

# Navigating the Highs and Lows: Bipolar Disorder in All the Bright Places

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## Abstract

*This article explores the portrayal of bipolar disorder in Jennifer Niven's All the Bright Places, focusing on how the condition influences the lives of the protagonist, Finch, and his relationship with Violet. Through Finch's fluctuating emotional states, the novel provides an authentic and complex representation of bipolar disorder, illustrating the intense mood swings between manic highs and depressive lows. The article examines the impact of these mood swings not only on Finch's self-perception and actions but also on his interactions with others, particularly Violet. It delves into the challenges of supporting someone with mental health issues, highlighting the emotional and psychological strain on both the individual and their loved ones. By analyzing the characters' experiences, this article emphasizes the novel's broader commentary on the complexities of mental illness, the necessity for empathy, and the difficulty of navigating relationships affected by mental health disorders.*

**Keywords: Bipolar Disorder, Manic Highs, Depressive Lows, Mental Illness, Empathy**

Bipolar Disorder is a mental illness with mood swings that oscillate between manic highs and depressive lows. It can affect an individual's emotions, thoughts, and behaviours. It gives an opportunity to examine how it influences an individual's day-to-day life and their relationships with the people around them. It can influence even small interactions with their friends, family, and others. In English Literature, the writers use mental disorders in their works as not only as an indicator of illness but also as a key to the development of character and narration. This helps the readers to understand the difficulties of having mental illness and show empathy towards them.

The novel All the Bright Places by Jennifer Niven is an exploration of Bipolar Disorder. It explores the emotional challenges of the characters named Theodore Finch and Violet Markey. The unstable relationship, miscommunication, and misunderstandings are stemmed from Finch's Bipolar Disorder which causes him extreme mood swings that frustrate and irritate Violet. Violet who is in a relationship with Finch goes through many obstacles to understand Finch's mood swings. Through Finch and Violet's relationship, Niven depicts how challenging it can be to love someone who has mental disorders and she showcases the willingness of the lover to support him even though she felt hopeless in the process of fixing or rescuing him.

Finch's manic episodes are the characteristics of his bipolar disorder, showcasing impulsivity, invisibility, and unpredictable behaviour. During his manic, Finch experiences a wave of euphoria and power in his heightened states. In one particular moment, Finch reflects on his emotional state during a manic episode, "now as I stand on a ledge six stories above the ground. I'm so high up, I'm practically part of the sky... Maybe this time I'll do it-let the air carry me away. It will be like floating in a pool, drifting off until there's nothing" (Niven 3).

This illustrates the emotional peaks related to manic states, where Finch feels overjoyed and fearless. His feeling of invulnerable in these moments is often temporary. And it soon ends with an inevitable slide into depression. During these manic episodes, Finch experiences detachment from reality as he feels like he's part of the sky and letting the air carry him away. It emphasizes the perilous charm of these episodes. It explains how bipolar disorder creates a false sense of control, strength, and overjoy, only for that illusion to collapse when the mood inevitably shifts again.

A striking difference to the manic highs, Finch's times of adversity are characterized by overwhelming feelings of hopelessness, isolation, and despair. These depressive phases highlight the devastating effects of bipolar disorder as Finch finds himself immersed by a deep sadness that hinders his ability to lead a normal life like others. During this phase, Finch's mental condition becomes all-consuming which leads him to retreat from those around him. "Listen, I'm the freak. I'm the weirdo. I'm the trouble maker. I start fights. I let people down" (Niven 307).

It provides insight into Finch's internal struggle during his depressive phases. He distinguishes himself as a freak and weirdo, detached from his personality. It demonstrates that depression overdoes mere sadness, exemplifying a deep sense of desolation and disenchantment.

During depression episodes, Finch isolates himself from people around him even from Violet. His phases of depression show the feeling of hopelessness, which led him to isolate and alienate himself from others. "I go upstairs, and for a long time I look at myself in the bathroom mirror, and I actually disappear before my eyes. I am disappearing. Maybe I'm already gone" (Niven 276-277).

This emphasizes the crushing nature of Finch's depressive episodes. He goes through the feeling of sadness, an absolute sense of emptiness and disconnection. He feels that he is disappearing which is a metaphor for being emotionally numb related to depression. His feeling of disconnection with himself and others depicts the challenging aspect of living with bipolar disorder.

Finch's swaying between manic and depressive phases forces him to re-examine his true self. He feels that he embodies a different personality depending on his emotional state. His mood fluctuations bring out a different persona or he makes an effort to adopt new identities to escape from his pain or seek meaning in his existence.

Bipolar disorder not only affects the person who's diagnosed with it but also exerts influence on others around them. It affected Finch's relationship with others, especially with Violet. She learns to adapt to the fluctuations in Finch's emotions, but her efforts to support him often lead to confusion and frustration. Finch living with this disorder had created a barrier around him which makes it hard for others to relate to him or understand his actions. It further resulted in isolation of Finch. "I haven't heard anything from Finch since March. I'm not worried anymore. I'm angry. Angry at him for leaving without a word" (Niven 323).

Violet's willingness to support Finch proves the overwhelming effect of bipolar disorder on their relationship. Her confession where she accuses herself of not being enough for him to make him come back. At one point, she realizes that something is wrong with him but she doesn't grasp the full scope of Finch's bipolar disorder. Her letter to him after his death:

If only I'd known.

If only I'd been enough.

I let you down.

I wish I could have done something ... (Niven 343)

This emphasizes the difficulties of loving someone who has bipolar disorder. Violet's love for Finch is true and clear, still, she feels powerless because of her inability to fix or rescue Finch. This novel exemplifies that giving a shoulder to someone with bipolar disorder not only requires an

understanding of the illness but also requires perseverance and patience throughout the process of healing as there are no straightforward solutions or immediate remedies.

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