

Male as Soldier and Female as Sinner:
The Role of Gender in the YA Suicide Narrative

The recent rise in the production and popularity of stories of mental illness and suicide shows a continuing shift in the illness narrative in the young adult market. Controversies and contention surround such works. The notorious Jay Asher novel *13 Reasons Why* exemplifies cultural disaccord with such works, as well as great acclaim. The emergence of such texts as a major part of young adult literature shows a gaping area in want of research. While the suicide narrative has a long history within literature, the evolution of such works, and development of these narratives has an ongoing impact, including current young adult culture.

This paper investigates the intersection of gender and mental illness in the suicide narrative. Asher's *13 Reasons Why*, Ellen Hopkins' *Impulse*, and Matthew Quick's *Forgive Me, Leonard Peacock* are works of prominence in the field. These works exemplify critical issues within the suicide narrative, in regard to this intersectionality. I argue that the suicide narrative creates and reinforces the stereotypes of gender that are used to create problems of suicidal ideation within these very texts. The characters fall victim to these systemic stories: the toxic masculinity of the male and the female as fallen sinner. The underlying and problematic roles of gender function as both cause and salvation for the characters in these novels, creating a cyclical and inseparable problem within the new emergence of the suicide narrative as it's own sub-genre within young adult literature.