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Mental Health in *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Thirteen Reasons Why*

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MENTAL HEALTH IN *THE CATCHER IN
THE RYE* AND *THIRTEEN
REASONS WHY*

A Thesis

by

ZUGAY TREVINO

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

Major Subject: English

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

May 2022

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THE RYE* AND *THIRTEEN
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ABSTRACT

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J.D. Salinger's 1951 novel *The Catcher in the Rye* shows the life of seventeen-year-old Holden Caulfield and the aftermath of his expulsion from Pencey Prep. Jay Asher's 2007 book *Thirteen Reasons Why* centers on seventeen-year-old Clay Jensen's aftermath of his friend Hannah Baker's death. Although both novels are written, published, and set decades apart, they have much in common. The two books were heavily challenged or banned upon their initial release. Although they were challenged due to different reasons, *Catcher* and *Thirteen* are better understood after analyzing mental health in the books. The books deal with unawareness of mental health, not feeling heard, and the possibility of the Werther Effect. Holden and Hannah attempt to reach out to different people. Holden repeatedly talks to different types of people in hopes of being reassured about the future. As well, Hannah reaches out to her school's guidance counselor.

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CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND AND BOOK CHALLENGING OF *CATCHER* AND *THIRTEEN*

Background context on how the books were challenged and banned is needed to better understand mental health in J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) and Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why* (2007). About teaching *Catcher*, scholar Helen Frangedis states, "The foremost allegation made against *Catcher* is, of course, that it teaches loose moral codes; that it glorifies attitudes and behaviors which parents condemn in their teenagers--drinking, smoking, lying, promiscuity, and more" (2). Similarly, *Thirteen* was 2017's most challenged book (Gomez). Betsy Gomez from Banned Books Week Reports explains, "the depiction of suicide was the primary reason for 2017 challenges. The book was also on the top ten list in 2012 for drug and alcohol use, sexual content, suicide, and being unsuited for age group." At the same time, Gomez also states *Thirteen* "has been a valuable tool in igniting conversations about suicide, bullying, and consent." Analyzing both books and their depiction of mental health will help make further sense of why they were banned and the books' ideas at their best and worst. Arguably, at their best, both books have helped create and normalize conversations about mental health. At their worst, the books glamorize or romanticize incorrect ideas.

Thirteen faced heavy criticism for its impressionable audience and topic of suicide. In Anna S. Mueller's article, she states there is enough evidence that "suggest reasons to be

concerned about 13RW. Because 13RW depicts suicide as a means for coping with psychological pain ... in a very compelling way, it could be in a position to trigger Werther effects and harm youth, particularly for youth who identify with the plight of Hannah Baker” (2). Besides Mueller, Sarah McKenzie also states, “Thus, concerns around the adverse effects of fictional TV shows such as 13RW on adolescent suicides appear legitimate” (1). Although the study is based on the television show, the concerns of suicide depiction are equally as applicable to *Thirteen*. Hannah Baker’s suicide is tragic due to its preventability, her suicide can be seen as an incorrectly depicted and potentially problematic portrayal. Hannah lists thirteen people who she believes could have helped her or whom she blames.

The idea of strong content negatively affecting students concerned a school in Mesa County, Colorado during 2017. In a news article, “An official with a Western Slope school district recently ordered librarians to stop circulating a book on Netflix’s popular series ‘13 Reasons Why’ after seven students recently committed suicide” (“Mesa”). Although the 20 school district copies were all returned three hours after the librarians and the school counselors looked at the book, this demonstrates a serious challenge (“Mesa”). Other schools similarly challenged *Thirteen*. Betsy Gomez said, “An elementary school in Florida banned the book from campus, even for personal reading, arguing that students weren’t mature enough to handle the depiction of suicide, profanity, sexual content, and drug use.” The television show is more graphic in showing audiences scenes of the assaults and Hannah’s death. As well, her death in the books, a pill overdose, is less violent in comparison to the show, where she cuts herself. Although the book is less graphic than the television show, the book still implies sexual assault, and Hannah’s suicide is established from the start. The book, however, has no trigger warnings

of any kind. Instead, it is marketed as young adult literature, making it accessible for teenagers. The show at least has a strong content rating warning.

The elementary school in Florida was not the only school to ban the book from their school: “The book was also pulled from middle school classrooms in Anderson County, Kentucky. Several school districts also cautioned parents against letting their children view the Netflix series” (Gomez). The book was a bestseller of 228 weeks and widely read. It is important for readers to not be impressionable if they start to identify with Hannah. At the same time, as a YA novel, the book is intended for and marketed towards young adult readers. Overall, challenging both books, especially *Thirteen*, expresses valid concerns due to how, “despite its well-known public health implications, the extent to which it is safe to inform, discuss, and portray suicide within society is yet unknown” (Da Rosa et al.).

Thirteen's controversies mainly stem from how copycat suicides are a potential possibility. McKenzie says, “Exposure to and identification with a role model who died by suicide can lead to increased suicides, particularly among similar demographic groups” (1). Impressionable young adults may empathize with Hannah due to the romanticization of her story. A reader's ability to sympathize with a suicide and be influenced due to a book is also known as the Werther Effect, which will be discussed in chapters three and four.

Catcher is also challenged despite having been taught at high schools (Clairemont). Kaylyn Clairemont's research states, “The first recorded challenge took place in 1960, when an Oklahoma teacher was fired for teaching the book to her 11th grade students. Although she successfully appealed her dismissal, the book was removed from the school.” In part, the book has been challenged due to “six controversial elements in *The Catcher in the Rye*: profanity, dishonesty, atheism, alcoholism, sexual promiscuity, and homosexuality” (Frangedis 2). *Catcher*

continued to be challenged decades later. The book was recurrently challenged throughout the 80s and 90s. During the 2000s, it was also “removed by a Dorchester District 2 school board member in Summerville, South Carolina (2001) because it ‘is a filthy, filthy book’” (ALA). As well, it was challenged by a Glynn County, Georgia “school board member because of profanity. The novel was retained” (ALA). It was last challenged in 2009 by Big Sky High School in Missoula, Montana. The book’s challenging mostly ended after the 2000s, and it is still taught in classrooms. In comparison to before, the book is less challenged currently for having offensive or vulgar content.

One of the most vital criticisms is how neither book, especially *Thirteen*, portrays a healthy manner for their characters to deal with mental health. The World Health Organization Center (WHO) has provided suggestions for how to approach topics like those in *Thirteen*. They explain, “More than 700,000 people die due to suicide every year. For every suicide there are many more people who attempt suicide” (WHO 2021). It is important to note that many suicide attempts related to *Thirteen* may not have been reported. The report by WHO suggests, “limit access to the means of suicide (e.g. pesticides, firearms, certain medications); interact with the media for responsible reporting of suicide; foster socio-emotional life skills in adolescents; early identify, assess, manage and follow up anyone who is affected by suicidal behaviors.” The risks indicate that an impressionable reader may be better off reading a book like *Thirteen* with an adult. At the same time, they state, “These [methods] need to go hand-in-hand with the following foundational pillars: situation analysis, multisectoral collaboration, awareness raising, capacity building, financing, surveillance and monitoring and evaluation.” Books with topics like suicide should only be read by a mature reader or along with discussing the book with others.

Thirteen, based on studies from the television show, has equal potential to hurt rather than help impressionable audiences who already deal with thoughts of suicide. It is notable the study was conducted to test the show's impact. However, the concerns are applicable due to how the book is the source material. Although the show and novel allowed for discourse on suicide as less taboo, the lack of healthy coping methods, romanticization of suicide, and glamorization of revenge outweigh the positives. An important idea to keep in mind is that "to the best of our knowledge, there is no direct evidence to support or refute the hypothesis that suicidality might be influenced by the media, nor in what direction that effect will strike" (Da Rosa et al.). A team led by Gabriel Santana da Rosa did a study questionnaire with 7,004 people.

The primary finding of this study was the higher proportion of adolescents reporting worsening in mood after watching the webseries *13 Reasons Why* among those who already had more severe or frequent feelings of sadness and lack of motivation. Likewise, more individuals with previous suicidal ideation, self-harm behavior, or history of suicidal attempt reported a worsening in mood after watching the series. (Da Rosa et al.)

In spite of this, *Thirteen* can be seen as a valuable and positive tool for educators. One manner in which the book can be helpful is through incorporating it into the curriculum for preservice teachers. For an adult, there are fewer concerns about impressionable readers. Through reading, preservice teachers can "live through the experience of someone being bullied or considering suicide. A story of an adolescent's life can provide an opportunity for PSTs to consider their future roles as teachers and their responses to students who are faced with bullying or contemplating suicide" (Pytash 3). In a study, Kristine Pytash had 22 preservice teachers, or PSTs, between the ages of 19 and 23 read either Jennifer Brown's *Hate List* or *Thirteen*. Furthermore, out of the 22 participants, 10 knew someone who had committed suicide (6).

Pytash stated the study consisted of peer-led discussions. As well, due to “the sensitivity of the topics under discussion, [Pytash] monitor[ed] conversations to ensure that PSTs were comfortable with and untroubled by this sensitive topic” (5). Most importantly, she also provided resources to ensure anyone who potentially needed help could receive it. Pytash added, “I provided all participants with contact information for the university’s free and confidential counseling center; if they had questions or concerns, a staff member could provide immediate assistance” (5). The study indirectly shows some of the tools which an educator should provide while discussing a book dealing with suicide. The book alone has not been linked to any direct cause of deaths. However, based on current studies, the book should be read with resources available to younger or impressionable audiences. At best, the book can help educators but can also hurt impressionable readers.

CHAPTER II

A CLOSER MENTAL HEALTH ANALYSIS IN *THE CATCHER IN THE RYE*

Although *Catcher's* ending can be seen as unexpected, Holden's deteriorating mental health throughout the novel foreshadows Holden's stay at a mental health facility. There are signs of Holden wanting help, characters to whom he tries to reach out, and how they attempt to attain help. This chapter will also explore how Holden's mental illnesses including depression and PTSD due to sexual assault and his brother's death are depicted. Holden's mental illness and whether he has one is never directly stated since Holden himself is not too self-aware about his own feelings. Instead, he only discusses what he is comfortable with. However, there is textual evidence which shows he deals with depression along with other symptoms. Twice in the book, for example, Holden states, "I felt like jumping out the window" (48, 104). The first time is after Stradlater's date with Jane and the following after Holden is threatened by Maurice. Although he reaches out to two of his teachers and other characters, they are unable to help him with his true problems.

Mental health is a recurrently mentioned underlying idea throughout *Catcher*, as opposed to *Thirteen*, which has it as its overt theme. Instead, *Catcher* shows what can happen if mental health is ignored. Throughout the book, Holden does not consciously know he needs help. Subconsciously, it can be interpreted that he talks to other people in hopes of finding

answers about becoming older. Due to not attaining this help, he later needs a psychoanalyst from a mental health facility. Chapter 26 provides insight into Holden's mental health. He states:

That's all I'm going to tell about. I could probably tell you what I did after I went home, and how I got sick and all, and what school I'm supposed to go to next fall, after I get out of here, but I don't feel like it. I really don't. That stuff doesn't interest me too much right now. A lot of people, especially this one psychoanalyst guy they have here, keeps asking me if I'm going to apply myself when I go back to school next September. (Salinger 213)

The statement "I could probably tell you" shows Holden only says what he has processed and emotionally understands better. It also depicts him as an unreliable narrator. Holden is not telling all major events of the story. Most likely, there are parts he might not want to think or talk about. It can best be seen through the jump in time of a few months after Winter. The story takes place over the course of a few highly detailed days. In contrast, the next months are rushed over the course of a couple sentences. Holden's cursory summary of the aftermath of what happened could be not from lack of interest but rather repression or unsureness about the events. Regarding this, Holden states he "got sick" (213). The statement shows Holden may have had another major turning point event occur he does not want to talk about. Holden has been shown to only mention events he is comfortable with or ready to talk about. Most notably, Holden mentions "this one psychoanalyst guy they have here" (Salinger 213). The statement shows Holden is not at home or back in Pencey Prep. It can be concluded he is in a mental health facility. The "psychoanalyst guy" who keeps asking Holden questions is likely providing therapy. The idea can be seen from the book's first paragraph. In it, he states, "I'll just tell you about this madman stuff that happened to me around last Christmas just before I got pretty run-down and had to come out here

and take it easy” (1). Holden never discloses the name or city of the place he is in. Equally important, he also never states he is in a mental health facility.

In spite of this, he brings up the idea of disliking phoniness while he is processing the days after his expulsion from Pencey while in therapy. Altogether, the last chapter shows Holden is still processing the book’s events and his thoughts about it and therapy. He has no definite opinions formed about the events or about the place he is staying in. It can be concluded Holden is in therapy out of his own free will due to his looking for help throughout the book’s events and willingness to talk. At the same time, he also shares only what he wants to and is shown again when he states, “... the first thing you’ll probably want to know is...what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap but I don’t feel like getting into it, if you want to know the truth” (1). The comparison between Holden and Copperfield suggests the story’s disinterest in and rejection of the bildungsroman genre though it does keep the idea of the importance of education. Yet, *Catcher* is not intended to be a traditional bildungsroman. Due to Salinger’s understated writing style, the story can also be seen to have other underlying ideas including mental health and the importance of education. Additionally, Holden’s dislike of “David Copperfield kind of crap” can be linked to associating Copperfield with what he considers phony and his dislike of anything “phony.” His dislike of phoniness is best shown when Holden talk about phonies at Pencey and disinterest in anything superficial. He says Pencey is, “full of phonies, and all you do is study so that you can learn enough to be smart enough to be able to buy a goddam Cadillac some day, and you have to keep making believe you give a damn if the football team loses” (131). Holden expresses frustration about currently not wanting to worry about a future career. Instead, Holden wants to talk about important issues. He continues, “and all you do is talk about girls and liquor

and sex all day, and everybody sticks together in these dirty little goddamn cliques” (131). The quotations show Holden wants to have a deeper conversation.

The idea of phoniness in the book is a recurring topic. It can first be seen in his dislike of Pencey Prep due to how “phony” it is. Regarding this, he states, “They advertise in about a thousand magazines, always showing some hotshot guy on a horse jumping over a fence” (2). Holden states the school depicts itself as if “all you ever did at Pencey was play polo all the time. I never even saw once saw a horse anywhere *near* the place” (2). From its introduction, the school is depicted as hypocritical. Holden also says he was expelled due to low grades. At the same time, he explains, “They give guys the ax quite frequently at Pencey. It has a very good academic rating, Pencey. It really does” (4). Although Pencey is meant to be prestigious, it can instead be seen as faking its high academic and social merit. The school can also be seen as not only hypocritical, but full of people pretending to be refined. In its marketing, the school says, ““Since 1888 we have been molding boys into splendid, clear-thinking young men”” (2). Holden, however, states it is “Strictly for the birds. They don’t do any damn more molding at Pencey than they do at any other school. And I didn’t know anybody there that was splendid and clear-thinking and all. Maybe two guys. If that many. And they probably came to Pencey that way” (2). Besides this, the school is full of thieves. Holden says items have gone missing, and that, “The week before that, somebody’d stolen my camel’s-hair coat right out of my room, with my furlined gloves right in the pocket and all. Pencey was full of crooks. Quite a few guys came from these very wealthy families, but it was full of crooks anyway. The more expensive a school is, the more crooks it has—I’m not kidding” (4). Overall, Holden shows Pencey Prep’s prestige is only a façade. Holden seeks to talk about ideas less superficial, as can be seen through his frustration over phoniness and reaching out to others.

The first main idea analyzed will explore how Holden reaches out to others for help. The idea of therapy is mentioned in Holden's conversation with Luce. Luce suggests Holden see a psychoanalyst since Luce's dad is one. Holden can be seen to struggle with two main problems. He struggles with his "lousy childhood" and with not wanting to leave behind his adolescence but not wanting to enter the adult world. Holden can be seen to indirectly want help. He speaks to many different kinds of people throughout the book including Luce, Mr. Antolini, Phoebe, Mr. Spencer, and a taxicab driver. Each offers Holden a different perspective as he wants to figure out how to deal with leaving childhood behind.

The first person Holden reaches out to is Mr. Spencer. He starts by explaining he was running down Route 204 even though, "I don't even know what I was running for. I guess I just felt like it" (5). Spencer and Holden are shown to have an informal teacher and student relationship. The two talk outside of class. Holden says he visits Spencer since "He had the grippe, and I figured I probably wouldn't see him again till Christmas vacation started. He wrote me this note saying he wanted to see me before I went home. He knew I wasn't coming back to Pencey" (3-4). It is clear that Holden cares for Spencer through how he spends time with him although there is nothing forcing them to. Spencer can be seen as an older friend to Holden through their informal meetings. Holden, for example, says how he and some other guys were at his house for hot chocolate last Sunday and even knocks on Spencer's door "just to be polite and all" before entering (7).

At the same time, although Spencer cares for Holden, Holden does not feel heard. Spencer does not understand Holden's true issues and humiliates him about his essay. Regarding Spencer, Holden adds, "He wasn't listening. He hardly ever listened to you when you said something" (10). Spencer seems genuinely interested in Holden through how he positively

remarks he was able to meet Holden's parents (9). Spencer states they are "grand people" (10). Although Spencer acts respectfully, Holden thinks the word grand is "phony" (10). He comments he wants to puke every time he hears the word. Altogether, the comments show that he may see Spencer as phony. The two talk outside of the classroom but Spencer does not understand Holden's point of view. After Holden states Spencer is not listening, Spencer abruptly says, "I flunked you in history because you knew absolutely nothing" (10). Furthermore, Holden becomes more frustrated since Spencer repeats this statement three more times. The statement humiliates him. Holden never claims being knowledgeable in history. Arguably, Spencer may be attempting to make Holden more responsible through making him accountable for his actions. Spencer proceeds to ask Holden for an essay he wrote for his class. Holden feels uncomfortable and says, "Boy, you can't imagine how sorry I was getting that I'd stopped by to say good-bye to him. He started handling my exam paper like it was a turd or something" (11). Rather than Holden feeling encouraged to reach out, he can be seen to regret this. As well, rather than show disappointment due to holding Holden to higher standards, Spencer is seen to judge him. Holden uses the negatively associated word "turd" (11). This shows disgust on Spencer's end. After, Spencer forces Holden to hear the essay. Holden is fully aware of the horribly written essay. He indirectly calls it "crap" (11). Spencer belittles Holden through telling him five times that Holden knows "absolutely nothing" (10). It is noticeable Holden disagrees with this and later states, "You wouldn't think such an old guy would be so sarcastic and all" (12). Holden even adds, "I was beginning to sort of hate him" (11).

Spencer's behavior towards Holden can be seen due to guilt and wanting to help. He wants to help Holden but does so in an ineffective manner. Rather than open a conversation, Spencer lectures Holden. Spencer can be seen to care for Holden due to how strongly he reacts to

Holden's note. Spencer, while reading it, is described as "hot as a firecracker" (12). The two are unable to communicate due to their disagreements in point of view. Holden attributes this to being "too much on opposite sides of the pole" (15). Spencer wants to hold Holden accountable for not finishing a better written essay in hopes of creating a smarter student. However, Holden states, "I don't think I'll ever forgive him for reading me that crap out loud" (12). He is fully aware of how his essay is incomplete. He can also be seen as embarrassed due to this. However, more important than the essay is the root of the problem. Holden does not openly admit why he does not place effort into it despite liking Spencer. He explains he only wrote the note so Spencer "wouldn't feel too bad about flunking me" (12). The quote, and how Holden went out of his way to write it with positive intentions, shows how Spencer and Holden do have a friendship of sorts. As well, it shows Holden is fully aware his lack of effort is the problem.

Spencer wants Holden to think about the future without understanding or asking about Holden's disinterest in school. Spencer asks Holden why he quit and whether he has any qualms with Pencey. Holden does not believe Spencer will understand and brushes this off. Furthermore, Holden adds it is "complicated" (12). However, Spencer is easily frustrated. Spencer asks Holden, "Do you feel absolutely no concern for your future, boy?" (14). He also continues to repeatedly call Holden "boy" during this frustration. The word belittles Holden. It can be seen when he asks questions such as, "What's the matter with you, boy?" (10). Holden also comments Spencer said the word "tough" compared to his usual speech (10). Spencer does not consider too much about whether Holden may be facing an outside issue or problem. Instead, Spencer would "like to put some sense into that head of yours, boy. I'm trying to help you" (14). Holden states he is aware Spencer wants to help. In spite of this, Holden is uninterested and leaves after this due to their "opposite sides of the pole" (15). He does, however, reassure Spencer through how

he is “going through a phase” (15). Although Holden is lying, it shows he still cares for Spencer despite Spencer’s not understanding the problem.

One notable idea seen from his interactions with Spencer is his fear of aging. Rather than express patience or admiration for his teacher, he says, “I used to think about old Spencer quite a lot, and if you thought about him too much, you wondered what the heck he was still living for. I mean he was all stooped over, and he had very terrible posture, and in class, whenever he dropped a piece of chalk at the blackboard, some guy in the first row always had to get up and pick it up and hand it to him. That’s awful, in my opinion” (6-7). The statement shows Spencer, or the idea of ageing like Spencer, is important to Holden through how much he says he thinks about him. Holden continues to show how much thought he has placed into this when he continues, “But if you thought about him just enough and not too much, you could figure it out that he wasn't doing too bad for himself” (7). Although Holden cares for Spencer, it can be seen that aging is an idea Holden is melancholy about. For instance, he continues about how he regrets going since “there were pills and medicine all over the place, and everything smelled like Vicks Nose Drops. It was pretty depressing. I’m not too crazy about sick people, anyway. What made it even more depressing, old Spencer had on this very sad, ratty old bathrobe ...” (7). It can be concluded Holden fears becoming like Spencer.

The future, and what will happen, is an important idea Holden attempts to talk about. Holden’s questions about the future can be seen through his interests about what will happen to the ducks in a lagoon. As he comforts Spencer, Holden explains he lives in New York and has seen ducks in Central Park. He says, “I was wondering where the ducks went when the lagoon got all icy and frozen over. I wondered if some guy came in a truck and took them away to a zoo or something. Or if they just flew away” (13). Aging may in part be something he fears due to

his inability to tell what will happen in the future. The question symbolizes Holden's unsureness of the future after Pencey.

Through Holden's interactions with Spencer, Holden's fear of aging, and its inevitability unless a person dies young, can be seen. He says, "I grew six and a half inches last year" (5). As well, Holden explains, "I'm seventeen now, and sometimes I act like I'm about thirteen. It's really ironical, because I'm six foot two and a half and I have gray hair. I really do. The one side of my head--the right side--is full of millions of gray hairs. I've had them ever since I was a kid. And yet I still act sometimes like I was only about twelve" (9). Holden's physical description is one of an adult. His height shows the inevitability of adulthood. Holden does not want to grow up which can be seen through his running away.

Holden's reference to Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) suggests the two are outcasts. In his article, Samuel Bellman states, "The modern Huckleberry Finn, J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* (1951), has been extensively commented on, in regard to parallels with Twain's novel" (3). Before leaving Pencey Prep, Holden sleeps in Ackley's room. Ackley states that Holden cannot sleep in his roommate Ely's bed. However, Holden disregards Ackley's wishes and sleeps there anyway. After, he says, "I felt so lonesome, all of a sudden. I almost wished I was dead" (48). The same quote is said originally by Huck in the first chapter of *Huckleberry Finn* (Twain 3). The two share a commonality in how they are outcast and unable to deeply connect with society. Huckleberry is an orphan taken in by the Widow Douglas. She attempts to teach Huck about the Bible, but he is uninterested in learning about religion or being civilized. Similar to Holden, Huck is reprimanded for his behavior.

The two books also share characters who devoutly believe in Christianity. Huckleberry dislikes the same inauthenticity in religion as Holden. It is shown when he attends church and

states, “there warn’t anybody at the church, except maybe a hog or two, for there warn’t any lock on the door, and hogs likes a puncheon floor in summertime because it’s cool. If you notice, most folks don’t go to church only when they’ve got to” (123). In regard to Holden, his father is a former Catholic. Holden comments, “my father was a Catholic once. He quit, though, when he married my mother. But Catholics are always trying to find out if you’re a Catholic” (112). The line subtly shows there are people in Holden’s life who have recurrently made him think about religion. The two protagonists lean more towards atheism. Holden shows this when he recalls a religious stage show he had seen with Sally Hayes. He says, “she kept saying how beautiful it was, the costumes and all. I said old Jesus probably would’ve puked if He could see it--all those fancy costumes and all. Sally said I was a sacrilegious atheist. I probably am” (137). In part, this shows the idea of how he dislikes the inauthenticity or glamorization and high money spent on religion. Holden never disregards ideas such as Jesus or religious beliefs due to science. Instead, it can be seen as due to inauthenticity, as when he later says he cannot stand ministers since “The ones they’ve had at every school I’ve gone to, they all have these Holy Joe voices when they start giving their sermons. God, I hate that. I don’t see why the hell they can’t talk in their natural voice. They sound so phony when they talk” (100).

Arguing Holden is merely whiny is misinterpreting the character. Regarding Holden, scholar Anne L. Goodman in “Mad About Children” says, “In the course of 277 pages the reader wearies of this kind of explicitness, repetition and adolescence, exactly as one would weary of Holden himself.” Instead of Holden being weary, he is likely a victim of sexual assault and post-traumatic stress disorder due to the death of his younger brother Allie. Holden can be seen to equate growing up to leaving innocence, behind. It is notable that Holden wants to protect kids from anything inappropriate. One of the strongest instances in which this can be seen is through

Holden's wish to be the catcher in the rye. Clinton W. Trowbridge writes that one of the simplest ways the idea can be interpreted is as

Holden's concept of good and evil; childhood is good, the only pure good, but it is surrounded by perils, the cliff of adolescence over which the children will plunge into the evil of adulthood unless stopped. But finally, the image is based on a misunderstanding. [...] Both Holden's nihilistic view of life as it is and his notion of what life ought to be are based on a misunderstanding of man's place in the universe. (Trowbridge 8)

Although Holden's views are based on a misreading of the original Robert Burns poem "Comin' Thro the Rye," he still greatly values innocence and wants to keep children from entering adulthood. More specifically, he wants to keep children innocent from certain parts of adulthood including vulgar language and sexuality. In part this can be seen due to Holden himself having lost that. Holden makes several underlying comments about sexual harassment towards the end of the novel.

The main instance this can be seen is when Holden is with Mr. Antolini. Mr. Antolini is Holden's former English teacher. He is married to a woman who is "lousy with dough. She was about sixty years older than Mr. Antolini" (181). He also proceeds to explain she has asthma and how "you were always yelling when you were there. That's because the both of them were never in the same room at the same time" (182). Holden can be seen to find it slightly odd since he adds, "It was sort of funny" (182). Holden has an informal relationship to Mr. Antolini similar to his and Spencer's. However, Mr. Antolini can be seen to be friendlier and more optimistic. One of the first questions he asks after finding out Holden flunked out of Pencey Prep is, "How'd you do in English? I'll show you the door in short order if you flunked English, you little ace composition writer" (182). Regarding Sally Hayes, Holden states he thought she was smart since

“she knew quite a lot about the theater and plays and literature and all that stuff. If somebody knows quite a lot about those things, it takes you quite a while to find out whether they’re really stupid or not” (105). The interest shows Holden as a deeper character worth asking questions about. Holden is shown to be smarter in areas in which he takes interest. As well, he has a strong respectful bond with teachers.

Holden’s relationship to Antolini is important due to the underlying implication of sexual assault. Antolini has a less formal relationship to Holden in comparison to his and Spencer’s. At the same time, Spencer and Antolini both lecture Holden about the importance of studying more. The idea of education is reinforced throughout the book through the adults who ask him about his future school plans including Spencer, the psychoanalyst and Antolini. Antolini also warns, “I don’t want to scare you ... but I can very clearly see you dying nobly, for some highly unworthy cause” (188). Similarly, Spencer tells Holden he needs to be more serious about his future. Holden disregards both of their statements. However, Mr. Antolini is different in his approach to Holden. Mr. Antolini drinks heavily while with Holden. The action is recurrently mentioned throughout the chapter. From the encounter’s start, Antolini is said to be a heavy drinker (181). Holden also says he is greeted by Antolini who is in a “bathrobe and slippers, and he had a highball in one hand” (181). Antolini is repeatedly mentioned to be drinking several highballs. Antolini’s holding a highball depicts a character who at surface level appears to be sophisticated, educated, and only a concerned teacher. He is far from the depiction of a town drunk. However, his motives and true character are not seen until later when he pets Holden. This incident could be interpreted as assault. As an underage runaway, Holden is impressionable and would likely not turn to others about what truly happened. During this time, Mrs. Antolini makes coffee and snacks for them. However, Mr. Antolini does not have any of this. Instead,

after finishing that drink, he makes another, and Holden says, “All Old Mr. Antolini had was another highball, though” (186). Antolini “took a big drink out of his highball. Then he started again. Boy, he was really hot. I was glad I didn’t try to stop him or anything” (189). As well, while drinking, Mr. Antolini is said to be smoking throughout since he “smokes like a fiend” (186). The quotes show high contrast between Holden’s relationship to Spencer and Antolini. Antolini is far more informal.

Mr. Antolini is also linked to another student whom Holden connects with, James Castle. Castle is shown to remind Holden of innocence and why he wants to be the “Catcher in the Rye.” It is important how Phoebe asks Holden to list one thing he likes a lot (170). Holden says he can’t think of anything immediately. However, one of the first things that comes to mind is James Castle. James is bullied while Holden showered in Elkton Hills. James comes to Holden’s mind since he finds James’s refusal to submit admirable, especially since James was likely to lose. Holden says, “He was a skinny little weak-looking guy, with wrists about as big as pencils” (170). At the same time, James refuses to take back calling Phil Stabile “conceited” (170). Stabile and six other students sneak up on James to fight him. They “tried to make him take back what he said, but he wouldn’t do it” (170). Holden refuses to say what they did to him. Again, this makes Holden an untrustworthy narrator. He only discusses what he is comfortable with. Holden does say, “I won’t even tell you what they did to him--it’s too repulsive--but he still wouldn’t take it back” (170). Holden reveals that instead of still taking it back, James finally jumps out the window. After James Castle’s death, Mr. Antolini is the only character who “finally picked up that boy that jumped out the window I told you about, James Castle. Old Mr. Antolini felt his pulse and all, and then he took off his coat and put it over James Castle and carried him all the way over to the infirmary” (174). The idea is important through how Holden

twice brings up the idea of wanting to jump out of the window himself. Antolini also further connects Holden and James when he warns Holden, “I don’t want to scare you ... but I can very clearly see you dying nobly, one way or another, for some highly unworthy cause” (188). The warning along with Holden’s lingering thoughts about Castle further suggest Holden attempting to jump out of a window himself before he is in the mental health hospital.

Another important part of *Catcher* and *Reasons* is dealing with other characters’ suicides and deaths. Holden describes that he heard the fall occur and recalls James was wearing his sweater. Regarding this, he states, “I thought about all that stuff. And the more I thought about it, the more depressed I got” (195). Holden is unable to explain too much about what he feels:

I hardly even know James Castle, if you want to know the truth. He was one of these very quiet guys. I think the only time I ever even had a conversation with him was that time he asked me if he could borrow this turtleneck sweater I had. (Salinger 171)

Despite the two not knowing each other too well, Castle’s death can be seen to matter to Holden due to how he thinks of him when Phoebe asks her question. However, similar to some of other Holden’s problems, he is unable to talk in depth about them.

Holden and James are connected through the idea of jumping out of a window. Holden twice in the novel states he feels like jumping out of a window (48,104). It is more concerning the second time he says this since he also says, “What I really felt like, was committing suicide” (104). He also states he would have done it if he knew someone would have covered him after. Holden says, “I didn’t want a bunch of stupid rubbernecks looking at me while I was all gory” (104). Like what Holden wanted, James Castle was immediately covered by Mr. Antolini.

Although it is never clearly stated why Holden is in the mental health facility, one major possibility is that he finally attempted to jump out of the window. To a degree, Holden can be seen to want to hold on to innocence and finds James's action important. Holden, like James, feels like he has no control over his life. James had no control over his bullies. Holden has no control over his brother's death and his parents' sending him to different boarding schools instead of dealing with him. Towards the end, one can infer that the parents still feel like they cannot deal with Holden and send him to a psychoanalyst. Holden jumping out of the window would make sense as to why his parents sent him to see a psychoanalyst. If Holden had only been kicked out and still confused, they would have sent him to yet another boarding school. He says Pencey was his "fourth" boarding school (9). Lastly, James and Holden are linked through the sweater James wears when he jumps. Holden says, "He had on this turtleneck sweater I'd lent him" (174). It is easy for Holden to imagine himself as James due to James wearing Holden's sweater and how Antolini is the only one to help. Holden does not mention other teachers from the school since he feels Antolini is the only one who would help him.

To dismiss Holden as merely an average teenager is to take away from the book's complexity. Holden also indirectly shows his interest in literature. Holden states how his favorite author is his brother. However, he makes many references to other writers. His references include Mark Twain, *Of Human Bondage* by Somerset Maugham, *Out of Africa* by Isak Dinesen, and he says, "I liked Ring Lardner and *The Great Gatsby* and all" (141). "What really knocks me out is a book that, when you're all done reading it, you wish the author that wrote it was a terrific friend of yours and you could call him up on the phone whenever you felt like it" (18). Overall, Holden is shown as intelligent in fields in which he takes an interest. Holden is not dumb. Instead, he lacks an interest in fencing and being part of higher status crowds. To Holden, these

kinds of places come off as insincere. Consequently, he dismisses Pencey Prep altogether and prefers to fail rather than play along with their system.

One other notable character Holden speaks to is Phoebe. He states in chapter 10 how, “I damn near gave my kid sister Phoebe a buzz, though. I certainly felt like talking to her on the phone. Somebody with sense and all. But I couldn’t take a chance on giving her a buzz, because she was only a little kid and she wouldn’t have been up” (66). Holden wants to reach out to Phoebe. As siblings, the two have a good relationship. Despite her age, she is able to listen to Holden and provide him with advice. About Phoebe, he states:

You should see her. You never saw a little kid so pretty and smart in your whole life. She’s really smart. I mean she’s had all A’s ever since she started school ... She’s only ten. ... You’d like her. I mean if you tell old Phoebe something, she knows exactly what the hell you’re talking about. I mean you can even take her anywhere with you. If you take her to a lousy movie, for instance, she knows it’s a lousy movie. (Salinger 67)

Holden speaks so highly of Phoebe. He states he is the only “dumb” sibling (67). Phoebe’s age does not stop her from helping Holden.

Although Holden never outright reaches out to Phoebe, throughout the book, she helps him indirectly through her bluntness and lending Holden about eight dollars. Her impact is one Holden feels since he respects Phoebe. He is seen to take her words personally, for example, when Phoebe states, “You don’t like anything that's happening. [...] You don’t like any schools. You don’t like a million things. You don’t” (169). The comment makes Holden feel “depressed” (169). The two are able to have deeper conversations due to how they have known each other longest. The two also share the death of their sibling Allie.

When Holden states one thing he does like is their deceased brother Allie, she is frustrated. It can be concluded she does not want Holden to be stuck in the past. Although her advice itself is not professional or inspiring, she provides Holden with new perspective. As well, Holden acknowledges, "I'm not too sure old Phoebe knew what the hell I was talking about. I mean she's only a little child and all. But she was listening, at least. If somebody at least listens, it's not too bad" (172). Overall, their dynamic is important due to how they care for each other deeply even if they do not completely agree.

The death of Holden's brother, Allie, affects him. Allie can be seen as more than Holden's brother. Holden states, Allie never got mad, was the nicest, and "terrifically intelligent. His teachers were always writing letters to my mother, telling her what a pleasure it was having a boy like Allie in their class" (38). Allie can be seen to symbolize childhood and one that Holden does not want to let go of. Holden's not wanting to let go of childhood and its innocence can be seen through Holden's recurrent comments. While walking outside in New York, he notices profanity written on the wall. He says:

It drove me damn near crazy. I thought how Phoebe and all the other little kids would see it, and how they'd wonder what the hell it meant, and then finally some dirty kid would tell them--all cockeyed, naturally--what it meant, and how they'd all think about it and maybe even worry about it for a couple of days. I kept wanting to kill whoever'd written it. (Salinger 201)

The comment shows immense anger but then immediately moves away from the topic. Again, it shows Holden's repressed feelings and his unreliability to say when something is wrong. Childhood, to Holden, is associated with niceness, innocence, and morality. Holden not wanting to let go of childhood can best be seen in chapter 25 when, while walking, he "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. [...] 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" (197-198). The street and disappearing symbolize letting go of childhood. Most importantly, he asks Allie for help. Since Allie can no longer age, he will forever remain to Holden a symbol of childhood and innocence. In contrast, the adult world is shown as full of questions, the unknown, and lack of innocence.

Allie's death can be seen as highly impactful to Holden who associates him with innocence and poetry. Holden faces difficulties due to how, as Edwin Haviland Miller states, he must "wrestle not only with the usual difficult adjustments of the adolescent years, in sexual, familial and peer relationships; he has also to bury Allie before he can make the transition into adulthood" (1). He talks about Allie from the beginning of the book. In regard to Allie, Holden says, Allie "got leukemia and died when we were up in Maine, on July 18, 1946. [...] He was two years younger than I was, but he was about fifty times as intelligent" (Salinger 38). Allie had a left-handed baseball glove; "The thing that was descriptive about it, though, was that he had poems written all over the fingers and the pocket and everywhere. In green ink" (38). Allie is said to do this so that he would have something to read while waiting (38). Holden likely developed an interest in poetry and books due to his older brother, D.B., and most importantly, his younger brother, Allie. Reading connects the two. Most importantly, it can be seen that Holden's bond to Allie caused him much grief. Holden is aware of his care for Allie. However, he is unaware of his anger and deep sadness. Miller astutely analyzes, "Life stopped for Holden on July 18, 1946, the day his brother died" (2). Holden pauses his life through how he has no future plans or interest in passing his classes. After Allie's death, Holden said, "I was only

thirteen, and they were going to have me psychoanalyzed and all, because I broke all the windows in the garage” (39). Holden continues, “I don’t blame them” (39). Miller analyses that the destructive action “reflects his uncontrollable anger, at himself for wishing Allie dead and at his brother for leaving him alone and burdened with feelings of guilt” (3). Holden does not show signs of guilt regarding feeling Allie’s death as his fault but does indeed display uncontrollable anger. It can be seen through how he also tries to break the car windows but only stops since he is physically unable to. The uncontrollable anger and lack of self-awareness are seen through how he says he cannot explain why he did this. The phrase “going to have me psychoanalyzed” shows Holden’s parents were partially aware of his need to talk to someone. However, prior to the last chapter, they never did have him talk to a therapist of any kind. Miller also adds, “Similarly, the attack on the station wagon may be seen as his way of getting even with a father who was powerless either to save Allie or to understand Holden” (3). Besides projected anger at his father, Holden takes out his anger on the windows due to his inability to control Allie’s death.

Holden’s parents do not notice his mental health issues due to dealing with Allie’s death. In regards to his father, he mentions him less frequently. Regarding his mother, Holden says, “She hasn’t felt too healthy since my brother Allie died. She’s very nervous. That’s another reason why I hated like hell for her to know I got the ax again” (107). Holden makes a few comments which show his mother is still mourning Allie. As well, Edwin Haviland Miller speculates, “What we can deduce, though, is that it is an accurate appraisal of Holden’s inability to accept loss, and that in his eyes his mother is so preoccupied with Allie that she continues to neglect Holden, as presumably she did when Allie was dying” (3). It can be seen through Holden regarding his mom as the more sensitive parent to be careful with. Later, for example, he states, “Anyway, I kept worrying that I was getting pneumonia, with all those hunks of ice in my hair,

and that I was going to die. I felt sorry as hell for my mother and father. Especially my mother, because she still isn't over my brother Allie yet" (Salinger 155). His parents are still shown to mourn for Allie despite Holden feeling Allie is still there. It can be seen Holden has not yet completely accepted Allie's death. He says, sometimes

When the weather's nice, my parents go out quite frequently and stick a bunch of flowers on old Allie's grave. I went with them a couple of times, but I cut it out. In the first place, I certainly don't enjoy seeing him in that crazy cemetery. Surrounded by dead guys and tombstones and all. It wasn't too bad when the sun was out, but twice --twice-- we were there when it started to rain. It was awful. (Salinger 155)

At the same time, Holden states nothing about communicating feelings about the mourning process. Mrs. Caulfield may also be struggling herself. Holden also reveals, "She's nervous as hell. Half the time she's up all night smoking cigarettes" (158). Holden and his mom may have more shared feelings than they admit. Holden is attempting to attain others' attention after Allie's death. His parents are still preoccupied with Allie. Consequently, Holden does not have the help or attention he needs. Overall, since Holden and those around him are unaware of his grief over Allie and a repressed sexual assault, it is difficult to have someone help him. Since Holden only talks about what he is comfortable with, he is an unreliable narrator who can be easily dismissed. Contrarily, Holden's character and mental health are more complex than a first reading suggests.

CHAPTER III

MISSED POTENTIAL AND MENTAL HEALTH DEPICTION IN *THIRTEEN REASONS WHY*

Hannah and Clay, like Holden, deal with initial unawareness of the importance of mental health, mourning, and reaching out for help. While Holden deals with Allie's death, Clay deals with guilt about Hannah's suicide. Clay mourns Hannah's death as he listens to the tapes. Mourning is important through how it affects the character's day to day life and mental health. As well, like Holden, *Thirteen's* Clay especially deals with Hannah's death, and due to the romanticization of her death, Hannah's mental health is undiagnosable. Moreover, younger audiences who potentially identify with Hannah can be susceptible to the Werther Effect. The Werther Effect "denotes within psychological literature the tendency of people to commit suicide under the compulsion of imitation rather than for individual motivations" (Siebers 2). *Thirteen* is not the first book to create concern regarding impressionable readers and copycat suicide. The Werther Effect was coined after Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774). According to Richard Bell:

Its unashamedly self-absorbed and self-destructive central character now propelled parents like Rush and preachers like Rev. Samuel Miller of New York further toward the reluctant conclusion that undisciplined and excessively sentimental narratives might actually skew young readers' delicate sensibilities to the point of perversion, encouraging

them to wallow in exquisite fictional tragedies while ignoring those around them truly in need of their sympathy. (Bell 100)

Thirteen includes tape recordings by Hannah that are comparable with the letters of *Werther*, an epistolary novel. The popularity of this novel raised concerns regarding readers' emulation of the tragic suicidal protagonist Werther, similar to Hannah. Hannah and Clay's issues are not too different from Holden's.

Although Clay makes fun of Holden's character, the two books share similar underlying problems. When Clay fills out a Valentine's Day survey to be paired with someone, Clay says, "For fun, I filled mine out as Holden Caulfield from *The Catcher in the Rye*, that semester's required reading and the first person to come to mind" (122). Although Clay states he was not serious while doing the survey, the statement shows that he associates himself with Holden: "Holden. What a horrible first date that depressed loner would make" (122). The comment is notable since Clay and Holden both mourn a character's death.

In contrast to *Catcher*, the idea of mental health in *Thirteen Reasons* is predominant. The book starts with Hannah's suicide. However, it ends with Clay reaching out to his classmate Skye, a girl similar to Hannah. Clay states, "Last night, on the bus, I left without talking to Skye. I wanted to talk with her, I tried to, but I let her slide out of the conversation. Over the years, she's learned how to avoid people. Everyone" (287). The brief details show Clay's character change. Clay takes ownership of letting her "slide out of the conversation" (287). He now takes on an active rather than passive role in reaching out. Previously, he lacked knowledge about mental health and hesitated to reach out to Hannah. However, reaching out to Skye is framed as notable and Hannah's death as worth learning from. The book's structure is also an important aspect. The dual narrator combination of Hannah and Clay helps show the main idea: mental

health awareness. The story would be highly different if only Hannah told the story. Arguably, since Clay himself is not a direct reason for Hannah's suicide, there is no reason for him to be in the tapes. Hannah herself states, "Clay, honey, your name does not belong on this list. [. . .] You don't belong in the same way as the others" (200). Hannah shows no blame for Clay. Clay is also not close friends with Hannah and is merely an acquaintance. Additionally, there is nothing special about Clay or any manner only he and not others could have helped Hannah. He is included in the tapes because he symbolizes the average classmate or person who could have helped talk to Hannah. If Clay or the average person were better informed about suicidal or depression signs, Hannah's ending may have been different. The story's underlying idea shows that although Hannah's death is tragic, other people do not have to have the same ending if the average person, like Clay, were to talk to others about their mental health.

Similar to *Catcher, Thirteen's* characters can be seen to reach out for help. Most notably, Hannah attempts to reach out to her school's guidance counselor, Mr. Porter. Hannah states she is unable to deal with her struggles alone. Despite their conversation about her problems, it does not resolve any issues or provide insight. His solution for her is to move on. Although Mr. Porter was unhelpful, it can also be seen that he is not qualified. About Mr. Porter, Clay states, he is "Our English teacher, but also the guidance counselor for students with last names A through G. Hannah Baker's guidance counselor" (270). Later Clay also says, "It was supposed to be a temporary position, but he's still at it" (68). The statements show how Mr. Porter is juggling two completely different school positions. It can be concluded Mr. Porter's area of expertise is being an English teacher since it is the full-time job he was hired for first. Whether Mr. Porter is paid or unpaid for his second job along with how or why he was chosen is unknown. Regardless, it shows the school failed to provide someone whose specialty was counseling. Mr. Porter "is

interim, and he is not dedicated to counseling [...] inspiring little faith in his abilities. Worst of all, Mr. Porter allows Hannah to leave his office a day before her suicide, missing every warning sign” (D’Agati et al. 350). Besides failing Hannah, he also fails his students after her death. After finding out about her suicide, “Mr. Porter ‘walked out of class and didn’t come back for a week’ (57), abandoning his students in their most desperate hour ” (D’Agati et al. 350).

Equally as important, however, there are other characters to whom Hannah does reach out, including Clay. While listening to the last tape, Hannah says no one reached out to her. However, Clay states, “You didn’t, Hannah. I was there for you and you told me to leave” (269). Clay thought asking Hannah questions would suffice. Clay is unaware of the severity of Hannah’s problems which shows the importance of awareness of mental health and communication. One of the first characters who did not notice Hannah needed help is Tony. However, he and Clay later figure out the suicidal signs they missed. Tony and Clay are characters who are not closely involved with Hannah but care for her. The two are genuinely upset by Hannah’s death.

Hannah can be seen as affected according to three main ideas pointed out in Angelique Jenney and Deiner Exner-Cortens’s article “Toxic Masculinity and Mental Health in Young Women: An Analysis of *13 Reasons Why*.” The social work scholars suggest Hannah deals with “(1) the overwhelming presence of toxic masculinity, (2) slut-shaming as a form of devaluing the female body and female sexual expression, and (3) the failure of adult systems to adequately respond to youth” (Jenney and Exner-Cortens 1). Jenney and Exner-Cortens explain these ideas as themes found in the show. However, these can be seen in the book as well.

The idea of “toxic masculinity” can be seen through how the boys Hannah is romantically involved with act. Justin Foley is the first to create difficulties for Hannah. Justin is Hannah’s

first kiss. However, after a few weeks, he starts lying and bragging about doing more with Hannah. Clay states, “I can still see Justin huddled among his friends at school. I remember Hannah walking by, and the whole group stopped talking. They averted their eyes. And when she passed by, they started laughing” (29-30). Clay states that he wanted to talk to her about this, but he felt “too shy” (30). He knew something was off about the rumors. The entire student population does not question the rumors and slut-shames Hannah. Matters only worsen when Alex votes her “Best Ass in the Freshman Class” (37). The two instances show how separate negative events create a snowball effect for Hannah. Since she was a new student, there is no previous reputation for students to base opinions on. Clay himself is not the only student who could have helped. Instead, any of the students could have approached Hannah about the two instances and helped shut down rumors. At the same time, blaming the two boys for Hannah’s death is unjust. Clay himself states, “Alex’s list was a joke. A bad one, true. But he had no idea it would affect her like this. This isn’t fair” (41).

Due to the initial rumors, Hannah is heavily disliked, objectified, and becomes an outcast. Hannah knows the sexual harassment that happens to her is wrong. Wally, a man who works at Blue Spot Liquor, witnesses one of Hannah’s classmates assault her. Although it is never overtly stated, the person is presumed to be Bryce Walker by Clay. Hannah states, “A cupped hand smacked my ass. And then, he said it. ‘Best Ass in Freshman Class, Wally. Standing right here in your store!’” (48). Wally does not comment on this and only clicks his tongue. Hannah swipes his hand away, but Bryce tells her, “I’m only playing, Hannah. Just relax” (50). She is confused about why he would feel this is appropriate since her clothes are described as not too tight or out of the normal. It shows how the students have not discussed the idea of how regardless of how a woman dresses, it never means permission. Hannah starts blaming Alex for the events. She

states, “Alex, am I saying your list gave him permission to grab my ass? No. I’m saying it gave him an excuse. And an excuse was all this guy needed” (52). Although the action is wrong, here, Hannah shows romanticization over the idea of revenge. It also shows Hannah directly blaming people over her death.

Other boys can be seen to display toxic masculinity to Hannah. In Cassette 3: Side B, Marcus Cooley makes Hannah uncomfortable while on a date. Marcus progressively touches in Hannah in a manner which she does not consent to including his hand sliding up her thigh. After telling him to stop, Hannah hits him hard enough to make him fall out of the booth they were sitting in. She states other people around them, “knew something was going on in that booth, they just didn’t feel like helping” (143). Marcus proceeds to loudly call Hannah a “tease.”

Jenney and Exner-Cortens write that Hannah deals with how female sexuality gets stigmatized and shamed. Female sexuality can be seen as shamed recurrently in times including when Justin Foley, who bragged about having done more with Hannah, is huddled around his friends and laughs as she passes by. She also vents about her kiss with Clay:

Some of you may be wondering, How come we never heard about this? We always found out who Hannah made out with. ... Wrong. You only thought you found out. Haven’t you been listening? Or did you only pay attention to the tape with your name on it? (Asher 214)

The lines show Hannah’s frustration over people judging her. She feels negatively viewed by her classmates due to her false reputation. She also continues, “Because I can count on one hand- yes one hand--how many people I’ve made out with. But you, you probably thought I’d need both hands and both feet just to get started, right?” (214). Hannah can be heard

to feel done with her frustrations about this. She feels as if there is no way to fix her reputation. The belief is further seen when she finishes saying, “What’s that? You don’t believe me? You’re shocked? Guess what ... I don’t care. The last time I cared what anyone thought about me was that night. And that was the last night” (214).

Although she says she stopped caring about what other think or about not making friends, it can be seen Hannah does care. She still tries to talk to the school counselor, Mr. Porter, which shows she does still want help and a solution. In spite of this, though Hannah wants help with her problems because she cares, she had already mostly made up her mind since before talking to Mr. Porter. She also expects Mr. Porter to chase her when she leaves after her counseling appointment. Hannah says she tries to leave his office. Mr. Porter, on the other hand, says they are not done talking. Mr. Porter tells her, “I think there’s more we can talk about, Hannah” (278). Mr. Porter wants to reach out to Hannah which contradicts her later statement he does not care enough. He also questions her rushed behavior. Mr. Porter says, “Hannah, I don’t understand why you’re in such a hurry to leave” (279). Her behavior towards Mr. Porter is unclear about what help she needs. Hannah then leaves his office and says, “His door is closed behind me. It’s staying closed. A pause. He’s not coming. ... He’s letting me go” (279). Mr. Porter can be seen to want to help though he is not stated to have psychologist credentials. His lack of credentials and desire to help ultimately make him unblameable. Instead, the school is at fault for hiring someone whose expertise is not counseling. Clay best states, “You were not very clear with me” (280). Although he says this about himself, it is also applicable to Mr. Porter. However, Hannah blames Mr. Porter. She says, “I think I made myself clear, but no one’s stepping forward to help me” (280). Hannah as a character does not accurately depict suicidal teenagers due to her blaming others for her death. Characters including Clay, Mr. Porter, and Mrs. Bradley attempt to

help her. Her parents are also unaware of her mental state. Her last few recorded words are an apology and blame. Hannah says, “A lot of you cared, just not enough” (280). Rather than a suicide narrative, the story should best be seen as a death for which Hannah blames others.

Similar to Holden, Hannah struggles with intimacy. Hannah never overtly says she has a crush on Clay. In spite of this, she does make small remarks which reveal her true feelings for him. Hannah says Clay is the reason she went to the party. She admits it was “to meet you” (211). Regarding him, she also feels it is easy for them to talk. Hannah says, “It seemed like you could know me. Like you could understand anything I told you” (210). Clay, while hearing her say this in the tapes, also immediately responds, “You could have told me anything, Hannah. That night nothing was off limits. I would have stayed till you opened up and let everything out, but you didn’t” (210). It is notable Clay reciprocates her feelings. He makes little remarks including calling her smile “the most beautiful” (209). He also explains, when he first sees her at the party, he is nervous to talk to her. Clay says, “When she first arrived, when she walked through the front door, she caught me off guard. And like a freak, I turned around, ran through the kitchen and straight out the back” (208). He comments he had told himself that regardless of who was at the party, if Hannah was there, he would keep his eyes “focused on her and we were going to talk” (208). Clay ultimately does keep his word and tells her, “I don't know why ... but I think we need to talk” (208). Although the two like each other, Hannah is incapable of having a relationship or opening up to anyone yet.

Hannah most likely struggles with anxiety or needs to talk to someone about her previous romantic situations. Although Clay clearly likes Hannah back, and he was open to talking, Hannah is emotionally unavailable. She has too much she is not ready to talk about and says, “some things were too scary. Some things even I didn’t understand. How could I tell someone –

someone I was really talking to for the first time—everything I was thinking. I couldn't, it was too soon" (210-211). She also comments at this point her mind is made up about not talking to someone. She says, "My mind was set. Not on ending my life. Not yet. It was set on floating through school. On never getting close to anyone. That was my plan. I'd graduate, then I'd leave (211). Although there are people who might still be there for her, at this point, she shows no interest in wanting to talk. She is too scared due to her past friendships and boys who wronged her. After kissing Clay, for example, she says, "The kisses felt like first kisses. Kisses that said I could start over if I wanted to. With him" (215). The phrase "start over" shows Clay may symbolize more to Hannah than just a stand-in for the reader, friend, or potential relationship. His role, in this manner, is more complex.

Clay represents a new chance at life. However, it can be seen after her reaction to kissing him that she is not ready for this. Instead, she tells him to "Stop" (215). Hannah, interestingly, thinks of Justin Foley right after kissing Clay. She says, "For the first time in a long time, I thought of our first kiss. My real first kiss. I remembered the anticipation leading up to it. ... And then I remembered how you ruined it" (215). Hannah can be seen to feel uncomfortable as soon as she thinks of Justin. Clay and Justin work as parallel characters to each other in this scene. Clay represents finally talking to someone, having a boyfriend or friends, no depression, and a regular life. Justin, however, is her reality, reputation, and what she is now used to. Clay to her feels too unreal after Justin. It is why she even states

Overhearing gossip about Clay became a similar distraction. And like I said, I didn't know him very well ... I guess I wanted to hear something – anything – juicy. Not because I wanted to spread gossip. I just couldn't believe someone could be that good.
(Asher 199)

Similarly, having a nice boyfriend or someone to talk to seems out of reach. After Hannah tells Clay to stop, she also adds, “Could you feel what I was going through, Clay? Did you sense it? You must have” (215). Hannah can be seen to be confused but also uninterested in starting something new due to past trauma. She feels unable to let anyone in. Clay is confused by this and shows frustration over his having had no clue. He says, “No. You hid it. You never told me what it was, Hannah” (215). The kiss though works as a negative trigger where she can only remember her bad experiences. She suffers from trauma despite not disliking the kiss and liking Clay greatly. She says, “I shut my eyes so tight it was painful. Trying to push away all that I was seeing in my head. And what I saw was everyone on this list ... and more” (216).

The idea of consent, or lack of, is one which is important. Already, after kissing Clay, it can be seen Hannah has trauma. As well, Hannah struggles with guilt over not helping out a rape victim at the same party she kissed Clay. While at the party, after a few drinks, Hannah is unable to walk out of the empty room she is in. She says, “two things kept me down on that floor. With my forehead pressed against my knees, I realized how much I must’ve drunk that night. And with my balance not what it should’ve been, to run across the floor felt a little hazardous” (223). A boy and girl, whom Clay identifies as Jessica and Justin, stumble into the room. Jessica is heavily intoxicated and falls off the bed twice. Hannah states he does not take advantage of the situation but “He wanted to. He tried for the longest time to get a reaction out of her ... It dawned on him--finally--that she wasn’t in a romantic mood and probably wouldn’t be for a while” (223). After, Justin leaves her alone (223). Justin does not assault her, but Bryce does.

An idea of toxic masculinity explored is lack of consent. Jessica is unable to consent to Justin, Bryce or anyone due to her intoxicated state. Bryce further shows this through how he proceeds to enter the room where Jessica is and Hannah is hiding. Justin refuses to let Bryce into

the room until Bryce jokes, “he was working the night shift and had to leave in a few minutes. A few minutes, that’s all he needed with her. So just relax and step aside” (225). The action is acknowledged as wrong by both Justin and Bryce. Justin requires heavy convincing by Bryce. Bryce has to insist with phrases including “Trust me” and “she won’t move. She’ll just lay there” (225). Hannah also says she and Bryce seemed surprised. Hannah says, “I couldn’t believe it. And your friend couldn’t believe it, either because when he grabbed the doorknob again, he didn’t rush right in. He waited for you to protest” (226). Hannah then tells Justin through the tape, “So what do you think of him now, Justin? Do you hate him? Your friend that raped her, is he still your friend?” (230). Hannah speculates that Justin could not see him as wrong in order to not feel guilty. She says, “And if he acts like the same guy, then he couldn’t possibly have done anything wrong. Which means that you didn’t do anything wrong, either” (230). Justin’s actions are clearly as in the wrong as Hannah’s. Justin wants to remain on good terms with his friend only and to not mean harm. However, though his intentions were not meant to hurt anyone, he is unable to speak up.

Bryce is never held to consequences due to Hannah and Justin. Justin’s inability to speak up for the girl or about his friend’s issues creates harm. Although it is not solely Justin’s responsibility to hold Bryce accountable for his actions, no one else does either, and Bryce is allowed to pursue an endless cycle of his mistreatment of women. Although Hannah’s death is not anyone’s fault, Justin is as equally as culpable to Hannah as Mr. Porter or other characters due to how he did not speak up. Justin is selfish in wanting to keep his friend and being too scared to hold Bryce accountable. Hannah says of Bryce, “he’s always had a temper. Sure, he goes through girls like used underwear. But he’s always been a good friend to you. And the more you hang out with him, the more he seems like the same old guy from before right?” (230). At

the same time, Bryce is never allowed to listen to the tapes. Justin is given the tapes to listen to instead of Bryce. Consequently, Bryce's behavior will continue since he is not held accountable. All of this is due to Hannah's revenge plan. If Bryce were to listen to them, there would be a chance Bryce could destroy them to avoid consequences.

Hannah's efforts to attain revenge stop suicide from being more accurately depicted. The narrative had immense potential to tell a story about mental health and signs to look out for. Overall, there is little that can truly be learnt from Hannah's death and about what victims go through. If Hannah's own logic is applied, she is equally at fault. Hannah also blames herself and knows she's at fault with not taking action to helping prevent Jessica's rape or reporting the missing stop sign. She says in Justin's tape about Jessica, "And you have no idea how much I wish I didn't ruin that girl's life. But I did. At the very least, I helped. And so did you" (230). The narrative attempts to tell a suicide story. However, the story fails to explain ideas such as why Hannah does not tell Mr. Porter about the sexual assault. As well, if Hannah feels guilty, then why does her character not confront Bryce even indirectly or in any manner? Her revenge plan, in part, is meant to hold others accountable. Bryce is one of the main characters mentioned on the tapes who holds most consequences to face and causes Hannah problems. As well, it becomes clear towards the end of the book that there are characters like Clay who do like Hannah. It is unclear why she did not reach out to these people or any other teachers.

During "Cassette 6: Side B," Hannah has been shown to have been sexually assaulted and have PTSD. Hannah seeks out Bryce on purpose. At first Hannah goes to Courtney's house party to "be a hero" (259). She says, "Maybe I'd find someone struggling to put a key in their car door and I'd give them a ride home" (259). At this point, part of Hannah's breaking point is due to her inaction. Her hesitation at the previous party prevented her from stopping Jessica's sexual

assault. Hannah also failed to stop Jenny from driving under the influence which led to an old man's death. In addition to her lack of control over her reputation, it can be seen that Hannah lacks control over her life. Suicide and revenge are unfortunately the only form of control Hannah feels she has left. Due to this, she decides to use Bryce to leave herself no other option than to commit suicide. Clay speculates, "You knew it was the worst possible choice. ... That's why you did it. You wanted your world to collapse around you. You wanted everything to get dark as possible. And Bryce, you knew, could help you do that" (261).

Hannah herself can be seen as confirming this when she says she is uncomfortable with Bryce. She addresses Bryce in the tapes, "congratulations, Bryce. You're the one. I let my reputation catch up with me" (265). Consequently, she also says she "let my reputation become me" (265). Hannah has no interest in Bryce. She says, "I was not attracted to you, Bryce. Ever. In fact, you disgusted me ... You were touching me ... But I was using you. I needed you, so I could let go of me, completely" (265). Hannah at most only passively consents due to not being in a proper state of mind to feel as if she has any other option but to commit suicide. Since female sexuality is shamed by her classmates, Hannah's reputation would be unwelcomed by and unacceptable to her peers. She is repulsed for what she has let happen to herself since she did not completely consent. Since Hannah did not fully consent, although it is less clear than Jessica's case, it is still sexual assault. Hannah can be seen as putting value into what her peers think of her. She, consequently, lets herself feel worthless and has nothing to look forward to. Her mind is made up, especially when Mr. Porter tells her the only options are to confront the assaulter or move on. Since Hannah feels like she can do nothing, the event marks a point of no return in her head.

Lastly, the school itself does not provide adequate resources for suicidal adolescents. It is seen in not only Mr. Porter's failure to help Hannah through assault or depression but with another of Hannah's teachers. The school does indeed provide counseling and has a teacher's class Hannah likes. There are a few individuals who attempt to be helpful to Hannah. However, they do not do this successfully. Hannah states one of her favorite classes is Peer Communications. Mrs. Bradley, one of Hannah's teachers, promotes a zero-tolerance for bullying environment. Hannah states it's her favorite since, "For one period each day, you were not allowed to touch me or snicker behind my back no matter what the latest rumor. Mrs. Bradley did not appreciate people who snickered" (154). In part, this shows the rest of the classes either did not acknowledge bullying or actively tried to prevent this awareness. Mrs. Bradley's class instead addressed the issue of bullying since the first day of class (154). The policy she has is, "If anyone snickered at what anyone else said, they owed Mr. Bradley a Snicker's bar. And if it was an extremely rude snicker, you owed her a King size" (154). Hannah states everyone usually followed the policy despite no real action being taken if the rule was not followed. Mrs. Bradley can be seen to attempt to be helpful to students in the environment she wants to create. Hannah says students, "paid up without argument. That's the kind of respect people had for Mrs. Bradley. No one accused her of picking on them, because she never did. If she said you snickered, you did. And you knew it. The next day, there would be a Snickers bar waiting on her desk" (154). Consequently, it can be seen that the teacher does attempt to create a positive environment and is respected.

At the same time, she deals with suicide in a manner which is unhelpful to Hannah. Mrs. Bradley promoted students communicating to one another and asking questions. Hannah states, "Mrs. Bradley knew people had a difficult time saying nice things to each other, so she devised a

way for us to anonymously say what we felt” (157). All students had bags where other students were allowed to put written notes intended for their classmate. After having a major haircut, Hannah hoped someone would notice the drastic change in her appearance. However, it remained unnoticed. Hannah resorted to reaching out to her teacher Mrs. Bradley anonymously via note. Hannah says,

Mrs. Bradley also had a paper bag. It hung with the rest of ours on the spinning bookrack. We could use it – and she encouraged it – for notes about her teaching. Critical or otherwise. She also wanted us to recommend topics for future discussions. So I did just that. I wrote a note to Mrs. Bradley that read: “Suicide. It’s something I’ve been thinking about. Not too seriously, but I have been thinking about it.” (170)

Here, Hannah directly questions suicide. The manner in which she approaches the subject is realistic in how people will admit to thoughts of suicide. She at first denies the note to herself and calls it a “lie” (170). Then, she slowly admits, “I hadn’t been thinking about it. Not really. Not in detail. The thought would come into my head and I’d push it away” (170). The problem for Hannah is how much she says she has to push away the thoughts. At the same time, Hannah does not know how to deal with these kinds of thoughts. She has no coping method. Instead, she has Mrs. Bradley’s note bag only to turn to.

However, the school fails her through having an instructor who does not know how to approach the subject well. Hannah explains the subject had never been discussed in class before. Partially, Hannah also wants to be caught leaving the note. She says, “deep down, maybe I wanted someone to figure out who wrote the note and secretly come to my rescue” (170). Although she might want to be caught, she says she is careful not to be (though she is by Zach Dempsey). Mrs. Bradley does discuss the subject in class with the students, who are unhelpful.

Hannah states her only goal is, “Mainly, I wanted to hear what everyone had to say. Their thoughts. Their feelings” (171). The students are unable to provide helpful advice. Hannah finds the conversation useless. She recalls, “One person said it was going to be hard to help without knowing why the person wanted to kill himself” (171). Overall, the students comment they can help the student with the problem. Hannah comments how, “everything they said--everything!--came tinged with annoyance” (171). One of the students goes as far as to suggest the student may just want attention. The student continues, “If they were serious, they would have told us who they were” (172).

It is unclear what Mrs. Bradley responds to the student. Regardless, the teacher would be better off explaining to students how to properly respond to people who say they have suicidal thoughts. Instead, “Mrs. Bradley rattled off statics — local statistics — that surprised us all” (172). The students’ unhelpfulness is not to blame since they are underage and are still learning. It is also unclear why the students are capable of previously talking about big topics including “abortion, family violence, cheating- on boyfriends, girlfriends, on tests” (172) yet they do not want to talk about suicide. On the other hand, Mrs. Porter does not provide any clear answer or suggestion for any possibly suicidal student to follow to save their lives. Her only helpful action is that “At the end of class, Mrs. Bradley passed out a flyer called The Warning Signs of a Suicidal Individual” (173). In the top five, she says a haircut is listed. Hannah obtains no help and instead only now knows, she is “predictable” (173). Due to its ending and how Clay reaches out to Skye, *Thirteen* is meant to start conversations about suicide. Yet, the book fails to show what a conversation looks like. The other four signs are never listed in the book. As well, Hannah herself states, “a thorough discussion did not begin in our class” (172).

Hannah also blames Zach Dempsey as part of the reason she commits suicide. Characters like him can be seen to be part of the toxic masculinity issue in the book. Yet, Hannah is in the wrong through how she assigns heavy blame to him. Regarding Mrs. Bradley's class, Hannah catches Zach taking all the positive notes other students wrote for her. She states, "Maybe it didn't seem like a big deal to you, Zach. But now, I hope you understand. My world was collapsing. I needed those notes. I needed any hope those notes might have offered" (165). It is cruel and unjustifiable for Zach to take the notes. Zach dislikes Hannah since she rejected him in front of his friends. After Marcus made Hannah uncomfortable, Zach seemed to want to comfort Hannah. He offered to buy her a milkshake. Hannah refuses to talk to him. She reasoned, "Part of me thought he was hitting on me--ready to use the fact that I was now alone to ask me out" (161). At the same time, she says she did not completely trust him. She does state that, to Zach's credit, he did try to talk to her. But Hannah begins to speculate about Zach's real motives. She addresses him on one of the tapes, and says, "did you think I turned you down at Rosie's? I mean, you never got around to asking me out, so I couldn't officially turn you down, right? So what was it? Embarrassment? Let me guess. You told your friends to watch while you put the moves on me ... and then I hardly responded. Or was it a dare?" (162). Zach taking Hannah's notes is clearly him getting revenge on Hannah. Hannah is still wrong to blame Zach. Clay also disagrees with Hannah and says, "This isn't fair. If Zach had any idea what Hannah was going through, I'm sure he wouldn't have stolen her notes" (166). Hannah refuses to see it from his point of view. Instead, she states, "I was at a point a point in my life where I really could have used any encouragement anyone might have left me" (168).

Overall, readers are supposed to want to start a conversation at the book's end. However, it is never made clear how a conversation is supposed to start. The conversation never truly

began in the book. The only two major signs of suicidal ideation that readers are made aware of are having a haircut or giving away possessions. But these can also be everyday occurrences. It is normal to have a haircut or donate items. Most importantly, since a conversation never began in the book, it can also be seen to not truly start in the reader's head. Rather, it is up to the reader to do their own independent research and educate themselves on the signs of suicide and how to have a discussion and provide good advice without triggering anyone. As well, it is easy for teens to have misguided conversations similar to the discussion Hannah and her classmates had in *Peer Communications*. The downsides here are how rather than showing the reader how to cope, *Thirteen Reasons Why* leaves room for the Werther Effect of copycat suicide, which will be discussed in chapter four.

Hannah's character has many issues with it through those who could detrimentally identify with her. The book had major success in becoming a television show with many well-known actors and the amount of money and promotion involved. *Thirteen* disappoints in how it did not promote healthy coping methods or signs of suicidal people. *Thirteen Reasons Why* and *Catcher* also do not portray mental health for people of color or of different social classes. It would be interesting to see the issue of mental health in young adult literature portrayed by a minority race or lower-class protagonist. As far as suicide narratives, Francisco Stork's *The Memory of Light*, which takes place after an attempt, offers a depiction of a protagonist who has survived an attempt at suicide that does not assign blame to others. There are other YA novels which are lesser known and deserve more recognition due to their more careful and thoughtful approach to suicide depiction.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Overall, *Catcher* and *Thirteen Reasons* have both contributed to young adult literature. While *Catcher* has become a classic, *Thirteen* has been linked to less positive effects. Asher states he wrote the book for teenagers (Gillis and Asher 544). Due to the book's ending of Clay reaching out to Sky, it is also seen the book is meant to be about starting a conversation. Although the importance of talking is shown, the conversation itself that happens in the book can be unhelpful to those struggling with mental health. As well, *Thirteen* is a book which younger audiences may be better off reading only while guided by educators. Both books do struggle in mental health depiction but in opposite manners. Whereas *Thirteen* is overt in its topic, *Catcher* is subtle to the point where it can be missed. Ultimately, there are other books that deal with the topic better. In spite of this, these two books have helped depict the complexity of teenagers' lives, mental health, and the universal feeling of teenagers being misunderstood.

Despite its initial publication in 1951, *Catcher* has been referenced in many recent books including Frank Portman's 2006 *King Dork*, John Green's 2005 *Looking for Alaska*, and Megan McCafferty's 2001 *Sloppy Firsts*. All three books feature main characters who feel alienated from society or in some manner relate to Holden. In *King Dork*, for example, though the protagonist Tom is an outcast like Holden, he dislikes *Catcher*. Although Salinger never agreed to have his book made into a movie, *Catcher* has been seen to inspire movie characters and songs

and John Lennon's assassin. On the other hand, current literary and psychology scholarship on *Thirteen Reasons* still has mixed opinions. Due to how well-known both books became and the conversations they have opened, there are now other books which have successfully depicted mental health.

Although *Thirteen* can be seen to encourage conversations with friends about mental health and suicidal signs, it is also sometimes said to glamorize or romanticize suicide. Additionally, "The Netflix show '13 Reasons Why' was associated with a 28.9% increase in suicide rates among U.S. youth ages 10-17 in the month (April 2017) following the show's release, after accounting for ongoing trends in suicide rates, according to a study published today in *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*" (Cole). The study tracked the number of deaths during the show's initial release from April 1 to December 31, 2017 and found an extra 195 deaths. At the same time, the study did not find any increase in deaths in people whose ages were 18 to 64. The study shows the concerning possibility of younger audiences' impressionability. In spite of this, opinions about censoring the book can be seen as possibly changing again considering how far less frequently challenged the book is. Future academic scholarship and its reception will change and evolve similarly to *Catcher's* initial banning.

Both books have problematic aspects to them, though more notable in *Thirteen*. The book may have been more effective in depicting the story of a suicide if it had taken a different approach. Instead, the book shows the romanticization of suicide through Hannah blaming others in a story meant for a still impressionable audience. At the same time, it can be seen that the author says he wrote the book because "a close relative of mine attempted suicide when she was the same age as the girl in my book, a junior in high school. ... The story wasn't just about what

happened to Hannah Baker, but also about one of the people she left behind and his sometimes contradictory impressions of what she's saying" (Gillis and Asher 544). The idea can be seen in the book through how Clay empathizes with Hannah but claims, "The only thing that's not fair are these tapes, Hannah, because I was there for you. We were talking. You could have said anything. I would have listened to absolutely anything" (211-212). Clay's statement shows the true tragedy of how lack of discussion can ultimately end. In the interview, Asher continues, "I wouldn't say my relative inspired the character of Hannah, but when the premise came to me, it was definitely a topic I felt passionate about and wasn't afraid to tackle" (544) Asher adds the book was intentionally written for teenagers (Gillis and Asher 544). Asher's statement on how he feels passionate on writing about suicide and how the book is meant for teenagers is vital in how the book depicts suicide. *Thirteen* is meant to help teenagers start a conversation about preventing suicide although that does not happen in the book.

Despite their problematic aspects, one positive aspect to both books is how they can be used to learn from. Jenney and Exner-Cortens suggest, "we encourage adults to be willing to participate in open and critical dialogue with teens engaged with the series or book" (6). The study also suggests the book can be seen as providing insight for educators about teenagers' lives or as a means of connection. However, educators should be prepared to discuss the issues in the book and, "may need to scaffold adolescents to take more global perspectives on the characters and their actions (e.g., asking youth why Hannah had so much trouble at school and connecting Hannah's troubles to structural issues of gender norms and sexual violence)" (Jenney and Exner-Cortens 6). The same approach can be applied to *Catcher*.

Holden can be clearly seen to struggle with mental health. However, the book does not overtly explore why or how. As well, the idea of the mental health facility is strongly implied but

glossed over. Similarly, it would be good for educators to discuss what Holden was affected by. In his case, Holden like Hannah, needed someone to talk to. Both characters do not have a close friend or adult they can feel heard by. Holden also deals with mixed feelings about his teacher, Mr. Antolini, and the potential sexual assault. Regardless of whether it happened, Holden mentions in two other instances where he implies he was sexually assaulted. He says, “I know more damn perverts, at schools and all, than anybody you ever met, and they’re always being pervert when I’m around” (192). Similar to when he explains breaking all the windows, Holden once again immediately moves on from the topic. The only other small but revealing comment he adds is, “When something pervery like that happens, I start sweating like a bastard. That kind of stuff’s happened to me about twenty times since I was a kid. I can’t stand it” (193). Although briefly stated, the lines confirm Holden has dealt with other people acting inappropriately around him. He should have confided in a different adult to discuss this. In all, the books show how the idea of mental health depicted in young adults in literature has been around for decades. As well, adolescents will remain misunderstood or troubled until these beneficial discussions are had.

One other reason the books are more similar than thought is due to the Werther Effect. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s 1774 *The Sorrows of the Young Werther* is about a protagonist who commits suicide. Both books have at a point in time dealt with the Werther Effect. David P. Phillips explains, “Goethe’s novel was read widely in Europe, and it was said that people in many countries imitated Werther’s manner of death” (1). The idea relates to how copycat deaths can be inspired by a fictional book. Phillips’s study explores the idea of the Werther Effect in news stories which contained suicides and whether there were increased suicides. Although Phillips claims there was an increase, Ira M. Wasserman’s article explains Phillips’s study is inadequate in its manner of determining whether the Werther Effect is linked to higher suicide

rates. Wasserman states, “In examining imitative suicide in conjunction with national television stories on suicide, Bollen and Phillips employ the quasi-experimental method” (432). In other words, the study was influenced to find an increase through how it was conducted. She continues, “The findings of this study may differ from Phillips’s not because he failed to control for economic factors, but because his use of quasi-experimental analysis influenced them” (432). In spite of this, the Werther Effect still addresses a valid concern due to impressionability.

Both *Catcher* and *Thirteen* evoked the possibility of the Werther Effect or a Hannah Effect. Parents were concerned about their kids imitating Holden’s underage drinking, cussing, or other behaviors. However, over the decades, parents no longer saw the content as worth challenging. *Thirteen* is also still challenged but less frequently. Although *Thirteen* is less frequently challenged, concerns over the content is important due to impressionable audiences who have no coping methods, similar to Hannah. In the future, it may also stop being challenged like *Catcher*, but concerns about Asher’s depiction of mental health still will remain.

Overall, *Catcher* and *Thirteen* show the complexities in depicting mental health and mental illness in that both novels struggle with fully portraying this. Holden is far more complex when examined through the idea of needing help. He wants someone who will help him transition to adulthood and move past his brother’s death. Similarly, Clay is not shown to have professional help moving past Hannah’s death. Hannah’s suicide and desire for others to feel blame are also an issue due to impressionable readers. However, the books’ popularity has helped make way for other books to better discuss mental health.

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