

FACT MEETS FICTION:
THE REPRESENTATION OF MENTAL HEALTH IN THE CONTEMPORARY
TELEVISION SERIES *13 REASONS WHY* AND *YOU*

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The stigmatization of mental illness¹ still holds a position in the eye of the general public today. Besides being highly discriminatory towards those in ill mental health, in the worst case, this pervasive stigma might even prevent people from seeking the help they need. Noticeably, in recent years, the process of destigmatization has experienced considerable support. I would claim that this shift has benefitted from representation in the media, such as through the emergence of popular movies and television series like *13 Reasons Why* (2017), which explicitly address mental health issues and allow the viewer insights into the thoughts and feelings of a person suffering from a mental illness in order to spread more awareness about the issue. At the same time, however, it seems as though some producers are still carrying on traditional depictions of the past, thereby providing inaccurate representations of mentally ill people, such as illustrating afflicted characters as violent, unpredictable, and dangerous, as in the show *You* (2018). In this paper I will delve into the nature of the stigma attached to mental illness in relation to the concept of ‘otherness,’ before giving an overview of the results of empirical studies that have examined the effect of media representations of mental illness on the general public. Lastly, I shall take a look at how contemporary television series approach the topic of mental health by analyzing a selection of conspicuous scenes from *13 Reasons Why* and *You*. I would like to find out how

¹ Throughout my paper I refer frequently to ‘mental illness,’ which is generally regarded a (relatively) non-stigmatizing term.

faithful the portrayal of mental illness is in these series as well as what cinematic techniques are implemented in its representation, as there is a lack of detailed studies in this area.

The topic of mental health has been covered in the mass media for a long time: it has been dealt with in popular magazines and periodicals (Wahl), on the radio (Bouhoutsos et al.; Levy et al.), in newspapers (Coverdale et al.), in comics (Walter), and, of course, in fiction (Dudley)². Above all, however, mental illness is frequently chosen as a theme in film and television shows (Diefenbach; Gabbard; Harper; Orchowski et al.; Philo; Wilson, et al.). Consequently, media consumers in general and television viewers in particular are often faced with the representation of mental illness in their daily lives.

The psychiatrist Peter Byrne distinguishes between five rules of movie psychiatry, which constitute a quite accurate summary: “[f]ollow the money: film-making is a commercial enterprise and producers may include inaccurate representations in their films to ‘give the public what they want,’” “[f]ilm begets film: every new film draws on previous films within the genre,” “[s]kewed distribution hides more films than censorship ever did,” “[t]here are no mental health films, just mental illness ones” and, of course, the most prominent rule that we as viewers are all familiar with, “if it bleeds it leads” (“Psychiatrists” 287). The representation of mental illness in films and series leads to the following broad issues, which can be taken as a starting point: First of all, the majority of the portrayals perpetuate myths and stereotypes about mental illness and are inherently negative, thereby contributing towards the stigmatization of mental illness.

Secondly, a further problematic issue is that portrayals can also be overly positive, suggesting a

²I would particularly like to stress that, of course, the focus on mentally ill characters has not only been of interest to filmmakers across time, but goes back to the treatment of madness in literature. Well known examples can be found in Virginia Woolf's “Mrs. Dalloway”, where the character Septimus Warren Smith, a WW-I veteran, is suffering from shell shock (or what today would likely be identified as post-traumatic stress disorder/ PTSD) as well as in “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, which offers the reader a window into the perception and treatment of mental illness in the late nineteenth century. In this novel we can observe the gradual deterioration of the highly imaginative narrator's mental state.

mental illness can be easily cured, which is conducive to the stigmatization as well. However, some portrayals of mental illness in film are deemed reasonably accurate and therefore suitable for psychiatric teaching purposes (Middleton 180). There is certainly a lack of detailed studies into film techniques used in the representation of mental illness. In my analysis I will argue in favor of TV shows like “13 Reasons Why” being capable of spreading awareness about those in ill mental health, since they aim at a more faithful portrayal of mental illness and deal with the innermost feelings and thoughts of an afflicted protagonist, meaning they actually show us how a person can experience a mental illness and suffer from it as well as from being disregarded by others.

Stigma and the Concept of ‘Otherness’

“Mental health problems are disabling, but even more crippling is the pervasive stigma attached to mental illness” (Beauchum 1). This quote by Beachum illustrates the severe consequences of the widespread societal stigmatization of those suffering from mental illness, the most severe one being that it might prevent them from seeking appropriate help. In order to make sense of this stigma and to understand where it comes from, first of all, the term ‘stigma’ itself needs to be defined. As Eisenhower explains, “stigma, a literal and metaphorical branding of the body for the purposes of disgrace and condemnation, is about marking the ‘other’ and delineating boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (16).

As I find the concept of the ‘other’ as well as the distinction between “us” and “them” highly interesting and a suitable approach for this topic, this article will deal with the concept of “otherness,” thereby affiliating the depiction of the mentally ill as different in the media to an ingrained human fear of the unknown. The stigmatization of people with a mental illness seems to have a long-established history within visual culture, and still remains a current practice, as

creative professionals of today's media are partly still carrying on traditional depictions of the past. This is particularly the case concerning the portrayal of the "mad murderer" as looking different which activates artistic conventions that have evolved over centuries (Middleton 181). The homicidal maniac (Hyer et al.) is the most common stereotype of mental illness, and perhaps the most destructive. This stereotype relates mental illness with violence and dangerousness, and is common among some of the most popular horror films of all time, such as the "Friday the 13th" series and the "Nightmare on Elm Street" series. On this basis, films such as *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Psycho*, which remain well-cited examples of representations of madness, have not only been exceedingly successful in themselves but perhaps even more successful in reinforcing the feeling of fear of the unknown.

Furthermore, another key icon that adds to the alienation of the mentally ill in the media is dishevelment. Further images which we conventionally associate with madness due to its depiction on screen are red-veined, staring eyes, muttered imprecations, fists shaken at things that are not there, as well as outspoken dialogues to the different parts of oneself (Cross 199). Additionally, there are several filmic devices, such as discordant music and atmospheric lighting, which are used to introduce a sense of danger into scenes featuring mentally ill characters and thus highlighting their difference. I would like to stress that these stereotypical conceptions greatly influence our perception of how mental illness is seen: as visible differences of appearance and behavior which delineate a symbolic boundary between "us" and "them." The construction of "otherness" can thus be deduced from our fear of the unknown and can be seen as a form of estrangement. Fear of the unknown can be deemed a deeply ingrained human quality – since mental illness might be one of the most untouchable things of all, the fear of it is what creates the need to distance ourselves from it and to ascribe certain labels to it in order to make it more comprehensible to ourselves, thus creating stigma and the representation of "difference."

Importantly, this concerns the human tendency of making sense of the unfamiliar by explaining it with the familiar, i.e. explaining something we do not know in terms of something we do know (Alber 8). This aspect is also highlighted by Rose, who defines otherness as “unfamiliarity, unclassifiability and danger” (226). The fact that mentally ill people are symbolically marked as different in the media thus enforces this idea and leads to certain images of mental illness being internalized by individuals.

Power of the Medium

A central notion that will be taken as a starting point for the following discussion is that cinema, as a powerful medium, has the capacity to evoke strong emotions and feelings and may influence the viewer’s knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and ultimately their behavior (Byrne, 2009). There are several aspects that make the medium of television so powerful, one important aspect that distinguishes it above others being that we are confronted with a heightened sensory awareness. Studies have shown that popular cinema can greatly influence societal beliefs about mental illness, diagnosis, mental health practices, and practitioner attributes (Darbyshire and Baker; Wedding and Niemiec). Furthermore, cinematic portrayals of mental illness can have a significant impact on public perceptions of and reactions to people who experience mental health issues, particularly around stigma, marginalization, and discrimination. Although some representations are negative, some commentators argue that many film images of mental distress, though challenging, can be positive and empathetic. This is also confirmed by the psychologist Peter Byrne who stresses the point that portrayals of mental health are often accurate and can be helpful for psychiatric teaching purposes. He elaborates that cinema frequently gets it right when it portrays the experiences of alcohol and substance misuse, grief, difficulties in relationships, autism, and dissociative identity disorder (Byrne 140). This shows that it is important to consider

that more authentic portrayals of mentally ill characters may function to counterbalance the many existing negative and inaccurate portrayals of mental health in film and TV series. The two popular shows *13 Reasons Why* and *You* are predominantly directed at teenagers and young adults, and cover several crucial issues such as bullying, stalking (cyberstalking), toxic masculinity, sexual harassment, and mental health issues that are linked to or the direct cause of these issues. They can potentially be seen as a useful platform to speak out about these issues and to educate the respective target groups.

Case Study I: The Homicidal Romantic in *You*

In this chapter I am going to analyze the portrayal of mental illness in the first season of the American psychological thriller television series *You*. This show focusses on the main character Joe Goldberg, a New York bookstore manager (and serial killer) who falls in love and then quickly develops an extreme, toxic, and delusional obsession with a woman named Guinevere Beck. When characterizing Joe, the most central character traits to point out are that he views himself as a hero and always tries to justify his own cold-blooded behavior as an act of love. Throughout the series, he manipulates and deceives Beck and everyone around her whom he sees as a threat to their relationship, even going so far as murdering both her current boyfriend and her best friend. In between all of these acts of violence, we hear Joe's voice-over addressing Beck and explaining that he is merely doing all of this out of love for her and for the sake of their relationship.³ Two conspicuous examples can be found in Episode 1, before Joe captures and kills

³ Interestingly enough, when taking a look at audience reception, one finds that viewers seem to be convinced by this image of Joe to a certain degree and sympathize with him, despite his despicable behavior. One can go as far as saying that he is even romanticized as a dangerous yet charming and mysterious character, who manages to entice his viewers. I would argue that Joe can be seen as a hero-villain, i.e. an evil character who is simultaneously likeable and possesses enough heroic characteristics (physical attractiveness, charisma, and a difficult past one sympathizes with), so that the viewer sees him as more than a simple villain. A closer analysis of this would unfortunately go beyond the scope of this paper.

his first victim, Beck's boyfriend Benji, and justifies this in his voice-over as follows: "there are scary people in the world, Beck. That's why it's important to be safe. And why I have to do what I'm about to do" (00:23:43-00:23:57), and "maybe I'm just a fool in love. But I'm right about you and I'm going to help you get the life you deserve, Beck" (00:46:55-00:47:07). Due to this reason, I have attributed the name "homicidal romantic" to Joe, which serves as the title of this case study, alluding to the pervasive "homicidal maniac" stigma.

It is important to mention that *You* does not focus on a particular mental illness, but rather combines stereotypical symptoms which are commonly connected to insanity: namely Joe's pathological obsession and jealousy, stalking, hallucinations, as well as manipulative, violent, and cold-blooded behavior. Apart from that, toxic masculinity is of central importance regarding Joe's strong desire to exert dominance over Beck, his condescending behavior towards her, and the rigid conceptions of gender identity roles displayed in this series. In my analysis I found conspicuous examples of the aforementioned method of displaying difference, such as discordant music and atmospheric lighting, which are used to introduce a sense of danger into scenes featuring the mentally ill main character Joe. Noticeably, he is also continuously socially isolated by a combination of close-ups and extreme close-ups, which displays otherness as well – he tends to be filmed alone, while other characters are much more frequently presented in a medium-shot with others. Furthermore, I found several cinematic techniques that visualize that Joe's mental health is deteriorating: especially the depiction of hallucinations and point-of-view shots, showing us Joe's at times blurry perspective, impaired by bright and surreal lighting that expresses his distraught mental state. Most importantly, it becomes clear how these filmic techniques serve to continually highlight Joe's otherness. In particular, this is established through frequent close-ups of Joe's terrifying and creepy facial expressions which are framed in single shots.

In the following, a conspicuous scene from Episode 1 will be analyzed, in which Joe lures Beck's boyfriend Benji into the cellar of his bookshop, under the pretense of being a reporter for *New York Magazine* interested in doing a feature on Benji's start-up, proceeding to hit him on the head with a mallet. The cinematic techniques used in this scene are representative of the suspenseful and ominous atmosphere that runs through the entire show, whenever Joe's dangerous and vicious side is foregrounded. The scene starts out with an image of Joe in a medium long shot, giving us an impression of the setting while still remaining in close proximity to the character. The location is a dimly lit back courtyard with stone walls at dusk. Concerning Joe's body language, he is raising his hand in a welcoming gesture, while his other hand is in his pocket, in a seemingly casual pose. In connection with his friendly smile, this creates a warm and inviting atmosphere which effectively demonstrates Joe's ability to manipulate the people around him. Benji is shown from behind, walking up to Joe in a medium shot and the two of them shake hands in a medium long shot.

Next, the camera cuts to a close-up of Benji's friendly facial expression, accompanied by his words "nice to meet you, man!" (Episode 1, 00:43:50). The perspective then changes to an over-the-shoulder medium shot of Joe, who reciprocates. As viewers, we already have an ominous feeling, due to the fact that we realize Joe is tricking Benji, who appears to be completely oblivious to Joe's intentions. Pre-eminently, this is intensified by the use of highly suspenseful and foreboding non-diegetic music, which is reminiscent of horror films. This has a strongly unsettling effect on the viewers, as we are apprehensive of what is about to happen. Furthermore, the sinister atmosphere is strongly reinforced by the setting and use of confined spaces here: a medium shot depicts an unsuspecting Benji following Joe through a narrow alley framed by high brick walls, alternating between single shots of Benji and Joe as well as two shots showing both of them in the frame together. A further confined space is the stairway leading

down to Joe's cellar. We see Joe gesturing for Benji to go ahead of him in a medium long shot, a brief inserted close-up of Benji's face revealing his slight unease.

Subsequently, in a two-shot framing both of the characters, we see Joe clapping Benji on the back in a medium shot as he passes him, signaling a friendly and soothing stance. The camera then follows Benji from behind as he proceeds to walk down the stairs in a medium shot, switching to a low angle shot of Joe, whom we see giving him directions in a medium shot. The low angle nicely exhibits the power-imbalance between the two characters, as it makes Joe appear dominant and threatening, highlighting that he is the one in power. Moreover, the shots depicting Joe's facial expressions strongly contribute to the mounting tension and feelings of discomfort in this scene, because the viewer, knowing what is going on in Joe's mind, understands that his seemingly calm reactions are insincere and deceptive. Thus, Joe's ability to mask his insanity adds to the horror here. The camera continues to follow Benji closely from behind as he walks through a dark stone dungeon, around a corner, until he discovers the glass cage. Importantly, the use of low-key lighting which accentuates shadows and dark colors heightens the viewer's sense of alienation and danger. This is reinforced through the dim ceiling lighting which creates a blueish, eerie gleam. In this medium shot, the back of Benji's head and his shoulders are in the foreground, while the glass box filled with books is portrayed in a blurry and obscure manner in the background. This sheds light on the fact that we are confronted with point-of-view shots, representing Joe's gaze while following Benji into his trap. The hazy surroundings in contrast to the clear silhouette of Benji are thus a means of visualizing Joe's mental illness, highlighting his heightened focus on his victim while fading out everything else.

We are then faced with a further cinematic technique reminiscent of the horror genre, when the perspective changes to a close-up of Benji's nervous and hesitant facial expression, while we see Joe's dark and indistinct silhouette slowly walking up behind him. This has a highly

menacing and gripping effect which builds up to the upcoming climax: as Benji turns around towards Joe, we see Joe quickly striking out with a mallet, before the camera cuts to a rapid medium long shot of Benji being hit on the head and falling to the ground. The horror of this is accompanied by a loud diegetic smashing noise along with the visual of blood splattering from his head. From this camera angle, Joe is concealed behind a brick wall which makes the sudden attack on Benji appear even more terrifying. Next, the camera cuts to an extreme close-up of glass bottles falling to the floor and shattering loudly, before depicting the hammer swinging in Joe's hand in an extreme close-up. The camera then slowly films up Joe's body in a tilt, the scene coming to an end with a frightening close-up of his terrifying stare. The loud menacing music in combination with the rapid cuts, quick motions, and dim, low-key lighting have a heart-stopping effect here.

In conclusion, it becomes clear that all of the cinematic techniques described in this scene work together to make Joe appear insane and highly dangerous, thus displaying his otherness and increasing fear in the viewer. Notably, the set-up is crucial here, as a sinister and angst-inducing atmosphere is created by lighting, music, empty and confined spaces, as well as the technique of following Benji in point-of-view-shots from behind. This is classic horror material that establishes a strong sense of foreboding possibly even more suspenseful and terrifying than the violent attack it builds up to.

To sum up, the cinematic techniques used in this scene serve to portray Joe as a dangerous, threatening, and out-of-control person whose insanity is leading him to inflict harm on others. This is further enhanced by the frequent use of threatening and disconcerting non-diegetic music. Of course, Joe is quite literally dangerous and threatening, since he is a mass murderer and stalker and it is thus legitimate that he is depicted in this way. I would like to clarify that my criticism is directed towards the show's connection of said dangerous attributes to his supposed

mental health issues. I would like to stress that such stereotypical conceptions can potentially greatly influence our perception of how mentally ill characters are seen, as visible differences of appearance and behavior which delineate a symbolic boundary between ‘us’ as audience and ‘them’. Far from being accurate, representations like this in the worst case serve to create fear of mental health issues as a whole, turning everything related to mental health into somewhat of a taboo topic, which is of course highly problematic.

Case Study II: The Invisible Target in *13 Reasons Why*

Next, I am going to focus on the portrayal of mental health in the first season of the American teen drama *13 Reasons Why*, focusing on the 17-year-old main character Hannah Baker. Hannah’s suicide is the central theme of the show and she narrates the story through tapes she left behind, revealing the thirteen reasons why she committed suicide. I am well aware that this is a very controversial television show due to the way her suicide is portrayed – the show has been accused of romanticizing mental illness and suicidal ideology precisely through the filmic devices employed, which needs to be taken into account when discussing the scene analysis of the show. I nonetheless would argue that Hannah’s depression caused by severe bullying, sexual harassment, and having no support system to turn to is effectively portrayed in this series.

In the last episode, Hannah’s voice-over summarizes the tapes as follows: “I recorded 12 tapes. I started with Justin and then Jessica, who each broke my heart. Alex, Tyler, Courtney, Marcus, who each helped to destroy my reputation. On through Zach and Ryan, who broke my spirit. Through Tape number 12, Bryce Walker, who broke my soul” (Episode 13, 00:03:04-00:03:45). Tape 13 is then dedicated to her guidance counselor Mr. Porter, reason number 13, who failed to help her out of her state of misery when she attempted to open up about her problems one last time. Besides Mr. Porter, another teacher she anonymously informs about how

she has been harmed by her fellow students does not take her seriously as well and Hannah's parents are themselves so much caught up in their own lives and problems that they fail to see how strongly their daughter is suffering and how she is getting more and more depressed. Due to these reasons, I have attributed the name "invisible target" to Hannah.

On the basis of the psychological literature on depression, it can be established that we are confronted with a quite accurate portrayal of a person suffering from depression in worsening stages. This is attributed to the fact that Hannah experiences a great number of the symptoms of depression in a realistic manner and her deteriorating mental state and move towards major depression are also presented in a faithful manner according to the psychological literature. The symptoms which are attributed most prominence are Hannah's long periods of sadness, feelings of worthlessness and guilt, as well as ultimate feelings of indifference and suicidal thought, all of which Laura Hoofnagle, Publications Manager of the National Depressive and Manic-Depressive Association, defines as symptoms of major depression (20). This focus serves a thematic purpose as it reinforces the seriousness of what is shown on screen and creates a high degree of empathy in the viewer.

Now I will focus on the cinematic techniques used to visualize Hannah's mental state. First of all, I would like to address the voice-over-technique characteristic of this series. Hannah, as part of the fictional world, is a homodiegetic, first-person narrator. Using a homodiegetic voice-over makes us privy of Hannah's inner most thoughts, fears, memories, and comments on the action, which is a very useful technique that creates a gateway allowing us as viewers a genuine insight into the emotional state of a person suffering from mental health issues. I would like to argue that this series places an extremely strong emphasis on showing us how a person who suffers from depression feels, in this case as a result of continuous verbal, physical, and social abuse and neglect. Hannah's very revealing and heartrending homodiegetic voice-over is

one of the key techniques in achieving this. This highlights the relatively new development in which such series actually focus on the psychological condition of afflicted characters, more so than just displaying their difference or even making them seem dangerous.

Concerning camera perspectives, I would like to point to the highly frequent use of close-ups of Hannah's face. We are often confronted with these close-ups in situations in which Hannah is, once again, being targeted by others and experiences bullying or abuse of some sort, her facial expression displaying her pain and sadness. I would like to point out that the use of the close-up is very suitable here, as it draws the viewer's attention to facial features and expressions which would be lost in a wide shot. This might serve to create feelings of outrage at how everyone else is ignoring Hannah in the viewers, as we see her pain so plainly while she seems 'invisible' to the other characters. Two lucid examples in this context are when she experiences sexual harassment by fellow classmates who take liberties with her in public settings. In the first instance, she is in a store and is taken advantage of by Bryce, who after having paid for her purchase, sexually molests her by touching her inappropriately (Episode 3). In the other scene, she is on a date with a fellow student Marcus, who tries to take advantage of her and gropes her in a restaurant (Episode 6).

I will now analyze the first scene mentioned above. In order to understand the context, it is important that in this episode, one of Hannah's classmates Alex, together with other male students, has made a list in which he rates and thus objectifies his female classmates based on their physical appearance. Hannah is also mentioned on this list in a very degrading way. In the scene, she is in a store wanting to purchase candy, when she meets her classmate Bryce, with whom she has not had any contact with beforehand. First of all, we see Hannah and Bryce in a medium shot from the front. Notably, the camera is positioned in a way that makes Hannah seem much closer to us, which is a technique of making us identify with the character and feeling for

her. The camera then changes perspective, showing the two in a medium shot from the back, before abruptly cutting to a quick close-up of Hannah's behind and Bryce groping her without consent.

Subsequently, there is a number of over-the-shoulder shots alternating between images of Hannah and Bryce respectively which are used to underline the confrontation and conflict we are faced with in the given instance from the two perspectives. First, there is a switch to a short over-the-shoulder shot of Hannah, which gives the viewer a glimpse of her shocked facial reaction in a close-up. The perspective then changes to an over-the-shoulder shot of Bryce in a medium shot, with the camera proceeding to zoom in on him and Hannah. This is accompanied by suspenseful, dark sounds in the background, building up tension in this menacing situation. Next, there is a further over-the-shoulder shot presenting Hannah's face, who appears to be overwhelmed and paralyzed with shock and we continue to see a close-up of her face after Bryce has left the store, the camera moving sideways in a pan to reveal more of her reaction.

Importantly, this is one of the many scenes in *13 Reasons Why* in which a hand-held camera is used, creating uneven movement which establishes a greater sense of immediacy for the audience. It is worth noting that this is a very effective way of creating a sense of reality. Furthermore, arguably, the fact that we are confronted with a very rapid succession of different shots which underline the action and create suspense through the quick pace has the effect of visually capturing Hannah's feelings of panic in this situation. The use of the hand-held camera adds to this effect, as it creates a shaking, trembling effect. This shaky camera technique therefore serves as a visual metaphor that expresses Hannah's mental condition of panic and fear.

The flashback ends with Hannah running out of the store in slow-motion, crying. The slow motion has a strong effect here underlining her sadness and despair and can be seen as a cinematic technique that visualizes her deteriorating mental state, showing how overwhelmed,

distraught, and helpless she feels in this situation. This is particularly powerful through the accompanying melancholic and spectral high-pitched sounds as well as Hannah's non-diegetic voice-over commenting on the action with the words "it seems like nothing, until the hurricane hits" and Alex making it "open season on Hannah Baker" by putting her name on the list (Episode 3, 00:43:10-00:43:29). The use of non-diegetic music again very effectively discloses Hannah's depression and feelings of deep sadness and despair here. To sum up, it can be said that the devices implemented in these scenes, such as close-ups of Hannah's facial expression, the use of hand-held camera and non-diegetic melancholic and desolate music, have the function of giving the viewer insight into Hannah's emotional state. The frequent use of close-ups in this show do not, therefore, serve to alienate the character in order to display her difference, but are used as a means of actually bringing us closer to the character's emotions by placing emphasis on her facial expression. When seeing these close-ups, we as viewers attribute mental states to Hannah and can therefore speculate about how she is feeling in the given situation. This is due to our Theory of Mind⁴, as we continuously engage in processes of mind-reading and try "to explain people's behavior in terms of their thoughts, beliefs, and desires" (Zunshine 6). Together with the very revealing and emotional voice-over, this frequent use of close-ups of Hannah's face functions as a gateway into her interior and her pain and the focus is placed on how she is suffering from her state of depression. As mentioned above, Hannah's long periods of sadness, feelings of worthlessness and guilt, as well as ultimate feelings of indifference and suicidal thought are all accurate symptoms of major depression which makes this depiction of mental illness fairly realistic. Furthermore, it is important to consider that these are all devices that create empathy and make the viewer sympathize with Hannah. As emphasized, this has the function of

⁴ Theory of Mind is a cognitive approach to narratives, the two most important representatives being Alan Palmer and Lisa Zunshine. The essential idea is that we always have a theory of other minds, i.e. we permanently speculate about the internal mental states of others.

shedding light on the excruciating psychological pain someone with major depression is suffering, which intends to help the viewers gain an understanding of this type of mental illness and traumatic experiences by accessing them through a first-person depiction.

Conclusion

All in all, the hypothesis that there has been a shift towards more awareness of mental illness in television series which explicitly address mental health issues and allow the viewer insights into the thoughts and feelings of a character suffering from mental illness, has been illustrated through the analysis and discussion of *13 Reasons Why*. This show focusses on the harm that is being done to Hannah and unveils her subsequent deep feelings of pain and sadness, revealing how strongly she is suffering from her mounting depression. It is important to keep in mind, however, that one show alone is not necessarily proof of a larger trend which indicates the need for further studies in this field. Apart from that, the analysis and discussion of *You* has supported the hypothesis that some contemporary producers are still carrying on traditional, stigmatizing depictions of mentally ill characters, by casting the psychologically imbalanced protagonist Joe as violent, threatening, and dangerous. This reveals that the subject matter of 'mental health' is partly still exploited for entertainment reasons today, despite the ongoing process of destigmatization. Although a shift towards more awareness of mental illness does make itself felt, further increasingly faithful and non-stigmatizing portrayals in the future would be desirable and beneficial in developing an adequate perspective on mental health issues, striving to counteract the pervasive stigma.

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