

**The Truth Untold: Depictions of Youth Challenges in  
Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places* and John  
Green's *The Fault in Our Stars***

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**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Master's Degree in English Language and Literature  
at Middle East University**

**January 2025**

الحقيقة التي لم ترو: تصوير تحديات الشباب في كل الأماكن المشرقة  
لجينيفر نيفين والخطأ في نجومنا لجون جرين

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قدّمت هذه الرسالة استكمالاً لمتطلبات الحصول على درجة الماجستير

في تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية وآدابها

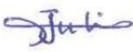
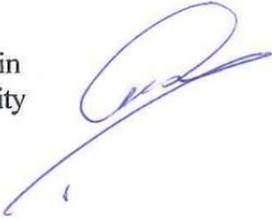
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كانون الثاني، 2025

## Thesis Committee Decision

This Thesis titled “**The Truth Untold: Depictions of Youth Challenges in Jennifer Niven’s *All the Bright Places* and John Green’s *The Fault in Our Stars*”** was successfully defended and approved on January 16, 2025.

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I, **Majd Amjed Qudimat**, authorize the Middle East University to provide copies of my thesis on paper and electronically to libraries, organizations, and institutions concerned with scientific study and studies upon request.

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## **Acknowledgment**

### **In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful**

All praise is due to Allah, who has blessed me with this opportunity to finish writing my thesis which is a symbol of collective efforts, dreams, and aspirations. I am grateful for His countless blessings and mercy that surround me every day. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to everyone who have walked along with me, have added a sparkle of magic to my learning journey, and have helped me to achieve my dream.

My sincere thanks and gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Nasaybah Awajan, whose guidance, invaluable advice, expertise, and unwavering support have been my guiding light during my studies. You have challenged me to think critically and pushed me to achieve more than I have ever thought possible. Thank you for being tolerant and kind; I really appreciate your efforts. I also appreciate the efforts of the instructors of the Department of English Language and Literature at Middle East University, who have been the streams that have filled my vast sea of knowledge. My deepest gratitude to Dr. Nisreen Yousuf, I just want to express my heartfelt thanks for the cozy and welcoming atmosphere you have created in your lectures. Your little motivational talks have always come at the right time, and they make a real difference every time. You have a unique way of blending knowledge with encouragement. Thank you for the great vibes and for being so inspiring. Special thanks go to the Committee members for their generous help and contributions to this thesis.

My deepest thanks to my first role models and the guiding stars in my sky, my beloved parents, whose endless love, countless sacrifices, words of wisdom, and acts of kindness have been my anchor through every challenge. Teta Zainab, my sister Samah, and my brothers Adel and Abd Al-Moez, who have always been there for me, offering me wisdom, laughter and unforgettable moments throughout this long journey. My best friends, Sultana, Manal, Lina, Maram, Zohoor, Doha and Rania, whose friendship is a comfort zone where my inner peace flourishes and my spirit finds harmony. They are my tranquil refuge that soothes the turbulence within me and inspires me to accomplish my goals. My study partners, I will always cherish all the memories that we made at our university campus, learning together and supporting each other, especially Lolita, who truly made a difference in my journey. My aunts and cousins, whose positive motivational words have brightened my path.

Finally, my deepest thanks to all my precious doctors before whom I once sat in the classroom during my learning journey and to all those who believe in me.

Thank you all!

## **Dedication**

To the sun that lights up my world; my family, my best friends and to all young adults worldwide who struggle to break free from daily burdens and challenges, I dedicate this thesis with profound gratitude and love. I hope it will be a source of inspiration for our generation and others yet to come.

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**Abstract**

The study attempts to investigate John Green's and Jennifer Niven's representation of young adult challenges and how they cope with them in the authors' novels, *The Fault in Our Stars* and *All the Bright Places*. Both novels are analyzed by using the lens of postmodernism. The significance of the study lies in its singularity in establishing connections between the chosen novels aiming to find the interrelationship between the struggles and challenges faced by young adults and the way they deal with them. It also highlights the power of speaking up and the significance of human connection in supporting young adults.

**Keywords:** Young Adult (YA), Challenges, Contemporary Literature, Illness, Mental Health Issues.

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### الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحري كيف قدم جون جرين وجينيفر نيفين التحديات التي يواجهها الشباب في روايتيهما "كل الأماكن المشرقة" و"الخطأ في نجومنا"، حيث تعرض كل من الروائيتين تصويراً عميقاً للتحديات النفسية والاجتماعية والعاطفية التي يمرّ بها الشباب في ظل الظروف الصعبة التي يواجهونها في هذا العصر مثل المرض النفسي والجسدي، ومخاوف فقدان الأحبة، والصراع من أجل الهوية، والبحث عن معنى في الحياة. قامت الباحثة بتحليل الروائيتين من خلال تطبيق نهج ما بعد الحداثة. وتكمن أهمية الدراسة في تفرداها في إقامة روابط بين الروائيتين بهدف إيجاد الترابط بين الصراعات والتحديات التي يواجهها الشباب وكيفية مواجهتهم لها. كما أنها تسلط الضوء على القوة الكامنة في التحدث عن هذه التحديات وأهمية التواصل الاجتماعي في دعم الشباب.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الشباب، تحديات، الأدب المعاصر، مرض، مشاكل الصحة النفسية.

# CHAPTER ONE

## Background of the Study

### 1.1 Introduction

Humanity has faced many crises over the years, especially in the last two centuries. The long history of wars and pandemics of the past has shaped the world. Global dynamics and individual lives have changed leading to immense human suffering. The legacy of these catastrophic conflicts extends far beyond immediate destruction and loss. They left an indelible mark on the course of human history, profoundly impacting nature, societies, economics, politics, cultures, health and individual lives for generations. Understanding the full scope of their impact is crucial for comprehending the challenges and struggles youth and communities face nowadays, and how they cope with them.

Literature reflects life which captures the complexities of human emotions, experiences, and social dynamics. Hazard (1971) in *Critical Theory Since Plato* mentions that Plato sums literature up as a mere imitation of life; it mirrors and explores universal truths, challenges, issues, struggles, and triumphs of real life through fictional characters, plots, and themes. It also provides insights into human nature and the serious human conditions by depicting the struggles, thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and moral dilemmas of individuals and communities, which offers the readers an opportunity for empathy, self-reflection, and understanding of the world around them. Shalini et al. (2017) claim that “In literature, we find stories designed to portray human life and action through some characters who, by their words, action, and reaction, convey certain messages for the purpose of education, information, and entertainment” (p.170). The

stories are usually boundless; they capture every stage of life, they embrace all gender identities and they reflect the whole human experience.

Young adulthood is a unique developmental period during which there are critical milestones of growth and maturation that allow the young adult to participate in self-exploration and identity formation. This period of transformation, when young people move from childhood to adulthood, is full of immense possibilities and potential. This phase is considered the second most critical developmental period in young people's lives after early childhood. It is also filled with challenges and obstacles. Arnett (2004) affirms that the transition faced when leaving childhood and entering adulthood is a difficult time for emerging adults, laden with many changes and important decisions.

This transformative phase, where individuals grapple with identity formation, independence, relationships, and responsibilities, attracts fiction writers because of its importance and its richness. It allows them to delve into the complexities of this transitional period, exploring themes such as identity crisis, struggles, love, loss, grief, peer pressure, the search for meaning, and the purpose of existence. Moreover, writing about young adults allows authors to capture the soul of contemporary youth culture, addressing relevant issues. Mitchell (2002) highlights that young adult literature's range and intensity are comparable to any other genre, with recurring themes such as love, death, loss, racism, and friendship, with even more current issues represented. Mitchell (2002) also argues that young adult novels have the power to make certain issues, which are very complicated, concrete, and comprehensible. This genre provides insights into the journey of growing up and navigates the complexities of a young adult's life. It has the power to inspire, empower, and provoke thought, contributing to personal growth,

social awareness, and cultural dialogue by depicting the experiences and challenges faced by young adults.

All spheres of life have changed between the past and the present: society, culture, technology, and economy. There are unimaginable differences between youth and their challenges today and in the past. Szafraniec (2019) notes that due to social, economic, and cultural changes of the contemporary world, social roles are being profoundly redefined, familiar rhythms of living are being disturbed, and developmental standards are being altered. Because of the rapid advancement of life, there has been a gap between the generations, which is why challenges vary significantly from one era to another. Every generation has its own struggles and challenges. While some challenges are timeless and may persist across generations, new ones may emerge, and existing ones may evolve in response to changing circumstances.

Contemporary challenges and issues, as mentioned above, are different from those faced by previous generations for many reasons, such as shifts in social norms, technological advancement, and economic changes. In the past, young adults faced challenges that seemed different and less severe than nowadays ones. However, historically, young adults faced significant challenges such as racial discrimination, limited access to education, career opportunities, social codes, and heavy family obligations. They have struggled to fit into societal molds amidst economic downturns. Additionally, the lack of education and mental health awareness made these struggles even more daunting.

A study of the impact of social development on young adults' lives and challenges by Crockett & Silbereisen (2000) shows how social changes and new circumstances cause serious challenges for young adults through Elder's (1974) studies of The Great

Depression. During the 1930s, the economic downturn created financial strains for many families in the United States, so they had to reduce their expenses and find ways to generate additional income. In response to this challenge, young adult-males initiated income-earning activities earlier than usual by finding work opportunities outside home. In addition, young adult females have contributed to the family economy by helping their mothers produce goods for the family's uses. Consequently, young adults gained independence, exhibited more autonomous behavior, and developed higher self-esteem.

In this contemporary intertwined world, youth are confronted with a myriad of serious challenges and obstacles that constitute their experiences, identities, and characters on their journey to adulthood. Contemporary challenges and issues are different and new, and it can be challenging for older generations to relate to or to understand what makes young adults worry today, simply because contemporary life is much more complicated, advanced and developed. These challenges and problems influence young adults' perspectives, aspirations and identities. Coping with such a variety of challenges and issues adds layers of complexity to young adults' lives nowadays.

Young adults' problems initially attracted scholars in the 1920s, and after the Second World War, they grabbed more attention because this genre's audience became much broader. According to Cart (1996), the 1960s would be "the decade when literature for adolescents could be said to come into its own" (p.43). This genre of literature still occupies one of the most critical places in contemporary literature as it comprises the radical challenges of society.

Contemporary young adult novels contain themes that mirror the problems facing many of today's young people. Stallworth (1998) mentions some of the reflected themes

in contemporary literature such as identity, violence, social alienation, illness, relationships, community impact, mental health, marginalization, racism, inequality, faith, social integration, loss, bullying and suicide. These themes are actually challenges and obstacles that shape young adults' identities, foster their resilience, build their character and promote personal growth. These challenges and obstacles teach essential life lessons, provide valuable learning experiences and strengthen young adults' problem-solving skills, on the other hand, they might draw them into the ocean of lost souls.

As a consequence of the swift-paced nature of modern and contemporary life and the influence of technological advancement, contemporary challenges and issues tend to be more intricate and interconnected. In light of the presented topics, the chosen works of the contemporary young adult writers John Green and Jennifer Niven are a case in point due to the fact that their chosen novels feature young adult protagonists grappling with a multitude of complicated challenges and issues. They also tackle themes of love, racism, friendship, identity and existential questions, often accompanied by sensitive topics such as loss, mental illness, grief, and self-discovery. John Green and Jennifer Niven are celebrated for their writing styles and ability to craft compelling narratives that match the experiences and emotions of young adult readers nowadays. Their literary works portray young adult challenges, experiences, and emotions, which are relevant and relatable to many young adults who navigate the challenges of young adulthood.

*All the Bright Places* is a young adult novel written by Jennifer Niven. The novel seems like a regular young adult novel. Still, in fact, it contains interesting events, incidents, and young adult characters related to this study when they are analyzed

thoroughly. The novel follows the story of Violet Markey and Theodore Finch, two high school students who meet under unusual circumstances and embark on a school project together. As they embark on a journey of exploration filled with both sadness and joy to various places and landmarks in their hometown, Indiana. They discover themselves, and it turns out that this journey of exploration is not only physical but also a spiritual quest of self-discovery. Markey and Finch forge a deep bond with each other as they grapple with their own personal struggles. The novel explores important serious issues of trauma, mental illness, loss, grief, social alienation, bullying, suicide, and relationships. It also emphasizes the importance of reaching out for help and the power of human connection in overcoming adversity. It is a touching and emotional journey that sheds light on young adults' genuine hardship, authentic struggles, and the complexities of their contemporary lives.

*The Fault in Our Stars*, a novel by John Green, narrates the story of two young adults who fall in love with each other, but their relationship is quite complicated because of their medical conditions. Both Hazel Grace and Augustus Waters suffer from their experiences with cancer. Hazel Grace is a sixteen-year-old girl who has been dealing with thyroid cancer since she was a child. She is in an advanced stage, and her treatment options are limited. She meets Augustus Waters in a support group for cancer patients. Augustus Waters has lost his leg to cancer, but his medical conditions are stable at the right moment; he has got Hazel's attention. As they bond over their shared experiences and love for literature, they embark on a journey of love and self-discovery. The novel has enthralled readers worldwide with its heartfelt prose and authentic portrayal of the complexities of young adulthood, the importance of finding meaning and purpose in inevitable suffering, and the importance of acceptance and letting go.

After intensive reading and literary analysis, this novel emerges as strong evidence that supports this study's claims as it explores contemporary challenges and issues discussed in this research.

Young adult literature plays a vital role in addressing the needs and interests of its target audience, offering relatable themes, characters, and storylines that resonate with readers undergoing similar experiences. It provides a platform for young adults to see themselves reflected in literature, which fosters their empathy and gives them a sense of belonging.

The researcher's motivation for writing this study stems from a profound personal connection and a strong desire to enhance young adults' well-being. Having witnessed the challenges and struggles young adults face in this transitioning stage and observing young adults nowadays, the researcher is driven to explore these areas more thoroughly. The researcher believes that by identifying the obstacles and issues faced by young adults, targeted strategies and interventions can be developed to support their growth and success. Furthermore, addressing these challenges is essential not only for the personal growth of young adults but also for society's overall well-being and stability. The researcher also hopes that this research fosters young adults' resilience and helps them thrive in this complicated world.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The current study aims to explore young adult challenges in John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* and Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places*. It also aims to investigate how young adult characters deal with these challenges and issues throughout the narratives. Both novels can serve as an extension to raise young adults' awareness, and

assure them that even in the midst of struggles and challenges, life can hold moments of joy, beauty, connection and purpose.

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

This study contributes to the field of young adult literature research. It demonstrates how young adult literature serves as a mirror that reflects the reality of young adulthood and the untold truth behind this stage. It also bridges the research gap that persists in young adult literature. Much of the existing research focus on other phases of life leaving this transitional period underrepresented. In addition, none of the previous studies overlook illness narrative or illness literature and the psychological, social, and relational impacts of illness during young adulthood which is a period marked by identity formation, and evolving interpersonal relationships. This gap underscores the need for more nuanced studies that account for the challenges and complexities of young adults who struggle with illness.

The significance of this study also lies in its singularity in establishing connections between two novels by comparing and contrasting between them, aiming to find the interrelationship between the struggles, challenges, and issues faced by youth, the way they cope and deal with them, and how these challenges construct their identities and build their characters. Another reason is that the study highlights the power of speaking up and the significance of human connection in supporting young adults in responding to the demands of their lives.

### **1.4 Questions of the Study**

This study aims to answer the following questions:

- I. What are the challenges that young adults confront in Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places* and John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*?

- II. How do the characters deal with these challenges throughout the narratives in Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places* and John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*?
- III. How similar or different are the challenges presented in the two novels?

## 1.5 Objectives of the Study

The study aims to:

- I. Highlight the challenges that young adults confront in Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places* and John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*.
- II. Explore how the characters deal with these challenges throughout the narratives in Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places* and John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*.
- III. Compare and contrast the challenges presented in the chosen works.

## 1.6 Definitions and Terms

**Young Adulthood:** Arnett & Jensen (2019) identify youth as emerging adults. It is the unique transitional period between childhood and adulthood. This phase marks personal changes, including problem-solving related to social identity, education, work, and the development of family. Furthermore, young adults often confront challenges and experiences as they navigate this phase of their lives. Such experiences usually allow them to build their character and promote personal growth, leading them to achieve their independence as individuals.

**Young Adult Literature (YAL):** Nilsen and Donelson (2009) define young adult literature as anything a young adult will "choose to read" (p.6). Kaplan and Hayn (2012) believe that YA books have a young protagonist who deals with daily concerns and problems that young people face. Young Adult Literature or "new adult" literature is a new genre that situates itself between children's literature and adult literature, referring to literature explicitly written for an audience typically aged 18 to 25.

This genre differs from other genres in a way that it mirrors the new complex issues that arise during young adults' journey. Kaplan (2005) points out that, to engage more young people in reading, young adult books are constantly searching for the new and are being transformed by topics and themes that years ago would have never been conceived. It also features young adult characters who usually live and wrestle with real problems that may be close to the reader's own life experiences as a young adult. Robert Cormier once said, "I write to affect people. Everything is to affect the reader" Carroll (2001, p.106).

**Contemporary Literature:** Peck and Coyle (2013) define contemporary literature as "Literature after World War II". In brief, contemporary literature refers to literary works of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and drama published after the Second World War until the present time, reflecting the current cultural, social, and political context. Precisely, it refers to postmodernism and what has come afterwards.

**Young adults' Challenges in Contemporary Life:** refer to the complex problems, difficulties, and obstacles that young adults confront in the contemporary period as they explore this phase of their lives. Hellström & Beckman (2021) note that various challenges in the lives of young people emerge, the most pronounced ones voiced by young adults are negative self-evaluations through social comparisons, relationship problems, academic failures and other tasks that result in stress, negative feelings and mental ill-health.

**Identity Formation:** Identity refers to people's sense of self and how they situate themselves in the world. Identity development was first proposed as a developmentally normative process in which people resolve an identity crisis primarily during their adolescent years Erikson (1968). The exploration of individual identity refers to

examining multiple potential plans and directions, understanding one's unique characteristics, values, beliefs, and experiences, and investigating them deeply before arriving at a committed identity. This journey involves introspection, self-discovery, and sometimes experiments to determine what is most authentic and fulfilling. According to Erikson's theory, identity is developed throughout eight stages; each stage paves the way for the following periods of development. In each stage, Erikson believes people experience a conflict that serves as a turning point in development.

**Mental Health:** According to the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health is “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community”. Mental health is an essential component of health and well-being that supports the individual in making decisions, building relationships, and shaping our world. It is also crucial to personal, community, and socio-economic development.

**Depression:** The word depression comes from the Latin “depressio”, which means sinking. The person feels sunk and overweight in their existence. According to Bernard (2018), depression consists of a disease with decayed mood as its primary symptomatology. There are also painful feelings, lousy humor, anguish and panic attacks, performance decay of various psychic and cognitive functions, a tendency to isolation, demotivation, difficulty to enjoy, hopelessness, and negative thoughts, including possible delusions in cases of serious severity.

**Bullying:** According to Volk et al. (2014), bullying is a heterogeneous and complex phenomenon that affects hundreds of millions of people every year. It is an aggressive goal-directed behavior that harms others within the context of a power imbalance.

Olweus (1993) defines bullying in schools as when a student is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other peers. Then he clarifies the components of his definition as he adds a negative action when someone inflicts injury or discomfort upon another can be carried out by physical contact, words, or mean gestures, and intentional exclusion. People may face bullying at any stage of life, but it is often most prevalent during childhood and young adulthood, particularly during the school years.

**Social Alienation:** Social alienation is a concept used by sociologists to describe the experience of individuals or groups that feel detached, disconnected, isolated, and estranged from the values, norms, practices, and social relations of their community or society. According to Hajda (1961), alienation is a feeling of uneasiness or discomfort that reflects self-exclusion from social and cultural involvement. Other meanings of social alienation are separation, exclusion, isolation, and people's withdrawal or lack of involvement in community activities. It is a condition in social relationships reflected by a low degree of integration or common values and a high degree of distance or isolation between individuals or between individuals and a group in a community or work environment.

**The Power of Human Communication and Connection:** The power of human connection refers to the profound impact that social relationships and interactions have on individuals' emotional, psychological, and physical well-being. It involves the ability of humans to construct meaningful bonds, share experiences, support, and create a sense of belonging and connection with others. The importance of human connection lies in its ability to reduce feelings of loneliness, improve mental health, boost self-esteem, and enhance happiness and satisfaction with life.

**Social Support Systems:** according to Lango (2022), social support systems are the individual associations and networks that offer care, provide support, assistance, encouragement, and guidance to individuals in times of need. This network is usually of close associates who may be mostly friends, family, and peers that an individual turns to in times of emotional support. They also promote well-being and facilitate coping with challenges and serious problems during difficult times.

**Trauma:** According to Herman (1992), trauma is an affliction of the powerless. At the moment of trauma, the victim is rendered helpless by an overwhelming force. Spiegel (2008) defines as trauma as a loss of control over one's body and the mental imprint of frightening experiences which takes the form of loss of control over parts of one's mind, identity, memory, and consciousness.

## **1.7 Limitations**

This research is limited to the time of its writing and to the authors Jennifer Niven and John Green and their chosen works: *All the Bright Places* (2015) and *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012). The concluding statements of the current study cannot be universalized or generalized to other works representing the tackled themes and topics.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of Related Literature

This chapter showcases an overview of relevant previous research on the topics and challenges that concern this thesis in the areas of humanitarian research and literature, as well as research papers discussing the chosen novels from different perspectives.

#### 2.1 Young Adulthood's Challenges in Contemporary Life

This section provides broader insights into the multifaceted experiences that shape the transitional period between childhood and adulthood in our contemporary life. It also highlights the challenges and hardships that young adults experience on their journey to adulthood, enriching readers' background information and providing a deeper context to understand the significance of this research.

Young adulthood is a phase of significant change, exploration, and growth. Arnett (2004) in *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties*, notes that the transition faced when leaving childhood and entering adulthood is a difficult time for emerging adults laden with many changes and important decisions. However, it is also marked by a myriad of challenges and obstacles that can impact individuals' well-being, development, and future trajectories. Highley's (2019) *Defining Young Adulthood* finds that societal changes have differentiated young adulthood as a distinct transitional phase between adolescence and middle-aged adulthood. During this timeframe, cognitive, emotional and psychological development along with developmental challenges. Courtney and Dworsky (2006) emphasize the transition into adulthood presents challenges related to education, economic insecurity and violent or delinquent behaviors that have the potential to shape not only their opportunities and adjustment during emerging adulthood but also later in development as well.

This period and development can be characterized by a variety of tasks and milestones which play a crucial role in shaping individuals' identities, relationships, and future trajectories. Habib and Ward (2019) in *Identities, Youth and Belonging*, point out that the personality of young people is temporary and arbitrary. Personality is neither complete nor incomplete, whereas personalization is ongoing. People's experiences and relational ideas shape their identities which have many forms created by the impact of social interaction and other processes on people. Identity formation, education, forming intimate relationships, building social networks, exploring family dynamics, personal values and beliefs, and developing coping mechanisms to cope with daily struggles, adversity and life challenges can be the most important milestones in this phase.

Meyerson (1975) proposes that young adults experience conflicting complex influences within themselves and the outside world. These factors that influence the transition process from childhood to adulthood may include the pursuit of higher education, employment, family dynamics, peer influence, ethnic and cultural background, technology and media. All of these factors interact and intersect in complex ways to shape young adults' experiences during this phase. Coffield et al. (1986) believe that most young adults struggle to cope with all the different aspects of life which impinge simultaneously.

Konopka (1973) finds five key concepts and six qualities of young adults emerged. The five concepts of young adulthood are an “experience of physical, sexual maturity,” an “experience of withdrawal of and from adult benevolent protection,” a “consciousness of self in interaction,” a “re-evaluation of values,” and an “experimentation” Konopka (1973, p.298-300). Furthermore, the results of her research included six qualities of young adults which are “audacity and insecurity,” a “deep

sense of loneliness,” a “high degree of psychological vulnerability,” “mood swings,” a “strong peer group need,” and a “need to be argumentative and emotional” Konopka (1973, p.300-1). These concepts and qualities can sometimes form difficult challenges to young adults. They play a major role in changing young adults' lives.

Navitha and Pettugani (2019) in *A study on social alienation among adolescents*, conclude that (88%) of the young adults, who responded to the study, have high social alienation. They experience detachment from their parents, changes in their comfort zone, weak social interactions with their friends, lack of a friendly environment and bullying.

Hellstrom and Beckman (2021) explore adolescents and young adults' understandings of the life situation by making their voices heard regarding their mental health and help-seeking behaviour. The findings of the study demonstrate that young adults present two different sides regarding mental health problems. Adolescents and young adults experience stigmatizing behaviors and other obstacles associated with mental health. The most notable challenges voiced by young adults include negative self-evaluations through social comparisons, academic failures, relationship problems as well as performance-oriented tasks that cause stress and negative feelings. Some of these challenges can develop mental issues which in the worst case lead to mental illness.

Highley's (2019) *Defining Young Adulthood* analyzes young adults' mental well-being, and the results proved that one in every five young adults have been diagnosed with a mental disorder Stroud (2014). In addition, Highley (2019) notes that 9% of all young adults suffer from major depressive episodes. Moreover, young adults are more likely to commit suicide than adolescents.

The concluding statement of the study, *Mental health problems among individuals with persistent health challenges from adolescence to young adulthood* by Helseth et al. (2016), reveal that young adults who live with chronic health challenges are more subjected to mental health problems than their healthy peers. They experience mental issues such as anxiety and depression.

## **2.2 Depiction of Young Adult Challenges in *All the Bright Places***

*All the Bright Places* draws a realistic image of the struggles and challenges that young adults may experience during young adulthood, through mirroring the lives of two young adult protagonists, Theodore Finch and Violet Markey.

Each of the protagonists suffers from different types of mental illness and issues to various degrees. Mental health challenges are considered to be a huge challenge to young adults in our contemporary life. Anwar (2023) mentions that the novel provides a platform of psychological and social problems. She analyzes Finch's and Violet's mental and social conditions and finds that Finch experiences mental challenges depicted in the presence of unconscious conflicts and unsolved difficulties within his psyche. The mental challenges experienced by Finch, encompassing both his periods of elevated mood and periods of depression, are in fact caused by his undiagnosed bipolar disorder. These challenges play a significant role in the emergence of his self-destructive thoughts. Similarly, Violet grapples with a psychological distress which is a result of the tragic loss of her sister. This tragic event not only harms her mental well-being, but also weakens her capacity to interact with others. As a means of coping, she engages in social withdrawal. She grapples with survivor's guilt, the emotion of guilt enhances her sense of social isolation. Anwar (2023) also states that Violet possesses a limited social network and Finch fails in establishing enduring bonds and his state of

detachment from society might be interpreted as an embodiment of Durkheim's notion of individuals who experience a sense of disconnection from social integration.

Another study which emphasizes the mental issues faced by Violet and Finch in *All the Bright Places* is conducted by Hermanto & Prasaja (2023), it finds that Violet is traumatized, and this trauma has an impact on her psychology. She struggles with obsessive-compulsive disorder because she was traumatized by her past experience. She always remembers what happened during the accident in which Eleanor lost her life. She also feels that she is being pressured by her parents, who feel that Finch is strange. On the other hand, in the analysis of the character of Theodore Finch, symptoms of violent and intrusive thoughts caused by the divorce of his parents appear.

Cahya et al. (2022) demonstrate that Theodore Finch is a man fascinated by death. The findings of their study prove that Finch undergoes social conflicts. The causes of these conflicts refer to the difference in his perception and the difference in his personality. Rahmawati (2021) lists the reasons and the motivations behind Theodore's frequent suicide attempts that led him eventually to end his life successfully. The inferior feeling caused by his mental illness, his low self-esteem, his striving for superiority whenever a schoolmate bullies him, his style of life, social interest, creative power and the desire to decide on his own death. Anwar (2023) emphasizes that committing suicide is a phenomenon that arises when a person experiences a sense of deficiency in terms of social integration and interpersonal connections.

Abu Bakar and Abidin (2020) emphasize the representation of mental illness, exploring topics such as depression and suicide in the novel. They add that the novel possesses all elements of cognitive distortions in Beck's cognitive theory of Depression. The elements include all-or-nothing thinking, magnification and minimizing,

overgeneralization, mental Filter, personalizing, Jumping to conclusions, emotional reasoning, labeling, mind reading and disqualifying the positive. Each element is displayed with different degrees, as observed by the two main characters Violet and Finch.

Yuliyanti (2020) finds some characteristics of bipolar disorder in this novel presented by the characterization of the main character, Theodore Finch. This adds to the mental challenges displayed in the novel. Theodore Finch seems to suffer from bipolar disorder, as shown by his experienced manic and depressive periods. Another cause of bipolar disorder is reflected in the novel which is his family's problems. The greatest cause of his mental illness is his father who totally neglects him and physically abuses him, likewise his mother who ignores him too. All the neglect, divorce, labeling and violence are the reasons behind his mental suffering, in addition to bullying which adds layers of complexity to his mental state.

Gjertsen (2023) implements Erik Erikson's (1968) concept of identity crisis on the main characters, finding that Violet and Finch face different crises during their lifetime, and both experience identity crises in their adolescence. Mahdani (2023) agrees with this argument, highlighting the inner conflicts that the two protagonists face. She notes that many of the inner problems they have to deal with are brought on by prior traumas and open wounds that have never healed. They feel the anguish of losing loved ones. They both suffer from loss; Violet has lost her sister. Finch, meanwhile, has lost his father, and he is still traumatized by his father's abuse. Being bullied frequently adds layers of complexity, contributing to Finch's internal strife. According to Gjertsen (2023), their mental health and social surroundings play a significant role in determining how they overcome their identity crisis.

Saputri (2021) finds that Theodore Finch and Violet Markey face internal and external conflicts. The internal conflict occurs between the main two characters and themselves. The external conflict involves the main two characters and other people such as their parents, their peers, and their teachers. These conflicts can sometimes be challenging to the young adult characters and they sometimes muddy issues rather than solving them. Suminar (2022) finds that the internal conflict which Violet faces has a huge impact on her character. The conflict portrays her character's deterioration. She becomes dishonest with everyone including her parents and the school counselor, closed, fearful, uncreative, guilty and frustrated after her sister's death. Her days seem to be very gloomy after the car accident. She always blames herself as if the car accident was her fault. She feels that she does not deserve to live happily and punishes herself by withdrawing from fun activities and social interaction.

On the other hand, Shah (2021) notes that Finch blames himself because he feels that he is abnormal, and feels uncomfortable in his own skin. His school counselor, Mr. Embry suggests that he might be experiencing bipolar disorder, but he denies it because he fears to be labeled and stigmatized. According to the escape theory, failures lead to committing suicide if they are accompanied with attributions such as low self-esteem, self-blame and negative implications about the self.

Azzaharah (2023) notes that awareness is an existential aspect that shows the meaning of the main character's life. In the search for the meaning of life, humans must exist first and then come into existence. This highlights the fact the young adult characters face existential challenges and questions. In the novel, Violet's life becomes meaningless after her sister's death. The meaning of nothingness marks the end of human existence. When humans are in a nothingness status, it means that they have no

meaning in life for themselves or even for all human beings, that is the case of Theodore Finch and it is one of the reasons that justify his suicidal act.

### **2.3 Depiction of Young Adult Challenges in *The Fault in Our Stars***

*The Fault in Our Stars* is another young adult novel that explores the challenges and struggles those young adults face during this phase. Analyzing the characters of the protagonists and their story proves that young adults suffer from challenges that they sometimes cannot bear.

Xayrullojeva's study (2023) *The Thematic Analysis of John Green's The Fault in Our Stars* highlights some of the challenges that the characters face in the novel. The results of the study proves that the characters suffer from challenges of the inevitability of fate, accepting harsh realities and the inevitable defeat faced by cancer patients in their inglorious battle. It also explores interpersonal relationships, which often bring more pain and courage to endure suffering.

The researcher finds that this novel is about a journey to death. It is about physical and mental suffering. The tragic sequence of events from Hazel's oxygen-deprived lungs, followed by the breakup in Isaac's case and Augustus's losing his right leg and having a collapse with the aggressive return of his cancer, shows that they all suffer mainly from the challenges of their health conditions.

The study, *An Attempt to Depict Grief in John Green's The Fault in Our Stars*, conducted by Niranjana (2021) explores grief and trauma in the novel and how they form an important challenge to young adults. The researcher finds that there are five stages of grief depicted in the novel; the first few stages can be observed in the case of Augustus Waters when he goes through denial, anger, and depression. The other stages

are seen when he becomes frustrated, a shadow of his former self where he hates everything happening in his life, and in his final few days when he enters depression. Meanwhile, Hazel Lancaster is already in the stage of depression where she withdraws herself from society and any fun activity, reads the same book repeatedly, and overthinks about what will happen to her parents when she dies, especially her mother.

Onthonio et al. (2022) mention another evidence on mental health challenges that accompany bad physical conditions in their research *Anxiety in John Green's The Fault in Our Stars*, where they come to the conclusion that the main character, Hazel Grace, is in a dominant state of anxiety. The pain she feels during the treatment process raises her feelings of anxiety. Her impact on others, especially on her parents and her boyfriend, Augustus, adds layers to her anxiety. She does not want to be a burden to her parents, and she does not want to hurt people around her because she knows that she is going to die and that she does not have much time.

Deeb (2016) highlights the concept of time and how it can challenge young adults when they know they have limited time to live. Time is also a concept the characters speculate about, particularly in their fear of oblivion and their need to be remembered after death. The author presents how time passes, how a disease like cancer affects young adults in real life, how time experienced by human beings seems to pass slowly or quickly, and how its duration changes according to circumstances. In addition to the typical developmental issues of young adulthood, Hazel and Augustus experience challenges that many do not usually encounter.

In the light of the existential challenges that young adults may face, Peter (2015) in *The Struggle for Existence in John Green's The Fault in Our Stars in the Light of Existentialism* demonstrates how the main characters, Hazel Grace and Augustus

Waters, navigate daily lives with cancer and try to live happily within their limited time and regardless of their inevitable death at a young age. So, they struggle to seize joy in the few precious moments that have left. They suffer from existential anguish characterized by the existentialist vision of life. Patmarinanta and Ernawati (2016) add that Green uses *The Fault in Our Stars* as a title because he wants to convey a meaning that it is not anyone's choice if they get a short life and the world is an unjust place in which suffering is unfairly distributed.

Anusi et al. (2017) illustrate how fate can be challenging to young adults. Fate intervenes in Augustus' and Hazel's love story. Their story takes a strong twist, Hazel who battles to survive gets much better and her conditions improve. On the contrary, Augustus, who is healthy, falls seriously ill and is picked by death. Eventually, fate separates them, ends their love story and their hope of being together, and leaves Hazel with the agony of loss.

Matallah (2020) mentions three core issues that Hazel Grace faces. Firstly, fear of abandonment, her idea of dying and abandoning her beloved ones become an obsession and it prevents her from enjoying her life. She is worried about what might happen to her parents when she passes away. Secondly, as for fear of intimacy, she is socially alienated and she neither has friendships nor a romantic relationship. Thirdly and finally, low self-esteem is a common issue for young adults. Hazel's terminal illness makes her lose her sense of self-worth and confidence. She also feels that she is less worthy of being loved than the rest of her peers. These issues make it quite hard for her to socialize.

## 2.4 Coping Mechanisms in *The Fault in Our Stars* and *All the Bright Places*

When young adults face challenges, they begin to use certain methods or processes to seek solutions to address these challenges. Coping mechanisms demonstrate how the young adult characters in the novels *The Fault in Our Stars* and *All the Bright Places* deal with their difficult situations and take actions to face their serious challenges. Human connection or social interaction, speaking up, and support systems are essential coping mechanisms in both of the novels. The main characters rely on relationships, communication, and supportive communities to face their struggles.

Hazel, Augustus, Finch and Violet find solace in the meaningful romantic relationships they have formed. Hertanto (2022) illustrates how Augustus Waters' influence and support help Hazel to confront her challenges and struggles. He gives her the strength to deal with her medical conditions and own fears. Mahdani (2023) mentions the impact of Violet on Finch and vice versa. They both believe that they do not fit in with anyone, until they meet and get close to each other. Finch encourages Violet, inspires and helps her to heal. Meanwhile, she offers him a sense of acceptance and understanding. Their relationship changes Violet's perspective on life and it gives Finch a space to rest from his mental struggles. It allows them both to experience moments of happiness, joy and connection.

Xayrullojeva (2023) mentions how the characters in Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* are aware of the dangers of their health condition and that illness has become part of them. In every meeting at the Support Group, they pray together so God grants them acceptance, courage, and wisdom to accept the things that they cannot change, and to change the things they can. Although they know that no one could guarantee them

whether they would be alive the next morning or not, they still have hope. The gatherings provide them with hope, resilience and shared experience. Support group also facilitates connection, it is where Augustus and Hazel first meet.

Matallah (2020) points out that Hazel has her loving and supporting parents beside her, doing their best to make a joyful environment for her at home since she feels that it is her safe place. Onthoni et al. (2022) emphasize the role of her parents in supporting her, they always accompany her especially when she receives her treatments. Her parents' support brings up her desire to endure the pain. She thinks that she has to be strong for them. They show her how much they love her and tell her that they will always love her even after she dies. Artha (2019) emphasizes how they are part of her support system, when she is around her parents, she feels optimistic. Her parents attempt constantly to make her feel better and happier. Moussa & Adeeb (2021) find that Augustus Waters gets his motivation from his family. His parents hang motivational quotes all around their house so he can always have a high spirit and live his life fully. His optimistic family influenced him to stay optimistic.

Hermanto and Prasaja (2023) analyze the pressure that Violet experiences from her parents. They find that her parents worry about her and try to protect her from Finch's company because they feel that he is strange. They are so protective, loving and caring and they try to encourage Violet to get back to her normal life after her sister's death. They even decide that they will try to help Finch after hearing his story and his condition. Mahdani (2023) explores Finch's relationships with his parents. He rarely shares his news with his mother because he feels that she has enough from his father. He thinks that he should not be an additional burden on her shoulders. She is so busy minding her life so she is unaware of his bad mental health condition and the other

challenges he suffers from. Mahdani (2023) also adds that Finch detests his father who left them haunted by memories of his horrific abuse and violence and married someone.

This thesis is different from all the presented studies because it is the first study that explores illness literature and the psychological, social, and relational impacts of illness during young adulthood. The existing research focus more on other phases of life such as childhood and adulthood leaving this transitional period underrepresented. This thesis came to fill the existed gap and the need for more studies that address illness narratives and young adulthood challenges.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

#### 3.1 Method

In this study, the researcher employs a qualitative research method based on thematic analysis under the umbrella of postmodernism and psychoanalysis to investigate the challenges young adults confront in Jennifer Niven's novel *All the Bright Places* and John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*, in addition to exploring the role of human connection, communication and support systems in helping individuals surpass serious challenges and problems and enhancing the quality of their lives.

Grenz (1996), in his book *A Primer on Postmodernism*, defines postmodernism as an intellectual mood and a range of cultural expressions that challenge the core ideals, principles, and values that lay at the heart of the modern mindset. It refers to the emerging epoch, the era in which we live. This phenomenon encompasses many dimensions of contemporary society. Grenz (1996) claims that the emerging generations are no longer confident that humans will be able to solve the world's great problems and that they perceive life on Earth as fragile. He also claims that they believe that the survival of humankind is now on the line.

As a mirror of the real world, postmodern fiction reflects these changes that the world witnesses among its pages. Postmodern literary works implicitly denied the modern ideal of absolute truths, universal meanings, and the notion of a single, coherent narrative. Postmodern fiction also heightens the focus on themes such as questioning absolute truths, the deconstruction of traditional narratives and the exploration of fragmented identities. It also focuses on the role of language in shaping reality and the blurring of boundaries between fiction and reality. Grenz (1996) notes that through

these techniques, postmodern fiction challenges readers to engage with complex, often paradoxical perspectives on society, culture, and human experience.

Postmodernism, as a research literary theory, challenges the traditional notions of objectivity and universal truths. It embraces a fragmented, skeptical approach to understanding fictional work. In postmodern research, meaning is not fixed, but it is constructed through language, culture, and power dynamics. This approach blurs the boundaries between reality and its representation in fictional works. As a participant in creating meaning, the researcher employs postmodernism to deconstruct dominant narratives and explore how knowledge is produced.

According to Braun & Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a flexible method that allows the researcher to focus on the data in numerous ways. With thematic analysis, researchers can legitimately focus on analyzing meaning across the entire dataset or examine one particular aspect of a phenomenon in depth. They can also report the obvious or semantic meanings in the data or interrogate the latent meanings, assumptions, and ideas behind what is explicitly stated. The many forms thematic analysis can take means that it suits a wide variety of research questions and research topics.

The researcher employs psychoanalysis to explore the unconscious dimensions of the characters' thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Rooted in the theories of Freud and his foundational contribution to psychoanalysis, Freud (1919) introduces the idea that human behavior is driven by unconscious desires and internal conflicts. Expanded by Lacan's (1977) reinterpretation of Freud, emphasizing language and the formation of the self through the imagery, symbolic and real to analyze the characters' identity crises and alienation and Jung's (1969) idea of the collective unconscious, the researcher

uncovers hidden motivations, unresolved conflicts, and profound psychological structures that shape the characters' collective experiences.

This study uses the method of thematic analysis in order to draw possible conclusions by analyzing and investigating evidence in the chosen novels. In addition, the novels are approached comparatively to draw an analogy between them as they are written in the same language but by different authors on similar themes. They subsequently have a lot in common.

Two data resources are needed in this study: primary data resources and secondary data resources. The secondary data resources of this research are books, online journals, and previously published research papers related to this research.

### **3.2 Summary of *All the Bright Places* by Jennifer Niven**

Jennifer Niven is an international bestselling contemporary American author who is best known for her young adult book *All the Bright Places* (2015). She grew up in Indiana. In 2000, she started writing full-time, she has written nonfiction and fiction, contemporary and historical, adult and young adult narratives. Her books as she notes are stories about ordinary people doing extraordinary things. Niven wrote her novel *All the Bright Places* based on her own experience with a boy she loved as she states in the author's note.

*All the Bright Places* is a young adult novel by Jennifer Niven, influenced by the author's personal story. The novel is about Theodore Finch and Violet Markey, two young adult protagonists who weave together a story of friendship and love, a story of saving loved ones and being saved in the face of a devastating loss. The story is narrated on the tongues of Finch and Markey. It starts with Theodore Finch, who has an abusive

father, but he no longer lives with them, and a mother who knows nothing about her son's suffering. Finch is ostracized by his peers and labeled a "freak" by them. He struggles under the weight of his life challenges and his mental instability; he struggles to remain awake, and he is obsessed with suicide. Finch starts the story by recounting how he finds himself, on a cold winter day, standing on the ledge of Bartlett High School's bell tower, contemplating suicide. This is the place where he first meets Violet. Six feet away, Violet stands on the same ledge with the same idea in mind. They both seem to suffer from problems that provoke suicidal thoughts in their minds.

Finch has a counseling appointment with Mr. Embry. They discuss his sudden absence and where he has been for the past five weeks. Then, the story shifts to Violet, who begins her story. She has a meeting with the school counselor, Mrs. Kresney. It is their twelfth meeting since the car accident in which her sister, Eleanor, has died. In her meeting with the counselor, Violet tells Mrs. Kresney she is not ready to resume normal activities.

Later that same day, Finch chooses Violet as his partner for the geography project "Wander Indiana". Violet tries to get out of the project, but the teacher refuses. Finch, in an effort to get to know Violet, opens a Facebook account and meets her again. Then Violet and Finch travel around Indiana to explore its important and unusual sites. During their journey, their friendship and mutual attraction start growing.

Finch takes Violet to the Blue Hole, a lake where he enjoys diving under and holding his breath for a long time. After a whole day out, Violet's parents get worried and ban her from being around him. He begins to slip further into his depressive, withdrawn sleep state because she has become his reason to stay awake. He somehow

ends up in the hospital because of an overdose of sleeping pills. Then, he attends a support group and eventually disappears after leaving strange emails to his loved ones.

Violet finds a message from him, quoting from *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf. He signs off with these words, “Come”, I say, “come”. Violet replies but never hears from him again, leading her to suspect his absence. She starts searching for him in the first place that comes to mind, the Blue Hole Lake. Eventually, they discover that Finch is dead, and divers find his body in the Blue Hole. At the funeral, Mr. Embry tells Violet that she is a survivor and gives her a handbook for survivors of suicide. Violet recognizes that she has forever changed and decides to finish their wandering journey. She uses clues from Finch’s last series of texts to find the places he had added to the map.

At the last wandering site, Violet finds a note and a musical score addressed to her from Finch. The novel ends with Violet at the Blue Hole, thinking about the epitaph she has written for Finch where she realizes that her own epitaph has yet to be written.

### **3.3 Summary of *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green**

John Green is a contemporary American author who writes realistic young adult fiction. He was born in Indianapolis, Indiana and raised in Orlando, Florida. He is New York Times bestselling author for 5 novels. His fourth novel *The Fault in Our Stars* is one of the bestselling books of all time. Green's works are praised for his bright yet troubled characters and thoughtful treatment of difficult topics.

*The Fault in Our Stars* is a young adult novel that recounts the story of Hazel Grace Lancaster, a lung cancer patient who attends a cancer patients' support group. In one of the meetings, she grabs the attention of another young cancer fighter named Augustus

Waters. He attends this meeting to support his friend, Isaac, who had lost one of his eyes to cancer and now has to have his other eye taken out as well. After the meeting ends, Augustus invites Hazel to watch a movie at his house. While they are hanging out, they discuss their struggle journey with cancer. Hazel reveals she has advanced thyroid cancer that has spread to her lungs. Augustus had osteosarcoma, but he is now cancer-free after having his leg amputated.

They agree to read one another's favorite novels. Augustus gives Hazel *The Price of Dawn*, and she recommends *An Imperial Affliction*. The protagonist, Anna, a cancer fighter, matches her experience. She is curious about the novel's author, Peter Van Houten, who fled to Amsterdam. A week later, Augustus surprises her by saying he succeeded in tracking Van Houten's assistant and starting an email correspondence with the author.

Hazel sends the author questions concerning the fate of Anna's mother and she hopes to clear up the novel's ambiguous conclusion. The author only agrees to answer her questions in person and invites her to Amsterdam. Augustus grants her his wish, and she manages to convince her parents and the medical crew to travel to Amsterdam. Finally, they meet the author to find that he is a mean-spirited drunk who claims he cannot answer any of Hazel's questions. After they leave Van Houten in profound disappointment, they end up in Anne Frank's house. Eventually, their relationship developed throughout this journey.

The following day, Augustus confesses that he has a body scan, which revealed that cancer has returned to him aggressively and spread everywhere. They get back home, Augustus' conditions worsen, and Hazel recognizes that she is deeply attached to him and that she loves him now more than ever. In his final days, Augustus arranges a pre-

funeral for himself, during which Isaac and Hazel give eulogies. Hazel expresses how much she loves him and that she would not trade their short time together for anything in the world.

Augustus dies eight days later. At the funeral, Hazel is astonished to find Van Houten, and he gives her a letter that she refuses to read. A few days later, Isaac informs Hazel that Augustus has written her the letter. Eventually, she learns that Augustus sent it to Van Houten because he wants him to use it to compose a well-written eulogy about Hazel. The novel ends with Hazel reading Augustus's words. He says getting hurt in this world is inevitable, but we choose who we allow to hurt us, and that he is happy with his choice, and he hopes she likes her choices, too.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Analysis

This chapter discusses the challenges that young adults confront through this phase and how they deal with them. It also aims to highlight the role of human connection and support systems in young adults' coping process in John Green's novel *The Fault in Our Stars* and Jennifer Niven's novel *All the Bright Places*.

#### 4.1 Interpersonal Relationships Challenges

According to Feldman (2000), an interpersonal relationship is a contribution of a person to a well and great relationship through an internal factor within the person himself/herself. Paulhus and Martin (1988) define it as the relation between friends, family, and the social circle with whom we hang. In literature, relationships allow scholars to delve deeply into the characters' lives and psychology, as well as to explore the variety of human connection and conflict that shape the characters' inner growth.

There are three categories of interpersonal relationships depicted in John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* and Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places*. The first one is romantic relationships, through which challenges of love and heartbreak are analyzed. The second category is familial relationships which capture family members bonds and the tensions between them. The third one is friendships, which are a space that provides the characters with support and helps them to discover themselves.

Relationships are meant to be a source of comfort and mutual understanding. They are supposed to be young adults' anchor through hard times, but they sometimes can be challenging for them as they navigate this transitional phase. Especially when young adults experience mental or physical illness, relationships can become significantly

challenging. Manne and Badr (2008) mention that partners or couples deal with challenges, such as worry about the likely loss of their partner and their ability to provide support to the patient.

#### **4.1.1 Romantic Relationship Challenges**

Romantic relationships capture the beauty and the complexities of human connection. They portray the emotional heights of love, human invaluable, tension, and heartbreak. They create an environment of mutual understanding and acceptance where flaws and imperfections are recognized but accepted and loved. They also showcase how love can transform individuals while they navigate their desires, fears, and dreams. This unique feeling usually fosters a deep sense of belonging and purpose, it also fosters the individuals' courage to face challenges, and it inspires them to sacrifice, support their partners, and grow to be the best version of themselves. Romantic relationships can be both a coping mechanism and a source of challenges.

In *The Fault in Our Stars*, Augustus confesses to Hazel Grace:

"I am in love with you, and I know that love is just a shout into the void, and that oblivion is inevitable, and that we're all doomed and that there will come a day when all our labor has been returned to dust, and I know the sun will swallow the only earth we'll ever have, and I am in love with you." (Green 2012, 153).

This quote shows Augustus' expression of love in the face of existential uncertainty. This proves Augustus' unconditional love for Hazel despite all the challenges they experience. The result of Rahayu's (2020) "*The Romantic Love Reflected in John Green's The Fault in Our Stars Novel (2012): A Sociological Perspective*" proves that the relationship between Hazel Grace and Augustus Waters fulfills the components of

romantic love. The results of Said's (2022) study of love conflict in John Green's novel *The Fault in Our Stars* align with the previous study as it proves that there is a romantic conflict between the two protagonists.

Augustus' and Hazel's love starts when they meet in a cancer support group, then their bond starts to strengthen because of their shared experience of living with a terminal illness. Their relationship is distinguished by their intellectual exchange, moments of humour, and courage to confront their fears. It is also marked by a profound emotional intimacy, symbolized by Augustus' act of heroism by sacrificing his wish from *The Genie Foundation* to take Hazel on a journey to Amsterdam in search of her favourite author Peter Van Houten.

Augustus' and Hazel's relationship is an inspiring relationship because no matter how challenging their lives are, they try to find solace in each other's company, they embrace their love in the face of their inevitable loss, and they even manage to enjoy their life in the limited time they have before dying. Deeb's (2016) "*Moments of infinite joy within a limited time: The concept of time in John Green's The Fault in our Stars*" corroborates the previous statement, it also adds that these two young adults who suffer from cancer are aware that it is not their fault.

Augustus and Hazel experience several challenges that threaten their love, such as the persistent fear of loss. Hazel fears the emotional risk of loving Augustus, because she knows deep down that their time together is limited. She tries to push him away and the tension between them elevates. Then Augustus' health crisis starts, the thing that forces Hazel to deal with the harsh reality of watching the love of her life suffer, knowing that she cannot do anything about it. Furthermore, after Augustus' death,

Hazel struggles with profound grief and loneliness. She tries to endure the deep scars left by her significant loss.

In *All the Bright Places* by Jennifer Niven, Mahdani (2023) notes that Finch believes he does not fit in with anyone because of his mental instability. He believes that no one likes him until he falls in love with Violet Markey. Violet likewise believes that she does not deserve to be loved by anyone because she holds herself responsible for her sister's death. Finch and Violet meet on the ledge of the school's bell tower. They suffer from emotional pain. Finch's adventurous spirit pushes Violet to break free from her grief as they spend time together doing their geography project Wander Indiana. He inspires her to see the hidden beauty in life through his eyes, which helps her to heal from her sister's loss. But in the end, their love fails to save him.

Finch confesses his feelings for Violet through various heartfelt moments. "Ultraviolet Remarkable, I think I love you." (Niven 2015, 144). This line captures Finch's unique, affectionate way of expressing his feelings for Violet. Another special moment is when he tells her "You are all the colours in one, at full brightness." (Niven 2015, 251). He sees her as a source of light in his life.

Their relationship becomes a delicate balance of joy and sorrow. Finch's unstable mental status becomes a huge weight on their relationship, as he struggles with mental health issues that he cannot communicate or talk about. Their relationship showcases the healing power of love and the difficulties of mental illness. It also demonstrates how support makes difference while they explore young adulthood struggles. Finch's support helps Violet to reconnect with the world and rediscover joy in life, it also helps her to get back to her hobby which is writing. Meanwhile Violet's presence gives Finch a sense of stability and belonging. She is his comfort zone, even when his mental

condition deteriorates, she stays by his side. She keeps reminding him of his value and shows him compassion. But when he commits suicide, she learns that her love and support are not enough for him to overcome his inner conflicts. She ends up struggling with intense grief and guilt because of her devastating loss.

#### **4.1.2 Familial Relationship Challenges**

Familial ties and connections are the bonds between individuals who are connected by blood or marriage. These relationships are normally supposed to be a source of comfort, support and belonging, but they sometimes can embody struggles, misunderstandings and violence as well. The most essential point about familial relationships is that they play a fundamental role in shaping the individual's identity, values, and emotional well-being.

In John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*, familial relationships create a whole atmosphere of unconditional love, comfort, security and acceptance. The relationships between Augustus, Hazel, and their families draw a great picture of supportive and distinctive family dynamics ruled by a challenging terminal illness. Augustus' family is loving, they try to support him with optimism and encouragement. They fill their house with motivational quotes, an encouraging quote above the TV says, "Without Pain, How Could We Know Joy?" (Green 2012, 35). This reflects his family's optimistic approach to deal with his illness; they try to create an environment filled with encouragement even in their difficult times. Even if they cannot control his illness and they are fully aware of the limits of their protection, they still love him and care for him as he himself explains his parents' situation that they love him and want to help him, but they cannot control anything.

Hazel's relationship with her parents, on the other hand, is more direct and closer as she notes: "My parents were my two best friends." (Green 2012, 12). Her parents are super protective, they put all their efforts into investing in her well-being, they become caregivers and companions, as they manage Hazel's medical needs and offer her emotional support. Both families have an essential role in shaping the way their kids deal with their illnesses and relationships. The challenges of their familial relationships lie in the pressure that is caused by their overprotective parents and the magnitude of the psychological damage of their children suffering as well as loss.

However, in Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places*, the familial relationship of Finch and Violet play a crucial role in forming their identities and facing the myriads of challenges they face. Finch's relationship with his family is weak and distant; his family is dysfunctional; his parents are divorced. He stays with his mother who is most of the time absent because of her full-time job, even when she is physically present, she is emotionally detached. His two sisters Kate and Decca also live with him. He struggles with mental issues so badly ignored by his family members. He despises his abusive father, who has abandoned them. Finch experiences both physical and emotional abuse from his father, he has a huge scar on his stomach caused by him. He also mentions his father's physical abuse on one of Sundays gatherings "he catches me by the arm and wham, slams me into the wall. I hear the crack as my skull makes contact, and for a minute the room spins." (Niven 2015, 102). His mother worries about him, she takes a space of his thinking because she has suffered from his father and still suffers from the responsibility placed on her shoulders raising her children alone. Finch's family adds weight to his burden and layers of complexity to his struggles.

Violet's family is supportive and intimately bonded. Her parents try to maintain a protective and caring environment for her. They always push her to allow herself to heal

from the traumatic accident. But their overprotective acts put her under pressure; she ends up lying to them and hiding her emotional struggles. The difference in familial relationships highlight how some young adults manage to break through adversity when they are surrounded with a caring family and how some young adults are left alone which makes it harder for them to overcome their challenges.

### **4.1.3 Friendships Challenges**

Friendship, in *The Fault in Our Stars*, represents the kind of relationship where bonds are formed through shared experiences, personal struggles, and mutual growth. It represents a supportive and a comfort zone where the characters share their fears, ambitions and enjoy trust, fun and forgiveness.

In John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*, friendship is portrayed as an essential source of support, humor, and companionship amidst the characters' challenging circumstances. Augustus' and Hazel's friendship with Isaac is a great space that allows them to express their fears and frustrations in ways others might not understand. When Isaac breaks up with his girlfriend and loses his eye, both Hazel and Augustus feel sorry and heartbroken, it is hard for them to see their only friend suffering. They stand by his side offering him support through his loss and disturbing him from emotional pain. On the other hand, after the death of Augustus, Isaac, and Hazel experience the pain of losing a friend. Isaac comforts Hazel and supports her through in the face of this loss.

In Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places*, friendships are depicted as weak as well as shallow bonds. Finch's friendships demonstrate that while he has some connections, these connections lack depth, understanding and emotional support. Charlie is one of Finch's school friends; their friendship is casual and lacks deep connection. In contrast, his friend Brenda, who is a more perceptive friend, offers him a space where he can be

himself without judgements. But at the end both Charlie and Brenda know nothing about his struggles that is the reason why they fail to be classified as good friends. Meanwhile, Violet's friendships deteriorate after the accident; she feels that no one would understand her pain. Furthermore, she does not want to appear weak, she also does not want anybody to pity her.

## **4.2 Social Interaction Challenges**

Social interaction is part of human nature. Kurniawan (2012) notes that humans are social beings, they need each other. They go on this complicated journey of forming new relationships and participating in activities adapting to new social, cultural and institutional frameworks because they need to feel a sense of mutual understanding, belonging and connection creating a status of balance that fosters social harmony. But sometimes the interaction between people in society itself shows a conflict or problem, as Harris and Orth (2019) argue. In both novels, social interactions often waver between moments of integration and alienation.

In John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*, social interaction is a great mixture of meaningful integration and painful alienation. Hazel and Augustus are exposed to a totally different social experience than other young adults; their social interactions are controlled by the health conditions that their illness implies. Their experience with cancer forces them to live in a world defined by medical treatment, hospitals, and support groups. Their interactions with others reveal both the healing power of interaction and sometimes a profound isolation that their illness brings.

Hazel's struggle with cancer separates her from normal young adult life which involves attending school, parties, travelling, and fun activities. This alienation intensifies when her condition worsens. The way she feels is clear and obvious in her

speech to her parents, “I’m a grenade, I just want to stay away from people and read books and think and be with you guys because there’s nothing I can do about hurting you.” (Green 2012, 99). Her illness makes her feel like a grenade that might explode anytime, the thing that drives her to push people around her away. She tightens her circle to only include her parents. She fears the pain and grief that her death can cause for her beloved ones. She does not want them to suffer from the feeling of loss.

She meets Augustus in a support group; her relationship with him starts to consolidate which represents integration at its most profound levels. She finds someone who sees the world exactly the same as she does based on their shared experience with cancer. Their bond gives her a sense of personal fulfillment as she has him besides her sharing love and support, until she loses him.

Augustus is more socially connected than Hazel. He attends support groups; he also has his friend Isaac by his side. When his relationship with Hazel develops, he starts feeling more accepted and loved. Their relationship provides him with the courage to confront his fear of being forgotten. But after the aggressive return of cancer, he starts feeling a sting of alienation. His relationship becomes a burden on his shoulder because of his own fears. He fears that Hazel sees him weak and pitiful. He also suffers from losing his sense of control and dignity so he distances himself from her.

In Jennifer Niven’s *All the Bright Places*, social interaction reveals both the beauty and the alienation that can accompany relationships, especially for young adults who face personal struggles. Anwar (2023) notes that Violet has limited social networks. Violet isolates herself after the tragic car accident. This kind of self-imposed isolation has a profound impact on her ability to interact with others and weakens her social relationships. Although she used to be outgoing, popular, and actively engaged in

school activities before, her grief creates a barrier between her and the world of young adults at her age. Her healing journey begins when Finch pushes her to re-engage in activities that help her to confront her grief and overcome it. Her relationship with Finch guides her to the right path and gives her the strength to rebuild her social ability, she starts to trust people, involves herself with them more and experiences joy again. This shows that meaningful relationships can be a powerful force that helps young adults to break free from their struggles because they serve as coping systems.

On the other hand, Finch experiences a paradoxical social world that both embraces and rejects him in different ways. He is sometimes welcomed, loved, and accepted, but other times he is bullied, labelled, and subjected to stigma because of his mental issues as well as unpredictable behaviour that form a huge challenge for him. His social interactions waver between moments of integration and deeper alienation. Cahya et al. (2022) demonstrate that Theodore Finch underwent social conflicts. The causes of these conflicts refer to the difference in his perception and the difference in his personality. Anwar (2023) finds that Finch fails in establishing enduring bonds and his state of detachment from society might be interpreted as an embodiment of Durkheim's notion of individuals who experience a sense of disconnection from social integration.

The result of the study "*A study on social alienation among adolescents*" by Navitha and Pettugani (2019) shows that most of young adults are socially alienated because of the lack of attachment with parents, sudden changes in their comfort zone, lack of interactions with their friends, lack of friendly environment and bullying . Theodore Finch suffers from most of the mentioned elements. He struggles with mental issues and the fear of vulnerability. He believes that if he reveals his mental health issues, he will be judged and labelled. He is already labelled as a "freak" due to his

unpredictable extreme behaviors and this label frustrates him a lot. He feels like an outsider among his peers, which is the reason that pushes him to avoid interaction furthermore to isolate himself for days, sometimes for weeks, whenever he feels low or overwhelmed. Confronting society, peers and parents adds layers of complexity to his challenges, so he develops self-defense mechanisms by avoiding the pressure of people and social interaction.

Social bonds are important for young adults' well-being, mental health, and life satisfaction. Navitha and Pettugani (2019) add that young adults should maintain strong social bonds with others because they reduce risks of mental health issues such as aggressiveness, deviant behaviors, isolation, and depression which Finch fails to do. This justifies why he is held prisoner to his mental struggles. Parental attachment is also very important in young adults' lives; it helps them to grow up sane and stable. This is not the case of Finch's family. As mentioned above, their family is dysfunctional; Finch is detached from his family members. His violent abusive father used to physically and mentally abuse him and his mother before leaving them. Finch's dark past seems to enhance his mental instability and negative behaviors.

On the other hand, Finch maintains good interpersonal relationships with Violet Markey. She symbolizes a safe haven for him, as she provides him with a space where he feels that he is loved and understood, which encourages him to confront his struggles. She inspires him to unconsciously enhance his coping mechanisms, because her presence alone offers him a sense of stability. She is his companion who colours his life as he states: "You are all the colours in one, at full brightness" (Niven 2015, 110). Through his relationship with Violet, he finds some sense of belonging, solace and healing. Despite finding some solace in his relationship with her, he still confronts a

strong internal darkness, he is also emotionally unstable. His mental issues and inner struggles prevent him from accepting her love and support. Although they share great moments of connection and understanding, his inner conflicts are too much for him to handle and they are hard to explain. This explains his last escape from everyone including Violet.

### **4.3 Health Challenges: Physical Illness, Mental Illness, and Mental Issues**

Physical and mental illness reflects the complexities of the human experience. These two novels delve into the challenges that mental and physical illness implies on young adults' lives, their relationships, and the way they perceive life.

Physical and mental illness, especially if the physical illness is terminal like cancer, causes immense suffering, pain and loss sometimes accompanied with stigma and isolation. They reshape young adults' identities, the way they perceive life and influence their interpersonal dynamics. Both of the novels portray how physical and mental illness can be challenging to young adults. John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* highlights the impact of stage IV thyroid cancer and osteosarcoma, which are incurable illnesses, on the young adult characters Hazel Grace and Augustus Waters. Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places*, on the other hand, portrays several mental health issues that confront young adults, with a focus on bipolar disorder, depression, and the effects of unresolved trauma.

#### **4.3.1 Physical Illness and mental issues in John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars***

Young adulthood is normally marked by its unique emotional, multiple physical and social changes that help young adults to develop their personalities as well as

construct their identities. But there are young adults with serious illnesses that force them to fight for life every day or count days to live. They are different from other young adults who are in good physical health and have stable minds. Illness redefines young adults' lives. The more complex and incurable the illness is, the harder the challenges and the limitations it imposes, especially if the illness is cancer.

Cancer imposes a range of limitations that significantly affect young adults' daily life and emotional well-being. It makes simple tasks feel overwhelming. It disrupts young adults' routines and plans because of its unpredictable development and furthermore aggressive attacks. As mentioned above, it affects their social interactions, relationships become strained, it also prevents full participation in activities because of the regular medical examinations, appointments and treatments, which leads to alienation or a sense of exclusion from communities. In addition to the fear of being misunderstood or judged because of their bad conditions and sometimes disabilities, young adults fear the future because no one can predict what awaits them and their loved ones.

John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* reflects the real image of the struggles and challenges that cancer fighters confront. It is about two young adults who suffer from two different types of cancer. Hazel Grace suffers from thyroid cancer that has affected her lungs causing respiratory issues and Augustus Waters suffers from osteosarcoma accompanied with leg amputation. Each of them is a warrior who fights the enemy which is made up from their own cells. As the novel suggests, cancer is a side effect of evolution.

Hazel's cancer physical challenges lie in all the pain that she constantly feels, in addition to the fluid which drains her lungs causing her choking attacks. She always

needs to stay connected to supplemental oxygen to compensate for her reduced lung function and because of her weak respiration. As she mentions:

“I had this little steel cart to wheel it around behind me. It delivered two liters of oxygen to me each minute through a cannula, a transparent tube that split just beneath my neck, wrapped behind my ears, and then reunited in my nostrils. The contraption was necessary because my lungs sucked at being lungs” (Green 2012, 8).

Her physical challenges also lie in the fluid that fills up her lungs and the physical limitations that restrict her mobility and her ability to engage fully in everyday activities. She often tires quickly, which makes even simple actions such as going up stairs exhausting.

Hazel’s advanced case has made her dependent, which adds a layer on her challenges. She relies on her mother and medical caregivers who help her through her daily life. Her mother helps her with transportation; she also assists her through her medical process and supports her emotionally. She is the anchor which provides her with comfort and a sense of stability throughout her illness challenges. This dependence emphasizes Hazel’s weakness and the impact of her illness on her independence.

Augustus Waters is a 17-year-old young adult, who is diagnosed with osteosarcoma. He has his leg amputated after a long battle with cancer. The amputation of his leg prevents him from participating in activities and playing basketball, which is his favourite hobby. He feels discomfort from his prosthetic, he tries to adapt to life with it. At first Augustus appears so pleased with his stable health condition, as he answers when Patreick asks him how he feels: "I'm on a roller coaster that only goes up, my friend" (Green 2012, 11). His chances of living appear to be better than Hazel’s,

whose health condition grows worse throughout the novel. Unexpectedly, cancer returns to Augustus and spreads aggressively. He becomes more vulnerable, exhausted, and independent. He always prides himself being strong and in control, which makes the way his illness strips him of his physical capability hard for him to accept.

On the emotional level, dealing with cancer symptoms alongside life goals adds layers of stress, exhaustion and complexity to the character's life. It also contributes to their mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression. Besides, cancer affects the way they perceive life; its physical limitations defeat their dreams, ambitions and confidence. Both of them experience feelings of regular fear, pain, and sadness. Furthermore, they feel overwhelmed because of their bad conditions.

The most emotional portrayal of cancer's reality is Augustus himself after the aggressive return of his cancer. Soon enough he loses his strength, and Hazel is forced to witness all the disgrace and pain her lover suffers from. Augustus becomes terrified and pitiful while trying to hide his feelings from his family and from her. His deepest fears are losing control, to live unnoticed and to be forgotten. He fears oblivion but he ultimately confronts fears.

From the psychological perspective, the novel portrays the profound psychological effects that cancer imposes on young adults' lives. Cancer brings significant mental challenges that affect Hazel's and Augustus' lives. Jebaselvi and Sivakumar (2022) in their study "*John Green's The Fault in Our Stars: Psychological Review of Adolescents with Cancer*", portray the emotional and the psychological struggle of young adult cancer patients. The study shows that the emotional complications which are not dealt with can lead to anxiety, sadness, withdrawal, or no interest in living. Onthoni et al. (2022) come to a conclusion that Hazel Grace is in a dominant state of anxiety because

of her illness. Anxiety has an adverse impact on the social interaction of the patient. Hazel's worry about her parents and Augustus and the way she tries to isolate herself because she does not want anyone to get hurt or suffer from the pain of her loss, prove that she is trapped in a loop of worry and anxiety.

Hazel says:

“Whenever you read a cancer booklet or website or whatever, they always list depression among the side effects of cancer. But, in fact, depression is not a side effect of cancer. Depression is a side effect of dying. (Cancer is also a side effect of dying. Almost everything is, really.) But my mom believed I required treatment, so she took me to see my Regular Doctor Jim, who agreed that I was veritably swimming in a paralyzing and totally clinical depression...” (Green 2012, 3).

The previous quote portrays an insightful and to some extent a pessimistic perspective on the psychological impact of Hazel's cancer. She distinguishes between depression as a side effect of cancer and as a response to the inevitable death. She acknowledges that cancer is part of the process of dying. This statement applies to Augustus after the aggressive return of cancer and how he suffers while battling his fears. It also can apply to all young adult cancer patients, because they are aware of their inevitable death at any time and at a young age.

#### **4.3.2 Mental Illness in Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places***

Mental issues and disorders impose serious challenges on young adults' lives. Whether these challenges and the struggles are diagnosed mental illness or just mental issues which arose in response to stress or specific situations, they are still a burden that falls heavily on young adults' shoulders. Young adults who confront mental challenges

start to have mood swings, their social engagement and their behaviour usually change which impacts their ability to function. It is important to highlight that mental issues can develop into a mental illness if they are left unaddressed although they are generally less severe and often situational. In contrast, mental illness or disorder is more persistent and more recurring, with a deeper impact on young adults' lives.

Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places* is a great portrayal of young adults' mental challenges, Anwar (2023) mentions that the novel provides a platform of psychological and social problems. It delves into the complexity of two young adults' minds and the emotional struggles that accompany their psychological challenges. Each one of them has their own struggles and challenges which eventually push them to attempt suicide at the ledge of the school's bell tower, where they first meet.

Finch is an unstable young adult who fights alone in a battle against his asleep periods, racing thoughts of death and suicide, as well as mood swings. His young adulthood phase is marked by intense mood swings, deep depressive periods or manic episodes, insomnia or hypersomnia, lack of interest and recurrent thoughts of worthlessness or guilt. These symptoms clearly portrayed in the novel indicate that he suffers from depression which makes him feel detached and exhausted.

According to Krog (2023), Theodore Finch has no established or named mental diagnosis, but he struggles with a variety of symptoms. He addresses his symptoms as the awake and the sleep, which reflects his alternating periods of depression and mania. When he experiences the asleep period, he isolates himself and avoids any kind of social interaction. This period is marked by "kind of black, sinking moods" (Niven 2015, 293). He prefers being awake, because he has a lot of energy during this period, this energy allows him to engage in physical activities and fall in love. Krog (2023) sees

that these alternating periods of depression and manic episodes align with the American Psychological Association's definition of bipolar disorder.

Since his early childhood, Finch has suffered from depression; his relationship with his father exemplifies traumatic and emotional abuse. It deeply affects his mental stability and self-worth. Finch's father is violent and abusive, who has a history of harming Finch and his mother, on physical and emotional levels. Violet Marky once observes a scar near Finch's stomach and asks him: "Where did you get the scar?" (Niven 2015, 144). Finch shares with Violet the story behind this scar. "The real story's boring. My dad gets in these black moods. Like, the blackest black. Like, no moon, no stars, storm's coming black. I used to be a lot smaller than I am now. I used to not know how to get out of the way" (Niven 2015, 144). His answer reveals how bad his father is and how he becomes even worse when he experiences dark moods. His past was painful and harmful although he is way too young to feel all this pain. He tries to hide all this pain behind his sense of humor which he uses to mask it and the trauma he suffers from.

Memories of the past still haunt him; his anxiety is reflected through the struggles he goes through starting with his father's actions such as abandoning them, starting a new family, neglecting him and leaving them to cope with the psychological aftermath of his abuse. The physical violence contributes to Finch's low self-esteem and anger issues. It also contributes to his fears of inheriting his father's anger issues and abusive actions. The biggest fear that worries him the most is that he hurts his beloved ones, particularly Violet.

Ratushima (2017) concludes his study of Finch's mental health with the following result, all the constant verbal and physical abuses from his father or from his peers who bully him at school make his mental illness, which is bipolar disorder, develop. Finch's

external conflict affects his mental stability leading to internal struggles. Bipolar disorder has two states or episodes as it is called, and it is possible to have a mix of both episodes. He mostly experiences mixed episodes as mentioned before. He is described as depressed, moody, suicidal, aggressive, smart, caring, and anxious. All these descriptions reflect Finch's suffering from a mental illness, especially bipolar disorder.

Violet is not officially diagnosed with mental illness but she suffers from clear symptoms that appear throughout the novel as challenges that she tries to get rid of. Everything starts after she loses her beloved sister Eleanor in a car accident. Before her sister's death, Violet has a close, cozy relationship with her older sister, she is her role model and her best friend. They share interests; both love writing as well as running online magazines. Violet and her sister share a strong bond filled with laughter, dreams, and mutual hobbies. Eleanor gives her a sense of purpose; she encourages and inspires her to live a wild young adult life. But after Eleanor's traumatic death, Violet becomes a new girl without purpose, she feels lost and detached, and she struggles to reconstruct her identity without her sister by her side. She also suffers from survivor's guilt, especially that she told her sister to take the road on which the accident occurs and she is the one who survives. This feeling of guilt compounds her grief which prevents her from going back to her normal life and living it fully like she once did with her sister.

Hermanto and Prasaja (2023) analyze Violet's character using Sigmund Freud's Theory of Personality and show that Violet's car accident and her sister's death have an impact on her psychology. The mental effects that she experiences consist of anxiety, trauma, depression and suicide. Her mental instability, her struggle with sadness, guilt and grief, push her to lose her interest in social interaction as well as engagement in school activities. All these challenges eventually lead her to have suicidal thoughts.

Abu Bakar and Abidin's study (2020) on the elements of depression in Niven's *All the Bright Places* prove that the novel has explored depression and suicide. According to Abu Bakar and Abidin (2020), all elements of cognitive distortions in Beck's cognitive theory of Depression are evident in the novel such as all-or-nothing thinking, magnification and minimizing, overgeneralization, mental filter, personalizing, jumping to conclusions, labelling, mind reading, emotional reasoning and disqualifying the positive. Each element is portrayed to varying degrees as shown by the two main characters Finch and Violet. Violet's depression is characterized by her weak social interaction and lack of motivation. As mentioned above, she distances herself from her old friends, and she quits extracurricular activities, writing, and online magazines. Simple activities become overwhelming without having Eleanor by her side, she is stuck in the past, unable to move forward.

Violet also faces anxiety, she refuses the idea of driving after the accident, she even avoids riding in cars. She also appears to think of parents and tries not to make them worry about her so she hides her pain, and behaves perfectly because they already suffer from her sister's loss. Her anxiety is also clear in the fear of losing another beloved one.

#### **4.4 Emotional Challenges**

Human feelings and emotions provide insights into the inner lives of the characters and their conditions. They have a huge impact on the characters' psychological development. These inner emotions and feelings can be challenging not only because they often remain unspoken. In *All the Bright Places* and *The Fault in Our Stars*, inner feelings and emotions portray how challenging can be as the characters struggle with the complexities of their mental health, loss, grief, and terminal illness. These emotions

and feelings may feel overwhelming for them which affects the way they perceive life, their interpersonal relationships, behaviour, and choices.

In *The Fault in Our Stars*, the main characters, Hazel and Augustus, confront a plethora of challenging feelings and emotions that are a side effect to their incurable illness. Their experiences trigger a range of intense feelings and emotions such as existential fears, guilt, anxiety, grief, frustration, low self-esteem, pain, exhaustion, and the emotional weight of their inevitable death. Augustus and Hazel struggle to regulate their emotions because of their unstable health conditions. Their heightened feelings and emotions contribute to mental health challenges, including anxiety and depression, as mentioned above in the analysis of their illness challenges.

The conflicting emotions and feelings about their aspirations, relationships, and societal expectations affect their journey of self-exploration and their identity construction. They also influence the way Augustus and Hazel relate to others. They struggle to articulate their emotions and feelings which lead to misunderstandings as well as conflicts in interpersonal relationships. They also affect their social interactions, the desire to fit in leads to feelings of deficiency and anxiety which impacts their self-esteem and mental health.

In *The Fault in Our Stars*, pain is illustrated as an inescapable part of Augustus' and Hazel's life. Xayrulloeva (2023) notes that cancer is a part of them and the pain is an inseparable company. Xayrulloeva (2023) also adds that it is not only about the physical torture, but also about the mental ones as well. They both struggle with physical and emotional pain. Physical pain is a constant reality for cancer patients including Hazel and Augustus. Hazel mentions her struggle with her oxygen carrier and the fluid that fills her lungs leaving her breathless. "I remember once early on when I

couldn't get my breath and it felt like my chest was on fire, flames licking the inside of my ribs fighting for a way to burn out of my body, my parents took me to the ER. A nurse asked me about the pain, and I couldn't even speak, so I held up nine fingers” (Green 2012, 263). Augustus’s prosthetic leg reflects the constant pain of living with illness. And after the aggressive return of his cancer, he starts to experience intense physical and emotional pain all over again. His charismatic confident character is overshadowed by his physical frailty.

The emotional pain of living with an incurable illness is central in their story. Hazel struggles with feelings of guilt, because she fears that her death will cause pain to her loved ones, especially her parents. Augustus’ emotional pain lies in his fear of oblivion and death. Later, after the return of cancer, he loses his independence which reveals his inner turmoil and how much pain he handles. They both try to hide their emotional pain to protect their families, which adds to the burden of their challenging lives. Eventually, Hazel faces the pain of her lover, Augustus, loss. According to Hazel, the excruciating pain which is inflicted by his death equals ten out of ten. "You know how I know you're a fighter? You called a ten a nine. But that wasn't quite right. I called it a nine because I was saving my ten. And here it was, the great and terrible ten, slamming me again and again as I lay still and alone in my bed staring at the ceiling, the waves tossing me against the rocks then pulling me back out to sea so they could launch me again into the jagged face of the cliff, leaving me floating face up on the water, undrowned” (Green 2012, 263). This quote implies Hazel’s resilience and refusal to acknowledge that she is experiencing the worst pain in her life. She avoids giving the pain a ten, not because the pain is not that bad, but because she is saving the label for something worse. The vivid imagery of waves smashing her suggests an ongoing battle with pain.

Both Hazel and Augustus experience fear. Hazel's fear revolves around her certain death and the pain it might cause her loved ones, especially her parents. She describes herself as a grenade that will cause devastation if it explodes. This feeling of fear makes her push people away in an attempt to minimize the damage. Augustus, on the other hand, struggles with his fear of being forgotten. As he states: "I fear oblivion. I fear it like the proverbial blind man who's afraid of the dark." (Green 2012, 12). Out of this fear, he desires to leave a legacy in this world, which influences his actions and ambitions. Augustus also fears losing control and being vulnerable. This plays a huge role in his actions and behaviors after his collapse.

Both Hazel and Augustus experience grief as they confront the losses and the limitations imposed by their illness. P.R (2021) describes grief as one of life's most complicated emotions. It is a significant source of stress but at the same time it is the most effective catalyst which uncovers human's true identity. Grief strikes at the loss of a beloved someone or something that we hold. Hazel experiences grief over her life, she feels that she will never fully live. She holds grief for her parents; she also struggles with her grief over losing Augustus after his health declines and after his death. In turn, Augustus grieves the loss of his independence, dignity, and his future. Grief becomes a driving force that influences his actions and behaviors after his health conditions collapse bearing in mind his own death and the impact it will leave on Hazel.

Guilt is a significant emotional challenge for both Hazel and Augustus. It is a burden that they both carry; they have a sense of responsibility for the pain that their loved ones might suffer from after their certain death. They think that they will inevitably hurt everyone around them when they die. The way they think affects their decisions and their interpersonal relationships. They start to hesitate whether to deepen

their relationships or to keep a safe distance. Hazel fears leaving her parents and Augustus devastated. She is aware of how much her parents have sacrificed so far and she feels guilty for not being a healthy daughter so they can live a normal life and enjoy it without being forced to deal with all her illness problems. Matallah (2020) notes that because of Hazel's feeling of guilt, she insists that her parents need to have a life which is not only based on taking care of her. This could be noticed in: "I want you guys to have a life," I said. "I worry that you won't have a life, that you'll sit around here all day with no me to look after and stare at the walls and want to off yourselves" (Green 2012, 173). On the other hand, Augustus starts to suffer from emotions of guilt precisely after the return of his cancer because he has always been independent and confident, but after the return of cancer he becomes gradually dependent. He holds guilt for the emotional aftermath of his collapse. Guilt deeply influences Hazel's and Augustus' relationship. His feeling of guilt is evident in his pre-funeral in *The Literal Heart of Jesus*, where he listens to his friend Isaac's and Hazel's eulogies. This proves that he wants to hear how much he means to them before he passes away and that he has not caused pain to the ones he loves the most.

Augustus and Hazel's physical and emotional weakness and their inability to cope with their physical and emotional challenges effectively provoke feelings such as vulnerability, helplessness, and frustration. These feelings form a huge challenge to the characters that affects their lives. They both struggle to hide their state of weakness as well as their feeling of vulnerability and helplessness. Hazel describes how cancer patients resist exposing their feelings and weaknesses, she states:

"Much of my life had been devoted to trying not to cry in front of people who loved me, so I knew what Augustus was doing. You clench your teeth. You look up. You tell

yourself that if they see you cry, it will hurt them, and you will be nothing but a Sadness in their lives, and you must not become a mere sadness, so you will not cry, and you say all of this to yourself while looking up at the ceiling, and then you swallow even though your throat does not want to close and you look at the person who loves you and smile” (Green 2012, 213-214).

They are afraid of becoming a source of pain for those they love, this drives them to hide their weakness and especially in the moments when they feel vulnerable and helpless. This is clearer in Augustus’ struggles with losing control when his health collapses. His sense of vulnerability and his fear that his imperfections and dependence affect the way his beloved ones view him, especially Hazel. His way of thinking justifies why he turns away from her when his cancer returns.

As discussed above in mental issues, both Hazel and Augustus struggle with anxiety considered a significant emotional challenge for them. Hazel’s anxiety stems from her fear of her death’s impact on her beloved ones, she is in a constant state of worry, thinking how they will be able to cope after she passes away. So, she keeps trying to minimize the bad effects of her illness by isolating herself from social interaction and forming strong bonds. Meanwhile, Augustus’ anxiety lies in his worries about his legacy and the fear of being forgotten. Whenever their illness becomes stronger, their anxiety and worries heighten. This increases their burdens by putting them in a constant stressful atmosphere. It is also important to mention that constant mental issues and increasing stress may lead to mental illness if they are kept unspoken and are not professionally addressed.

All emotional and physical challenges may lead to feelings of frustration. Augustus and Hazel both struggle with the limitations and the restrictions imposed by their illness.

They are frustrated because of their inability to live normal lives, they are uncertain about their future because of the constant threats to their illness. Hazel is frustrated because she cannot move freely without the oxygen tank, and she is herself also a burden to her parents. Augustus starts to feel frustrated when he loses his control and independence. The more he gets ill and incapable, the more his frustration increases.

Low self-esteem constitutes an emotional challenge for both Hazel and Augustus. Firstly, they view themselves as different from their peers who enjoy good health. Secondly, their perception of themselves as a burden to those around them because of the pain they cause them makes them feel unworthy. Hazel struggles with her physical challenges which her illness imposes and increases her feelings of low self-esteem. On the other hand, Augustus experiences moments of self-doubt after his cancer returns. When he loses his physical strength and independence, he starts to question his worth. He also suffers from the idea of being remembered as a weak person.

In *All the Bright Places*, the main characters, Finch and Violet, also confront a myriad of challenging feelings and emotions caused by either undiagnosed mental disorder and a dark past, which is Finch's case, or a previous traumatic experience, which is Violet's car accident. Their experiences evoke a range of feelings and emotions that could be challenging for them to overcome or to escape from. Finch and Violet struggle to face their difficult emotional challenges and their deep wounds. Their unresolved emotional struggles consume them and influence their lives. There are plenty of emotional challenges depicted throughout their journey.

Guilt plays an important role in *All the Bright Places*. They both feel guilty about things they are not responsible for. This feeling of guilt shapes and influences the emotional journey of Violet and Finch. Violet struggles with survivor's guilt after the

car accident in which her sister Eleanor dies. Hartati et al. (2022) note that the source of Violet's guilt is because she is with her sister in the car when the accident happens. She holds responsibility for surviving and having a chance to live while Eleanor was deprived of this chance. She tells Finch about the accident, she describes her sister:

“She was upset, but she wouldn't let me drive. I was the one who told her to take the A Street Bridge. I remember the sign that said ‘Bridge ices before road.’ I remember sliding and Eleanor saying, ‘I can't hold on.’ I remember the air as we went through it, and Eleanor screaming. After that, everything went black. I woke up three hours later in the hospital” (Niven 2015, 83).

This guilt she holds and the way she blames herself affect her in a very bad way, they stop her from living a normal life, she never practices any of her previous activities and reconnects with her hobbies, as she states: “But I haven't touched the site since Eleanor died, because what would be the point? It was a site about sisters” (Niven 2015, 20). She alienates herself and decreases social interaction. She also starts feeling guilty when she starts lying to her parents to see Finch. They think that he is not a good companion to their daughter, but she knows that he is not to blame, and he is good for her. She pretends that she is going to visit her friends but in fact she goes to see him, it is her first experience lying to her parents.

On the other hand, Finch experiences guilt because of his unstable mental health. He also feels guilty towards his mother because he believes that he is a disappointment to her, he does not meet her expectations and he is unable to be the son she wants him to be. He believes that he is failing her. As he states: “I see my mom looking at me—when she looks at me at all—like she's thinking: Where in the hell did you come from? You must get it from your father's side” (Niven 2015, 26). He thinks that he adds to the

burden to those around him and blames himself for not being able to overcome his struggles. He never shares his problems; he tries his best to stay awake and not to worry anyone around him.

According to Hall (2014), grief is a reaction to complete disappearance, including the emotional, physical and spiritual manifestations of a person, and it is a natural reaction to loss. Both Violet and Finch experience feelings of grief. Violet's grief stems from the tragic loss of her sister in the car accident, this experience leaves her feeling detached from the world. She is unable to move forward without her sister, she is unable to surpass this adversity without having her sister by her side. She also experiences grief after the devastating death of Finch, who has drowned himself in the Blue Hole Lake. Meanwhile, Finch experiences grief because of the deep loss of meaning in his own life, the unstable family bonds and his struggle with mental illness. Grief becomes another weight on their burden because it influences the way they interact, behave, and view the world.

Another emotional challenge lies in their feeling of pain. Both experience physical and emotional pain. Violet struggles with a very strong painful experience, which is losing her sister. There is nothing on earth that could hurt more than losing a beloved one, especially if the person is highly attached to this one. Violet cannot do anything without her beloved sister; she uses to share everything with her before she passes away. The fact that she is the one who tells her to take that street was her, makes it harder for her to forgive herself, which adds layers of pain on her burden. She faces difficulty in finding meaning and purpose in a world where her sister no longer exists.

On the other hand, Finch's pain is very complicated to depict because he rarely shares how hard it is to battle mental illness. His emotional pain is invisible to others

because he is good at hiding it. He knows that life is not that easy for any of his loved ones, particularly his mother, so he never wants to be an extra challenge for them. He also suffers from the emotional pain that accompanies physical pain caused by his school peers bullying him and his abusive father, especially in situations when he cannot respond. He mentions a moment at school when he is bullied by Gabe Romero, but he is forced to take no action because he will be expelled, “And then he slams me into the locker and, before I can even blink, punches me in the eye, and then again in the nose” (Niven 2015, 131). He also mentions his dad's bad abusive actions, “And then he’s off the couch and lunging for me, and he catches me by the arm and wham, slams me into the wall. I hear the crack as my skull makes contact, and for a minute the room spins” (Niven 2015, 102). It must have been painful for him to endure all of these bad experiences without talking about them or addressing them. These two quotes demonstrate the physical violence that Finch goes through at school and at his father's home when he meets him on Sundays.

Fear fills an area in Finch’s and Violet’s journey while they explore the uncertainties of their lives. Violet is afraid of being open to new relationships again and she also fears social interaction. She is worried that if she goes back to interact with people after the accident, they will judge her or pity her. So, she starts to avoid situations that might draw attention to her grief or make her seem vulnerable. Finch fears being labelled or stigmatized for having mental illness. As he notes: “The thing I know about bipolar disorder is that it’s a label” (Niven 2015, 172). He is also afraid of people around him if they discover his weakness. Finch's biggest fear is becoming abusive as his father. He is afraid that he will inherit his father’s anger and aggressive

tendencies. This fear is clear in his struggle with his identity. He does not want to hurt his loved ones who he really cares about.

Both Violet and Finch experience frustration as they deal with their personal challenges and struggles. Violet's frustration is evoked by her inability to overcome her traumatic loss of her sister, Eleanor. Her frustration increases whenever anyone around her tries to push her to get back to her normal life including her parents, Mrs. Kresney and Finch. She tries to escape the pressure that they cause for her by saying "I'm not ready." (Niven 2015, 21) and she notes "These are the three magic words. I've discovered they can get you out of almost anything" (21). She feels trapped in her grief and her feeling of guilt for being the one who survived and this makes her frustrated whenever anyone mentions the word survivor as she states: "You need to remember that you're a survivor, and that means ...I will never know what that means because as soon as I hear the word survivor, I get up and walk out" (Niven 2015, 21).

Meanwhile, Finch's frustration is evoked by his mental health instability; he is frustrated from the unpredictable mood swings of his bipolar disorder. He also holds this feeling because of his inability to control his mood swings and he cannot escape from his altered condition. He mentions his mood swings and how much he despises them when he frankly talks about them with Violet. He declares "I get into these moods sometimes, and I can't shake them ... Kind of black, sinking moods. I imagine it's what being in the eye of a tornado would be like, all calm and blinding at the same time. I hate them" (Niven 2015, 187). His sense of helplessness pushes him away from his loved ones and contributes to his decision of committing suicide.

Both Violet and Finch experience feelings of vulnerability while they confront their fears and insecurities. Finch struggles to uncover the fact of his mental illness and

emotional challenges because people around him would judge him and view him as weak as well as vulnerable, this makes it hard for him to be open and show his real self. As he keeps telling himself: “Disguise the pain. Don’t call attention. Don’t be noticed.” (Niven 2015, 171). On the other hand, Violet’s vulnerability is connected to her grief and her fear; she is too weak to confront her fears. Her weakness contributes negatively to the way she perceives life after the accident; she is trapped in her mental prison. She will never be able to live fully if she remains vulnerable. She also keeps distance from others because she is afraid that she will experience more loss and pain which she is way too weak to handle. She describes herself and the way she feels after she loses Finch: “I wonder if my face will ever look the same again or if I’ll always see it in my reflection Finch, Eleanor, loss, heartache, guilt, death” (Niven 2015, 216).

Feeling of anxiety is analyzed above in mental health challenges, both Finch and Violet are found struggling from feelings of anxiety. Violet’s anxiety lies in her overwhelming feelings of grief and the fear because she cannot afford another loss. Finch experiences constant feelings of anxiety regarding his unpredictable mental health conditions. Rahmawati (2021) mentions that the first and second stages of Finch’s mental illness are general anxiety and anxiety disorder. His general anxiety is reflected in his extreme actions that threaten his life, and the second level starts when all of Finch’s frustrations are discarded during adrenaline pumping activities, including fast driving and night running. He is anxious to lose control of his mental issues. This persistent anxiety may lead to feelings of hopelessness, which may contribute to the characters’ depression. It becomes more challenging for them especially when they are not able to address these feelings.

Both Violet and Finch experience feelings of low self-esteem. It is the way in which they view themselves and their value in this world. Violet's self-esteem is shattered after the death of Eleanor. She loses her self-worth because she believes she does not have the right to live happily. These beliefs push her to withdraw from social activities and form new relationships. Finch, on the other hand, struggles with serious feelings of inadequacy which arise from his mental health issues. He often feels that he is different and worthless. He views himself in a very negative way, as he declares:

“Listen, I’m the freak. I’m the weirdo. I’m the troublemaker. I start fights. I let people down. Don’t make Finch mad, whatever you do. Oh, there he goes again, in one of his moods. Moody Finch. Angry Finch. Unpredictable Finch. Crazy Finch. But I’m not a compilation of symptoms. Not a casualty of shitty parents and an even shittier chemical makeup. Not a problem. Not a diagnosis. Not an illness. Not something to be rescued. I’m a person” (Niven 2015, 196).

This quote demonstrates a vulnerable declaration of identity from Finch who feels deeply misunderstood and reduced to labels. Finch confronts the stereotypes and judgments impose on him by his peers. These labels reflect how the community he is addressing reduces complex individuals, especially who struggle with mental health or emotional challenges, to their behaviors or diagnoses.

All of the four characters face a lot of difficulty in managing their emotional challenges. These unregulated emotions can transform into a source of stress that disrupts their daily lives and affects their choices. The four characters experience overwhelming emotions that contribute to their mental stability and mental health issues. They struggle to communicate their emotions effectively. They try to battle these challenges without revealing what they are going through and without adequate coping

mechanisms, because they do not want to appear vulnerable or weak, they also do not want to worry their loved ones, and some of them fear judgements as well as being labelled. This adds layers of complexity to their challenges leaving them unresolved. These unresolved challenges negatively influence the characters' relationships and some of them overpower even the strongest bonds.

## 4.5 Trauma

Trauma manifests itself in the effect of a physical or mental painful catastrophe and the extreme circumstances that an individual goes through, which might cause damage to the body or shock to the mind. There are different viewpoints on the nature of the bond between trauma and literature but all the theorists specialized in analyzing the connection between trauma and literature agree that literature is capable of dealing with various traumatic experiences with specificity and is able to portray the exclusive nature of each experience in its social and cultural contexts according to Davis and Meretoja (2020). The chosen novels examine the traumatic experiences of the main characters and the ways they respond to them.

In John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*, the characters cope with the trauma of being cancer victims. The novel illustrates the traumatic lives of Augustus and Hazel haunted by their painful experiences with illness. The two main characters confront the psychological consequences of dying as Hazel states: "Depression is a side effect of dying" (Green 2012, 3). Augustus' and Hazel's fear of death unfolds through their relationship as they keep discussing and thinking about their lives and shared experiences together. They appear to be preoccupied with finding an answer to the question of what will happen after they die. The shadow of death does not just haunt them; it also reshapes their priorities, relationships, and the way they find meaning in

their life. P.R (2021) shows that trauma theory can be applied easily in Green's *The Fault in our Stars* since the effect of grief and trauma are evident in the surface level of the narrative.

Thyroid cancer has caused Hazel to be traumatized, she always keeps thinking about death. Her daily routine is ruled by medical treatments and appointments which is unusual at this age. She is thirteen when she is first diagnosed with cancer; she grows up threatened by sudden death. The fluid that fills her lungs gets worse each time which causes her panic attacks that it will be her last day each time she enters the hospital. She expresses the last one of her experiences: "Just before the Miracle, when I was in the ICU and it looked like I was going to die and Mom was telling me it was okay to let go, and I was trying to let go but my lungs kept searching for air" (Green 2012, 116). This demonstrates how traumatic Hazel's experience with her deadly illness is.

Likewise, Augustus' trauma stems from his illness in addition to the existential fears it brings. Cancer strips him of his sense of ability as well as control. It makes him feel helpless as it forces him to be dependent on what he detests the most. His deepest fear is oblivion that is the reason why he always tries to leave an unforgettable legacy behind him. When his illness comes back aggressively, he becomes traumatized by the realization that his life might end before he can achieve his goals. For him, he would not consider himself remembered at all if he is not remembered greatly. He tells Hazel "If you don't live a life in service of a greater good, you've gotta at least die a death in service of a greater good, you know? And I fear that I won't get either a life or a death that means anything" (Green 2012, 168). Augustus yearns to do something heroic before he dies. He wants to be remembered for something great but being a cancer patient has made his dream a million times more difficult to achieve.

In Niven's *All the Bright Places*, Mahdani (2023) notes that many of the inner problems the characters have to deal with are brought on by prior traumas and open wounds that have never healed. Gorat (2020) proves that the two main characters are found suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms. The mentioned symptoms are sleep problems, avoidance, and emptiness. They have several impacts on Finch's and Violet's lives such as suicidal obsession, refusal to get in or drive a car, and changes in cognitive function. Gorat (2020) also mentions that an accident which involves death, bullying and a bad family environment are the causes of their traumatic experiences.

Finch's traumatic experience lies in his turbulent dysfunctional family, bullying and his struggles with mental illness. Finch is haunted by his past filled with violence and rejection, his father used to physically and emotionally abuse him and his mother when he was young. His father has abandoned them and started a new family, but he still holds Sunday meetings in which he never misses a chance to bother Finch. Finch always feels like an outsider even at his school where he is bullied and labeled as a "freak" by his peers. He also is traumatized by his battle with his undiagnosed bipolar disorder which manifests in extreme mood swings, unpredictable behaviour and the periods. His unresolved trauma fuels his internal conflict and pulls him into a darker mood and self-destructive act.

Violet's trauma lies in the loss of her sister Eleanor in a car accident. Violet blames herself and holds herself responsible for the accident because she is the one who tells Eleanor to take the bridge street that night. She becomes consumed by her grief which makes her withdraw from her past life's activities, hobbies and even her friends. Her trauma manifests in her feeling of fear, guilt, avoidance and anything that reminds her of her sister, including writing. Violet creates barriers between her and socializing to protect herself from further pain. Edeh (2023) relates Finch's and Violet's present

challenges to the lasting effects of their past traumas on their journey. Edeh (2023) notes that Finch and Violet experience trauma and conflicts that influence them to become who they are. P.R (2021) a central claim of contemporary literary trauma theory asserts that trauma creates a speechless fright that divides or destroys identity. In *All the Bright Places*, Finch breaks down and escapes from his challenges by committing suicide, whereas Violet gains a profound understanding of how to keep living and build resilience.

#### **4.6 Quest Challenges and Identity Crisis**

*The Fault in Our Stars* and *All the Bright Places* are a great manifestation of powerful physical and spiritual journeys that the characters embark and end up by self-discovery and reconstruction of identity. The journeys themselves are a challenge to the young adult characters; they are also fraught with obstacles.

In *The Fault in Our Stars*, Augustus Waters and Hazel Grace embark on a physical and spiritual journey which widens their horizon and changes the way they perceive life. Their physical journey begins when they travel to Amsterdam together aiming to meet Hazel's favourite author, Peter Van Houten, and to find answers to all their shared questions about the end of his book *An Imperial Affliction*. The challenges first start to show when Hazel's doctors hold a meeting after her last collapse, and discuss her case. Dr. Simon argues: "Placing a patient—one of the most promising Phalanxifor survivors, no less—an eight-hour flight from the only physicians intimately familiar with her case? That's a recipe for disaster." Dr. Maria replies: "It would increase some risks," and turns to Hazel and says, "But it's your life." (Green 2012, 117). After they prepare a team to take care of her and provide her with medical supplies, she, her mother and Augustus fly to Amsterdam. In Amsterdam, they share great moments and experiences,

including their visit to the Anne Frank House, where Hazel's physical struggle intensifies, climbing the long stairs with her oxygen tank form a huge challenge for her. Even in their intimate moments, their bodies are a reminder of the reality of their terminal illness. Their physical journey takes an upsetting turn as Augustus reveals that his cancer returned aggressively which emphasizes the harsh reality imposed by their illnesses.

Their spiritual journey lies in the quest for meaning. Both Augustus Waters and Hazel Grace question what it means to live a meaningful life, how to be remembered and how to leave a lasting impact. Augustus expresses his darkest fears which is oblivion, he is driven by the desire of being remembered as a hero, seeking a way to immortalize legacy. On the other hand, Hazel always worries about being a grenade and hurting her beloved ones so she never gets close to anybody. When they get close to each other, they begin to understand the meaning of life. The meaning which lies in the small intimate moments and the love they share with their beloved ones. Peter (2015) notes that Hazel Grace and Augustus Waters finally find the meaning in their lives at the end of the novel. Their spiritual journey reflects a thoughtful life lesson that it does not matter how long we live but the good deeds we accomplish are all what matters.

Jebaselvi and Sivakumar (2022) note that the most important aspect of Hazel's spiritual journey revolves around her mystical and philosophical thoughts of death. She believes that depression is a side effect of cancer, but she discovers that it is a side effect of dying. She becomes obsessed with the idea of her death and its impact on her beloved ones like parents and friends. As mentioned above, this is the reason that prevents her from getting close to anyone. She is afraid to do so because her near death will hurt them. She compares herself to Anna who is a fictional character of *An Imperial*

*Affliction* that is why she travels to determine the end of characters. She wants to make sure that Anna's mother is okay so that she can persuade herself that her parents will end up alright after her death, especially her mother.

Over time, Hazel's relationship with Augustus becomes stronger and the way Hazel perceives life and death changes, especially when everything reverses, and Augustus' cancer returns in a deadly way. She stops feeling sorry in contrast to the actions she used to take when her condition worsens; she ends up falling in love with him, even though his loss will hurt her. Finally, and after going through all the pain and the struggles her journey causes, Hazel seems to grow more spiritually, as she emphasizes at the end saying "*I do, Augustus. I do*" (Green 2012, 313). This proves that she has changed her beliefs, that death is not the end, and that relationships continue even if people do not exist. She learns the meaning of joy as well as happiness within a limited span of time.

Augustus' and Hazel's physical and spiritual journey symbolizes a challenging journey towards self-discovery and reconstructing a new identity. At first, both Augustus and Hazel face an identity crisis provoked by their incurable illness, so they struggle to redefine themselves beyond their illnesses. Hazel defines herself as a grenade which will explode someday, alongside with the fear of pain her death might cause to her beloved ones. This perspective pushes her to protect them by staying distant. Her identity is dominated and overshadowed by illness. Augustus, on the other hand, struggles with the idea of leaving a heroic legacy. He believes that his value is measured by being remembered for doing or being something extraordinary, which forms a huge challenge for him after the return of his cancer. He becomes limited by his own weak body and his remaining time.

Through their relationship, Augustus and Hazel start to reconstruct a new sense of self. Both Hazel and Augustus come to understand that identity is rather about living happily and cherishing every moment with our beloved ones because this is what gives life a deep meaning. Their journeys and their self-discovery reflect the characters' courage in overcoming the challenges they confront, such as accepting themselves wholly, embracing their vulnerability and standing strongly in the face of mortality. They redefine what it means to live fully, even within the boundaries of illness. Their love teaches them how life's limited and brief time can hold deep significance when it is shared with the right person who truly understands and cares.

In *All the Bright Places*, Theodore Finch and Violet Markey also embark on a physical and spiritual journey that helps them to confront their fears, pain, and struggles. It helps Violet to heal and reconstruct her identities, but it shows that not all young adults can make it through hardships as in Finch's case. Finch and Violet's physical journey begins when Finch succeeds in convincing her to do the geography project with him. They start to wander the hidden and the forgotten places in their hometown Indiana. Finch's enthusiasm and energy allow Violet to step outside the wall she has wrapped around herself. She starts to engage with the world, and she learns from Finch to find beauty even in unexpected places. Each moment they spend together in this journey is a small step toward healing and overcoming challenges for Violet. Meanwhile, Finch's internal struggles continue to intensify.

Their spiritual journey is a journey of fighting loss, trauma, and grief to reach a state of self-acceptance. In the beginning, Violet, as mentioned above, struggles with survivor's guilt and depression. She feels detached from the society and engagement in activities. Finch, on the other hand, struggles with his own mental health challenges, he

finches his undiagnosed bipolar disorder alone, he feels like an outcast among his peers and he suffers from his difficult family dynamics. As their journey together begins, Finch helps Violet to confront her grief. The way he perceives life encourages Violet to embrace new experiences as well as start living a joyful life. In return, Violet offers him understanding and acceptance. Her compassion, which he does not feel anywhere else, allows him to feel seen and valued.

Finch ends up his journey by his choice to commit suicide. His mental health challenges and struggles overwhelm him, and his devastating death serves as a reminder of the harsh reality of mental illness. Violet's second loss makes her stronger, she confronts her grief more openly. She acts normally after Finch's death, honouring his memory by exploring the rest places he marked on the map. Their physical and spiritual journey captures the beauty and the strength of human connection and its profound impact on others' lives. It helps them to stand in the face of struggles and loss.

Gjertsen (2023) notes that Violet and Finch face different crises during their journey and both experience identity crises in their young adulthood. Furthermore, social surroundings and mental health play an important role in determining how they overcome their identity crisis. Identity crises arise from various experiences that young adults may go through such as trauma and significant life turn points. In the novel, Finch and Violet grapple with questions of who they are and where they belong after the mentioned turning points in their lives. They experience intense inner conflicts, torn by the weight of their past as well as parental and societal expectations. This internal battle manifests in the shape of mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, existential questions and the search for meaning. Finch's and Violet's journey, and identity crises

show how challenging it is for young adults to have purpose, to understand the meaning of life and to discover their true essence.

#### **4.7 Existential Challenges: Life, Destiny, and Fate**

Life is a complex journey filled with purpose and uncertainty. It portrays an image of the possibilities shaped by personal choices and the forces that go beyond people's control. In *All the Bright Places* and *The Fault in Our Stars*, some of the characters carve out their own futures; meanwhile some of them are just forced to face their fate. These characters face dilemmas that influence their moral values and aspirations. Their unpredictable lives may lead to either triumph or tragedy. Fate adds a layer of complexity, because it is predetermined, and it is beyond human control. When the main characters of the mentioned novels embark on their journeys, they confront existential questions about their purposes and the meaning of their lives. Existential challenges arise from the fundamental questions of existence that the characters start to have such as the meaning of life, the purpose, and the inevitability of fate. Fate is often connected with loss and the unpredictability of the future. The characters face challenges in accepting the inevitable twists of life such as incurable illness and death. Together, life, destiny, and fate form existential challenges and struggles to all of the characters. Peter (2015) notes that existential agony is a concept that is in general held to be a negative feeling which arises from the experience of human freedom and responsibility.

The title of the novel, *The Fault in Our Stars* which John Green has taken from a line in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* which is an evidence of fate's role in the novel. The word stars refers to fate. The title directly indicates that the fault for Hazel's and Augustus' struggles with cancer, and dying at a young age is not their fault as well as choice but it is their inevitable fate. Hazel perceives life in a realistic way which is

shaped by her experiences with cancer. Unlike Augustus who romanticizes his existence and aspires to leave a grand legacy. Xayrulloeva (2023) emphasizes that the characters suffer from challenges of the inevitability of fate, accepting harsh realities and the inevitable defeat faced by cancer patients in their inglorious battle. Anusi et al. (2017) illustrate how fate can be challenging to young adults. They add that fate separates Hazel and Augustus, ends their love story and their hope of being together, it also leaves Hazel with the agony of loss.

As mentioned above, Hazel refers to herself as a "grenade" (Green 2012, 99), she believes that her death will be devastating to the ones who love her and it will hurt them, especially her parents and Augustus. Through the novel Hazel seems to be preoccupied with searching for answers to her questions of the end of her favourite book *An Imperial Affliction*. She wants to find out what happens to the characters after Anna's death, especially her mother who is left alone. She compares Anna's mother to her mother. That is the reason why she becomes obsessed with the ending and tries to reach out to the author just to calm herself on what will happen to her own parents after her death. She tries to minimize the impact of her death on others to protect them from the pain of losing her. Peter (2015) mentions how Hazel's philosophical standpoint changes through her strong bonds with Augustus. After Augustus passes away, she realizes that after death people carry on and live on through their relationships with their loved ones. They leave an eternal impact on the lives of their loved ones.

On the other hand, Augustus Waters sees life from his idealistic viewpoint, he is determined and he craves to leave a great legacy after he dies. Regardless of his struggles with cancer, he strives to live his life to the fullest and refuses to let his illness control him or define him. He is concerned with making an everlasting impact in this

world because he wants to be remembered. Life is his opportunity to create a meaningful impact. He enjoys being in control, this is evident through his metaphor of the unlit cigarettes. He carries a cigarette and places it in his mouth to show that he can face danger without giving it the power to destroy him. He approaches life with a sense of humor and charm, masking his weakness.

When his health conditions deteriorate, Augustus struggles with the loss of his independence and the shocking reality that he may not achieve his goal of leaving a grand legacy which he has always hoped to achieve. This twist forces him to realize the value of personal connections. When Hazel reads these words from Augustus to Van Houten in the letter that Mrs. Lidewij sends to her: “I got my wish, I suppose. I left my scar” (Green 2012, 313). She realizes that Augustus desires to be remembered after his death, which is his main purpose. He has always dreamt of doing something heroic before dying, so he has donated his wish from *The Genie Foundation* to make Hazel’s dream of meeting the author of *An Imperial Affliction* in Amsterdam come true. This act of kindness allows him to remain in Hazel’s heart after his death and his legacy carries on with Hazel forever.

The last mentioned quotation emphasizes the dual nature of pain in the novel. The scar Augustus leaves is an emotional scar which brings pain to Hazel. It also highlights the fact that Hazel will be hurt after Augustus’ death. He feels worried about her because he knows that his death will cause her harm. In the end, he dies and leaves a scar on Hazel. But the pain of this scar is not so harmful to Hazel because she genuinely loves him and he matters a lot to her. She even demonstrates understanding during Augustus’ eulogy when she emphasizes: “Without pain, we couldn’t know joy.” (Green 2012, 272).

Deeb (2016) notes that love gives them both the power to fight their disease. Their philosophical perception of life intensifies when the idea of inevitability and death are intertwined. They are aware that human beings are bound to die, hence the pressing need to be remembered. Hazel's experience of losing Augustus allows her to recognize the fact that her family will be able to make it through her own devastating death. Life is defined by the individual's relationships with others and the meaning of these relationships is conveyed through the pain felt when a loved one dies.

In *All the Bright Places*, both Finch and Violet experience existential challenges. Finch's existential challenges stem from his struggle to find meaning in a world where he feels like he is out of place. His undiagnosed mental disorder makes him doubt and alienates himself. He strives to be understood, but his fear of labels; rejection and his unpredictable behavior push people around him away. Finch's existential challenges also lie in his search for a purpose that can make him hold on to life. He is deeply empathetic and attuned to the beauty in the little things, finding joy in moments others might overlook. Rahmawati (2021) mentions the reasons behind Theodore's frequent suicide attempts that led him eventually to end his life successfully, the inferior feeling caused by his mental illness, his low self-esteem, his striving for superiority whenever a schoolmate bullies him, his style of life, social interest, creative power and the desire to decide on his own death. Anwar (2023) emphasizes that suicide is a phenomenon that arises when a person experiences a sense of deficiency in terms of social integration and interpersonal connections.

The characters look for meaning in their lives by carrying out the project assignments given by the teacher to them. They try to define themselves in the process of being human beings, discover when they become aware of themselves, their

existence, their choices, and the meaning of their life. Meaning of nothingness is the essence that ends human existence. When a human feels that he is nothing, he has no meaning and purpose in life for himself even for all human beings.

Finch's perception of life is so badly influenced by his mental health challenges. He sometimes views life as boundless and full of chances, when he is in his awakening status. But during his depressive episodes, asleep as he refers to, his perspective shifts. Life feels overwhelming and meaningless. He struggles with a constant inner conflict between these two episodes, which shapes his random behaviors and unstable relationships. His connection with Violet offers him a sense of purpose temporarily, but his unresolved issues and pain, in addition to his inability to escape from his inner struggles force him to view life as something he cannot sustain. His negative perception of life reflects the depth of his challenges and the profound impact of mental illness on his life perception.

Rahmawati (2021) notes that Finch's feeling of inferiority enhances his thoughts of committing suicide. Finch also strives hard to overcome his mental illness by acting as if he is superior, which is clear in his rebellious behavior. She also mentions that his chaotic lifestyle contributes to his instability. His views on death increase his motivation to commit suicide. She concludes that his fictional finalism in suicide is that he is desperate with his mental illness, that he decides to commit suicide. Azzaharah (2023) notes that everyone controls his choices since they are free to choose whatever they want. Everyone has the right to make their decision and they also have reasons for their choice.

On the other hand, fate interrupts Violet's quiet life. When it steals her only sister from her leaving her struggling with existential challenges. Her perspective on life

revolves around her grief and her sister's loss in the car accident. She has all these questions in mind about why she is the one to live and Eleanor is the one to die. She struggles with survivor's guilt, she blames herself and she believes that she does not deserve to move forward, she thinks it would be a betrayal to her sister. Violet begins to overcome her existential challenges and starts to change the way she perceives life after her relationship with Finch develops.

He challenges her to step outside her social restrictions put by her, he also pushes her to overcome the past and embrace the present. He opens her eyes allowing her to rediscover the beauty of the world through their wander. Violet learns to connect with life and find meaning even in the small and unseen moments. Her perception of life shifts to resilience and hope because of Finch, whose influence helps her to understand that even in the midst of pain and grief, life is worth living. In the end, Finch's tragic destiny forces Violet to accept the fact of the unpredictability of fate as well as life. She also learns that it is important to cherish every single moment in life with those who she loves before fate steals them from her.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter is concerned with the concluding statements for the questions of the study. Furthermore, it contains the recommendations that may reveal other challenges of young adults represented in John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* and Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places*.

#### 5.1 Conclusion

##### 1. What are the challenges that young adults confront in Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places* and John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*?

Human life is not always blissful. In the course of life, humans have to confront various difficulties. They should be ready to bear the inevitable circumstances. John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* presents young adults who confront various challenges, each has his own experience. John Green masters representing the essence of young adulthood's hardships in his novel by capturing the complexity of young adults' lives especially when they deal with incurable illness that has a huge impact on their lives. He captures the fragile beauty of young adulthood which is marked by extraordinary difficulties, in addition to the emotional, physical, and existential challenges that influence young adults' journeys.

Young adult challenges were skillfully portrayed in *The Fault in Our Stars*, they include health challenges which are represented in the physical limitations that cancer implies, the pressure of interpersonal relationships, the emotional weight of forming connections resulting from the risk of inevitable loss and the existential challenges which are depicted in the questions the characters have about purpose, leaving an eternal legacy, and the meaning of life.

The title *The Fault in Our Stars* gives the impression that even if bad things happen in life that cannot be avoided and it is not young adults' fault. Hazel and Augustus change the fact of their incurable illness and inevitable death at a young age and they are aware that it is not their fault so they change the way they perceive life and try to live fully in the limited time they have. Green wants to deliver an impactful and touching message that young adults can live life and they are free to choose how to live despite the fault in their stars as well as the unpredictable future that awaits them. John Green seeks to demonstrate that the value of life is not determined by the length of the period a person lives but by the depth of the valuable relationships and unforgettable moments that fill it. Green also highlights the beauty of finding meaning in the small personal infinities and the importance of the time that a person spends with people who matter most.

Similarly, Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places* presents a myriad of young adult challenges but this time the challenges stem from mental health struggles, trauma and grief. The challenges that Finch and Violet face are similar to those presented by John Green but with different experiences. Jennifer Niven aims to shed light on the struggles of mental health and the importance of breaking free from the stigma that surrounds it. Finch struggles with undiagnosed mental illness in addition to all of the challenges that may face any young adult. Meanwhile, Violet struggles from her traumatic loss of her sister in a car accident which leaves her in a constant grief suffering from survivor's guilt. Moreover, Niven's representations resemble the unspoken feelings that accompany mental struggles.

It is worth mentioning that the novels are mirrors that reflect the realities of many young adults. These four characters and the challenges they go through represent a wide

scale of young adults in our communities. The novels provide readers familiar with the presented challenges with a background knowledge to broaden their understanding to cope with the difficulties of their challenges as well as they convey powerful messages about the young adulthood experiences, emphasizing the importance of interpersonal relationships, social connection, and resilience in the face of these challenges.

The importance of producing such literary works lies in empowering young adults by not only highlighting their challenges and issues but also suggesting solutions as well as coping mechanisms. In the light of this fact, it is important to highlight that both Green and Niven highlight the importance of addressing young adult challenges, support the idea of speaking up for one's self and others. They also believe that young adults have the power to be the voice of reason for someone who might be on the verge of losing their lives because they cannot handle the plethora of their struggles. Everyone has the power to brighten someone's day. Words, energy and power can make a difference, and everyone makes a difference. Life is worth living so every young adult is worth living a happy and peaceful life. No one is alone even if they are different. Our differences are what make us beautiful.

## **2. How do the characters deal with these challenges and issues throughout the narratives in Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places* and John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*?**

Both Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places* and John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* portray how young adult characters cope with their lives' struggles and the challenges that face them. The novels illuminate the transformative power of human connection and relationships in the human experience. They are a fundamental aspect of their exploration journeys and identity reconstruction. They provide the young adult

characters with solace and strength to face their challenges. They also highlight how speaking up can change everything.

The novels present several coping systems that the characters resort to such as human connection presented through the interpersonal relationships that the characters form whether through family, friends, love or broader social networks. The other systems are speaking up, school counselling and support systems. These systems play an important role in helping the characters to overcome their adversity. They provide emotional and practical support as well as understanding that not only enhance the character's well-being but also contribute to their sense of belonging and purpose.

In *The Fault of Our Stars*, strong interpersonal connections, family and support groups help Hazel and Augustus to cope with their struggles. Their relationship allows them to feel understood and valued; it provides them with the courage to face their fear of loss. Through their love, they experience personal growth as well as perception change and they understand the meaning of life. They learn to find joy and meaning despite the limitations of their illnesses. Augustus helps Hazel to go out of her isolation and changes her negative perception, while Hazel helps him to redefine his legacy. Their friendships as well as their Families are another source of emotional and practical strength for them. Their parents are loving, caring and considerate. Their unwavering support and encouragement reassure them, they allow them to explore their possibilities while knowing that they are not alone.

The support group plays an essential role in Hazel's and Augustus' story, it is where Augustus first meets Hazel. It provides them a sense of community among other fellow sufferers who share the same struggles. The group also gives them a space to speak up

which serves as a reminder that they are not alone in their journey, this gives them a sense of solidarity and empathy among its members.

In *All the Bright Places*, love, connection, school counselling and speaking up are coping systems that help both Violet and temporarily help Finch to overcome their challenges. Finch's and Violet's relationship allows them to find solace and meaning, it provides them with moments of joy and connection. Finch's love helps Violet to rediscover life, he pushes her to confront her grief and reconnect with the world. But for him, love provides him with a temporary escape from his mental struggle and inner conflict, Violet becomes his source of stability. Their love is a transformative point to Violet, but it was not enough to save Finch. Familial relationships play contrasting roles in the novel. Violet's parents are supportive and present; they provide her with a stable environment and push her to heal. In contrast, Finch's parents are largely absent; they fail as parents to provide a stable environment for their son. And instead of protecting him they add a burden to his challenging life.

School counselling is evident in the novel but it does not play a huge role in leading and supporting both of the characters. Finch and Violet avoid being open to their school counselors because they know well the consequences of their honesty. Their counselors monitor their behaviour and try their best to emotionally support them. Finch's school counsellor observes his bipolar symptoms but fails to address his deeper issues because of Finch's tendency to mask his mental struggles. Violet, however, begins to embrace the idea of seeking help especially after Finch's death, which signifies a step toward healing and growth.

Such representations of young adult challenges and coping systems are needed to be put under the microscope of further studies in order to find the issues and challenges

faced by young adults through Young Adult Literature to create awareness on the importance of their development in the contemporary period. The importance of paying attention to the physical, mental and emotional growth of young adults. These representations are also important in the field of English literature, for they help the researchers to appreciate the value of Young Adult Literature.

### **3. How are the challenges presented in the two novels similar or different?**

*The Fault in Our Stars* and *All the Bright Places* share both similarities and key differences, reflecting the diverse plethora of young adult challenges. The characters in both of the novels experience distinct yet overlapping challenges that demonstrate their personal struggles.

Hazel and Augustus in *The Fault in Our Stars* struggle from the physical burdens of their terminal cancer and the emotional consequences that accompany their illness. In contrast, Finch and Violet in *All the Bright Places* battle their mental health issues and illness. Finch confronts bipolar disorder and feelings of alienation, while Violet struggles with grief and survivor's guilt after her sister's death. Another difference is the familial atmosphere of the characters, Augustus, Hazel and Violet who enjoy good familial relationships which serve as a source of support and understanding. Meanwhile, Finch's familial relationships are bad, which is another factor that contributes to his tragic end. The three mentioned characters managed to overcome their struggles and to start a new beginning except Finch whose struggles exceeded his capacity leading him to end his life as a way of escape. Despite these differences, the four characters share common challenges, including illness, emotional challenges, and the difficulty of finding meaning and purpose in life amidst hardship.

It is also important to highlight how coping systems differ in both novels. They have a very important role in young adults' lives. As seen in the novels, support systems make a huge difference, they might elevate young adults' lives or deteriorate it as in Finch's case.

## 5.2 Recommendations

1. More studies should tackle the impact of the incurable physical illness on young adults' mental health in John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*.
2. More studies should be done on interpersonal relationships, such as coping mechanisms in John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* and Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places*.
3. More studies should tackle the portrayal of traditional and non-traditional coping mechanisms in John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* and Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places*.
4. More studies should tackle the role of "Wandering" as a therapeutic mechanism in *All the Bright Places*.
5. More studies should be conducted on the representation of family influence on young adults' well-being in *All the Bright Places*.

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