension confuses Charlie, leaving him with the impression that being gay is bad (it is not) but with no justification as to why.

This impression is further reinforced for Charlie through the novel's exploration of its prominent queer relationship between Charlie's friend Patrick and their school's star quarterback Brad. Early in the novel, when Charlie happens upon Patrick kissing Brad at a party, Patrick quickly escorts Charlie out of the room. He tells Charlie that Brad does not want anyone to know, and he must promise that he will not tell anyone (37). Charlie agrees, of course, but this exchange reinforces Charlie's impression that queer relationships are bad or, at the very least, must be secretive. As Charlie is learning, men's relationships with their feelings and with each other are, first and foremost, predicated on silence. This silence occurs later in the novel when Patrick takes Charlie to a park where men go to have sex. Not only is the location secluded, though, implying further secrecy, but as Charlie explains, "Patrick told me that if I didn't want to be bothered by anyone that I should just not make eye contact. He said that eye contact is how you agree to fool around anonymously. Nobody talks. They just find places to go" (161). The importance of silence here is explicitly evident in the lack of speaking. Considering the remote location and the role of anonymity, Charlie is once again left with the impression that men must hide their relationships from others, especially if they are romantic or sexual relationships, which is different than the heterosexual relationships in the novel. No one implies that Charlie must hide or be silent about any sexual or romantic relationships with girls.

Masculine silence and the socializing influence of family likewise inform Michael Thomas Ford's *Suicide Notes*, which details the story of fifteen-year-old Jeff after he

wakes up on New Year's Day in the psychiatric ward of a hospital following a suicide attempt. His parents, Marjorie and Eric, come home to find him with his wrists cut and quickly get him to a hospital, where the doctors keep him alive. After he recovers physically, he is admitted to the hospital's psychiatric wing, where he frequently speaks with his therapist, Dr. Kratzrupus (who Jeff jokingly calls Dr. Cat Poop), and he socializes with a rotating cast of characters with diverse psychological backgrounds. These discussions and other problematic events in the novel inevitably lead Jeff to the realization that he is gay.[60] When Jeff first describes his family setting to Dr. Kratzrupus, he focuses on how his life is entirely average and ordinary, stating: "I have a sister named Amanda who's thirteen, and my parents are still married to each other, and all four of us live in a perfectly nice house in a perfectly nice neighborhood in a perfectly nice city that's exactly like a billion other cities" (Ford 30). The repetition of "perfectly" signals Jeff's general sarcastic tone throughout the novel, but it also suggests his tendency to describe his life in unrealistic language, hiding whatever is really going on behind a veil of 'everything is fine.' If his life is as perfect as he describes, then there should be nothing wrong, especially with his mental health, and he should be free to leave the

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[60] Mid-way through the novel, another boy named Rankin joins the hospital ward, who Jeff describes as "a big guy" who reminds him of "the guys who play football at school" (Ford 135). Such descriptions define Rankin as a kind of masculine ideal. Shortly after Rankin's introduction, however, and after Jeff accidentally stumbles upon him masturbating in the boy's bathroom, Rankin sneaks into Jeff's room late at night and sexually assaults Jeff while he is sleeping (185-187). The event itself is coded through Jeff's internal monologue, where he details, "I wanted to tell him to stop. I wanted to tell him to get out of my bed and out of my room. But it was like my voice was locked in my throat" (185). Unfortunately, the reason this event becomes even more problematic is because it leads to Jeff's willing participation in further sexual acts with Rankin, and thus becoming more and more sure of his queer identity (191). By attaching Jeff's sexual and queer awakening to a sexual assault, though, Ford not only reinforces the problematic trope of gay men as sexual predators, but he also excuses the act by never explicitly condemning it in the text. Worse still, the novel's positive ending of Jeff's acceptance of his queer identity is certainly tainted by the fact that his learning he enjoys gay sex is at least partially a result of him having been sexually abused by another male.

hospital. Leaving the hospital is Jeff's number one priority, as he frequently reminds other characters and the reader that "There's nothing wrong with me" (14). However, his adamant denial of needing help is primarily linked to the shame he feels for being attracted to boys. Since this attraction is repressed so heavily throughout the novel, Jeff's associating his family—a traditionally heteronormative household with a mom, dad, son, and daughter—with perfection is also a not-so-subtle hint of his fear that his queerness threatens his family's and his own image.

That queerness is something Jeff feels shame towards is something engrained in him early in his life. For instance, when Jeff thinks of his mom on the night his parents found him with his wrists cut, he describes her as if she looks like the real-life version of a Barbie doll that he and his sister used to play with: "My mother still had on all her makeup and her party dress, and there were these great big streaks of purple eye shadow down her cheeks and her lipstick was all smeared and she looked like a freaked-out Grow 'N Style Barbie head my sister had when she was about eight" (233). Jeff and his sister would play with this Barbie together until another boy saw him, as Jeff explains, "Amanda and I used to play with it a lot until the day our next-door neighbor, an older kid named Troy, found us doing it and called me a fag. Later on I buried it in the backyard" (233). Jeff's admission illustrates the conditioning of masculinity in process. He had no issues playing with the doll until another boy made fun of him for doing so and then called him a homophobic slur. Thus, in order to prevent such an event from ever happening again, he not only stops playing with the doll, but he buries it as well, never talking about it again. This burial is symbolic of a few things—his shame, his defensiveness, his upholding of antiquated gender tropes, and his aversion to being

associated with anything feminine—though it also demonstrates how such masculine conditioning hurts both boys and girls. Jeff, who changes that day into someone he thinks is more masculine, directly affects his sister by burying a toy she also enjoyed. In other words, masculine ideals must prevail no matter who they impact. Jeff's decision to bury the doll initiates his prolonged sense of masculine identity as something based on repression, silence, and the denial of any pain, struggle, or distress.

Silences between Jeff and his family also fuel his tendency to deny that anything is wrong. Notably, while Jeff is a bit more open with his sister Amanda (minus discussing his attraction to boys), he tells Dr. Kratzrupus that his family does not talk; rather, they assume things. When Dr. Kratzrupus presses Jeff to explain what he means, Jeff says, "I mean my parents assume…They assume that Amanda and I will ask them if we have questions about anything. Otherwise, they assume it's all good with us" (262). The basis of Jeff's relationship with his family, then, is predicated on silence and ignorance. If no one says anything is wrong, nothing must be wrong. I recognize, of course, that it is unfair to critique his parents for not being mind-readers. But if Jeff is learning to suppress his struggles while his parents happily claim ignorance unless told otherwise, it is unsurprising that Jeff finds it challenging to open up to them. Jeff's descriptions of his family as generally unaffectionate additionally complicate their ability to communicate: "It's not like we've ever been into the whole sharing thing, anyway. We're not huggers" (59). This phrasing implies that that there is more to hugging than physical affection. If a family hugs, they must also talk about their feelings.

Like Charlie, Jeff's relatively unaffectionate father also influences the way he hides his emotions and distress. When Dr. Kratzrupus asks Jeff if his parents ever tell him

that they love him, Jeff replies, "Sometimes…My mom more than my dad, but I think

that's usually how it goes" (57). While Jeff's answer is relatively brief, it speaks to both

the lack of communication within the family and the sense of normalcy he attaches to his

father not expressing emotions. In Jeff's eyes, fathers being emotionally unavailable is

part of their masculinity and part of being a dad. This connection between masculinity

and self-control over one's emotions is reinforced later in the novel, as Jeff explains, "My

dad never says sappy stuff to us. He's the kind of guy who can sit through a movie that

has everyone else bawling like babies and all he'll say is, 'Can you believe how big Julia

Robert's mouth is?' I'm serious. Nothing gets to him. He's like one of those cowboys in

an old western" (147). The connection between Jeff's dad and the cowboy image (á la

John Wayne) as the height of masculinity has its roots deep within mid-twentieth century

U.S. culture, and the image still resonates today.[61] Moreover, Jeff emphasizes again how

his dad never says "sappy stuff" (emotional silence), he has no problem explicitly

critiquing women's bodies (establishing gender dominance), and "nothing gets to him,"

as if acting stoic is a badge of honour for men. Jeff's perceptions of his father play an

influential role in his sense of masculinity and how to handle his distress.

Although such rugged and tough descriptions of men reflect the father figures in

Charlie's and Jeff's lives, they arguably pale in comparison to Darius Kellner's father,

Stephen Kellner, in Adib Khorram's *Darius the Great Is Not Okay*. Khorram's novel

follows Darius and his family as they travel from Portland to Iran to spend time with his

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[61] See Michael Kimmel's *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (2012), who writes, "The cult of the
cowboy's most celebrated hero" through the twentieth century was linked to none other than John Wayne:
"For much of the 1950s and all of the 1960s and even into the 1970s, [John] Wayne topped popularity polls
as the American man that other American men most admired" (182).

maternal grandfather before he dies. Darius is a "Fractional Persian"—his mom is from

Iran, and his dad is from the U.S.—who struggles to connect with his Iranian cultural

heritage and the people around him in Portland. He refers to his peers at school, for

instance, as the "Soulless Minions of Orthodoxy" (Khorram 4). Complicating his efforts

to connect with others is his depression, a diagnosis he shares with his father, for which

they both take regular medication. To Darius, however, Stephen Kellner is an

"Ubermensch" (13) with angular and powerful hands (61), who never struggles with

gaining "medication weight" (127), never asks for directions (161), is ashamed of

needing to take medication (28), while simultaneously being "categorically opposed to

self-pity" (135). Ultimately, in Darius's eyes, "Stephen Kellner [is] the Paragon of

Teutonic Masculinity" (42). Implicit in these descriptions of Stephen Kellner is the

Nietzschean concept of the Superman or someone who is beyond human definition, with

the physical features of toughness, bodily control, supreme-level competence, and disgust

for that which renders him "weak." In turn, Darius clearly sees himself as less-than

compared to his peers, as someone not good enough, and who makes consistent "tactical

withdrawals" (223) to internalize his pain and appear as strong as possible when his

model of masculinity, his father, is imagined in purely idealized terms.

Unfortunately, Darius struggles mightily with his mental health, and the image of

swirling emotions is how he imagines his distress. He describes his depression and

feeling of despair in the scientific language of black holes: "The quantum singularity in

my chest churned, drawing more interstellar dust into its event horizon, sucking up all the

light that drew close" (223). Wrestling with this singularity, Darius constantly worries

about mood swings; his weight; his anxiety over not being manly enough, Persian

enough, or Übermensch enough; crying often; and his lingering wish to slip into a void.

When the singularity swirls its quickest, he observes his family and notes, "They looked

happy and content without me" (223). This description typifies Darius's struggle to resist

his internal distress. He defines his subjectivity through a lens of alienation and despair.

Darius, in isolation, perceives his family as happy. He imagines himself as a metaphorical

black hole stealing the light and positivity from those around him, making it easier to

justify his musings regarding whether anyone would miss him if he died.

Although Darius's emotions consume him, he has no outlet through which to

express his affective burden. Even his positive emotions are subject to silent cover-ups.

Although Darius loves his sister, Laleh, deeply, he is acutely aware that openly

expressing affection towards her is off-limits: "It wasn't the kind of thing I could ever say

to anyone. Not out loud, at least. I mean, guys aren't supposed to love their little sisters.

We can look out for them…But we can't say we love them. We can't admit to having tea

parties or playing dolls with them, because that's unmanly" (16). But Darius *does* play

dolls with her and join her tea parties. He just does not tell anyone he does these things.

Like his male role models, he buries his emotions in the name of silent, stoic, manly

toughness.

Such silent toughness likewise informs Darius' budding attraction to Sohrab, a

friend he meets while his family is in Iran. Noticing Sohrab playing soccer one day,

Darius' feelings overtake him:

> He was kicking his soccer ball/non-American football around, barefoot and
>
> shirtless. Sweat plastered his short hair and temples and the nape of his neck. He
>
> waved when I came out and put his hands behind his head in Surrender Cobra.

His flat chest rose and fell, rose and fell, and his stomach muscles rolled with

each breath. I knew if I got close enough to him, the intense thermal radiation he

was emitting would scorch me. (258)

Darius' attention to Sohrab's physical body is intense and overwhelming. His eyes notice

every detail, including the repetitions of chest inhalations and stomach muscles moving.

He uses a euphemism to conclude that Sohrab is so attractive that he could very well

mark Darius' physical body. This intense attraction culminates for Darius in a moment of

peace with Sohrab, where they are both enjoying an innocent physical connection with

one another. However, it, too, remains embedded in silence: "I turned and watched

Sohrab. The way his eyes lost their focus. The way his jaw finally unclenched. I put my

arm over his shoulder, and he linked his over mine. And we sat like that, together. And

the silence was okay" (296). Such descriptions illuminate the powerful connection

between them. Sohrab sits, relaxed and at ease in Darius' arms. Darius is attentive and at

peace with their companionship. Although their relationship does not turn into anything

sexual, it provides Darius with a growing sense of his queerness. What is unfortunate for

Darius is no matter what he feels—intimate affection or severe mental distress—he only

knows how to act like a man by suppressing it.

Such suppression is perhaps best observed, though, in Darius's grandfather,

Ardeshir Bahrami, when they visit an ancient burial site in Iran known as "The Towers of

Silence," where many of their family ancestors are buried. Once they arrive, Ardeshir—

or Babou, as Darius calls him—mourns that soon there will be no more Bahramis living

in Yazd and that a once-great family lineage within the city will end. It is in this brief

moment of sentimentality, a crack in Babou's fortified exterior, that Darius finds connection:

> My grandfather seemed so small and defeated then, bowed under the weight of history and the burdens of the future. I didn't know what to say. The singularity in my stomach was back, pulsing and writhing in sympathetic harmony with the one I knew lived deep inside Babou. In that moment I understood my grandfather perfectly. Ardeshir Bahrami was as sad as I was. He rested his hand on my neck and gave me a soft squeeze. That was a close to a hug as he had ever given me. I relaxed against him as we studied the landscape below us. That was as close to a hug as I had ever given him. (230-231)

I contend that what occurs at the "Towers of Silence" between Darius and his grandfather demonstrates how masculine socialization affects men across generations. Not only does the burial site's name connect silence with overtly phallic imagery, but Darius and Babou, who hardly know each other and struggle to relate to one another, manage to find common ground in their buried pain. Babou, mourning the loss of his family's legacy in the city, cannot talk through his grief with his grandson, demonstrating for Darius how men are to behave. However, while this moment appears meaningful to Darius, the details of the passage are entirely narrativized internally. They do not exchange words, nor do they exchange looks, as Babou only puts his hands on Darius' neck and squeezes. Darius leans into him in return, illustrating that their exchange of intimacy will occur physically, not verbally, which I interpret as enough for Babou. When Darius says that he understands Babou "perfectly," he recognizes that sharing this intimate moment is meaningful to his grandfather. This understanding makes it meaningful to Darius, even if

he desires more out of his relationships with other men, and especially with his father. I consider this moment symbolic for its signalling of the generational differences between Darius and his grandfather and their approach to emotional intimacy as men, as it also reveals Darius' yearning for something more than his grandfather provides him. Knowing that this exchange is the most he will get from Babou, Darius brings the moment to an end. This particular passage closes the chapter it appears in, which is a rather fitting reflection of Darius' efforts to pursue the kind of emotional connection he craves. If he can feel this connected to his grandfather without speaking, then his father and he should be capable of connecting more deeply than they do.

Beyond Masculine Silence

Part of what makes these texts and others like them important is their critiques of masculine silence through the active emotional engagements of their protagonists. That is to say, these protagonists not only experience complex emotions, but they inevitably become deeply expressive of their emotions. Although they are taught and encouraged by other male characters to suppress their distress and be silent in the name of manly toughness, each boy protagonist actively initiates a rebellion against such encouragements by eventually reaching out to others. In so doing, they ultimately find a genuine connection with others based on emotional intimacy. This rebellion is not to say that boys should not be tough, nor do these characters argue that being emotionally vulnerable is the most critical lesson for adolescent boys to learn. Still, there is a conversation regarding boys' emotions that involves reconfiguring our cultural perceptions of masculinity. As bell hooks contends, "We cannot teach boys that 'real men' either do not feel or do not express feelings, then expect boys to feel comfortable getting in touch with their feelings" (36). It is precisely the struggle to get in touch with

their emotions that these boy protagonists capture in their narratives. Their efforts to reach out to others about their grief are rewarded with genuine companionship.

Charlie's efforts to reach out to others, for instance, begin with him addressing the reader. In his initial letter, he indicates that he will not enclose a return address because he does not want his reader to discover who he is, though he explicitly comments on his desire to be heard: "I am writing to you because she said you listen and understand…I just need to know that someone out there listens and understands and doesn't try to sleep with people even if they could. I need to know that these people exist" (Chbosky 2). Although the reader's subjectivity is qualified by Charlie's hope that whoever reads his letters does not impose themselves on others, he hopes they demonstrate empathy. Charlie is clear that he needs this person to exist because the internalization of his emotional trauma is devasting his mental health. And if he is going to work on processing his distress, he will need someone patient, kind, and considerate of the needs of others. Even if they could, not sleeping with someone shows a sense of selflessness that Charlie wants to believe exists in a narrative where too many characters look out for their own best interests. By maintaining his anonymity, Charlie keeps from being wholly vulnerable, but he is not asking his reader to enter an exchange of emotional labour; instead, he desires an outlet.

As the narrative progresses, Charlies provides evidence of several traumatic events in his life—his aunt's death, his best friend's suicide, physical abuse, verbal abuse, the sexual assaults of others, and his own experiences being molested by his aunt Helen—but he lacks a healthy space to unpack such distress. By stating in his first letter, "I want you to know that I am both happy and sad and I'm still trying to figure out how

that could be," Charlie admits that he strives to understand his trauma and distress, a goal the writing process itself may allow him to achieve. In an interesting moment of intertextuality, it makes sense why Charlie reads *The Catcher in the Rye* (four times in a row) to keep him from "panicky" crying (93). Like Holden Caulfield, Charlie is looking for relief, emotional sympathy, and space to process his grief.

Although Charlie's emotional struggle predominantly occurs internally at first, as he struggles to "participate" with those around him, there is no shortage of examples of him trying to connect with others. He tries talking to his sister on multiple occasions, as well as friends Patrick and Sam; he visits his Aunt Helen's grave to muse out loud, which brings him to tears; and when he reaches out to a former friend, Susan, she meets him with a blank stare. Much of Charlie's difficulty expressing himself honestly, however, stems from his conditioning to suppress his pain into secrecy, which eventually leads him towards a brief psychic break with reality. Unable to navigate the trauma of his past sexual assaults, Charlie's intimate encounter with Sam during their end-of-the-year party triggers his horrible memories and causes him to internalize so profoundly that he ends his second last letter with an abrupt goodbye.

The final letter of the novel picks up Charlie's narrative two months later, and much has changed in his life. Staying in a hospital, he speaks with his therapist about what happened with his Aunt Helen, allowing him to begin working through that trauma. His family also visits him every day they are allowed to, especially his brother and sister, which means the world to Charlie: "The time it started to feel like everything was going to be all right was the time when my sister and brother stayed after my parents left…They asked me a lot of questions about Aunt Helen because I guess nothing had ever happened

to them" (210). This development is crucial to Charlie's understanding of himself. He not only learns that his traumatic past and grief are important, but this realization is validated by his family, particularly his brother and sister. They talk to him about his emotions and experiences, demonstrating to Charlie that they want to help him get better. There are further similarities to *Catcher in the Rye* here—just as Holden connects with Phoebe—as the communicative opening between siblings is emphasized and centred as an important narrative development. Perhaps this reflects a generational critique. It may be difficult for Charlie to connect deeply with his father, who is entrenched in his masculine conditioning. However, there is hope for the future within his brother, who is still young enough to learn from his more expressive sibling. Such emotional intimacy helps Charlie determine the kind of man he does not want to be, which is a direct critique of the masculine silence and emotional suppression his father embodies. As Charlies says, "I think that if I ever have kids, and they are upset, I won't tell them that people are starving in China or anything like that because it wouldn't change the fact that they were upset. And even if somebody else has it much worse, that doesn't really change the fact that you have what you have. Good and bad" (211). Charlie's position at the end of the novel highlights how treating distress through silence does not always work. He rejects the idea that one must internalize their distress, their traumas, and their emotions. Instead, he advocates for honest and open communication that validates one's experiences regardless of their gender identity.

Jeff finds his own opportunities for honest and open communication through his discussions with Sadie, a fellow patient with him in the hospital. She is roughly the same age as Jeff, they share a similar sense of humour, and she is also in the hospital after

attempting suicide (she tried to drown herself). Jeff is defensive with her at first because Sadie views all the patients in the hospital as crazy, and Jeff firmly believes he is not. He eventually warms up to her as their similar senses of humour help them bond. They get so comfortable with one another that Jeff sneaks into Sadie's room one night, and they start to engage in sexual activity before Jeff asks to stop and leaves. Although he is embarrassed about the incident, Jeff cannot believe Sadie's behaviour the next day, as he explains, "She was talking like it was any other day and not the morning after I tried to have sex with her but couldn't keep it up. I figured she was just being nice and pretending" (Ford 177). But Sadie is not just being nice. She tells Jeff that what occurred is not an issue, and he does not have to defend himself, which is Jeff's initial attempt to recoup his lost sense of masculinity.

Moreover, Sadie reminds Jeff that he has nothing to be sad or ashamed about, as he is a good person who genuinely means well. She takes no offence to what happened between them. And in a moment of pure surprise, Sadie demonstrates for Jeff that it is okay to be openly honest and affectionate, as Jeff describes:

> Then she got up and hugged me. I totally wasn't expecting it. Like I said before, my family isn't big on the whole affection thing. I mean Amanda hugged me when she saw me, but that was just a case of temporary insanity. Normally she would never do that. Even Allie has never hugged me more than a couple of times, and she comes from a big family of huggers. I just have this invisible sign on me that says NO HUGGING. But Sadie ignored the sign. She hugged me hard, patting my back and squeezing me. I wasn't sure what I should do, so I patted her back. (180-181)

Jeff's reaction in this passage comes from inexperience with displaying a positive emotional connection to someone. Even though Jeff does not feel sexually attracted to Sadie, he experiences her sense of understanding and compassion for who he is, not who he thinks he needs to be, as a man. His reference to Allie, his best friend outside the hospital, illustrates how his relationships with others, even his female friends, are predicated on being emotionally guarded. Notably, this exchange does not cause Jeff to open up about everything in his life immediately. What it does, though, is provide Jeff with an experience to build upon moving forward. Until his conversations with Sadie, the only experience Jeff has with talking openly about his thoughts and emotions is with the reader, who he frequently signals by regularly asking rhetorical questions. The frequency of such questions suggests that Jeff yearns to talk to someone, which is what makes Sadie's efforts to befriend Jeff so important. He can sit with Sadie's actions and create with her a budding friendship built upon transparent and vulnerable conversations rather than guarded secrecy.

Unfortunately, Jeff's decision to be honest with himself, Dr. Kratzrupus, and his family about his queerness comes from Sadie's death by suicide. When Jeff learns of Sadie's death, his emotions overwhelm him in Dr. Kratzrupus' office:

It just started pouring out of me, this loud laughter. Like some kind of crazy clown. I don't think I was even thinking anything. I was just laughing. And then it turned to crying. I was crying. Just bawling my eyes out. Then the next thing I know, Cat Poop was beside me. He actually hugged me. And I let him. I let him hug me while I bawled. I still don't believe him about Sadie. But I cried anyway.

> After a while I didn't even know why I was crying…And it didn't matter. It just
>
> felt good. (229)

In the emotional climax of the novel, Jeff finds some comfort and support in the arms of not just another person but another man, a man who has been trying to connect with Jeff throughout his entire stay in the hospital. Jeff's thoughts leave him, and he finally gives himself over to his emotions. He allows his distress to overtake him and accepts the support offered to him. He allows himself to be a more complex version of masculinity than the stoic masculinity he struggles to uphold. Notably, there is something to be said about the fact that Jeff's breakthrough is at the expense of a female character. This moment can, therefore, be read as both uplifting, in that Jeff opens up to and connects with another male character, and unfortunate, in that Sadie's character is a narrative sacrifice for Jeff's character development. It is a moment that I argue harkens back to Jeff's burying his sister's Barbie doll in an equally negative way: the masculine ideal, no matter how emotionally complex, must once again prevail at the expense of girls and young women.

After this breakthrough, though, Jeff sees no reason to keep any more secrets. He immediately follows this moment by sharing how he may as well explain what drove him to attempt suicide, seeing as "There's no reason not to talk about it now. It's not like things can get worse" (230). He relays to Dr. Kratzrupus his attempt to kiss his best friend Allie's boyfriend, Burke, at a party, and Burke both rejected and humiliated him. He called Jeff homophobic slurs and drove him away in tears, leaving Jeff to wallow in his shame and guilt, which Jeff determines is all-consuming. To escape his unrelenting mental distress, Jeff cut his wrists with razor blades. His explanation for why he injured

himself is tragic, and Dr. Kratzrupus validates his fluctuating emotions. However, Jeff's

most explicit sense of development occurs when he explains why he opens up to Dr.

Kratzrupus at all. As Jeff explains, "I knew that he knew that there was more to my story

than what I'd already told him. And suddenly I was really, really tired. Not of talking to

him, but of *not* talking to him. I was tired of all the games I'd been playing, and of

holding back" (243). Here, Jeff critiques masculine silence and recognizes how damaging

it is to him mentally, emotionally, and physically. He feels the weight of his masculine

expectations so thoroughly that when he gets a glimpse of what it is like to act in literally

the opposite manner, he takes it. Being silent does not serve his mental health, and thus

he begins the actual work of his therapeutic journey.

Jeff's story culminates shortly after this breakthrough with Dr. Kratzrupus. He is

finally able to open up to his family about his sexuality and his experiences, as he

describes their long talk: "And that's what we did. For about four hours. I can't even

remember everything we talked about. There was some yelling, a little crying, and finally

a big family hug, which is a miracle all on its own" (287). Their conversation is awkward

at first because Jeff is unsure of how to initiate the discussion, but once the family begins

talking, they share a whole range of emotions with one another. Most importantly, they

end their family discussion with a hug, which Jeff alludes to as a rarity. Just as Jeff did

with Sadie and Dr. Kratzrupus, he can embrace his family, and they embrace him. The

text's critique of masculine silence completes itself at this moment, as Jeff's father lets

his emotional guard down to embrace his son and his family. In the end, Jeff's

therapeutic journey is only beginning, but his sense of manhood is no longer tethered to

stoic silence; rather, he will work through his trauma with honest, open conversation,

helped, in part, through the intervention of comprehensive therapeutic treatment. Like Charlie, Jeff's thoughts and actions symbolize the novel's broader critique of silence as a suitable response to experiences of mental distress. He, too, comes to reject the idea that adolescent boys must treat their mental distress through silence and by pretending that it does not exist.

Like Charlie and Jeff, Darius finds reaching out to others difficult, at least until he meets Sohrab. Different from the "Soulless Minions of Orthodoxy" back in Portland, Sohrab creates space for Darius to talk openly: "Sohrab nodded and waited for me. I liked that about Sohrab. That he would wait for me to figure out what I wanted to say" (Khorram 236). He provides this outlet to Darius fairly early in the novel, and it takes time for Darius to become accustomed to this form of intimacy. As noted previously, there is a unique attraction between Sohrab and Darius, and Darius routinely comments on how often they hold each other and how Sohrab smells "soapy and fresh, like rosemary" (264). Coupled with these descriptions are other intimate moments, often psychically centred, as Darius finds himself learning to be more comfortable with his body and his attraction to Sohrab. In one scene, they shower following a game of soccer:

> Once again, Sohrab stripped himself completely, like it was totally normal for guys to be naked around each other. His skin was a volcano, with sweat running down every valley. My face was experiencing some extreme thermal flux of its own…I was even more amazed I managed to talk back to him while I scrubbed my belly button and my stomach jiggled like some sort of gelatinous non-humanoid life-form. Maybe I was learning to have less walls inside me too. (250-251)

Crucial here is the inversion of expectations from multiple positions. Khorram challenges readers' expectations of the conservativism in Iranian culture, while Darius' expectations regarding masculine intimacy are challenged by Sohrab's level of comfort in the shower.[62] Darius is initially uncomfortable in the shower for several reasons: his discomfort with his body, his attraction to Sohrab, and his unfamiliarity with this kind of vulnerability. Sohrab, however, does not care about any of those things. He understands that it is completely normal for boys and men to shower together after team sports, and his attitude reinforces that this experience is normal, encouraging Darius to shower at the same time and to become more comfortable with himself. Before meeting Sohrab, Darius believes it is unimaginable that other boys or men would be vulnerable around him or with him, whether physically or emotionally. When he is around Sohrab, however, particularly when they are alone together, the two forms of intimacy are connected. Darius also alludes to the metaphorical walls within him. Those walls have been fortified through the social conditioning of his father and his peers in Portland specifically and masculine culture in the U.S. generally. Around Sohrab, those walls begin to fall.

With Sohrab, Darius finds himself in a unique space to talk about his emotions and mental health. Both are typically difficult topics for Darius. But his connection to Sohrab also suggests that he finds it easier to connect with young men his own age, particularly if they are outside his family. After all, he is not trying to impress Sohrab while he is trying to impress his father and grandfather. He struggles to bond emotionally

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[62] Khorram is writing for a primarily Western audience, so he is challenging readers' expectations, but he may also be challenging readers' stereotypes. Persian, Middle Eastern, and Mediterranean cultures have a long history of public baths, particularly in Iran. For more, see "Vakil Bath: National Heritage Site."

with his dad, and his grandfather does not understand him either. When Darius tells his grandfather why he takes medication for depression, his grandfather replies, "Medicine is for old people. Like me…You just have to try harder…Did you have enough to eat?" (102). There is a parallel in how Darius feels less-than compared to both his father and grandfather, as Darius explains: "I would never be good enough for Ardeshir Bahrami" (102). As a result, Darius feels alienated. He is stuck behind his metaphorical walls that impede his emotional connections with his father and grandfather, which is why Sohrab's actions illustrate for him how young boys are capable of resisting the grip of their masculine conditioning.

The level of intimacy between Darius and Sohrab eventually encourages an interaction with his father, who finds Darius after he has fought with Sohrab. Careful at first, Darius warns himself that he "couldn't let Stephen Kellner see [him] cry" (282). Still, after recognizing that he has "so much anger turned inward," Darius expresses his frustrations to his father: "You don't want me to feel anything at all. You just want me to be normal. Like you" (283). His father, reeling from such accusations, tells him that he only worries because he is scared that one day Darius's depression may cause him to self-harm like he almost did once. He tells Darius that several years prior, when Darius was around seven, his depression got so bad that he almost took his life. His doctor prescribed him a higher dosage of medication, which took a while to work, making him distant and beginning the rift in their relationship that grew over the years. As his father explains, "Suicide isn't the only way you can lose someone to depression" (286). Darius, taken aback by such an intimate admission, describes a shift between father and son: "Dad looked up at me again. There were no walls between us…There were tears in his eyes.

Actual human tears. I had never seen my father cry before. And due to some harmonic

resonance, I started crying again too" (286). Much like Darius's moment with his

grandfather, this passage reflects an instance of a male companionship rooted in an

empathetic exchange. Unlike the moment Darius shared at the "Towers of Silence" with

his grandfather, Darius and his father are verbally expressive and openly crying. They

talk about their feelings, the histories that contributed to their affective states, and,

together, they find a way to understand one another more deeply.

Moreover, their exchange notably carries two additional implications. First, it

signifies the potential for an emotional connection between father and son in ways the

other novels discussed do not explicitly display. Readers never learn if Charlie eventually

bonds with his father emotionally, and they only see Jeff's limited closure with his father

through their group family hug. Darius, however, experiences a fully developed moment

with his dad. I contend that it is significant for a novel published in 2018 to exemplify

this possibility. As academic and cultural discussions around masculinity and gender

continue to expand, demonstrating the potential for older generations to change their

behaviour will go a long way in encouraging more men to express their emotional depth

and talk about their mental distress. Second, the difference these novels make for

adolescent boys like Darius, who already exhibit an inherent desire to speak out, is that

they will see how to channel their expressions outward rather than inward. Like Charlie

and Jeff, Darius talks to readers directly because that is his only viable outlet. He

frequently seeks validation from readers throughout the novel by repeating the phrase,

"That's normal. Right?" (17). Asking such a question several times begs for a response if

only the reader could provide one. But the lesson Darius must learn is how to channel his

expressions towards those who can offer him emotional support, which, in this novel, begins with Sohrab and ends with his father. In perhaps the most fitting conclusion to a narrative centred on the complexities of masculine emotions and silence, Khorram's novel ends with Darius's father checking in on his son and asking him how he is feeling: "Dad looked at me. 'You okay, son?' 'Yeah, Dad,' I said…'I'm great'" (312). Thus, Stephen Kellner joins his son in rebelling against stoic, silent, Teutonic masculinity. They both come to realize that the silence between them, especially around their experiences with depression, was harmful to their relationship. As a result, Khorram's novel joins Chbosky's and Ford's texts in their critiques of silence as a viable solution to adolescent boys' experiences with mental distress.

Additionally, what draws these novels together is their critique of masculine silence not only in their content but in their form. The fact that the novels are all written in first-person matters. Charlie, Jeff, and Darius do not write for the sake of writing. They write to be heard. Charlie continuously checks in with his reader through his letters, while Jeff and Darius speak to their readers through a range of rhetorical questions. Thus, the framing of these novels reinforces their critiques of silence: by their very nature, as cultural artifacts, they illustrate a masculine yearning to open an emotional dialogue with those willing to engage. However, readers can offer these protagonists nothing in return. Darius's rhetorical questions will always go unanswered, and Charlie will never receive a letter of his own. Still, part of working through emotional distress and grief means finding ways of expression that allow you to be honest with yourself. Even the toughest men are by nature deeply emotional, and these boy protagonists actively rebel against a process of social conditioning that encourages them to define their manhood by their

stoic silences. From the opening lines of their narratives to their final periods, every thought, sentence, and word is an act of rebellion against such masculine silence. Even if they are not open with other characters, their first-person perspectives demonstrate how they are always describing, always thinking, and always speaking into their reality what masculinity means to them. They define their own forms of masculinity with the firm acknowledgement that it is okay for boys to have feelings of sadness, grief, and despair and that it is okay to talk about those emotions openly and honestly. As Charlie states in his final letter, "Maybe it's good to put things in perspective, but sometimes, I think that the only perspective is to really be there…Because it's okay to feel things. And be who you are about them" (Chbosky 212). In short, while they do not critique the social structures that value silence, these novels critique silence as a suitable form of treatment in that they advocate for expressive adolescent boys and for the spaces necessary for those boys to talk about their mental distress.

Despite these critiques, however, these novels remain aligned within the broader neoliberal project of encouraging adolescents to model productive citizenship. Charlie's intention to "participate," for example, is a direct reflection of how *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* encourages his development into a young adult that displays the motivation to achieve specific goals. By the novel's end, Charlie's identity is far removed from the quiet "wallflower" that sits back and observes those around him. Instead, he has an assertiveness about himself and his future as a self-reliant neoliberal subject who is capable of personally handling future issues. He ends his final letter by stating, "So, if this does end up being my last letter, please believe me that things are good with me, and even if they're not, they will be soon enough. And I will believe the same about you"

(Chbosky 213). He offers his reader assurance in this passage that they no longer need to worry about him and that they can trust he will take care of himself. Moreover, by saying that he will "believe the same" about his reader, Charlie implies that he will now be seeing others as self-reliant neoliberal subjects as well. Thus, while Charlie is introduced to therapeutic treatment, allowing him to overcome the masculine conditioning that encourages him to be silent about his distress, he nevertheless ends the novel by embodying productive citizenship to the fullest extent, as a motivated, self-reliant neoliberal subject who accepts the individual responsibility of treating his distress.

Jeff's development is similar to Charlie's in that *Suicide Notes* also ends with him embodying the full tenets of productive citizenship. He is more assertive and motivated to get better, he is willing to talk with Dr. Katzrupus about his experiences, and he trusts their therapeutic sessions as a safe environment to work through his distress. He knows that he is becoming more sure of himself and that others will notice, as he explains, "That's going to be the hardest part, I think, seeing all the people who were in my life before. They don't know what's happened to me. They're going to expect the same old Jeff back. But I'm not the same old Jeff. I hope they are ready for that" (Ford 293). By placing the emphasis on others being ready, Jeff affirms that he is not going to change for them. He is a self-determining individual who is doing what is necessary—seeking therapeutic support—to help him with his distress, and others will have to get on board. Like Charlie, Jeff swaps silence for therapy, but he continues to accept the personal responsibility of treating his mental distress. Jeff's acceptance of this responsibility, coupled with his new motivated and self-determining attitude, reflects his adherence to productive citizenship.

Although Darius' development is distinct from Charlie's and Jeff's, Khorram's novel similarly ends with Darius fully embodying productive citizenship. The biggest difference in Darius' growth, of course, is that he does not attend therapy for his mental distress. Instead, he takes medication for his depression, as does his father. In other words, while Charlie and Jeff initially treat their distress through silence and later accept therapeutic support, Darius treats his distress with medication *and* silence before realizing that the silence is making his mental health worse. Where Darius aligns with the others, however, is in how he also becomes a self-determining neoliberal subject. He acknowledges that a shift has occurred in him during his time in Iran, and he returns to Portland as a more confident and assertive version of himself. He plays soccer more confidently, noting he is "one of the better players in our class," which leads him to join the school's soccer team after the team's coach recruits him (Khorram 304). In the clearest distillation of Darius' new perspective on life, he acknowledges that perhaps he is like his namesake after all. Named after Darius the Great, a famous Persian "diplomat and conqueror," Darius initially struggles to understand why his parents would name him after someone who represents everything he thinks he is not (158). When he is offered a position on the school soccer team, however, he explains that he almost told the coach no, but he agrees because "that's what Darius would have done" (306). This transformative moment symbolizes Darius' shift into a motivated individual who continues to assume the responsibility for treating his mental distress through medication rather than therapy. Thus, Darius aligns with Charlie and Jeff as adolescents who learn to develop into a model of young adulthood defined by the tenets of productive citizenship.

Ultimately, these novels primarily fit my theorization of productive citizenship, particularly its third tenet, which is the acceptance of mental distress as something addressed through individual treatments. By accepting this responsibility, the adolescent boy protagonists in these novels inevitably adhere to a model of young adulthood akin to what the young female protagonists accepted in my second chapter. Together, all of the protagonists I have discussed thus far point to a trend within contemporary YA literature of mental distress that encourages a model of young adulthood grounded in adolescents being motivated, self-reliant neoliberal subjects who accept individual solutions— whether therapy or medication or both—as the primary solution to their mental distress. As a result, I argue, these protagonists all become productive citizens.

Chapter 4: Psychiatric Hospitals and the Release of Capitalist Pressures

One thing that has been evident throughout this project is that when adolescent distress intensifies to life-threatening levels, YA novels of mental distress often feature psychiatric hospitals as havens of recovery. Enclosed and protected, such environments seemingly provide distressed teens support in overcoming harmful thoughts and behaviours. These supports include conversations with nurses or therapists, group activities with other patients, and moments of introspective musing. Accepting such treatment, of course, is rarely straightforward, but in most examples, protagonists inevitably find their experience liberating and empowering. Even short-term stints encourage active self-development and an increased sense of control over one's desire to live a healthy, meaningful life. However, as my theorization of productive citizenship describes, "healthy" and "meaningful" in these novels typically means embodying a model of young adulthood defined by the governing forces of neoliberal capitalism.

In this chapter, I examine the use of psychiatric spaces in YA novels of mental distress and how they operate as environments for adolescents to interrogate the capitalist pressures in their lives. I contend that such facilities paradoxically undermine the neoliberal insistence of defining a "healthy" and "meaningful" life via capitalist terms by replicating the living conditions of a pre-industrial society. To forward this argument, I consider Ned Vizzini's *It's Kind of a Funny Story* (2006) and Francisco X. Stork's *The Memory of Light* (2016), two texts which feature adolescent protagonists who are experiencing mental distress and who thrive in environmental conditions stripped of their capitalist pressures. Moreover, these protagonists' respective therapeutic journeys reveal

an inextricable link between mental distress and capitalist expectations. Specifically, they learn how the pressures of neoliberal capitalism contribute to their suicidal ideations and how having their basic needs met in a community-first environment better fosters their desires to live. Despite these developments, however, it is important to note that both novels continue to encourage adolescents towards my model of productive citizenship. While they go further than the other YA novels I have discussed in their critiques of neoliberal capitalism, they, too, inevitably reinforce the importance of adolescents who display motivated, self-reliant individuality, and who accept the responsibility of treating their mental distress through personal therapeutic environments.

I consider *It's Kind of a Funny Story* and *The Memory of Light* for their protagonists' unique intersections. Vizzini's Craig Gilner is a fifteen-year-old straight white boy who is somewhere between working- and middle-class. Money is not a debilitating obstacle in his life, but he often references his family's financial concerns and how that will affect his future. He and his family live in Manhattan, and Craig is obsessed with attending the best high school, the best college, and landing the best job, which will provide him the respect and financial security he desires. But after securing a place at Manhattan's Executive Pre-Professional High School, a public school that students have to test into, he becomes overwhelmed by the pressure to succeed. He struggles to eat and sleep, eventually contemplating suicide, leading him to Six North, the psychiatric ward named for its location on the sixth floor of Argenon Hospital. There, Craig works with Dr. Minerva, his psychologist, to discuss his chemical imbalances and how to manage his depression enough to continue pursuing his idea of a meaningful life.

Conversely, Stork's Vicky Cruz is a sixteen-year-old Latinx-American girl, whose family is incredibly wealthy. Her father, Miguel Cruz, is a shrewd businessman who runs a predatory real estate company in Austin, Texas. Unlike Craig, Vicky does not worry about money; however, her economic security does not prevent her from experiencing mental distress. Regardless of her family's wealth, Vicky becomes depressed and attempts suicide, resulting in an extended stay at Lakeview Hospital, a psychiatric facility in Austin. Under the guidance of psychiatrist Dr. Lina Desai, Vicky learns to navigate her relationship with her emotionally stunted, business-minded father, whose primary concern is making sure Vicky's academic trajectory lands her financially successful employment. Vicky's initial lack of desire to meet her father's expectations is deemed a result of her depression rather than the socio-political conditions of her life. The depictions of Vicky's and Craig's mental distress neatly reflect the biomedical framing of mental "illness," which primarily focuses on an individual's chemical composition as opposed to the social determinants of their health. In response to their respective distress, Vicky and Craig participate in treatments designed to motivate them to live. Along the way, they realize they must live their lives on their own terms, claiming their subjectivity against the capitalist pressures placed upon them, though they accomplish this task through fundamentally altered environments.

To clarify, neither Vicky nor Craig actually lives in a pre-industrial world. Both novels are set in the early twenty-first century and, therefore, depict the environment, technology, and social structures of their eras. Neoliberal capitalism wholly shapes their society and their experiences. Moreover, the objective of both protagonists and their respective treatment plans—the actualization of living a "healthy" life—is to return to

this society, even if their distress is complicated by, if not an outright result of, the pressures stemming from society itself. What these novels *do* depict is the environmental differences for adolescents both internal and external to psychiatric hospitals. Outside the hospital, life for Vicky and Craig is competitive and individualistic; the responsibility of their success is pressed squarely upon their shoulders. Neither have many friends, and their busy lives mask their feelings of alienation from their labour, which primarily consists of schoolwork. Inside the hospital, however, life is very different. For Vicky, the immediate pressures of school, grades, debate team, competitive academics, her father's expectations, and achieving any semblance of success comparable to her older sister Becca, are absent. Similarly, Craig experiences the same reprieve from his ultra-competitive high school, the disconnection from his friends, and his fears of failing to secure stable enough employment to stave off homelessness. Instead, both protagonists experience a combination of holistic, communal support; private freedom to foster individual expression; subsistence living; a limited division of labour; and parochial communication, thereby enhancing their abilities to connect more meaningfully with people around them, their residence, and their labour. Vicky's and Craig's personal developments, and their ultimate ascension towards a position of thriving, is predicated entirely on the removal of capitalist pressures and the entry into a modified mode of pre-industrial living. Thus, in order to produce the conditions necessary for a "healthy" life, the industrial capitalist system, historically responsible for producing therapeutic treatment, effectively generates spaces antithetical to its own existence.[63] These spaces

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[63] As Dana L. Cloud asserts, "Therapy is a historical product of modernity; more specifically, it is a

highlight that Vicky's and Craig's potential to thrive—to live creatively, freely, and communally with others—has less to do with their neurodivergence than the systemic pressures that shape their social environment.

I organize this chapter into three sections. First, I discuss how neoliberalism shapes the contours of individual expression in gendered ways and how such gendered expectations inform Vicky's and Craig's experiences. Second, I examine depictions of mental health in these texts, as well as how Vicky and Craig frame their experiences outside the hospital setting. These depictions help illuminate the ways both novels turn towards a socio-political critique by having their protagonists think beyond their chemical imbalances. Third, I turn to Vicky's and Craig's experiences within hospital settings and how such environments mimic the conditions of pre-industrial life more than that of neoliberal capitalism. Ultimately, my goal is to demonstrate how alternative environmental conditions provide the impetus for Vicky and Craig to claim their individual subjectivities and to resist the capitalist pressures that pushed them to attempt suicide.

The Gender Politics of Neoliberalism

Central to this chapter is an understanding of how neoliberal capitalism informs the lives of twenty-first century adolescents. As I have stated previously, David Harvey's assertion in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* is that neoliberalism is defined by its proposition that "human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual

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product of industrial capitalist social imperatives" designed to "[dislocate] social and political conflicts onto individuals and families, [privatize] both the experience of oppression and possible modes of resistance to it, and [translate] political questions into psychological issues to be resolved through personal, psychological change (xvi-xxi).

entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (2). By centering individual, notes Harvey, "each individual is held responsible and accountable for his or her own actions and well-being," and "Individual success or failure are interpreted in terms of entrepreneurial virtues or personal failings…rather than being attributed to any systemic property" (65-66). As a result, mental health problems are excused as individual issues and are rarely connected, at least explicitly, to any specific systemic qualities.

In fairness, part of the reason neoliberalism centres individual responsibility, at least in theory, is to liberate citizens and empower them to take control of their lives. As I discussed in Chapter One, the crisis of capitalism and the political discontent of the 1960s and 1970s helped generate resentment towards the state for imposing itself in socially unjust ways.[64] As Harvey explains, "Civil rights were an issue, and questions of sexuality and of reproductive rights were very much in play. For almost everyone involved in the movement of '68, the intrusive state was the enemy and it had to be reformed. And on that, the neoliberals could easily agree" (42). Corporations also recognized the benefits of a reformed state infrastructure that emphasized deregulation and enabled opportunities to expand unimpeded by government oversight. In other words, by advocating for individual freedoms and against state regulatory powers, the capitalist class could protect their own economic interests under the banner of empowering individual freedoms.

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[64] Harvey contends, "The Vietnam War was the most obvious catalyst for discontent, but the destructive activities of corporations and the state in relation to the environment, the push towards mindless consumerism, the failure to address social issues and respond adequately to diversity, as well as intense restrictions on individual possibilities and personal behaviours by state-mandated and 'traditional' controls were also widely resented" (42).

Neoliberalism proved to be in accordance with both corporate expansion and individual

empowerment, but it also required strategic application. "[Neoliberalism] had to be

backed by a practical strategy that emphasized liberty of consumer choice," Harvey

asserts, "not only with respect to particular products but also with respect to lifestyles,

modes of expression, and a wide range of cultural practices" (42). Despite this instance

on wide-spread, individual modes of expression, however, twenty-first century

adolescents remain caught navigating gender-based discourses that inform their

development into proper neoliberal subjects.

For adolescent girls, this navigation often involves engagements with the

discourses of contemporary girlhood. According to Girlhood Studies scholar Anita

Harris, young women today have become "a focus for the construction of an ideal late

modern subject who is self-making, resilient, and flexible" (6). Harris' term for this ideal

female subject is the "can-do" girl, someone identifiable through her commitment to

embodying the tenets of "Girl Power" (14). These tenets include, but are not limited to,

being career-driven, taking advantage of increased access to education, showing

dedication to continuous forms of self-improvement, striving for financial independence,

and participating actively in consumer culture. As Marnina Gonick notes, "Girl Power

celebrates the fierce and aggressive potential of girls as well as reconstitution of girl

culture as a positive force embracing self-expression through fashion, attitude, and a Do-

It-Yourself (DIY) approach to cultural production" (7). This construction of girlhood,

then, is necessarily intertwined with contemporary notions of productivity and

consumerism, and it positions 'successful' girls as active and central agents within

increasingly shifting labour markets under neoliberalism. Opposite Harris' "can-do"

subject is the "at-risk" girl. At-risk girls are instead associated with antisocial attitudes, the consumption of inappropriate substances, namely drugs and alcohol, delinquent behaviour, and not just unemployment but, as Barbara Schneider and David Stevenson note, completely "misaligned occupational ambitions" (85). At least two problems with the at-risk discourse come to mind. First, girls labeled at-risk are constructed as not having employment ambition when in reality the structural inequalities and social barriers before certain girls limit their employment opportunities. Second, and perhaps most importantly, at-risk girls by definition are youth; they are not adults. The existence of an at-risk discourse purely serves neoliberal framings of the "coming-of-age" narrative— where one must strive for independent success as quickly as possible—and the expansive reach of capitalist logic into the lives of adolescents and, eventually, children.

Although *The Memory of Light* contains a range of female characters, the "at-risk" girl and the "can-do" girl are largely embodied by Vicky and her sister Becca, a student at Harvard Law School and the Cruz family's pride and joy. To Vicky, Becca is the ideal can-do girl, the epitome of normative femininity, and her polar opposite. She describes Becca to Mona, her roommate at Lakeview, as "super pretty," "super smart," and "super popular," reflecting both personal and social ideals (Stork 63-64). Moreover, Becca has "energy": she does "debate, yearbook, [the] school musical, varsity soccer, school president, Young Republicans." And, unsurprisingly, she is their father's favourite, as Vicky notes: "Why wouldn't she be? What father wouldn't prefer a daughter like her?" (64). Each of these descriptions characterize Becca as ideal, almost to the point of caricature. Without Becca owning up to her own faults later in the novel, she would seemingly be too perfect to believably exist. However, I take Becca's near perfection as

precisely Stork's point: girls do not critique themselves against abstract notions of girlhood; rather, they critique themselves through material comparisons against other, real girls. Even photoshopped magazine images are intended to reify the abstract "ideals" of beauty upon the bodies of real people. Becca is the construction of girlhood young women aspire to, sister or not; she is the standard of neoliberal subjectivity that Girl Power encourages girls to obtain, both in looks and in ambition.

To Vicky, Becca is somehow an athlete, artist, musician, politician, intellectual, and socialite, with an impeccable work ethic. On top of that, she's beautiful as well. These labels are aspirational in their own right, but considered together, they signal the expanding image of success in the lives of young women. As Harris explains, "The processes of working on the self and competing with others, especially other women, to be perfect in self-presentation have been extended so that improving oneself is necessary to success in the labor and consumer markets" (19). What constitutes successful girlhood now reaches into all areas of life, and Becca's will to produce results drives her success. When Mona asks why Vicky compares herself so intensely to Becca, Vicky seems confused by her question: "That's normal, though, isn't it? When you have a sister who's so good at everything and you're bad? She's smart. I'm dumb. She's pretty—look at me. She has incredible will power. She used to get up at four a.m. to study. Not even for a test, but just for a regular school day!" (Stork 64). Becca's persistence unnerves Vicky; her dedication and work ethic, even on days when it does not seem necessary, baffles her younger sibling. Interestingly, Mona's confusion as to why Vicky compares herself so harshly against her sister speaks to the role environmental conditions play in the socialization of girls. The fact Mona finds this harsh comparison odd highlights its

unnaturalness and emphasizes its role as a learned behaviour. I am not suggesting that

Mona does not compare herself to other girls or women, but that *who* Vicky compares

herself to and in what ways is a product of her social environment. Vicky is convinced

that if you have a sister, and one with such tremendous talents, looks, and abilities, that

comparing oneself to such a standard is normal, signaling the ways competitive

individualism have been naturalized within her home. Further, by flagging Becca's

routine, Vicky describes how the can-do girlhood championed in her family requires

persistent effort. For students to meet their goals, such as passing tests, they must work

hard. For girls today, however, being successful means acting as though every day is a

test, which makes Becca's routine an apt metaphor.

Notably, Vicky does not fall neatly within the "at-risk" category outlined by

scholars such as Harris. While the Cruz family are Latinx-American and, thus, ethnic

minorities, they are also wealthy. At-risk girls are less likely to be middle-class,

according to Harris; such girls typically "[live] in poverty, in unstable homes, in

communities known for violence, drugs, crimes, and so on" (24). Vicky's life is far from

what Harris describes in this respect. She attends Reynard, an elite private school for the

wealthy and privileged, her immediate family values status and money, looking down on

manual labour and working-class jobs and people, and she knows this wealth

distinguishes her from others. For example, when Vicky first meets Mona, she muses, "I

have a feeling our backgrounds are very different. My family is wealthy and hers is

probably not. I've lived a life of ease and comfort and she hasn't" (Stork 16). Although

Vicky's family is wealthy, her comparison to Becca nevertheless positions her as a failure

and liability for her family. She does not share her family's valuing of competition and financial prosperity, compromising their image of success.

Vicky's employment ambition reflects her at-risk position most acutely and concerns her the most. When talking with Dr. Desai, Vicky explains, "It's not like I have some big philosophical reasons against status and success. I've tried to care about grades and Ivy League schools, but I just don't have the drive that my sister has, or the brains" (50). Ironically, what Vicky expresses here is her individuality. She defines herself as different than her sister, as someone who does not share the same drive, but she is made to feel less than for doing so. The capitalist logic espoused by her parents, the promotion of working hard to achieve individual success, comes at the erasure of Vicky's unique identity. Her individuality pales in comparison to the goals and ambitions her parents prescribe for her, and they only know how to understand Vicky on those terms. Even when discussing the lead-up to Vicky's suicide attempt, her stepmother, Barbara, is convinced "There were no signs," yet this assertion is grounded in Barbara's understanding of Vicky as less than Becca: "There were bad grades, but Vicky was never a good student. Then she quit the debate team in the middle of a tournament, leaving her best friend without a partner. We thought it was some kind of sibling resentment bubbling up. Her sister was the best debater Reynard's ever had" (141). Aside from this explicit comparison to Becca and the ideals she embodies, Barbara only knows how to describe Vicky in negative terms. She is associated with "bad" grades, never being good enough, resentment, and leaving others "without." Each of these descriptions help frame Vicky's sense of self, her sense of unworthiness for not living up to her parents' neoliberal expectations, and her general apathy towards life.

Despite Barbara's identifying Vicky for her lacks—of ambition, of academic success, of drive—Vicky does feel emotionally connected to a certain kind of work. She enjoys helping Juanita, her nanny, for instance, in all areas of domestic labour. When she explains to her father and stepmother that perhaps she could work as a maid one day, "They looked at me like they didn't know how I could be related to them," signaling the alienation Vicky feels from not just the world she lives in but her family (49). To Vicky, there was purpose and meaning in domestic labour that allowed her to think of life in positive terms: "'The thing is,' I say, quickly, before the tears come, 'I was serious. I had secretly been helping Juanita with the housework since her leg had gotten worse, and I enjoyed it. There was something about making the beds and getting them perfect, vacuuming the carpets, doing laundry, and washing dishes that made me feel good'" (50). Unlike her parents' dismissiveness of such labour being fulfilling, Vicky associates domestic work with joy and positivity. She finds peace in working with her hands and preparing the household for each day. This interest in domestic labour is also useful for marking the shift in expectations placed upon girls. Historically, girls expressing interest in cooking, cleaning, gardening, and other domestic work would reflect society's traditional expectations of them. With the shifting social, political, and economic climate of the twentieth century, however, girls became increasingly encouraged to take advantage of their increased access to education and new labour markets *in addition* to their domestic labour. Today's girls are encouraged to adhere to traditional expectations of running a household, becoming mothers, as well as entering the labour market. These expectations are why Miguel and Barbara view Vicky's labour aspirations as lacking: they do not consider domestic or manual labour as valuable employment. Her parents,

and neoliberals more generally, define productivity in specific and often exclusionary ways. They would prefer Vicky do that work anyway, or at least pay someone else to, while also channeling her Girl Power to claim vocational and financial independence.

Achieving this independence requires girls to adhere to a strict academic and employment plan, which is where Vicky distances herself even further from her family. Early in the novel, for example, Vicky outlines her father and stepmom's image of what it means to be happy: "Have goals. Do your best to achieve them. Be all you can be. Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera" (123). This advice remains quite nebulous, of course, but when her parents visit Vicky at Lakeview, Miguel crystalizes his opinion further:

> [Vicky] needs a future to look forward to. She needs the confidence of overcoming struggles, of accomplishment under her belt. She needs challenges and goals, things to strive for...Yes, there's some pressure in that, but that's what makes life interesting. You find your dream and then do what it takes to get there. She needs an environment that rewards healthy choices and effort, not illness.
>
> (137)

Miguel's commentary offers at least two useful insights. First, he distinguishes between health and illness and explains when either is acceptable. He attaches worthiness to a life lived where "healthy choices and effort" are regarded and illness is not, pathologizing any life that veers from his understanding of neoliberal subjectivity. He does not welcome illness; thus, he exhibits an ableist position that discriminates and erases the experiences of anyone within the disabled community, and especially those experiencing any form of mental distress. Second, he places pressures and expectations upon Vicky as a girl that are both advisable and necessary to living a worthwhile life. Moreover, her

happiness is predicated on experiencing these challenges. This advice is surely coloured by the fact it is coming from her father, a man with no direct insight to the challenges of being a girl in the twenty-first century, though, apparently, he does have an idea of what a girl should be: like him. Such remarks highlight the overlap between his patriarchal and capitalist views in that he considers his mode of being superior to his daughter's and that she must embody his methods to make up for this lack between them. By dictating Vicky's life through such narrow terms, Miguel dismisses their gendered differences, as well as any alternative methods of living. These are the parameters of Miguel's capitalist logic, and it is Vicky's responsibility to push herself as hard as she can to reach such ideals.

The same capitalist logic is a guiding force for Craig Gilner in *It's Kind of a Funny Story*. For Craig, life boils down to working hard, securing stable employment, and making money. After putting all his time and energy into studying for his entry into Manhattan's Executive Pre-Professional High School and receiving a formal acceptance, Craig's life trajectory is made clear when a classmate, Julie, asks him what he will do with his time: "I'll work hard at school, get good grades, go to a good college, get a good job" (Vizzini 77). Craig's roadmap to success looks identical to the one Miguel Cruz advocates for Vicky. It is premised on working hard and realized through moments of individual accomplishments, culminating in stable employment, as Craig muses later in the text, "It's all about living a sustainable life" (107). When Dr. Barney, a psychiatrist Craig visits before he enters Six North, asks Craig to elaborate on what he means by a sustainable life, Craig imagines a "real job" with a "real house" and, most importantly, a family. To Craig, "What kind of success are you if you don't have that?" (107).

Coincidently, Craig's employment aspirations align with Vicky's sister as he wants to be a lawyer as well. He considers the idea while walking with Aaron, his best friend, who wants to be a lawyer like his uncle, and Craig agrees that he wants to be one too. To Craig, however, being a lawyer has less to do with any noble purpose than it does about money. Even while agreeing with Aaron that they could be lawyers together, internally Craig is preoccupied with finances, as he ponders the way money governs his life: "We were on a bright, cold, gray Manhattan sidewalk. Everything costs so much money. I looked at the hot dog man, the cheapest thing around—you wouldn't get away from him without forking over three or four bucks" (58). Craig's thoughts demonstrate how capitalism and capitalist logic inform his sense of a meaningful life. In his eyes there is only one trajectory, one kind of life worth living, and that involves making money. Money is what organizes the world, from the best lawyers to the hotdog vendors; it is Craig's litmus test for what is considered valuable and meaningful in life.

Wrapped up with Craig's notions of a meaningful life, of course, are the gendered expectations of masculinity. Just as the development of feminist activism and neoliberal policy have shaped the twenty-first century discourses of girlhood, so, too, has masculinity transformed under neoliberalism. In their essay titled "Masculinities and the lived experience of neoliberalism," Nancy Lindisfarne and Jonathan Neale argue that neoliberal policies have impacted contemporary masculinity in three ways: through "the naturalization of inequality," the acceleration of "gendered marking," and the increasing "physical and cultural distances" between upper- and working-class people (42). While Lindisfarne and Neale offer a compelling explanation of how each plays a role in the lives of today's men, the first two developments are of particular interest in Craig's life.

Take the example of increases in gendered marking and how that connects to Craig's

desire to be a lawyer (read: financially wealthy). In societies with growing class

inequalities, such as the United States, the distinction between dominate and subordinate

images of masculinity become more noticeable. The 'tough guy' image of masculinity,

for example, is typically thought of as the dominant image; however, Lindisfarne and

Neale argue, that is not entirely the case:

> If we look at class relations across society, the Bruce Willis style of masculinity is
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> that of a subordinate man, and everything about him is coded working-class.
>
> Hegemonic masculinities look different. They are the styles and behaviour of
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> David Cameron or Barack Obama. Everything about them is coded ruling class…
>
> We tend to be very aware of the masculinity of working-class men, while we tend
>
> not to mark the masculinity of upper-class men explicitly. But it is there. Ruling-
>
> class men are performing masculine power almost all the time. (38)

The masculine hegemony referenced here relates to the idea that in any society there are

competing notions of masculinity, with one form dominating others in particular

contexts. Under neoliberalism, the image of a successful man is predicated on becoming

an elite, a member of the capitalist class, where financial wealth secures additional forms

of social and political power. There are contexts where the images of the 'tough guy' still

carry importance, but the political and social leaders of today are recognized for their

suits and ties, wealth, and business acumen. With this version of masculinity in mind, it is

easy to see why Craig and Aaron would find being lawyers, and the prestige it brings, so

appealing. As adolescent boys under neoliberal capitalism, their masculinities are at stake

with their academics, their careers, and their finances.

The naturalization of inequality also plays a role in how Craig sees himself. For twenty-first century youth, who only know a world organized through capitalist logic and neoliberal policies, "Inequality is said to be in your genes," Lindisfarne and Neale contend, "and this is applied to education, mental illness, addiction, personality, gender and in some sense race. By some magic, all your problems are both genetic and your own fault" (42). Craig imagines himself precisely by this worldview. Comparing himself against other kids doing better than him, Craig rationalizes that they simply are better. He does work hard, but he does not have the genetic factors that make him the best: "Other people weren't smoking and jerking off, and those that *were* were gifted—able to live and compete at the same time" (Vizzini 96). This thought stems from Craig's worry that taking too much time for himself—to smoke pot with friends, to masturbate—is interfering with his ability to live the meaningful life he desires. Other people can balance both, Craig concedes, but only because they are special. Notably, Craig forms a distinction in this passage between "living" and "competing," as if they are mutually exclusive. Though he adheres to the image of a meaningful life based on competitive individualism, Craig also recognizes that there are aspects of "living" that he enjoys, until he sees them as obstacles to his aspirations. That is to say, if he truly desires the life he imagines, he has to stop spending so much time smoking and masturbating and instead put that time and energy into extracurriculars.

Yet Craig's self-reflexive attitude does not keep him from comparing himself to Aaron and naturalizing their differences as well. As Vicky views Becca, Craig initially perceives Aaron in ideal terms. Attending a party to celebrate their entry into Pre-

Professional High School, Craig locks eyes with Nia, a girl who has been flirting with

Aaron, and Craig imagines her categorizing them in her mind:

> *You're cool, but you're not as cool as Aaron. He has pot and he's so much more*
>
> *laid* back *than you; you spent the last year studying for this test; he didn't lift a*
>
> *finger for it. That means he's smarter than you. Not that you're not smart, but*
>
> *intelligence is very important in a guy—it really is the most important thing, up*
>
> *there with a sense of humor. And he has a better sense of humor than you, too. It*
>
> *doesn't hurt that he's taller.* (71-72)

Craig's projection onto Nia's mind is marked by his feelings of inadequacy. Not only

does Craig believe he is less funny and less smart than Aaron, views that Nia does not

hold herself, he considers these the reasons that she will date Aaron over him. Craig

strips Nia of any agency, as he considers it natural for her to find Aaron more attractive

for the reasons listed above. Moreover, this passage reinforces Lindisfarne and Neale's

claim about the image of the ruling-class man holding prestige. In Craig's vision of what

Nia desires, height is a nice detail—a manifestation of his physical inadequacy—but it is

Aaron's supposed humor and intelligence that make him the superior man. In fact,

Aaron's intelligence, specifically, is the most important thing, particularly because it

enabled him to get into such a competitive school without really trying. Plus, he has pot,

which means he has both disposable income and the time to balance living with

competing. Each of these attributes reveal Craig's insecurities about his ability to live up

to his masculine and social ideals. Just as Vicky never thinks she will be like Becca,

Craig believes he will never be Aaron, who is just naturally better in every way, and the

best Craig can do is work harder to close the gap between them, though he knows that will never be enough.

In another interesting parallel with Vicky, Craig also finds connection with another form of labour, one not typically known for financial prestige: art. He thrives on drawing imaginary maps and environments because, as early as four-years-old, drawing allowed him to express his ideas and no one else's: "I could make up my own city. I could use my own streets. I could put the ocean where I wanted…I could have my own grid stretching off the edges of the map" (26-27). The quick successions of "I could" highlight the excitement Craig has about mapmaking. With his drawings, Craig could express his individuality in any way imaginable, with full control over the page. It is also worth pointing out that Craig's love of mapmaking is a direct indication of his desire to change environments. In the real world, Craig feels beholden to the environment he exists within, but with his maps, he could create new worlds, which brings him joy: "And I did that for the next five years—whenever I was in class, I didn't doodle, I drew maps. Hundreds of them…I made cities. That made me happy" (27). This connection foreshadows what's to come for Craig, whose change in environment will lead him to joy again, but early in the novel his opinion of art is influenced by its relationship to capitalism and the profit motive. "If I kept making my maps," Craig ponders, "and some art collector came across them and decided to make them worth hundreds of thousands of dollars, if I killed myself at the height of that, they'd be worth *millions* of dollars" (103). At this point in the novel, Craig can only understand his art as it relates to financial gain. He acknowledges how drawing brings him joy, but that matters little in comparison to other vocations. If there is any money in art it will come from someone else, someone

external to himself who deems it worthy and valuable, which means Craig does not consider the practice of drawing maps inherently valuable to himself in other ways. Instead, his mind is focused on how, even in the best scenario of his art being worth something, it is ultimately his death, his absence from the equation, that produces further value.

Vicky's and Craig's mindsets are dangerous precisely because they understand their value in capitalist terms. For Vicky, her value as a person is linked to being more like her sister, something she feels she cannot do, which feeds into her sense of unworthiness. If she is not like Becca, she has no worth. For Craig, his value is linked to his ability to do well in school, land stable employment, and obtain financial prestige. However, he begins to fear that he will never reach these ideals, ideals embodied by people like Aaron, thinking instead that it is his death that will bring value to the world. These two characters are connected by the capitalist logic that governs their lives. They each are provided a model of succeeding in life, a model containing gendered nuances but one without alternatives to competitive individualism. Instead, both Vicky and Craig must reconcile their thoughts and emotions with the neoliberal expectations shaping their lives, and they must do so as those expectations chip away at their mental health and overall will to live.

Capitalism, Mental Health, and Environmental Pressures

That mental health issues are displaced onto individuals is one way in which capitalism becomes naturalized. Since suffering is part of the human experience, Mark Fisher argues, it is easy to frame mental distress as a "natural fact," thereby absolving capitalism from any meaningful responsibility (19). But there are ways of addressing capitalism's evasiveness when it comes to mental health concerns, as Fisher contends,

I want to argue that it is necessary to reframe the growing problem of stress (and

distress) in capitalist societies. Instead of treating it as incumbent on individuals

to resolve their own psychological distress, instead, that is, of accepting the vast

privatization of stress that has taken place over the last thirty years, we need to

ask: how has it become acceptable that so many people, and especially so many

young people, are ill? The 'mental health plague' in capitalist societies would

suggest that, instead of being the only social system that works, capitalism is

inherently dysfunctional, and that the cost of it appearing to work is very high.

(19)

By picking up the question Fisher posits, it becomes possible to interrogate the pressures

and expectations that are unique to capitalism, and specifically neoliberalism, and how

they influence the lives of adolescents. Thus, the focal points of this section are the

depictions of depression within both novels and how Vicky's and Craig's suicidal

ideations appear linked to the pressures of capitalist logic in their lives.

Unsurprisingly, the biochemical framing of mental distress is typically the entry

point to understanding depression in adolescent literature. Vicky encounters this framing

when she researches depression at Lakeview, learning that it is an "illness" that affects

the mind and "It interferes with certain chemicals responsible for transmitting messages

from one part of the brain to another" (Stork 43). This perspective is reinforced later in

the novel when Vicky recalls advice from Gabriel, a fellow Lakeview patient: "Gabriel

said once that if the depression is chemical, it never really goes away, but I could manage

it. I could learn to live with it. Exercise, good thoughts. I got to find me some good

thoughts" (232). The connections between psychiatry and neoliberal capitalist logic are

readily apparent here in their focus on the individual. When the cause of depression is rooted in the unique chemical composition of Vicky's mind, the notion of thinking 'different thoughts' seems like an apt solution. By practicing the habit of thinking good things then Vicky can begin to gain control back over her psychology.

Vicky's problem, however, is that she struggles to think good things, which manifests, for her, as "minerlike" elf labourers in her mind who are grumpy, tired, and sending her negative messages. They even go as far as to send her cartloads of the message "*Kill yourself*" (43). What Dr. Desai helps Vicky realize is that depression is not her fault, that it distorts everything in her life, and that it "not only makes it hard for the brain elves to deliver messages. Sometimes it makes them put the wrong messages in the cart" (53). The analogy between depression and "minerlike elves" is striking. Vicky describes her mind as a collection of these elves working away happily until the thick fog of depression roles in and makes them struggle, causing them to dump the wrong messages into their carts, which is an all-too-specific reflection of life under capitalism. Like Vicky, the elves of her mind are made to work incessantly and are not allowed to stop, even when the material conditions of their labour become considerably worse. When the thick fog of depression roles through, they must continue mining their messages and those messages inevitably lead to suicidal ideation; their way of life offers no respite, no care, and no alternatives.

The lack of alternatives to capitalism for Vicky are mirrored by her insistence that she is solely responsible for her depression. "I don't want to blame my father or Barbara or my sister for how messed up I am," Vicky thinks, "It's just too convenient to blame your family. It seems cowardly" (51). This neoliberal talking point positions Vicky as

responsible for failing to live up to the expectations placed upon her. Unlike Becca, who rises to every challenge, Vicky considers herself weak. She refuses to accept any alternative perspective and considers a critique of her social environment too easy to make. What makes this position understandably intriguing is that it provides an individual with some semblance of control: the problem is with me and therefore I have the power to change it. The issue, however, is that even though Vicky understands her depression may never go away, she will never be able to out-think it. The reason she will never out-think it is because the depression affects her thoughts, but they are *not* her thoughts. If the elves in her brain were fine carting messages until the depression arrived, it follows that the depression is external to the thoughts themselves, that it came from somewhere else and imposed itself upon her mind.

Over the course of the novel Vicky recognizes that her father's actions and parental policies prove detrimental to her mental health, arguably guiding her contemplation of suicide. These pressures largely emerge through her father's actions, but they are also symbolically reflected in her family's house. Early in treatment, Vicky describes her house—a material representation of her environment and the world she lives in—as "soul-piercing," containing a "cold, dark loneliness" with a "leathery, dead smell": "Living there is like going to a party where you don't know anyone and no one speaks to you and you don't know where to stand or sit" (71). This description not only frames her house through grotesque, deathly language, it typifies Vicky's sense of alienation, a long-argued feature of living under capitalism, from her family's world and

values.[65] Her family moved there after her mother died and her father married Barbara, and inside this massive house there is not only a room for servants but a living room full of abstract paintings bought specifically for "investment purposes" (72). Each of these descriptors reinforce her family's status, their wealth, and Vicky's disconnection from the values that produced it. It is here, in her house, where Vicky should feel welcome, wanted, and safe. Instead, Vicky's home environment is inextricably linked to her distress and her suicide attempt: "My house is how I know that sooner or later, I will try to kill myself again" (72). Inside Vicky's house, a mirror of life under the roof of her father's expectations, the pressures of capitalist logic and neoliberalism are inescapable, equally applied at school, during work, and when at rest.

Vicky's psychiatrist, Dr. Desai, picks up on Vicky's alienation from home and how that environment shapes her mental health. While discussing if Vicky should leave Lakeview, a position for which her father firmly advocates, Dr. Desai reminds Vicky not to take her father's frustrations personally: "The thing we need to keep in mind is that underneath that anger, there is fear and hurt. In a way, your suicide attempt is a rejection of him, of his way of life, of the way of life he wants for you, and what he has worked hard to give you" (143). Notably, Dr. Desai's assessment opens with a subtle comment on masculinity in that anger is an emotion allowed for men, but not fear or hurt. As a result, Vicky is not allowed to connect with her father through their mutual fears or pain; rather, his anger renders him standoffish, further alienating Vicky. But Dr. Desai's

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[65] See George C. Comninel's *Alienation and Emancipation in the Work of Karl Marx* (2019) for an extensive overview of alienation in Marx's writing. See also Karl Marx's *Selected Writings* (1994), edited by Lawrence H. Simon, for selections of Marx's writing and, specifically, his work on "Alienated Labor" (58-68).

second comment is an explicit critique of Vicky's social environment and her father's

expectations. Through this lens, Vicky's attempted suicide reads as a rebellion against her

father and the capitalist logic he espouses. The conflict between them comes down to

ownership, which is why Vicky routinely refers to her attempted suicide as "the deed."

As a noun, a deed could be considered an intentional act and/or a legal document of

ownership to property, both of which fit Vicky's experience. Her suicide attempt was

both intentional and an effort to claim ownership over her life. Even as a verb, to "deed"

refers to the transfer of property rights to another person, reinforcing the complexity of

her attempt and its symbolizing the power of language, capitalism, and ownership in

Vicky's life. There is some danger in this reading, though, in that it considers suicide an

empowering act, and, while in some ways it can be thought of as such, there are other

forms of liberation that do not require the loss the life.[66] Vicky is inevitably encouraged

to pursue those forms of liberation, but her suicide attempt operates as a springboard for

her symbolic rebellion against capitalism and her father's expectations that she be a good

neoliberal subject.

Still, before Vicky finds alternative acts of empowerment, she is convinced she

will never escape her father's capitalist logic. When Gabriel asks her if she thinks life

will be different once she is done at Lakeview, she decisively replies, "No…Everything

and everyone will be exactly the same" (75). She holds her opinion for good reason, of

course, and her opinion speaks to the seemingly inescapable qualities of capitalism

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[66] Notably, there is a rich literary history of featuring women protagonists who can only take complete control of their lives through suicide: Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, and Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*.

argued by Fisher.[67] To Vicky, nothing outside of Lakeview is changing, and what is

outside of Lakeview is miserable and sad. When she returns home after weeks away,

Vicky immediately feels the depressive fog engulf her: "I feel as if someone opened a

valve in the back of my neck, and a thick gas the color of egg yolk begins to infiltrate my

head…I never expected it to be so sudden or so soon. How long have I been home? Half

an hour? What is it about this place that's so toxic, and how will I ever survive here?"

(229). The intensity with which her depression returns seems unconscionably quick, but

the point is that the environment itself has always been and perhaps will always be toxic

for Vicky. The gas she speaks of does not immediately arrive when she does; rather, it is

always present, an ambient feeling of existence that makes it difficult for her to think,

feel, and breathe. Miguel's solution to Vicky's struggle returning home—he gets her a

job at his office—reinforces her belief that there is no alternative to his capitalist logic.

By this point in the novel, however, Vicky is more aware of her father's narrow

worldview and how it does not serve her. Upon hearing his offer, Vicky thinks, "He

expects me to be impressed and grateful. I smile, because I recognize what he is trying to

do. He wants money, the fun of earning it, the pleasure of having it, the thrill of wanting

it, to light a spark in me. It's my father's answer to depression" (274). This realization is

in stark contrast to Vicky's opinions earlier in the novel. Before, Vicky understood her

father as someone looking out for her best interests. But by the time she returns home,

she sees him differently, as a man who is trying to help, but in the limited ways he knows

how. Such a point removes any sense of malice from Miguel's actions, as his intentions

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[67] See Fisher's *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (2009).

are noble enough, but Vicky also sees how they are profoundly insufficient. Even worse, it is the very capitalist logic he champions that is what keeps Vicky's spark unlit.

Like Vicky, Craig's understanding of depression begins with a biomedical basis. When Craig first experiences his distress building, he makes an appointment with Dr. Barney, who asks Craig if he knows how depression works. Craig cites the "chemicals in your brain," "neurotransmitters," specifically "serotonin," and how a lack of serotonin leads to depression, which can be supplemented through the use of "selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors" or SSRIs to help make someone feel better (Vizzini 108-109). The technical language in their exchange is precise, scientific jargon, and Craig has a surprisingly intimate knowledge of biochemistry. This discussion is nevertheless grounded in individual biology and how Craig's symptoms are manifesting themselves. Moreover, for Craig's parents, his depression is a "chemical imbalance, and if [he] gets the right drugs for it, [he'll] be fine" (104), and later in the novel when Craig worries about the stigma of receiving psychiatric treatment, Dr. Mahoud, a Six North psychiatrist, reminds him, "You have a chemical imbalance, that is all. If you were diabetic, would you be ashamed of where you were?" (240). The comparison to another illness is intended to destigmatize Craig's distress and remind him that he deserves to feel better, but Dr. Mahoud's claim that Craig has a chemical imbalance and "that is all" is profoundly inaccurate. It may be the case that Craig requires, in part, a chemical treatment plan, and the novel signals this when Craig feels better taking Zoloft. This imbalance, however, is not *all* that is wrong in Craig's life. There are significant environmental pressures imposing themselves on Craig and informing his sense of self-worth.

Craig likens these pressures to "Tentacles" reaching out and constricting him. Specifically, they are "the evil tasks that invade [his] life" (14). The image of Craig being bound by these tasks mirrors the lack of options available to him as a neoliberal subject under capitalism; he is stuck and restricted to this way of life. If he should fail at any of these tasks, then he risks losing out on the meaningful life he desires. For example, after missing out on the chance to earn extra credit in his American History course, preventing him from earning a 98 average, Craig explains how this tentacle made him spiral:

> [It] meant 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 the 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: it made it so I wouldn't get out of bed, which led to the ultimate thing—homelessness. If you can't get out of bed for long enough, they come and take your bed away. (14-15)

This cause and effect understanding of life connects one mark in school to a slippery escalation into homelessness, Craig's ultimate fear. The meaningful life he yearns for is highlighted in this lengthy sentence through the capitalization of certain checkpoints, signposts of success for any good neoliberal subject. Outside of those accomplishments, however, Craig feel valueless, not even worth the bed he sleeps in. A danger of capitalist logic is that it positions every feature of life, material and some immaterial, as something to be earned. Craig feels that he needs to earn the bed he sleeps in, that he needs to earn his worthiness, that he is not inherently entitled to either under capitalism. He

understands the world he lives in makes it impossible to truly succeed, but if anything

goes wrong or prevents him from achieving his goals then it is entirely his fault. He must

be better because he believes a meaningful life is his responsibility to obtain.

Much like Vicky's, Craig's failure to obtain such a life is no one's fault but his

own. If he cannot handle the Tentacles, it is because he is not working hard enough. After

getting high one night, Craig starts to hear the voice of a military soldier berating him for

smoking pot. When Craig wonders how he can feel both ambitious and lazy, the voice

informs him, "*I'll tell you how, soldier. It's because you're not ambitious. You're just*

lazy" (99). This internal dialogue positions Craig as an army recruit, which would seem

out of place if not for the fact that Craig faces extensive pressure to meet certain

standards and match his peers, much like any recruit is conditioned during basic training.

His feeling of personal failure is also reinforced by his parents' continuous attempts to

support him: "My parents are always looking into new ways to fix me. They've tried

acupuncture, yoga, cognitive therapy, relaxation tapes…self-help books, Tae Bo, and

feng shui in my room. They've spent a lot of money on me. I'm ashamed" (38). These

efforts, though, do not account for the role of capitalist logic; in fact, some of them

reinforce it. Therapy, self-help books, yoga, and other methods of self-development have

their place in people's lives, but when framed as 'solutions' to mental distress they

overlook a core issue: no amount of yoga will protect you from needing enough money to

stave off homelessness. Breathing exercises will not stop a bank from foreclosing on your

home. This passage reveals Craig's feedback loop. He feels depressed, so he tries

anything to fix it on an individual level, which never fully works, so then Craig feels

shame, which further triggers his depression, establishing a cycle. Unfortunately for

Craig, until he considers the role of his environment, he remains stuck in the cycle: "I had a lot of Tentacles. I needed to cut some of them. But I couldn't; they were all too strong and they had me wrapped too tight; and to cut them I'd have to do something crazy like admit I wasn't equipped for school" (95).

But Craig's distress is less about his inability to handle school than his expectations of himself as a student. During one exchange with Dr. Minerva, Craig explains how he hates his school email, even though he is consumed by it. When Dr. Minerva presses him on why, Craig describes how vital email is to his academic success. Through email Craig is connected to his school, with his (few) friends, teachers, announcements, volunteer opportunities, and other forms of professional development. His future depends on him seeing and responding to email, something he cannot do at Six North, which exposes the root cause of his distress: if he does not see those emails and take advantage of their opportunities, he will fail at school, and because school is his life, he will fail at life. Dr. Minerva questions this conclusion, but Craig swiftly reminds her, "I'm not going to be able to do anything but work as hard as possible all the time and compete with everyone I know all the time to make it. And right now school's the *one thing* I need to do. And I'm away from the e-mail and I can't do it" (385). This disconnection from the only life he knows is distressing in its own way because Craig can only comprehend life, at least a meaningful one, by the capitalist pressures engrained in him, particularly by his school. Such pressures are precisely why he develops depression to begin with, and Craig knows it. When asked by Dr. Barney why he thinks he has depression, Craig replies, "I can't compete at school…All the other kids are too much smarter" (105). Craig's desire to be in school and his concerns with falling behind,

coupled with his lack of self-confidence, indicate a clear relationship between his school environment and his depression.

Besides Craig's concerns with being away from school, he also understands that those pressures are waiting for him outside the walls of Six North. Like Vicky, Craig sees no escape from the capitalist logic that dictates his world: "*I just talked to this girl—and I did okay—but the Tentacles are coiled and the pressure is rising, getting ready to pounce on me when I leave. If I'm here too long, I'll have that much more to do when I get out*" (238). Even though Six North offers him respite from this pressure—a point I explore in the next section—life outside of Six North remains the same; nothing has changed, and, even worse, he will have to do twice as much work to catch up for lost time. All his development within Six North does not change the fact that his life will inevitably be identical to what it was before he was admitted, and this realization does not lead to a preferred prognosis: "And what if I *keep* on? What if I do okay, live with depression, get into College, do College, go to Grad School, get the Job, get the Money, get Kids and a Wife and a Nice Car? What kind of crap will I be in then? I'll be *completely crazy*" (392). There are several layers to this passage, but Craig's core realization is that the capitalist logic fueling his ambition and quest for a meaningful life will eventually overwhelm him psychologically. The life he feels bound by, even if he achieves some of what he desires, will never be enough. It will consume his mind until the end of his life. Moreover, he blurs the line among the 'points' in his life through capitalization, as if they are all unified as symbolic items on a checklist and devoid of deeper meaning. It was never about going to a specific college, or landing a specific job, or marrying a specific kind of person. This is where neoliberalism fools him into a false sense of individual freedom.

Yes, he gets to choose the specifics as he goes along. But where he has no freedom, where his life is controlled by external factors, is that in order to 'succeed' or live anything worth calling 'meaningful' he must follow this outlined plan. The map for Craig's life is set, and he may travel to different destinations in any order he chooses, but the map itself is rigid. He cannot live out his own path.

Mental Health Treatment and Modified Living

Inside their respective hospitals, life is different for Vicky and Craig. Both Lakeview and Six North are spaces of communal gathering and support, areas of subsistence living, and close-quarter communications. A core premise of my argument is that these spaces better reflect aspects of pre-industrial life, such as those agricultural in nature, than they do capitalist societies. However, as noted in the introduction to this chapter, I recognize that these texts do not actually take place in pre-industrial worlds. Moreover, there are several aspects of pre-industrial society that are absent entirely. These include but are not limited to forced labour or slavery, land ownership, and the production of agriculture itself. Neither Vicky nor Craig farm, and they do not produce the food they eat. Still, while one could spend an equal amount of time outlining how the psychiatric spaces in these novels do *not* reflect all features of pre-industrial life, the strength of my claim rests on the idea that life within the hospital is not capitalistic. Instead, the hospital spaces function as new environments entirely, borrowing aspects of

a pre-industrial world and mixing them with contemporary characters and their

psychology.[68]

Vicky's growth at Lakeview, for example, is grounded in the communal support

of those around her. She becomes close friends with several fellow patients, including

Mona, her roommate; Emilio "EM" Machado; and Gabriel, a confidant for Vicky within

the hospital. She also develops a close relationship with her psychologist, Dr. Desai, who

guides her towards a position of thriving and helps Vicky foster a desire to live. Together,

these characters participate in group activities and discussions and communal breakfasts,

lunches, and dinners. It is within the hospital setting that Vicky begins to understand how

a supportive and communal environment eases her distress: "This dark thing, I now

know, is my depression…It has gone into hiding these past few days because I had

help—it's been five against one. But once I'm home, the odds will be in its favour"

(Stork 126). A distinction is made here between life in and outside of the hospital. Inside,

Vicky always has direct support around her, enough so that her depression goes into

hiding. Outside Lakeview, a life of "individualism" awaits Vicky's return. The difference

Vicky alludes to in this passage suggests that capitalist pressures are nearly absent from

Lakeview. They are not forgotten entirely, as she fears what awaits her when she checks

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[68] I add here that the depictions of these facilities are also at odds with much of the history associated with the field of psychiatry. The field of Mad Studies itself, for example, is born from the significant and horrific features of psychiatric medicine, past and present. While I do not engage directly with such scholarship in this project, it is important to note the great journalist and academic work being done in that area. For journalistic perspective, see Robert Whitaker's *Mad in American: Bad Science, Bad Medicine, and the Enduring Mistreatment of the Mentally Ill* (2002). For academic literature, see Gerald N. Grob's *The Mad Among Us: A History of the Care of America's Mentally Ill* (1994), George W. Dowdall's *The Eclipse of the State Mental Hospital: Policy Stigma and Organization* (1996), Linda J. Morrison's *Talking Back to Psychiatry: The Psychiatric Consumer/Survivor/Ex-Patient Movement* (2005), Nick Crossley's *Contesting Psychiatry: Social Movements in Mental Health* (2006), and *Madness, Distress, and the Politics of Disablement* (2015), edited by Helen Spandler, Jill Anderson, and Bob Sapey.

out, thus rendering them somewhat present, but capitalism's ambient presence as the only mode of being is thoroughly dispelled from Vicky's life inside the hospital.

In addition, Vicky's daily routine reveals the absence of capitalist logic at Lakeview. Gone are the pressures of school, debate team, extracurriculars, and her father's overbearing persistence that she works hard to succeed in life. Instead of these pressures, she experiences a slower daily pace, with afternoon activities, such as Group Therapy Healing, to spark Vicky's creativity and relationships with others, and occasional one-on-one sessions with Dr. Desai. The patients eat together and with enough prepared food for each of them to receive proper nourishment. Nothing of excess exists within the hospital environment, and Vicky fosters an appreciation for the labour she participates in during her stay. One day when her father and Barbara try to bring her home, Vicky thinks "I think of all the things I should have said to my father that I didn't. *I'm needed here. I'm good at things here, even if it's folding sheets. I'm getting back on that horse of yours but I'm doing it my way, as best I can*" (142-143). The horse Vicky references stems from her father's motto—getting back on the horse means getting back to normal—which is her conceding that she will inevitably lead a life closer to his expectations, but Vicky finds empowerment in the work that makes her feel fulfilled. She never has to compromise herself for the sake of others. In Lakeview, Vicky finds purpose, joy even, in her labour and in being alive. When her environment is stripped of its capitalist pressures, Vicky discovers a meaningful life worth living.

She also fosters the same sense of purpose and meaning when the group of adolescent patients get to visit Dr. Desai's private ranch. On the drive from Lakeview, the group of patients discuss their lives as well as their thoughts on religion and their belief

structures. Vicky journals the entire trip, pondering her own beliefs: "*What do I believe in? How can I find something to believe in, to me give me strength?*" (149). This yearning for something more in life keeps Vicky optimistic as their group sets up for their visit. Upon their arrival, Vicky describes the ranch as an "oasis" and "serene," with "big leafy trees" around the house, and lots of animals, including horses and chickens, roaming around (150). Inside there are homemade quilts, a few pieces of furniture, and shelves of books ranging from East Indian authors to *Jane Eyre, Wuthering Heights*, and *The Collected Poems of Robert Frost*. As Mona describes it, "The whole trip here I felt like roadkill. As soon as I saw this place, I felt better. This is like another world where all the ugliness out there can't get in…I bet you no one has ever tried to kill themselves in this place" (152). Hearing that Mona has been struggling with a personal matter, Vicky puts the skills she has gained from therapy into action: "I hug her. I hug her without thinking, without realizing that I'm doing it until my arms are around her. This must be what healthy people do with their friends" (155). This moment marks an important stage in Vicky's development, a movement from her feeling isolated to being an active social support for someone else. Under her father's roof, Vicky is conditioned to think individualistically, to think about her success first and foremost. But Vicky is looking for something else in life, a tether to something more than law school, money, or employment. Both Lakeview and the ranch provide Vicky the space both to question her own beliefs in search of what is true for her and to reach out to others, no matter who needs support. The "ugliness" kept from entering the ranch is the mantra of individualism that ignores the social needs of people, a mantra Vicky rebels against when she hugs

Mona, signalling to her that she is there for her as a friend; doing so is what "healthy" looks like in Vicky's eyes.

During their stay at Dr. Desai's ranch, Vicky and the others learn a great deal about each other. While digging holes to repair a broken fence, Vicky learns something about EM's life that reinforces her evolving view of capitalism. Taking a break from digging, Vicky asks EM about his work in construction, genuinely curious how he does similar work to their digging on a daily basis. EM does not mince works and is pointed with his response: "I do it day after day because if I don't do it, we don't eat" (160). His matter-of-fact tone reinforces Vicky's sense of capitalism's all-pervasive presence. The bottom line is that EM's material world is shaped by the necessities a capitalist society does not provide him or his family. If he does not work, he will not eat, and then he will die. This exchange introduces a new layer to the pressures Vicky already knows. While she experiences pressures in the present, they are largely future orientated. As a member of a wealthy family, she will not go without food, water, or shelter. That does not mean capitalist pressures are any less present for her. Rather, they manifest differently in her life, and Vicky is left to wrestle with how damaging that must be to EM's psychology, knowing that his ability to live is predicated on his ability to work. This realization is significant to the growth Vicky experiences while away from home.

That growth leads Vicky to take charge of her own life, though she is not without concern for life outside of Lakeview. Speaking with Dr. Desai about feeling ready to return home, Vicky reveals to her, "I guess I'm afraid I will feel the way I felt before. These past few days I've felt…different. Like I've wanted things I've never wanted before, hoped for them" (219). Dr. Desai, hearing Vicky acknowledge her growth, agrees

that she has developed and nods to the role her environment has played. She informs

Vicky, "I've noticed a bit of rebirth in you as well. It's not an uncommon occurrence in

people who have attempted suicide to bounce back and appreciate their life and the world

in a new way. This is especially true if the person is in a new environment, even a place

as drab as a hospital, as long as it's away from the stressors that triggered the attempt"

(219). That Vicky feels differently while at the ranch, coupled with her feeling better

within Lakeview, reinforce Dr. Desai's claim that putting people into different

environments commonly relieves their distress. What is fascinating is that Dr. Desai

explains this fact as if it is not revolutionary. When the only environment one lives in is

under capitalism and it becomes common to find people getting "healthier" while away

from the pressures of neoliberalism, the solution to a public mental health crisis seems

clear: capitalism must be reformed or be replaced by an alternative organizing structure

that does not produce such rampant inequality, distress, and death. This exchange in *The*

Memory of Light offers the most explicit critique of capitalist societies, yet Vicky and Dr.

Desai's conversation continues as if nothing monumental had been shared. Lingering in

the absence of further commentary from either Dr. Desai or Vicky is the profound

presence of another voice sighing, 'Well, this problem really sucks but what are we going

to do? Change the system? Anyway…'

 Although the novel never pushes towards a systemic revolution, the novel does

suggest, through Vicky's experiences, that there are alternative ways to be in a capitalist

society. Vicky uses what she has learned about herself and the world to rebel against her

father and, thus, capitalism more generally. After getting out of Lakeview, she discusses

with her parents what her plans for school are moving forward. Standing up for herself,

Vicky tells them, "I'll stay at Reynard…But I'm not going to the office on Saturdays. I need Saturdays to catch up on school and to work on stuff for *The Quill* and my own writing. I want to continue seeing Dr. Desai, and I'll need a new car to visit Juanita and Gabriel and see Mona and EM., wherever they are" (324). This pronouncement is on the last page of the novel, marking the end of Vicky's old perspective and the beginning of something new, something her parents agree to. Further, it signifies Vicky's growth in at least three ways. First, she tells her parents she will not go to work on Saturdays. She does not ask their permission; she asserts herself, expressing her own purpose and desires. Second, she then explains what she will do instead. This includes catching up on schoolwork, which demonstrates that she does value her parents' perspective, and focusing on her own writing, something she is passionate about. By becoming an assistant editor for the school paper, as well as writing more poetry, she prioritizes her love of writing, a love she developed further while within Lakeview. Finally, she claims ownership over her own treatment plan, including continuing to see Dr. Desai and her new friends. Feeling alienation and loneliness prior to Lakeview, Vicky learns, through treatment, how powerful communal support and friendship can be when one's environment encourages it. While it will be difficult to keep their community together amidst the pressures of the outside world, Vicky asserts doing so as a core purpose in her life. Her friends and personal passions matter now; for her, they are part of a meaningful life worth living.

Still, I contend that while Vicky's sense of self and identity do develop, they develop into the model of productive citizenship. She is no longer the self-deprecating and seemingly directionless version of herself. Instead, she is assertive and confident, and

she takes control of her own life and does things (with some mild negotiation) on her own terms. Vicky may still not be exactly like Becca, but she is definitely acting closer to the "can-do girl" than when she entered Lakeview, as she fully embraces her neoliberal subjectivity. Her final discussion with her parents illustrates her assuming personal control of her future, her individuality, and her mental health treatment plan. As a result, Vicky ends the novel becoming a productive citizen.

Similarly, Craig's growth at Six North reflects his becoming a productive citizen, which is initially generated through communal support and drastic environmental changes. One of Craig's fellow patients, Humble, points to the changes to life within Six North early in his treatment. Using an analogy from the animal kingdom, Humble explains, "Now in the wild, the lion who sees new youngsters from another pride, another breed, he'll kill and eat those youngsters so he can breed his own offspring. But here…There unfortunately appears to be a distinct lack of women accepting my breeding potential. So in your youth you are not a threat to me" (Vizzini 207-208). Much like Vicky marks a clear distinction between inside and outside Lakeview, Humble describes how competitive the outside world is for them, particularly as men. Through the marketplace of a society governed by capitalist logic, everything becomes a competition, every act becomes a sign of success (dominance) and failure (subordination). Moreover, this competition is violent, leading to the deaths of young people who cannot overcome the expectations of society. Although Craig and Humble are not lions, they are conditioned to treat one another in similar ways, especially when it comes to sex. Women, in this analogy, are breeding prizes for males, which highlights the heteronormative and patriarchal aspects of free-market capitalism. At Six North,

however, things are different. The women demand their individuality and their agency, and Humble becomes nothing more than a man with an opinion. Inside the hospital, the rules of life are different, and the competitive threats people are to one another are largely removed.

Craig, however, sees the differences in life at Six North as illusory. He, too, knows that the pressures of capitalist logic are waiting for him when his treatment is over: "I'm going to get out of here at some point and have to go back to my real life. This place isn't real. This is a facsimile of life, for broken people. I can handle the facsimile, but I can't handle the real thing" (259). Craig's argument that Six North is not real, that it is a copy of the real world made to look and feel similar when it is not, is correct. The differences between both environments are stark and how he does or does not handle either depends on several factors. But what Craig overlooks here is that while his real life may not be for "broken people," it is a significant reason people feel broken at all. Life at Six North may be easier to handle, but it is designed to help people realize that there are other ways of living life, other modes of being worth living. Six North may copy aspects of the real world, but it also strips away the core features driving young people to suicide. That is a good thing.

One of the many ways Six North is a healthier environment is through its emphasis on the true essentials of life. While there, Craig must focus on the basics. Humble's lion analogy is only one example of the many animal or nature references within the text, and what exactly constitutes the natural aspects of human life. Human beings are social beings, and the hyperbolic image of individual people competing against one another for glory or purpose is merely the result of capitalist rhetoric. At their

core, people require some basic necessities for survival that do not require individual

competition to obtain, and Six North provides these to its patients. As Craig notes

following his first lunch in treatment, "When it's done—clean plate—I feel better than I

have about anything I've done in a long time, maybe a year. *This* is all I need to do. Keith

was hesitant at the Anxiety Management Center, but was right—all you need is food,

water, and shelter. And here I have all three" (213). This passage is a direct response to

one of Craig's biggest fears: homelessness. In it, he references Maslow's hierarchy of

needs, a motivational theory in psychology that outlines what humans need to survive,

with the physiological requirements of food, water, and shelter being the bare minimum

humans need to live. Six North provides these, stripping them of their economic contexts

under capitalism. Just as EM acknowledges to Vicky that if he does not work, he will not

eat, food, water, and shelter must all be purchased in a capitalist society. Inside Six

North, however, these basic necessities are distributed to everyone regardless of their

class. Coupled with the fact that everyone eats together as a community, Craig's first

lunch at Six North is one bereft of capitalist logic. His ability to meet his physiological

needs are never at risk. Without this risk, he is able to eat everything on his plate—

something he has not done in over year due to his depression—and he ends up eating a

second helping. In this context, the fact he eats another plate of food is not about

capitalist excess; it is about recognizing what his body needs and having enough food to

support it.

Aside from the physiological basics, Craig also realizes Six North is about

community and support. After telling Dr. Minerva that "there aren't any Tentacles" inside

Six North, Craig discusses his Anchors. Unlike Tentacles, Anchors make Craig feel safe,

and his Anchors in Six North are clear: "The people are Anchors" (308). Dr. Minerva reminds Craig that people are not good Anchors because they change, they can come in and out of your life; rather, she tells him that building connections and a social community is what will help improve his mental health. Craig picks up on this during a conversation with Nia when she asks him if he is lonely, to which he replies, "Actually, no…It's very social here. I made friends" (348). Making friends is something Craig struggles with before treatment. While studying for the entry exam to Manhattan's Executive Pre-Professional High School, he cuts ties with all his former friends, and even his relationships with Aaron and Nia are shaped entirely by the competitive nature of their school, with no true substance beyond that thread to one another. But within Six North, Craig fosters real connections with the people around him, including Humble and another adolescent named Noelle. The community there is about purely support, and that is good for Craig's mental health.

The environment is so good, in fact, that Craig begins to reframe his experiences with depression. He starts improving his outlook on the world, though he remains concerned that Six North is lulling him into a "false sense of security" because it is not normal like the real world. Dr. Minerva helps quell this concern by reminding him that "Nowhere is normal" (305). When Dr. Minerva goes further by suggesting Craig may even be "good at making friends," he reminds her that he is only acting different because "there's no pressure," a sign that Craig fully understands how debilitating the expectations placed upon him are outside Six North (307). He knows it so well that he sees depression as a coping mechanism for life under capitalism: "I don't know how much of it is really chemical. Sometimes I just think depression's one way of coping with

the world. Like, some people get drunk, some people do drugs, some people get depressed. Because there's so much *stuff* out there that you have to do something to deal with it" (240). The comparison of depression to drinking and drugs illustrates the dangerous behaviours people expose themselves to when capitalist logic subsumes them. Faced with no alternatives to neoliberal subjectivity, life becomes bleary and distressed, forcing the body into unhealthy responses. Addiction, depression, and other psychological forms of distress become public health concerns within capitalist societies, and Craig understands why. He recognizes that different social conditions are required to foster purpose and meaning for people like him.

Even though Craig knows what a better world looks like to him, the problem is how he will achieve it. Like Vicky, Craig gets to the point of critiquing capitalism, but he takes it one step further by thinking about what he sees as a better world:

> I wish the world were like [Six North], if I just woke up and marked the food I'd be eating and it came to me later in the day. I suppose it *is* like that, except you have to pay for whatever you want to eat, so maybe what I'm asking for is communism, but I think it's actually deeper than communism—I'm asking for simplicity, for purity and ease of choice and no pressure. I'm asking for something that no politics is going to provide, something that probably you only get in preschool. I'm asking for preschool. (266)

Craig's references to communism and preschool appear tongue-in-cheek in that he knows his request is a stretch, but he parses out the features that he really wants in life. He wishes for a society where access to food is a right, not a privilege; where money is not a barrier to living, separating people into the haves and have-nots; and where the ambient

feeling of pressure to work or die is removed. Maybe communism or preschool is not the answer, but these wishes are all worthwhile goals. It is not unreasonable for the richest nations in the world, nations who produce more food than is required and have plenty of available housing, to redistribute their resources to provide everyone the basic necessities in life. Doing so would be "pure," according to Craig, but nothing any politics could provide. That might be the case in today's political climate, but that does not mean these goals are not worth aspiring towards. As Craig's mom notes near the end of the novel, "I think they might have to change the whole system…Smart young people, sent in here because of pressure…I'm going to write my congressperson about it" (439).

For Craig, however, the world improves with the immediate changes he *can* control, and this means removing himself from the one environment that pressures him the most: school. He does not drop out of school entirely, but he tells his family he wants to transfer to the Manhattan Arts Academy. His family is unsure of this move, particularly his father, but they are ultimately supportive. They support Craig because he discovers that art and drawing maps is something he loves. It is what makes him unique, and he wants to follow his newfound sense of individuality: "One thing they do in here is give you a lot of time to think," Craig begins, "I never really liked math…I never really liked English. This…this is something different. This is something I *love*. So I'd better do it" (415). This rekindling of his love for drawing is coupled with his desire to change the social conditions of his life, as Craig adds, "If I don't make some kind of big change, I'm going to come out of here wondering how anything is different from before, and I'm going to end up right back here" (415). Craig is correct in that significant environmental shifts are important to truly alleviate his distress. He may have learned new techniques

and coping mechanisms in Six North, but they will never fully prevent his Tentacles from reaching out to bind him. Removing the Tentacles means changing environments, and while, like Vicky, Craig teases a larger socio-cultural rebellion is in order, he understands his limitations and enacts his own private rebellion by claiming his individuality and direction in life.

As a result of this rebellion, Craig likewise embraces productive citizenship. He makes an important tweak by switching schools and focusing on his art, which he has a passion for, but his new and motivated sense of self clings to the identity he formed in Six North. Moreover, he talks explicitly about not wanting to sit back in life. Craig wants to be an active contributor to society, as explains the mental shift that has happened for him, "It's a huge thing, this Shift, just as big as I imagined. My brain doesn't want to *think* anymore; all of sudden it wants to do" (443). Craig's development, of course, is not inherently bad and, like Vicky, it is great that he finds his reasons to live. But what must not be lost is how the psychiatric treatments in these YA novels of mental distress act as explicit agents of neoliberal policy designed to inform adolescents of their personal responsibility to develop into productive bodies within a capitalist society. Craig's development reflects the success of this policy, as he ends the novel embodying a different model of young adulthood than before his time in Six North: productive citizenship.

Ultimately, the rampant growth of mental distress in capitalist societies signals that large-scale changes are required. At the very least, we must begin reframing the ways we talk about mental distress and the relationship between distress and the material conditions of life. The stories we tell one another and the novels we write matter in the

effort to shift public perceptions, and YA novels such as *The Memory of Light* and *It's Kind of a Funny Story* are critical to this discussion. Although they at times reinforce the biomedical model of mental distress, which makes individuals solely responsible for their stress, they also implicitly and explicitly critique this position in their exposure of how important environmental factors are in shaping psychological well-being. Vicky and Craig struggle deeply under the callous and cruel conditions of capitalism, which leave them with little reason to live. With no alternative pathways in sight, both adolescents experience thoughts of suicide that cloud their judgements and puts their lives in jeopardy.

That they experience such distress and suicidal thoughts while living within the neoliberal paradigm of their fictional worlds reveals an important tension, if not a full contradiction, to neoliberalism's claim to best advance human well-being. Inside Lakeview and Six North, though, the conditions of their lives are different, and their psychology improves considerably. The hospital spaces in these novels are designed to foster purpose, meaning, and the ability to thrive through holistic support and connection, time for deeper forms of personal development, and subsistence living. Everyone has what they need to survive and can instead focus on truly growing as individuals and as a community. There are obviously always ways to improve one's personal experience, and Vicky and Craig do so by claiming ownership of their labour and their passions. But until the solidarity of those inside places like Lakeview and Six North expand beyond these spaces, larger environmental shifts will be more difficult to come by. If the people living in neoliberal capitalist societies know that the conditions for "healthy" and "meaningful" lives look different than life under capitalism—and the organizing features of psychiatric

hospitals within these YA novels confirms this point—then the growing experiences of adolescent distress and the stories being written about them should indicate that the treatment for one of today's largest public health crisis is deep reformation to the political and economic structures molding capitalist societies.

Until such reformations occur, though, the YA novels I discuss throughout this project provide crucial insights into the expectations currently facing adolescents in the twenty-first century, and the kind of young adulthood they are encouraged to model. *It's Kind of a Funny Story* and *The Memory of Light* fit neatly with the other novels I discuss precisely because they all point to the same vision of young adulthood preferred within neoliberal capitalist societies: productive citizenship. Vicky and Craig, with their motivated sense of individuality and their adherence to accepting the responsibility for their distress, symbolizes what successful young adulthood looks like for contemporary adolescents.

Conclusion

In a 2014 article for *The Guardian*, author and literary critic Amanda Craig interviewed Robert Muchamore, a young adult literature writer, on whether children's books should have happy endings. Craig makes her position on the topic explicit. Expressing concern about Kevin Brooks' YA novel *The Bunker Diary* (2013) winning the 2014 Carnegie Medal—a British literary prize awarded annually to a new English-speaking novel for children or young adults—she asserts that while "A book that makes a reader feel worse rather than better may deserve to be published… it does not deserve to be promoted by the children's equivalent of the Booker prize" (Craig and Muchamore).[69] Moreover, Craig continues, although plenty of children's books "don't deny that bad stuff happens" and are capable of making "complex arguments about moral choices," there remains a remarkable quality to children's literature worth keeping: "My essential point is that children's fiction is, and should remain, a world apart. There's plenty of time for adults to discover that, alas, terrible things happen to good people who have done nothing to deserve it" (Craig and Muchamore). Muchamore, however, argues for the opposite position. He agrees that children and young adults may look for the satisfaction of a happily-ever-after. But the world is complex and rarely, if ever, offers anyone a truly happy ending. Thus, authors of realistic children's and YA fiction should be free to explore such complexity's dark and sad nuances. He cites John Green's *The Fault in Our*

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[69] Kevin Brooks' *The Bunker Diary* (2013) is the story of Linus Weems, a kidnapped adolescent boy who never escapes his captor and is left, along with five others, to die in a bunker. Linus is the last character to die and the novel itself ends abruptly mid-sentence and with no resolution beyond the sense that nobody made it out of the bunker alive.

Stars (2012) and John Boyne's *The Boy in Striped Pajamas* (2006) as two highly successful YA novels whose emotional impacts are based on sad endings.[70] Ultimately, he concludes, "Children's writers must carefully consider the effect their stories have on young readers. But that's a different thing to making rules on how stories must end and vague assertions that our books must fit inside some cloyingly safe 'world apart'" (Craig and Muchamore).

All the YA novels of mental distress I discuss throughout this dissertation arguably conclude with happy endings for their respective protagonists. J.D. Salinger's Holden Caulfield and John Neufeld's Lisa Shilling receive therapeutic support for their distress. At the same time, Joanne Greenberg's Deborah Blau heads to college after her psychiatric treatment. Virginia Hamilton's Junior Brown does not directly engage with the medical community, but he finds acceptance in the world of the Tomorrow Billys. Laurie Halse Anderson's Lia Overbrook, Meg Haston's Stevie Deslisle, and Julie Halpern's Anna Bloom all find a level of acceptance with themselves, which stems from a desire to move beyond their disordered eating thoughts and behaviours. Stephen Chbosky's Charlie and Michael Thomas Ford's Jeff come to find peace and familial support while attending intensive therapeutic treatment, while Adib Khorram's Darius Kellner ends his story by sharing a heart-warming and emotionally transparent moment with his father. And Ned Vizzini's Craig Gilner and Francisco X. Stork's Vicky Cruz, who both begin their stories after attempting suicide, learn that aspects of the world—

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[70] Muchamore writes, "Without the freedom to deliver a sad ending, many stories would lose the emotional power that makes them great. Do you really want a miracle cure for the terminally ill girl in *The Fault in Our Stars*? Would young readers get a better insight into the holocaust if *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*'s main characters were plucked from the gas chamber and lived happily ever after?" (Craig and Muchamore).

such as family, love, and friendship—are worth living for after all. There is a sense in each of these endings that life is getting better for these characters. There is hope in how some protagonists finally admit that their distress is overwhelming and that they need help of some kind, in how some parents learn to be meaningfully attentive to their children's mental health. These moments symbolize a positive growth in mental health discourse that centres adolescent trauma and distress as important and worthy of support.

These happy endings, however, come with significant implications worth addressing. In particular, many of the YA novels of mental distress that emphasize therapeutic treatments in their narratives often conclude with the notion that their adolescent protagonists need therapeutic help to move forward with their lives. Narratively speaking, the choice by these authors to end their novels by attaching hope and growth to therapeutic treatment is interesting in that, for many people, therapy marks the beginning of what will likely be a long and challenging process. That so many novels end with the start of one's therapeutic journey, or with adolescents finally accepting that therapy can help them, proffers important insight into the nature of contemporary mental health discourse. For one, the continual structuring of YA narratives in this manner implies that the most important message to communicate to young adults is their acceptance of therapeutic treatment. Once one makes that decision, the seemingly hardest and most important one to make, they will be well-positioned to address their distress moving forward.

Additionally, it is worth noting that these decisions are primarily made without the costs of therapeutic treatments addressed in any meaningful way. Halpern's *Get Well Soon* is one exception to this trend, for instance, as Anna learns from another Lakeview

patient that "It costs our parents over a thousand dollars a day to keep us here" and that the reason most people leave the hospital, whether they are ready or not, is because their health insurance runs out (71). Still, mental healthcare costs in these novels are mainly absent from discussion, let alone central to any plot. I speculate that adolescent narratives are uniquely suited for discussions of mental healthcare without major economic concerns because the adolescent figure is not the one paying for treatment. Adolescents, in their liminality, are in many ways encouraged to behave as adults (i.e., as productive citizens) without the same responsibilities (i.e., covering healthcare costs). Ultimately, though, the notion that attending therapy is all one needs to support their mental distress supports a particular ideological stance, namely, in the instance of the novels, is neoliberal capitalism.

I arrive at this conclusion because the YA novels of mental distress I discuss are all grounded in a realism that mimics the current political, social, and economic landscape of the United States since the mid-twentieth century. In these novels' efforts to represent real problems experienced by real young adults growing up in an era defined by neoliberal policy and culture, they help crystalize the good and the bad features of such culture, the expectations and the dangers of maturing in such conditions. Nestled in the heart of these realist novels dealing with complex issues, which also appear to conclude in positive ways, is the idea of hope. Acclaimed children's literature author, Katherine Paterson, provides a helpful framework for thinking through hope and happy endings in children's literature in her acceptance speech for the 1988 Regina Medal. Paterson, a self-described devout Christian, turns to the story of Moses for her understanding of hope. Revisiting God's call to Moses at the burning bush, Paterson notes how God tells Moses

to share his message, but He gives Moses an unpronounceable name: "'Say this to the people of Israel,' God says, 'I am who I am and I will be who I will be has sent me to you'" (947). The God Paterson signals here is one of the present and the future; it is a God both with Moses and a symbol of a better life ahead. For Paterson, Moses' story of God and the burning bush distills the essence of what she believes hope is:

> As a spiritual descendant of Moses, and of the prophets and apostles who followed him, I have to think of hope in this context. We are not really optimists as the common definition goes, because we, like Moses, must be absolute realists about the world in which we find ourselves. And this world looked at squarely does not allow optimism to flourish. Hope for us cannot simply be wishful thinking, nor can it be only the desire to grow up to and take control of our own lives. Hope is a yearning rooted in reality that pulls us toward the radical biblical vision of the world remade. (947)

Separating Paterson's definition of hope from its religious context, it reads as revolutionary. It is a concept based in the material world, no matter its conditions, and seeks radical change. Of course, this conceptualization of hope can seem negative for its inextricable link to the world's problems, which is why Paterson also refers to herself as a "prisoner of hope"; however, it also contains a positive association with what is yet to come, as Paterson concludes: "So the hope of my books is the hope of yearning... My stories will lean toward hope as a sunflower to the sun. The roots will be firmly in the world as I know it, but the face will turn inevitably toward the peaceful kingdom, the heavenly city, the loving parent watching and waiting for the prodigal son's return" (947). Thus, for Paterson, the return of Jesus Christ is the ultimate and only truly

complete happy ending. Otherwise, the best a story can end is with a sense of hope balanced between life in the material world and the idyllic notion of a world not yet arrived. That is what Paterson believes her stories and characters are symbolizing for readers: how the world is imperfect, full of difficult experiences, yet one must press on, keeping their sights ahead toward a better life for all.

When I consider the endings of YA novels of mental distress, I cannot help but think of hope and the role hope plays in these stories. For some, like Charlie or Jeff, hope is partially attached to familial support and how much better life can be when you live within a loving, supportive, family community. For others, like Lia or Stevie, hope is about learning to unashamedly accept your body for what it is, bit by bit, day by day. But since all of these protagonists live in societies organized by the same neoliberal capitalist principles currently organizing life in the U.S., hope is also attached to the idea of contribution, turning oneself into an active social agent, and becoming a productive citizen. Charlie, for example, stops being a wallflower that sits in silence and grounds his hope for the future in active engagement, as he ends his final letter: "Tomorrow, I start my sophomore year of high school. And believe it or not, I'm really not that afraid of going. I'm not sure if I will have the time to write any more letters because I might be too busy trying to 'participate'" (Chbosky 213). In Stevie's final conversation with her therapist, Anna, she asks her why she always makes paper cranes. Anna replies, "I like the process. I like making something with my hands. And the cranes themselves are meant to symbolize peace…If you'd like, I can teach you," to which Stevie says, "That would be…thanks" (Haston 285). And even Craig Gilner, who shares no shortage of critiques against neoliberal capitalism, ends his story, as noted in Chapter Four, by

talking about a shift that has occurred within him: "It's a huge thing, this Shift, just as big as I imagined. My brain doesn't want to *think* anymore; all of sudden it wants to do. Run. Eat. Drink. Eat more…Talk. Talk to people. Read. Read maps. Make maps. Make art. Talk about your art. Sell your art" (Vizzini 443). There is hope and possibly excitement attached to these actions that associate activity and production with growth and development. Charlie is so excited to participate in school that he does not think he will have time to write more letters, while Stevie expresses curiosity and an interest in working with her hands to start bringing her a sense of fulfillment. Craig shows excitement for both actions, towards not just participating and making more art but for the prospects of selling it as well, as a way to make his mark in the world. These instances, and others like them, illustrate how these characters find themselves embracing my theorization of productive citizenship. They become motivated, self-reliant young adults who accept simultaneously the responsibility for their distress and how to treat it.

I will clarify my position here that there is nothing wrong with therapeutic intervention or treatment. Therapy, when accessible, is beneficial and certainly plays an essential role in helping the mental health of children, adolescents, and adults alike, myself included. Still, I hesitate to label it a complete solution when it is, at best, only part of the solution. We must do more to address the root causes of mental health concerns, and YA novels of mental distress occupy a complicated role in both revealing and concealing such efforts. As the Marxist critic Barbara Foley asserts, "Attention to ideology figures centrally in [Marxist literary criticism's] attempt to avoid mid-level analytics. To what extent does the text function as apologia? As critique? As a contradictory blend of the two?" (125). On the one hand, YA novels of mental distress

offer implicit and explicit critiques of the social and political conditions contributing to adolescent mental distress. Whether through the pressures of consumer culture or the expectation that every relationship with another person must be grounded in hyper-competitive individualism, most protagonists struggling with mental distress are doing so because their environmental conditions—socially, politically, and economically—are actively making their lives worse. Sometimes those conditions are so difficult to endure that those protagonists question whether it is worth living at all. Each of these textual moments provides an opportunity to pause and reflect on the dangers of neoliberal capitalism in the lives of adolescents trying their best to fit into a world of increasing inequality and struggle. On the other hand, such novels simultaneously relieve such problematic conditions of any meaningful or comprehensive critique by accepting the privatization of distress and forwarding the importance of therapeutic treatment over any alternative response. Buried between the lines of these novels is a whispering voice that says: "I know the world can be an awful, horrible place, but as long as you go to therapy, you will be fine." This voice and its implications remind readers that they are responsible for their themselves.

Due to these contradictory positions, I argue that YA novels of mental distress remain hopeful in much of the way Paterson describes it, while also problematic in that they reinforce productive citizenship. For example, although these texts are not forwarding any explicit Christian messaging, they are at once rooted in the material world and keeping an eye toward a better future for adolescents. Indeed, the protagonists of YA novels of mental distress are clearly struggling with mental health issues that cause them and their loved ones problems that require solutions. And through a variety of efforts,

these novels' protagonists overcome their most demanding challenges. They illustrate, as

individuals, that they have a role to play in the world, and they will face any barrier by

personally finding a way over it, around it, or through it. However, these novels are

simultaneously problematic in their advocacy for suggesting that adolescent mental

distress is uniquely resolved through private support, motivational growth, and the

willingness of adolescents to carry the responsibility of their psychological struggles.

They display a pattern worth reflecting on more deeply, a model of young adulthood that,

intentionally or not, they are encouraging all young adults to aspire towards, and that is

productive citizenship. By revealing a preferred model of young adulthood based in one's

commitment to the neoliberal capitalist mode of being, these novels position productive

citizenship as the identity adolescents should hope for when these characters, and we as

readers, can hope for more.

I base this contention on the final implication of these novels' happy endings

worth noting, which is the idea that mental distress is only permissible in so far as those

who experience it remain productive citizens. Coupled with these novels' advocating for

a deeper understanding and acceptance of mental distress is the notion that support for

such distress is conditional. It is conditional depending on whether you can pay for

support (something most of these novels assume). It is also conditional in that such

support is designed to transform adolescents experiencing distress into active social

agents. Put crudely, it is okay to experience depression or severe anxiety, as long as one

can afford therapy and get themselves back into working order. These conditions,

therefore, merely raise many more questions, much more than the scope of this project

could adequately address, but what happens to those experiencing distress if they cannot

afford treatment? How does one exist in a world with severe mental distress when society increasingly demands more contributions of one's time, energy, and money? These questions, of course, are for another time, another project, which perhaps makes my dissertation a symbol of Paterson's hope. Maybe it, too, is something grounded in the reality that the novels I study are speaking to the world as it is, a world concerned primarily with the symptoms of mental distress while yearning for a remade world based on easing distress at its roots.

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