

**LOCATING VIOLENCE: EXPLORATION OF AMERICAN
SCHOOL CULTURE IN SELECT NARRATIVES**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF
PHILOSOPHY**

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**LOCATING VIOLENCE: EXPLORATION OF AMERICAN SCHOOL
CULTURE IN SELECT NARRATIVES**

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**In partial fulfillment of the requirement of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in English and Culture Studies of Mizoram University, Aizawl.**

MIZORAM UNIVERSITY
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “Locating Violence: Exploration of American School Culture in Select Narratives” is the bonafide research conducted by Catherine Lalruatfeli Ralte under my supervision. Catherine Lalruatfeli Ralte worked methodically for her thesis being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of English and Culture Studies, Mizoram University. This is to further certify that she had fulfilled all the required norms laid down under the Ph.D. regulations of Mizoram University. Neither the thesis as a whole or any part of it was ever submitted to any other University.

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DECLARATION
MIZORAM UNIVERSITY
DECEMBER, 2025

I CATHERINE LALRUATFELI RALTE, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form basis of the award of any previous to me to do best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/institute.

This is being submitted to the Mizoram University for the **Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English and Culture Studies.**

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In the United States of America, from 1600 to 1800 only small private schools seemed to provide education to children. In colonial period, young boys learned core subjects such as reading and math, and young girls learned domestic arts. Schooling especially in New England was mostly about teaching children to read the Bible and become moral citizens. The Puritans believed that education could stop ignorance and sin, therefore the Old Deluder Satan Act of 1647 required towns to set up schools to teach reading and writing (Keastle 7). These early schools were mainly for white boys, while girls, Native Americans, enslaved children and the poor often had very few educational opportunities. In the southern colonies, formal schools were rare since people lived farther apart. Wealthy families often hired private tutors (Urban and Wagoner 31). Public schools seemed to be non-existent during the colonial era, and there was no compulsory education. Schools were established where there was a need for them, such as in Boston and Philadelphia. Otherwise, children were home-schooled. Schools in the colonial era emerged as tools for controlling behaviour and instilling obedience. While physical violence within schools was not the focus, strict discipline often enforced through corporal punishment was common. The first private schools were established by the Roman Catholic Church. In the 1800's people began to see the need for a public school system that could serve all children and not just the wealthy or those in certain religious groups. Therefore, public education began to be established in 1840. Reformers like Horace Mann worked hard to promote free public education. He called education "the great equalizer of the conditions of men" (qtd. In Kaestle, 102). They believe that schools could help create good citizens, reduce crime, and bring people of different backgrounds together. Public schools were also seen as a way to teach American values and language though this often meant pushing aside their own cultures (Tyack and Cuban 25). These schools often enforced conformity therefore, harsh discipline were used on poor, immigrant and non-white children. The suppression of students' languages, cultures and identities especially in schools for Native American and Black children created deep tensions that sometimes erupted in defiance or violence (25). Schools began to change during the late 1800 and early 1900 when America became more urban and industrial. Schools became more organized and focused on preparing students for work in offices and factories. At the

same time, schools became places where young people were sorted, tracked and disciplined largely in response to fears of urban disorder and juvenile crime. Thinkers like John Dewey asserted that schools should help students learn through experience, and that classrooms should act like small democratic communities where students learned cooperation and problem solving rather than coercion (Dewey 89). In reality, schools reinforced rigid social hierarchies and when students resisted the systems through rebellion and fighting, schools often responded with punitive measures rather than addressing root causes of conflict. The twentieth century brought major changes in the American education system. The famous court case *Brown v. Board of Education* of 1954 made it illegal to have racially segregated schools, but the fight for true quality in education continued for many decades (Anderson 229). Schools also became a place where Americans debated issues such as how to teach about race, gender and history. Later reforms focused on testing, choice of school and accountability, but they often made inequality worse instead of better (Ravitch 123). In the late twentieth century, fears about gangs, drugs and shootings led to policies emphasizing zero-tolerance and employing security measures. However, these made schools feel more like prisons than places of learning (123). At present, American schools still reflect the nation's ideals and challenges. At the same time, they also show the continuing gaps between people of different class and between different racial and ethnic groups.

At present, around eighty per cent of American children access education through public schooling (Kennedy). With the emergence of the public school system, it has been relied on to generate patriots and reputable individuals who will be beneficial to the community. The public school system grows developed and became one of the main ways the country tried to prepare young people to succeed in life. As early as 1779, there was a nationwide awakening to educate children of all social standing in the hope of producing future leaders and responsible citizens. This chapter explains the historical background and concepts of school culture in the United States of America. In doing so, the chapter reflects important historical events of violence taking place in the schools of America. The history of American schools shows how education developed as the country changed over time.

Before 1800, the privilege of schooling seems to have been open only to elite white men Americans (Kew 33). Tyack and Cuban observed that there is a focus on core subjects such as “math, English, science and history” (453). Metz describes the nature and characteristics of American schools, highlighting their defining features:

There was little variation in the school schedule and all schools had long hallways with nearly identical classrooms lined up along them. Class size and teachers’ normal assignment to meet five groups of students for instruction five times a week varied little. The scope and sequence of curriculum differed only in detail from school to school though the number of sections available in subjects like advanced foreign language or vocational education varied significantly. Students were expected to attend all their classes promptly every day. There were extracurricular activities after school, or occasionally during the last hour of the day (76).

Ambiguity and vagueness tend to characterise the concept of school culture. In an article titled “Improving School Culture for a Better Learning Environment,” the American University’s School of Education notes the nature of American school culture as -

How the school is structured, including its educational aims. Involvement in the community in caring for the school. Community values concerning what’s good, what’s bad, and what’s wrong. The enjoyment and respect of school community members. The satisfaction of its learners. Expectations of students’ and staff behaviour. Collaboration to develop a vision for the school. Respect for each person’s beliefs. Actual student and staff behaviour (3).

This description reflects the multi-faceted and dynamic nature of school culture which extends far beyond formal policies or physical infrastructure to include the subtle shared understanding and practices that shape daily life within educational settings.

American culture is shaped by diversity, individualism and a strong belief in personal freedom. It is characterized by a strong emphasis on individualism,

independence and freedom alongside a commitment to equality and diversity. It is often described as a melting pot because people from diverse backgrounds, races and religions live together, bringing different traditions, ideas and beliefs. Americans value hard work, independence, and the idea that anyone can succeed through effort often called the American Dream. Equality, free speech and democracy are important ideals in American society. At the same time, American culture places importance on innovation, competition and personal achievement. Community involvement and volunteerism are also part of the culture although attitudes and values can vary greatly depending on region, religion and family background.

American schools much like American culture often promote competition, personal responsibility and individual success. From grading systems to honours programs to college admissions, students are encouraged to distinguish themselves (Tyack and Cuban 19). While this fosters motivation, it can also create exclusion and conflict leading to environments where bullying and peer rivalry take root. U.S. schools also aim to prepare students for participation in a democratic society. John Dewey states that schools should function as “embryonic communities” (88) where democratic habits are formed. However, in reality students from marginalized groups often find that their voices are not equally heard and respected. Schools in America are among the most diverse in the world reflecting the nation’s immigration patterns and multicultural society. For Nieto, this diversity is a strength but also a source of tension. When not supported by inclusive policies and practices, differences in race, religion, language, and socioeconomic status can fuel divisions, discrimination and at times, violence (78). American schools often emphasise maintaining order through rules, code of conduct and even increasing security measures such as metal detectors and school resource officers. Particularly since the 1990s, zero-tolerance policies have become common in response to fears about school violence (Ravitch 145). Even though such measures are taken with the intention to protect, they also create a culture of surveillance that alienate students and may escalate conflict rather than prevent it. Driven by policies like No Child Left Behind and Every Student Succeeds Act, U.S. Schools are steeped in a culture of testing and performance. This often overshadow emotional aspect of schooling and weakening the sense of community

that helps prevent violence and promote well-being (Tyack and Cuban 59). Schools also transmit unspoken norms about authority, conformity and acceptable behaviour often termed as the “hidden curriculum” (Anyon 38). This can reinforce social inequalities and produce resentment and resistance among students.

Along with the existence of schools, whether private or public, is the existence of violence in schools. It is not a new phenomenon and it can be traced back to colonial times, continuing to manifest in various forms at the present. For this study, violence in schools refers to acts of violence where the perpetrators and victims involved belong to the institution itself. During the colonial period, violence in schools usually took the form of students rebelling against teachers and authority. Physical confrontations became more common in the nineteenth century. For instance, in 1853, a Louisville High School student murdered their Principal William H.G. Butler for disciplining his younger brother. In the mid-twentieth century, the 1927 Bath School bombing in Michigan and a 1959 bombing in Texas marked early examples of fatal school violence. The late twentieth century and beyond saw other prominent school shootings like Columbine. Columbine High School shooting gained popularity as “it was one of the first to take place after the advent of 24-hour cable news and during ‘the year of the net’...This was the dawn of the digital age of perfect remembering, where words and deeds live online forever. Columbine became the pilot for future episodes of fame-seeking violence” (Strauss 5). This led to the emergence of several narratives based on this incident. Three of the primary texts dealing with school shootings for this study are based on or influenced by the Columbine High School shooting. Firstly, *Give a Boy a Gun* (2000) is inspired by the Columbine High School shooting though it is not a direct retelling. Todd Strasser wrote the novel in the aftermath of Columbine using fiction to process and critique the cultural, psychological and systemic factors that led to school shootings. The novel explores the experience of two teenage boys Gary and Brendan in school which ultimately leads to violent death. Both are subjected to social exclusion, systemic indifference and bullying almost daily. Their unresolved pain festers silently leading them to exact revenge on their bullies and teachers who fail to intervene and stop their mistreatment by shooting them in the school building. This

novel is an autopsy of the causes of violence in schools such as unchecked cruelty among peers, normalisation of violence among youth and absence of adult intervention. It allows for the exploration of cognitive and neurobiological dimensions of school violence. Secondly, *Nineteen Minutes* (2007) by Jodi Picoult centres on Peter Houghton, an introvert and a quiet young boy who has to endure years of bullying and social humiliation. The pain emanating from his negative experiences in school culminates when one morning, in a span of nineteen minutes, he brings a gun to his school and executes a planned mass shooting killing ten and wounding many. The novel then unfolds an exploration of guilt, shame, trauma and the eventual process of how he becomes a violent individual through persistent cruelty, rejection and bullying from his peers. The novel is also told through the eyes of Josie, a popular girl who does not directly experience violence from her peers but experiences mental torture. The novel is not simply a novel about school shootings but is an exploration of how negative thinking without the necessary intervention can erupt into mass violence. It exposes the fact that school violence is rooted in individual suffering and societal failure. Thirdly, *Shooter* (2004) by Walter Dean Myers centres on Leonard Gray or Len, a high school student who commits a school shooting and dies during the incident. The story is told through interviews, journals and reports as investigators try to understand why he did it. Two other students Cameron and Carla share what they knew about Len before the shooting. Len was bullied for years. He dressed differently. Acted differently and did not fit in. Over time, he became isolated and started to write in his journal about how angry and hopeless he felt. He also became obsessed with guns and revenge. No one paid attention to the warning signs. This shows how negative thinking, social rejection and lack of support can lead to violence. It is a demonstration of how psychological suffering, if ignored, can become deadly.

In *Thirteen Reasons Why* (2007), Clay Jensen receives a mysterious package containing thirteen cassette tapes recorded by Hannah Baker, a classmate who recently died by suicide. On the tapes, Hannah explains the thirteen people and events she believes contributed to her decision to end her life. Each tape reveals moments of sexual harassment, betrayal, indifference, cruelty and rumours which are

all seemingly small actions that eventually overwhelm her as time passes. In Anderson's *Speak* (1999), Melinda Sordino starts her freshman year at Merryweather High as a pariah. Over the summer, she calls the police during a party but no one knows why and she refuses to explain. Her former friends abandon her and the attitude of the teachers towards her is condescending and indifferent. She withdraws into silence and self-doubt. The truth is eventually revealed. She has been raped by a popular senior Andy Evans at the party. She spirals into depression and alienation. However, as time passes, through her art and introspection, she is finally able to confront her rapist and starts to speak out about her experience, reclaiming her voice and sense of self. *Tease* (2014) by Amanda Maciel portrays the perspective of Sara Wharton after her classmate Emma Putnam commits suicide. Sara along with her best friend Brielle is facing criminal charges for harassment. Initially, she feels that she is unfairly targeted. However, she eventually realises that she also participates in carrying out violence eventually leading to the death of Emma Putnam.

John G. Cawelti was an American scholar and critic known for his work in American cultural studies. He highlights the prominent role of violence within American popular culture, stressing its widespread impact across diverse media forms. From early colonial narratives of Indian conflicts and captivity to contemporary portrayals of gunfighters, detectives, and organized crime figures, American literature and film have persistently explored violent motifs. He writes:

American culture has long manifested a large public demand for books, films and television programs in which violence plays a central role...American writers and filmmakers have been exceptionally prolific in the invention of stories and even whole genres of violent action....From the end of the seventeenth century when early tales of Indian wars and captivity were among the first best – sellers, through the nineteenth century fascination with bloody sagas of the western frontier and gothic thrillers about the cities, down to the violent gunfighters, private eyes, gangsters and gangbuster of twentieth century film and television...So potent and pervasive have been these American images of violence that it is through them that Americans have been imaginatively known to much of the rest of the world (521).

The portrayal of violence in American media has a long and complex history. From the earliest days of print and theatre, to the rise of film, television and digital platforms, violence has been both a source of entertainment and a mirror reflecting societal tensions. In the nineteenth century, newspapers often sensationalized violent crime, helping to shape public fears and fascinations. The invention of film brought violent imagery to mass audiences. In early cinema, the concept of violence was used to create excitement and drama. These stories often portray violence as a way to resolve conflict, protect freedom or achieve justice, themes that are deeply rooted in American cultural ideals of individual rights, heroism and moral struggle. Television and later digital media continued these patterns. From the 1950s onward, crime shows, war dramas and action series regularly featured violence, often framing it as necessary for the protection of law, order or national security. In this aspect, Hollywood can be said to be a part and parcel of American culture. It is the centre of the U.S. film and entertainment industry, reflecting the society as well as actively influencing it. Hollywood tends to glorify violence through presenting violence as exciting, heroic or even necessary. For instance, in revenge movies or superhero movies, violence is often shown as the only way to achieve justice. Children and young adults may internalise violent behaviour as a way to solve problems or gain power. Repeated exposure to such violent scenes can make violent behaviour feel normal and acceptable. Throughout its history, American media's portrayal of violence has both shaped and reflected the nation's culture. It reveals a society fascinated by strength, conflict and moral battles, but also struggling with the consequences of glorifying the use of force.

Cawelti states that "the question of violence in the mass media" in America has been "[o]ne of the "big issues" in the late 1960's" (521). However, David Brion Davis asserts that "the frequency of fighting and killing in American literature is not necessarily proof of an unusually violent society, but literary treatments of violence have reflected certain historical conditions and circumstances" (28). He also contends that:

For more than one hundred and sixty years American literature has shown a peculiar fascination with homicidal violence...There has been considerable

carnage, after all, in the world's greatest classics from Oedipus Rex and the Song of Roland to King Lear and Crime and Punishment. If the shootings, stabbings, lynchings, and fist-fights of American fiction present a different world from that portrayed by Jane Austen, Anthony Trollope, or C. P. Snow, there has been a strain of sadistic violence in English popular fiction from Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk*, published in 1795, to Ian Fleming's recent *From Russia with Love*... Since literary fashions have almost a life of their own, and since much of the violence in American literature bears the imprint of Elizabethan drama, English Gothic romance, or Flaubertian realism, it would be naïve to conclude that the frequency of fighting and killing in American fiction is proof of an unusually violent society (29). On the other hand, there can be no doubt that the treatment of violence in American literature reflects certain historical conditions and circumstances. Although we are handicapped by the absence of a fully developed sociology of the novel, we can make a number of tentative observations on the relations between fictional violence and American social patterns (29).

David Brion Davis also states on the pre-occupation of the notion of violence by American writers and believes in the assimilation violence in American society, asserting his statement as:

Critics who interpret violence in contemporary literature as a symptom of a sick society may be reassured to know that American writers have always been preoccupied with murder, rape, and deadly combat. Yet, in so far as the older themes have been assimilated to an antirationalist philosophy, and as the individualistic hero has been moved from the open seas or prairies to a dense society in which only the most brutal survive, the treatment of violence in our literature has grown increasingly ominous for a people who profess to believe in peace and human brotherhood (36).

American culture has been accused of being violent in the past. Thomas J. Diloranzo states:

In a thorough review of the “West was violent” literature, Bruce Benson (1998) discovered that many historians simply assume that violence was pervasive – even more so than in modern – day America – and the theorize about its likely causes...Thus, an allegedly violent and stateless society of the nineteenth century is blamed for at least some of the violence in the United States today (227).

However, he continues to assert that “an alternative literature based on actual history concludes that the civil society of the American West in the nineteenth century was not very violent” (227). Eugene Hollon states that the western frontier “was a far more civilized, more peaceful and safer place than the American society today (qtd. In Diloranzo, 227). Richard Hofstadter also contends that violence cannot be assumed as a tradition of America as “our violence lacks both an ideological and a geographical centre; it lacks cohesion; it has been too various, diffuse, and spontaneous to be forged into a single, sustained, inveterate hatred shared by entire social classes (187).

One of the most debated factors contributing to the high rates of homicide in the United States is the accessibility of firearms. Alfred Blumstein and Daniel Cork highlights how the ease of obtaining firearms has shaped patterns of homicide and influenced the broader landscape of violence in America:

In the United States, opinion polls over the last several years have consistently placed violence near the top of the public’s list of concerns. This seems to happen regardless of whether homicides rates are climbing or falling...while there has been a significant decline in homicides committed by older offenders, homicides committed by younger offenders grew dramatically beginning in 1985. An important factor in that growth has been a significant increase in the availability of guns to young people...further examination of mortality rates – due to gun homicides as well as gun suicides compared to non-gun suicides – for various age and race groups also

implicates gun availability as a key contributing factor to the growth in youth homicide (5).

The United States has long been known for its high levels of gun ownership. The Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution (1791) guarantees the right to bear arms which has been a cornerstone of American identity. However, the easy availability and accessibility of firearms has been a topic of intense debate. Gun violence and mass shootings continue to rise, therefore, gun availability and its regulation. The history of gun access in America is deeply tied to the nation's foundation. The Second Amendment, ratified in 1791 was originally designed to ensure that state militias could be armed for the defense of the country. Over time, however, the interpretation of the Amendment has expanded leading to the proliferation of guns in private ownership. Various pieces of legislation such as the Gun Control Act of 1968 and the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act of 1993 sought to regulate firearm access, but significant gaps in enforcement and loopholes have made it easier for individuals to obtain guns particularly in certain states with less restrictive laws. One of the primary factors contributing to the ease of access to firearms is the inconsistency in gun laws across the United States. Even though federal regulations set a baseline for gun control, each state has its own laws regarding gun purchase, use and ownership. Some states like California and New York have strict background checks and limitations on types of firearms, while others such as Texas and Florida have looser regulations making it easier for people to acquire firearms. In addition, loopholes in gun laws such as private sales and gun shows have allowed individuals to circumvent background checks. Research consistently shows a correlation between high levels of gun availability and increased rates of gun-related violence. The more guns in circulation, the higher the risk of gun-related accidents, suicides and homicides. States with looser gun laws often experience higher rates of gun violence including mass shootings compared to states with stricter controls.

Gun availability and easier accessibility by youth in the street seeps even into school campus which is supposed to be free from it. Kathleen Reich, Patti L. Culross, and Richard E. Behrman states that, "each year, more than 20,000 children and youth under age 20 are killed or injured by firearms in the United States. Thousands of

young people are shot by peers, family members, or strangers, either intentionally or unintentionally (5). Guns are exceptionally lethal weapons, and they are easily available to young people. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the lethality and availability of guns, particularly handguns, fueled a youth gun violence epidemic that peaked in 1994, when nearly 6000 young people under age 20 died from firearm injuries...the number and rate of youth gun homicides, suicides, and unintentional shooting death remained high in this country. Nearly 4000 children and youth under age 20 were killed with firearms in 1998, and more than 18,000 others were injured (Reich, Culross, and Behrman 6).

In recent years, the issue of gun violence among young people has gained increased national attention, prompting urgent calls for policy reform and community intervention. Reich, Culross, and Behrman states that, "Guns...are easily available to young people, even though federal law, with a few exceptions, prohibits those under 21 from purchasing handguns and those under 18 from purchasing rifles and shotguns or possessing handguns (6). Despite existing federal regulations aimed at restricting youth access to firearms, children and adolescents continue to encounter minimal barriers to obtaining deadly weapons. This troubling reality contributes to a devastating public health crisis in which firearms remain one of the leading causes of death for young Americans. "Exceptional lethality, combined with easy access, accounts at least in part for the fact that firearm-related injuries remain the second leading cause of death among children and youth ages 10 to 19. Only motor vehicle accidents claim more young lives (6). Schools once considered a safe haven and training ground to produce responsible citizens become frequent ground for committing crimes. Anderson states, "concern about (school) safety led to a congressional commission and a study named Violent Schools - Safe Schools: The Safe School study Report to Congress" (318), prepared by the National Institute of Education, and found in its study that "3 million students in America avoided locations in school buildings for fear of attack and 5 million who said they were always afraid while at school" (318).

Concerns about school safety have long troubled educators, parents and policymakers alike. As violence in and around schools increased during the latter half

of the twentieth century, the U.S. government sought to better understand the scope and impact of this growing threat. In response, a congressional commission authorized a landmark study as stated. The findings revealed a troubling reality where millions of students were living in constant fear with many actively avoiding parts of their own school buildings due to threats of violence. These findings continue to resonate in today's debate on school safety, gun control and mental health support within educational setting. The Safe School Study Report to Congress sheds light on the psychological and environmental toll of school violence. According to the report, approximately three million students avoided certain locations within their school buildings for fear of being attacked while five million admitted to feeling always afraid while at school (318). These statistics reveal that the issue of school safety extends far beyond isolated incidents of violence. It encompasses a widespread climate of fear that affects daily student behaviour, emotional well-being and academic performance. The significance of this data lies not only in its scale but also in its implications. When students cannot feel safe in what should be a secure, nurturing environment, their capacity to learn, grow and succeed is severely compromised. Fear becomes a barrier to education. Furthermore, the fact that these findings emerged from a government-backed national study reflects a recognition at the highest levels of the need for policy-driven solutions. It also underscores that school safety is not a new concern, but rather a persistent and evolving challenge requiring continuous attention. The data from the Safe School Study can be viewed as a foundational moment in the broader discussion on educational policy, school security infrastructure and mental health support services available to students. It illustrates how systemic fear, just as much as actual incidence of violence, can erode the educational experience for youth.

News coverage of youth and school violence ended the denial of earlier years. Drugs, guns and gangs created issues and by 1989, awareness of the problem had developed to the point that the president and the nation's governors, meeting at an education summit, acknowledged it in a set of national education goals to be reached by the year 2000. Goal 6 calls for schools to be free of drugs and violence and able to offer a safe, disciplined learning environment (U.S. Department of Education 1993).

But educators and other public officials remained divided or confused about how to pursue such a goal, for they faced big obstacles. Family breakdown in urban neighborhoods had reduced the number of involved parents who were traditional, and essential allies in the enforcement of discipline and academic performance (Anderson 319).

The alarming escalation of violence within educational settings is observed by Ryan P. Brown, Lindsey L. Osterman, and Collin D. Barnes, particularly highlighting high-profile tragedies such as the Columbine High School attack and the Virginia Tech massacre:

From the coordinated attack at Columbine High School in Colorado, to the one-man massacre at Virginia Tech, violence in schools has become a topic on increasing concern in recent years and has prompted a flurry of studies on possible precursors to gun-related aggression among youth (1400).

This reflects the way school shootings have transformed from isolated, shocking occurrences into phenomena that demand sustained academic and policy attention. The Columbine High School shooting in 1999 becomes a pivotal moment in American history in term of school shooting. Larkin draws a clear distinction between Columbine and earlier school shootings. Unlike previous incidents which often stemmed from personal grievances and involved impulsive or emotional driven attacks by a lone assailant, Columbine introduced a new militarized model of violence in school. The attackers Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold were not simply lashing out, they were orchestrating a large-scale massacre. Larkin states-

The assault on Columbine High School (in 1999) was a unique event in the history of American education. Prior to the attack, school shootings involved a lone and deranged student or former student bringing a gun to school and shooting at teachers and peers for real or imagined humiliations. Although the shooter may have obsessed over the actions prior to the shootings, the actual act tended to be either a rampage or a targeting of a specific individual or small group. The exception to these is Jonesboro, where two boys ransacked their father's gun cabinet, took weapons to their middle school...and...began

shooting at girls and female teachers in an apparent retaliation by the older shooter Mitchell Johnson for being rejected by a girl (Domestic Violence Project 1998). In none of these cases, did the assailants plan to blow up their school. None engaged in long-term planning, collected explosives and weaponry, employed diversionary tactics, reconnoitred their school, tested their weaponry, or thought about killing hundreds of students, devising ways that would maximize the destruction (155).

Larkin emphasizes on the premeditation and tactical planning that characterized Columbine. The attackers engaged in behaviour more similar to military or terrorist operations than the typical incident of a troubled youth committing an act of violence in schools. They collected weapons and explosives and even designed diversionary tactics. These are signs of an intention not just to kill but to maximize destruction and chaos. This level of planning suggests that their motivations went beyond personal revenge or individual grievances, but instead points to a desire for a symbolic act of rebellion against social structure. In contrast, earlier shootings such as the 1998 Jonesboro attack by two middle school boys, while also shocking, were generally more personal lacking the calculated, almost theatrical nature of Columbine. Even in Jonesboro which involved two shooters and a coordinated ambush, the scale and ambition did not approach what Harris and Klebold envisioned. Larkin's analysis also implied that Columbine introduced a new cultural script for mass violence in schools. It became a blueprint for future attackers, many of whom referenced Harris and Klebold in their own manifestos. In this sense, Columbine did not just mark a change in tactics. It fundamentally altered how school shootings would be conceived and executed in the years that followed. According to records at Jefferson County Sheriff's Office in 1999 -

The Columbine attack was planned over a period of at least eight months. Even though the actual attack ended up as a rampage with Harris and Klebold shooting wildly and randomly killing peers, Gibbs and Roche state that they conducted what they planned as a "strategic military assault" (qtd. in Larkin, 156). Although puny by the standards of *Soldier of Fortune* magazine, the boys were heavily armed for an assault on a school. Each had a sawed off

shotgun; Klebold had a TEC-9 semiautomatic handgun; Harris carried a Hi-Point 9 mm carbine rifle. Between the two of them, they had four knives...They carried shotgun shells in utility belts, ammunition and CO2 bombs in their cargo pants pockets. They also carried bombs in a duffel bag. They hauled two twenty-gallon propane tank bombs into the school cafeteria that were timed to explode at 11:17 A.M., when the lunch area was most crowded (qtd. in Larkin, 155).

While mass shooting in schools represent only a fraction of overall gun violence, their psychological, emotional and societal toll is disproportionately large. The devastating impact is felt not only by students but by those witnessing the event even through media. Students who survive school shootings often experience long-term trauma. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, anxiety, depression, survival's guilt and hypervigilance are commonly reported among young survivors. These psychological wounds can hinder academic performance, social relationships and overall development. A growing body of research has found that students exposed to school shootings have lower graduation rates, decreased school attendance and increased use of antidepressants and mental health services. Even those students who are not directly involved in a school shooting but are repeatedly exposed to the threat through lockdown drills, news coverage or the knowledge that such violence is possible report increased levels of fear and stress. The normalisation of school shootings has also led to systemic changes such as the proliferation of security measures such as metal detectors, armed guards, surveillance systems and active shooter drills. While intended to protect students, this measure can also create a prison-like atmosphere and contribute to students feeling criminalized rather than nurtured. When such violence takes place, attention is paid to victims. However, when the perpetrators are also students themselves, they also need to be understood in terms of them being victims to other forms of violence such as bullying and their violent outburst is also the outcome of violence they themselves suffer. Easy access to firearms allowed these troubled individuals to resort to physical acts of violence. In many cases, shooters do not fit into a criminal profile. But rather they show signs of distress and alienation that go unnoticed or unaddressed. When firearms are easily

accessible through availability of guns in the house belonging to family members, or through gun shows, or even online purchases; the tendency of a person to commit violence is heightened. Moreover, the way media and society respond to these shooters can have ripple effects. Some perpetrators seek validation through their actions which is a factor that can unintentionally be fueled by media coverage as evidenced in the Columbine School shooting. In addition to affecting schools, mass shootings contribute to a culture of fear and disillusionment. Communities grieve, protest and demand change but often see little systemic change or response. At a national level, repeated tragedies have desensitised the public leading to what is often called mass shooting fatigue where outrage fades quickly and policy change stagnates. This nature of tragedy followed by public mourning, political debate and eventual inaction reveals a deep societal paralysis fueled by the easy availability of guns and the failure to address underlying causes.

In the United States guns are not just tools for protection or sport. Many Americans regard ownership of gun as a symbol of freedom and personal rights. The idea that people should be able to protect themselves has become a core part of how Americans think. Because of this belief the country has made it easier to own and carry firearms than most other nations in the world. But this strong attachment to guns also reveals how much the Americans value individual rights even when those rights can put others at risk. In many ways, this tends to reflect a society where personal freedom comes before community safety. And when violence enters schools, it shows how serious the problem is. Schools are supposed to be places where children feel safe and nurtured, where they learn and grow and dream about their futures. In recent years, American schools have made major changes in how they prepare for violence, especially school shootings. In the past, schools focussed mainly on basic safety rules like fire drills and keeping strangers off campus. There was little attention given to preparing for serious violent events. Today, that has changed because of the growing number of school shootings and safety threats. Many schools in America today have installed security cameras, locked entrances and sometimes metal detectors. Some schools even have School Resource Officers who are trained police officers present on campus full time. In earlier times, police

were usually only called after an emergency happened, but now they become part of daily school life. Instead of only fire drills, schools now conduct lockdown drills and active shooter drills to prepare students and staff for violent situations.

With the rising problems of gun violence even in academic setting, more schools in the United States have realised that mental health is just as important as academic learning. Many students struggle with stress, anxiety, depression or trauma and schools try to help by building support systems. These systems usually have three level - support for all students, help for those who are at risk and special care for those with serious needs. First, schools use social-emotional learning (SEL) programs to teach students how to understand and manage their emotions, build good relationships and make responsible decisions. These programs help students feel more confident and behave better in class (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, 2020). Students who show early signs of mental health problems are to be given extra support such as small group counselling or regular meetings with a trusted adult. Students with more serious needs can see a school counsellor, psychologist or social worker. Some schools even offer therapy through clinics right on campus (National Center for School of Mental Health). Unfortunately, not all schools have enough staff to help students properly. The national average student-to-counsellor ratio is about 408 to 1 even though experts recommended a ratio of 250 to 1 (American School Counsellor Association, 2023). Schools in poor or rural areas are more likely to have no mental health professionals at all. In addition, some students feel embarrassed or afraid to ask for help because of the stigma surrounding mental health especially in communities where the topic of mental health is considered a taboo (Reback 709). However, there are also areas of improvement. For instance, the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act and other federal programs give schools more funding to hire counsellors and improve mental health services (United States Department of Education, 2023). These efforts show the increased understanding of how important mental health is for students. Some schools have threat-assessment teams consisting of groups of staff members who work together to identify students who might be at risk of hurting themselves or others. These teams try to get help for those students before violence occurs. Schools

also run programs that teach students to speak up if they see or hear something that seems dangerous.

Recently, there has been an enormous change in how the law treats parents when their children are involved in school shootings. In the past, only the shooter would be punished. But now, in some cases, the parents are also being sent to jail especially if they give their child access to a gun or ignored warning signs. The shift began after the Oxford High School shooting on November 30, 2021 in Michigan. A 15-year-old student shot and killed four classmates using a gun his father had bought for him. His parents James and Jennifer Crumbley were warned by the school that their son was acting strangely but they did not take it seriously. They also did not keep the gun locked up. In 2024, the parents were found guilty of involuntary manslaughter and sentenced to at least ten years in prison (Bogel-Burroughs). This case is important because it was the first time in America that the parents were sent to jail for a school shooting their child committed. It made awareness about safe gun storage laws which require adults to keep guns locked away from children. Breaking these laws can lead to jail time if a child uses the gun to hurt someone (Giffords Law Center). Kumpfer and Alvarado states that “strong families and effective parents are critical to the prevention of youth problems” (457). This emphasizes the role of parenting in the upbringing of children and whether their children will grow up to become criminals or responsible citizens.

To understand why violence especially gun violence happens in American schools, it is important to look at some parts of American culture. The Second Amendment (1791) gave Americans the legal right to bear arms, and many people saw this as a symbol of personal liberty and independence. However, this belief also makes it harder to pass strict gun control laws even when children’s safety is at risk. Even after school shootings, there is often pushback against any law that might limit access to firearms because many people see it as a threat to their rights. Another common notion in American culture is self-reliance. It is the belief that people should take care of themselves without relying too much on others. In many school shooting cases, the perpetrators showed signs of emotional or social struggles before the violence happened. But because of the tendency to not rely on others, they often did

not get the help they needed. These cultural values such as freedom and self-reliance are part of what makes America unique. Yet they can also make it harder to prevent violence in schools. In dealing with violence in schools, on initial observation, there is a tendency to locate violence only in its most visible and extreme forms such as physical fights, bullying or school shootings. These aggressive actions especially shootings often dominate media headlines, shaping how society understands violence in schools. However, focusing solely on the act of violence itself can be misleading. It ignores the deeper and more complex factors that contribute to it. A deeper analysis reveals that such violent acts are often symptoms of larger systemic issues. For instance, long-term exposure to neglect, emotional isolation, discrimination, peer pressure, or lack of support within families and school environments can all play a role in shaping the perpetrator's violent behaviour. The perpetrators tend to have mental health challenges, histories of trauma and the influence of violent media including games. Lack of early intervention, poor student-teacher relationships, or a school culture that tolerates exclusion or marginalization can create conditions where violence becomes more likely. The way society often treats school violence is similar to how it approaches mental health, that is by focusing on visible symptoms rather than the underlying causes. In mental health treatment, for instance, people are often diagnosed and treated based on how they behave or feel. Medical solutions like medication or even brain scans are sometimes used to understand these symptoms. But what often gets overlooked are the root-causes such as a person's life experiences, relationships, environment and past trauma. These deeper factors are harder to see but they are often the true source of the problem. Similarly, when school violence occurs, especially tragic events such as school shooting, the response is often focussed on the event itself, yet the underlying sufferings the perpetrator experiences often get ignored or pushed to the background. Progress in understanding school violence requires looking beyond the violent act itself to the social, emotional, cultural and systemic roots that made the violent act possible.

There exists a wide range of studies on violence in schools in America. However, significant gaps remain. One key gap is the lack of attention to root-causes such as neglect of mental health, social inequality, systemic inadequacy and cultural

values that normalize aggression. This thesis explores and addresses this issue by diving deeper into the root-causes of violence thereby throwing into limelight the various subtle forms of violence embedded in everyday life. Another gap lies in the limited presence of student voices in the literature. Most studies are conducted from adult perspectives and are based on teacher reports, administrator interviews or policy analysis. But student voices are rarely central even though they are the ones most affected by school violence. The present study fills this gap by presenting the voices of students who are the victims as well as the perpetrators in violence in schools. Most research and media coverage tend to focus on high profile events such as school shootings or physical bullying. But they represent only the tip of the iceberg. There is much less attention paid to the everyday processes such as school's disciplinary system, peer isolation, subtle forms of bullying such as name-calling, or a lack of mental health resources that create environment where violence can grow over time. This study investigates the underlying causes of such physical outburst. There is also limited research on how American cultural values such as hyper-individualism and normalised aggression in media and sports shape student behaviour and attitude towards violence. The present research also attempts to fill this gap by analyzing the presentation of such cultural values in the select primary texts. Much research focusses on reactionary measures like lockdown drills and introduction of metal detectors rather than enforcing relational solutions such as recognizing what others feel and showing empathy within the school community. This study addresses this issue by analysing the benefits of dealing with feelings in a healthy way and being caring or thoughtful through exploring the select texts. To sum up, a major gap in the study of violence in the schools of America is that it often treats violence as an event rather than a condition that is built over time gradually through neglect, exclusion, bullying, cultural norms that allow for the perpetuation of violence and the systems that endure it which this research addresses.

Early studies tended to define school violence as physical aggression or criminal acts occurring within school campus. Researchers have begun to broaden this definition to include psychological harm, social exclusion and institutional practices. This shift moves beyond security concerns and opens up the discussion to

include school culture, teacher-student relationships and emotional safety (Cornell and Mayer 14). The majority of research and public attention focuses on school shootings. These studies often examine the shooter's background, access to firearms or school security systems. While helpful, this approach tends to isolate the incident from the environment in which it occurs. Critics have noted that this narrow focus may obscure long-term issues such as student alienation, neglect or even toxic masculinity (Kupchik 37). They are often harder to locate but are key to understanding the broader roots of violence. Research has increasingly shown that schools with high levels of compassion tend to have lower rates of aggression. On the other hand, schools with strict discipline systems where students have little voice, or weak teacher-student relationships often show higher levels of behavioural problems. This thesis focusses on locating violence not only in its physical form but also in the cultural and institutional elements that project subtle forms of violence.

The research is carried out by interpretative and qualitative analysis methods. This has been done by using the critical and theoretical framework of Johan Galtung, Michel Foucault and Hannah Arendt to determine violence in the select novels. Zizek's notion of violence is also applied to differentiate the kinds of violence in schools. Galtung's theoretical framework of violence is employed as the overarching theory to pinpoint the instances of violence. Foucault's theories of disciplinary power and surveillance is employed to highlight how school system itself acts as a panopticon for controlling students and shape docile bodies that are accepted or punished according to their behaviour. Arendt's theory of violence is used to explain how violence arises in the absence of power and sense of community. A gendered lens is also applied to determine how violence differently affects the male and female characters.

The thesis is categorised into the following chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction:

The introductory chapter explains the historical background and concepts of school culture in the United States of America. In doing so, the chapter reflects

important historical events of violence taking place in the schools of America. This chapter highlights the necessity of understanding violence not only as physical aggression but also as subtle forces that accumulate and eventually lead to violent outburst. It has laid the foundation for the understanding of the culture of the United States of America that allows the perpetration of violence through gun ownership to its citizens by the Second Amendment Act of 1791. Select American literature has been explored in the light of pinpointing violent instances in schools.

Chapter 2: Locating Direct Violence:

This chapter locates the different kinds of direct violence in school settings. For Galtung and Dietrich, direct or personal violence “refers to the type of violence where there is an actor that commits the violence” (170). Direct violence for Galtung is a survival needs deficit resulting in death. Well-being needs deficit results in maiming and siege. Identity needs deficit results in desocialization and resocialization. Freedom needs deficit results in repression, detention and expulsion (292). This chapter also analyses the perpetrators’ violent behaviour by employing general strain theory, social learning theory and control balance theory.

Chapter 3: Cultural Violence in Context:

This chapter highlights instances of cultural violence which is often invisible and subtle in the select texts. Drawing from Johan Galtung’s concept of cultural violence which is similar to Zizek’s notion of symbolic violence, each text reveals situations where violence is legitimised through normalization of cultural norms, established patterns, societal code, assumptions, views, value systems and perspectives that are harmful, demeaning and generates suffering to others. A Foucauldian reading of the select texts analyses the power that circulates through surveillance, categorisation and discipline. The two approaches of cultural violence and Foucauldian power highlight the invisible nature violence.

Chapter 4: Structural Violence in Schools:

This chapter undertakes analysis of structural violence by locating them in academic setting within the select literary texts. Johan Galtung’s notion of structural violence is

that it is “a structure” that is “churning out harm” and “causing basic human needs deficits” (36). This chapter highlights one of the most invisible forms of violence projected unintentionally to students. The chapter analyses how the school itself inflicts harm on its students through curriculum and system which are meant to provide education and advancement to students. Using Galtung’s framework helps in categorising and locating instances of structural violence in academic environment. The chapter also engages in Hannah Arendt’s notion of violence.

Chapter 5: Conclusion:

The concluding chapter reflects upon the key insights drawn from the thematic analysis of select six novels highlighting the school-life of American students and the hurdles they go through in navigating the halls of their schools. The study sets out to explore how schools, instead of protecting students from harm often function as sites of exploitation through mechanisms such as suppression, exclusion, silence and neglect. Guided by Johan Galtung’s theory of violence, Zizek’s notion of violence, Hannah Arendt’s critique of violence and power and Foucault’s concept of power, alongside a gender-conscious reading, this thesis has demonstrated that the violence experienced by students in school settings is varied and complex. The literature analysed offers not only a reflection of these dynamics but also a powerful critique revealing how violence is embedded in everyday reality in schools and how violence is normalised and remains unseen due to its undetectable nature as it is embedded in the culture and structure of the school itself.

This chapter has laid the foundation for the understanding of instances of violence in American schools. It shows the necessity of a deeper analysis of violence that do not only lead to outburst or extreme aggression such as school shooting as there are deeper layers that are responsible for such outburst of violence. While violence in schools is often portrayed through instances such as pushing or shoving or causing physical pain, this study argues that violence can take many forms and physical aggression is only the tip of the iceberg. Underneath the physical forms of violence lie the subtle forms of violence that tend to occur daily such as name-calling, intimidation, threats or social exclusion leading to mental exhaustion. When

such acts that tend to look small when taken in isolation, takes place almost on a daily basis, it takes a toll on the person and accumulates into such a heavy burden that the person tends to release the suffering through violent acts of physical outburst. The next chapter detects the location of physical or direct forms of violence as portrayed in the select primary texts in school setting. The chapter also analyses the perpetrator's violent behaviour by employing general strain theory, social learning theory and control balance theory.

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CHAPTER 2

LOCATING DIRECT VIOLENCE

The concept of violence requires the understanding that it extends beyond physical aggression. One of the attributes of violence stated by the World Health Organization is that it is “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group of community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation” (5). This definition posits threat as a form of violence, thereby helping in locating violence within threat itself, independent of any violent action since it generates fear and psychological distress. Therefore, violence can be located through the resulting consequences which manifest not only as physical injuries but also as psychological distress. Fairchild contends that “violence is an epidemic in America. Many thousands lose their lives to violence every year...The financial costs are in the hundreds of billions of dollars annually...The emotional and psychological costs are inestimable” (13). Violence is pertinently feasible even though it seems such an intimidating task to do. Therefore, it has permeated through all spheres of life. Fairchild asserts that it “can be explored in the context of where it occurs: at home, at school, at work, or in the broader public sphere” (14). Due to its feasible nature, violence is seeping through a sphere that, in its nature, should be the solution to it. That is the sphere of the educational institution, especially the K12 schools in American context. K12 schools indicate the educational institutions consisting of kindergarten through the twelfth grade. Violence of any kind occurring within the school campus, or in places even outside the school campus where various school-linked programs are held can be asserted as school violence. Sharon Llewellyn Clark gives her observation on school violence as:

The term “school violence” emerged in 1992. Throughout the research literature, school violence has been defined in many ways with no one definition accepted as final. Definitions of school violence represent a continuum of behaviours revolving around physical harm, psychological harm, and property damage (Clark 1).

School violence is not a new phenomenon. Yet it tends to be elusive in its definition and meaning. Furlong, Morrison and Dear assert that “there continues to be

confusion over the exact meaning of the term” even though this “issue of school violence has gained national prominence (qtd. in Scott et al, 309). Jackson Toby states that “violence in school is not new. Especially at the college level, deaths and injuries from hazing have long occurred sporadically...But widespread violence in public and secondary schools seems to have developed only in the past generation, especially in the United States but increasingly in other urban-industrial societies” (1). Even though school violence as a phenomenon is not new, this does not diminish the importance of its recognition as a problem, both at the personal and the community level as a whole. A national survey of American school social workers conducted in 1997 suggests that “school social workers did not perceive violence as a serious problem on the basis of a single event even when the event was life-threatening. From a zero-tolerance perspective, school violence as a problem was underestimated in all community settings but more often in suburban and rural settings than in inner-city or urban settings. The social workers’ perception of a serious problem was contingent on the presence of multiple types of violence and the community setting of the school” (Astor et al 1).

In the 2021 annual report on National Center for Education Statistics, the School–Associated Violent Death Surveillance System provides definitions and parameters inclusive for extreme violence in school resulting in deaths as -

[A] homicide, suicide, or legal intervention death (involving a law enforcement officer), in which the fatal injury occurred on the campus of a functioning elementary or secondary school in the United States. School-associated violent deaths also include those that occurred while the victim was on the way to or from regular sessions at school or while the victim was attending or traveling to or from an official school-sponsored event. Victims of school-associated violent deaths may include not only students and staff members but also others at school, such as students’ parents and community members (1).

Anderson and his colleagues define a school-associated violent death as “a homicide, suicide, legal intervention (victim killed by a police officer in the line of duty), or

unintentional firearm-related death.” Clark states that “The United States Department of Education and the United States Secret Service issued a joint report that examined 37 instances of targeted school violence occurring in U.S. schools between 1974 and June 2000” (2). She then defines targeted school violence as “an attack upon someone by a recent or current student using lethal means (e.g., gun) on school grounds” (2). She further states:

The investigators searched public and subscription databases and consulted with law enforcement officials and experts in the area of school violence to identify incidents that met the definition of targeted school violence. Investigation, school, court, and mental health records from 37 instances were investigated according to a detailed set of descriptors that were then analysed for commonalities. In some instances, the data collection also included interviewing the perpetrator of the incident of targeted school violence. A major finding of this report was that 71% of the attackers believed that they had been bullied or persecuted. These findings were echoed in another study that found that students who were homicide perpetrators were two times as likely as victims to be bullied by peers (3).

Johan Galtung defines violence in the following way:

Violence is any avoidable insult to basic human needs...Violence lowers the real level of needs satisfaction below what is potentially possible. Violence to human beings hurt and harm body, mind and spirit. Hurting/harming one of them usually affects the other two through somatic transfers...Violence leaves deep wounds, trauma, that is difficult to heal. Violence to the mind takes the form of distorted cognitions and emotions, and to the spirit the form of hopelessness (*Pioneer* 35).

For him, violence is experienced at three levels. At the first level, violence is experienced in the body when the body is harmed or hurt physically. The second is in the mind wherein a person’s mind and emotions are changed in such a way that their mindset and perspective becomes twisted from reality in a negative way. For instance, due to constant bullying, a child may develop a negative mindset that he is

not successful and not good enough like his classmates even though he may get good grades. This then leads to distorted emotions such as feeling intense rage over small disagreement amongst peers. Thirdly, violence is experienced at the spiritual level through the state of hopelessness a person experiences. He further adds that “[t]hreats of violence are also violence, as insults to mind, creating distortions and hopelessness through fear” (32). He continues:

The object of violence is any carrier of life, particularly a human being, an actor, individual or collective...The subject of violence can be any actor, as in intended actor or direct violence. Or, a structure at work, churning out harm, causing basic human needs deficits, as in un-intended, indirect, or structural violence. Or, culture at work when used to legitimize direct and structural violence (32).

For Galtung, there are three kinds of violence. Direct violence is when a person intentionally harms another human being or group of people. Structural violence is when harm is done to people through systems unintentionally as the systems are usually designed for the good of others but its functioning proves otherwise. Cultural violence is the segment of culture that let others believe that their suffering, fear or hopelessness are natural part of life and are to be accepted, subtly teaching that the violence they are suffering from is okay or normal. Galtung focusses on the need to go beyond direct violence that is clearly visible to the subtle forms such as cultural and structural that are not functioning in the background. In the same vein, Zizek forms his theory of violence. He does not explicitly cite or state Galtung in his work *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* published in 2008 while Galtung has already published his work in which he introduces the concept of direct and structural violence in 1969. He later included cultural violence in 1990. Zizek categorises violence into two types, subjective and objective violence. Under objective violence, he places symbolic and systemic kinds of violence. Subjective violence according to Zizek constitutes “acts of crime and terror...violence performed by a clearly identifiable agent” (1). Objective kinds of violence consist of “the contours of the background which generates such outburst” (1). He classifies objective violence into two. The first is symbolic violence “embodied in language and its forms” (1). It is

considered to be akin to Galtung's cultural violence. The other is systemic violence which is "the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems...the violence inherent in a system" (2, 9).

Direct violence tends to take the central stage when violence occurs in schools such as school shooting which this chapter will be dealing with in particular. Willert contends that in using the term violence, the first notion that comes to mind is the kind of violence that causes "severe injury or death" (2). The most common perception of violence is that it is a behaviour that is intended to hurt or kill someone as Zizek states-

At the forefront of our minds, the obvious signals of violence are acts of crime and terror, civil unrest, international conflict (1).

This popular notion of violence is used and accepted extensively because of its obvious distinguishable trait and clearly identifiable nature. Johan Galtung asserts that violence constitutes "any avoidable insult to basic human needs" (Galtung 35). This concept serves as a foundational element in this study of violence. His theory of violence serves as the overarching framework for understanding violence beyond physical acts. It has been widely acknowledged that the different manifestations of violence in schools can be categorised through this lens. He classifies these basic needs into four categories: survival, wellness, freedom, and identity (35). Galtung contends that violence emerges when the attainment of these needs is obstructed to the extent that they are not satisfied, or when the potential for their attainment of these needs is "lowered below what is potentially possible" (35). Consequently, the obstruction of these essential needs precipitates acts of violence. His framework enables one to locate the different forms of violence within academic environments, categorising the various forms of violence into direct, structural and cultural violence. The author asserts that the nature of these forms of violence differs depending on the subject or perpetrator, which encompasses both human entities and non-human elements such as structure or culture. For him, "the object of violence is any carrier of life, particularly a human being, an actor, individual or collective" (36). Violence is defined as the misuse of strength and capacity to inflict pain and

distress on the mind, body and spirit, whether intentionally or unintentionally. In the context of educational institutions, violence encompasses various forms of violence that manifest both within the school campus and in external settings where school related activities occur. It is essential to recognise that violence in schools is a multi-dimensional and complex phenomenon. It extends beyond physical acts. It includes the behaviours and attitudes that schools normalises, overlooks, or perpetuates. The presentation of school shootings as one of the most extreme forms of violence in school tends to be predominant, which characterises school shootings as the most visible and most damaging. This condition of predominance provides a foundational basis for the study as it evokes the need to bring into the limelight subtle forms of violence which can be even more detrimental than school shootings, even though the consequential result may not directly lead to death. The detrimental effects of subtle forms of violence lie in the accumulation of what appear as small events of violence, such as name-calling, shaming, intimidation, bullying, punching and shoving. “It may seem like a small role now, but it matters. In the end, everything matters” (Asher 13). Ryan Clancy in *Give a Boy a Gun* (2000) recalls why Brendan resorted to a school shooting in the end. He recounts the damaging consequences of subtle forms of violence that accumulate over time, causing silent pain and inner turmoil that can further explode into fatal incidents. He states, “It’s stupid to point at one incident and say, “It’s all because of this.” It has to be something that builds gradually and eats at you for a long time until you go psycho” (Strasser 61). This study identifies and detects different manifestations of violence in the American academic context that harm the body, mind and spirit by delving deeper into the cultural aspect that sustains forms of violence that are difficult to detect through their teachings and practices, and the institutional aspect that harm students unintentionally through the system. It provides a ground on which the nuances of violence can be studied and located within the school environment in the United States of America. Also, this research articulates literary accounts of representations that focus on forms of violence looming large in the schools of America.

This chapter locates the different kinds of direct violence in school settings. Direct or personal violence “refers to the type of violence where there is an actor that

commits the violence” (Galtung 170). Direct violence for Galtung is a survival needs deficit resulting in death. Well-being needs deficit results in maiming and siege. Identity needs deficit results in desocialization and resocialization. Freedom needs deficit results in repression, detention and expulsion (292). Among the instances of direct violence, school shooting stands out as the most damaging and prominent one, affecting everyone involved even mentally and emotionally if not physically. In *Give a Boy a Gun*, Paul Burns recounts his experience of the shooting:

They were yelling at us to get away from the doors. That the doors were booby-trapped. They herded us all into the center of the gym and told us to lie facedown. Mr. Curry tried to get stern and tough, and started to tell Gary to put down the gun. Gary didn’t say a word. He just fired off half a dozen quick shots at the ceiling. Those bullets ricocheted around up there. One of them came back down so close to my face I could feel the air move (126, 127).

In *Nineteen Minutes* (2007), the terror and chaos of shooting inside the school is portrayed in the aftermath inspection by Patrick, a police officer after reaching the scene:

The cinder-block walls were chipped where bullets had pierced or grazed them A vending machine – glass shattered, bottles pierced...He walked down the main aisle of the cafeteria. It looks, at first glance, like a science fiction movie: everyone had been in the middle of eating and chatting and joking around with friends, and then in the blink of an eye, all the humans were abducted...Another officer examined blood-spatter patterns...Patrick stared over the bodies of two girls who lay sprawled on the floor like mirror twins...John thought of Courtney Ignatio...how suddenly there had been a flower blooming in the middle of her chest, bright as poppy. ‘How many dead?’ ‘Ten confirmed’” (59-63).

Cameron Porter describes the shooting incident in the novel *Shooter* (2004):

Len shot a blast at us and knocked out the glass from a display case. The glass shattered and blew all over the hallway and Carla screamed. I turned and saw Len headed toward us, and I jerked Carla’s sleeve and we started

running down the stairs. I was yelling that Len had guns and was bleeding and everything but I knew it wasn't coming out right. Len started shooting down the stairwell and bullets were flying every which way" (137).

The aftermath reveals the horror of the shooting:

When we entered the hallway, the walls were splattered with blood. There was a student on the floor, motionless. Leonard was further down the corridor, crouched behind a locker bank, holding a rifle (195).

School shootings resulting in deaths and suicide are examples of Galtung's concept of survival need deficit resulting in death. Survival needs refer to the basic requirements for physical safety and security. In *Nineteen Minutes* (2007), Peter kills nine students and one teacher. In *Shooter*, "a student was killed on the spot; several other students were wounded" (Myers 139). The student killed is Brad Williams, and Leonard also takes his own life after the shooting. "From the positioning of the wounds it appeared that Gray had placed the muzzle of the rifle in his mouth and self-inflicted a fatal wound" (160). From the major findings of the School-Associated Violent Death study, it is discovered that "[h]omicide is the second leading cause of death among youth aged 5-18. Data from this study indicate that between 1% and 2% of these deaths happen on school grounds or on the way to and from school" (Conley 7).

Maiming as direct violence is located in *Give a Boy a Gun* where Ryan Clancy, a popular jock who was known for bullying Brendan and Gary is injured severely, getting permanent damage by shooting him in the knee and is left paralyzed. "They wanted him to roll over on his back so they could shoot him in the knee. They didn't want to shoot him in the back of the knee, because they weren't sure if that would cripple him or not. They wanted to shoot him in the kneecap. They wanted to make sure he'd be ruined for life" (Strasser 139). Ryan himself states, "I remember hearing a pop, and then there was just pain – so much pain. I couldn't feel my legs. I knew something was wrong. I looked down and saw blood everywhere" (91). This shows maiming of Ryan during the school shooting. In *Nineteen Minutes*, Patrick Durham who is the detective describes how he finds the girl who has been

shot: “The girl on the floor had been shot in the abdomen. Blood fanned out beneath her like a halo. Her hand was twitching, but she wasn’t screaming. That would come later” (120). In *Shooter*, a teacher is maimed during Leonard’s shooting. “Mr. Solberg was struck twice – in the arm and the lower back. He may never walk again” (210).

Siege is another form of direct violence caused by a well-being needs deficit. In *Give a Boy a Gun*, the sense of being in a military operation where forces surround a place to cut off supplies to compel surrender is experienced where “two heavily armed young men...rigged booby-trap bombs in a way that kept us from getting to the doors from the outside. Inside they chained the doors shut” (121). In *Shooter* the school counsellor states his experience: “The SWAT guys were everywhere. We had to keep our heads down. They didn’t know if Len had more weapons or explosives” (202). Cameron also narrates his account:

The school was in lockdown. No one knew where the shots were coming from, or if the shooter was still in the building. Kids were crying in the hallways, trying to hide behind lockers. Some teachers barricaded the doors (211).

Galtung’s concept of imposing sanctions as direct violence refers to using threats to maintain control, to make others conform or to suppress dissent. In *Shooter*, Cameron continually faces threat from his peers even when he does nothing, saying “Hey Cameron, what are you looking at? Look someplace else or I’ll beat the crap out of you” (Myers 97). In *Nineteen Minutes*, imposing sanction taking the form of verbal threat is portrayed. “Matt grabbed Peter by the collar and hissed, ‘You talk to her again, and I’ll make sure you never walk right again’” (81). Threats and intimidations are used to silence truth in *Speak* (1999): “Andy Evans leaned close and whispered, ‘You better keep your mouth shut, Melinda, or you’ll regret it’” (163). In *Thirteen Reasons Why* (2007), imposing sanction takes the form of social rejection and reputational destruction. Bryce warns Hannah, “If you don’t do what I say, I’ll ruin you. You’ll be the next rumour” (194).

Misery is another form of violence caused by a well-being needs deficit. It manifests as bullying or harassment that goes unaddressed by the school administration. Brendan in *Give a Boy a Gun* laments on how persistent abuse he faces create emotional misery: “They’d trip me in the hall, shove me into lockers, call me ‘faggot’ and ‘loser’. Every day, I stopped caring. I just wanted it to stop” (59). He writes on his suicide note how others are making his life miserable: “You made my friggin’ life miserable. How? By the way you raised your kids to all want to be the same and to hate anyone who dares to be a little different” (17). In *Nineteen Minutes*, Picoult narrates instances of bullying that used to take place in schools. One such incident is when “Drew...tore off a piece of the damp napkin and stuck it in his mouth, then tossed the spitball at the back of an overweight boy who carried the tuba in the school marching band” (337). Peter used to be bullied by his own brother besides the bullying he used to face from his peers.

He used to tell people I was adopted. That my mother was a crack whore, and that’s why my brain was all fucked up. Sometimes he did it right in front of me, and when I’d get pissed off and whale on him he’d just laugh and knock me on my ass and then he’d look back to his friends, as if this was proof of everything he’d been saying in the first place (238).

Dan Olweus states that “[a] person is being bullied or victimised when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons. Negative actions include things like hitting, name-calling, or other forms of verbal or physical aggression” (35). Peter faces bullying constantly trapping him in a state of misery. Josie laments to her mother that “Drew picks on him all the time and Peter gets hurt” (Picoult 90). The constant state of misery leads to desocialization and repression which fall under direct violence according to Galtung. Peter is pushed into a state of desocialization through peer rejection. Since he was bullied constantly, even his childhood friend Josie refuses to be his friend anymore, telling him to back off when he tries to help her saying “Don’t ever talk to me again” (Picoult 271). Repression is the suppression of freedom. Peter is bullied “outside of school, too” (171) resulting in his freedom-need deficit. Galtung’s concept of resocialization is highlighted in Asher’s *Thirteen Reasons Why* where adults try to

change students by force instead of understanding and lending help. Hannah is subjected to social expectation about how she should behave. She is advised to erase the pain of rape in favour of social conformity which becomes a form of resocialisation.

Mass shooting in schools, for Galtung, is direct violence which is a situation where “a little challenge would trigger considerable killing and atrocity”, indicating “a situation of unstable equilibrium, where the level of actual realization is not sufficiently protected against deterioration by upholding mechanisms” (*Violence* 172). The consequences of direct violence are immense and can be seen clearly with the naked eyes. Due to this nature, Galtung states that “it is not strange that attention has been focussed more on direct than on structural violence” (*Violence* 173). He further gives the reason for this, stating that “[p]ersonal violence represents change and dynamism-not only ripples on waves, but waves on otherwise tranquil waters. In a static society, personal violence will be registered, whereas structural violence may be seen as about as natural as the air around us” (173). However, the mere visibility of direct violence may not amount to the extent of destruction and damage it can create. Even though it seems disastrous on the outside, the other kinds of violence such as cultural and structural violence “may contain much more violence” (174). According to Zizek, there exist three different forms of violence. He states that the first form is “the obvious signals of violence” such as “acts of crime and terror, civil unrest, international conflict (1). However, he asserts the need to “perceive the contours of the background which generates such outbursts” by learning to “step back, to disentangle ourselves from the fascinating lure of this directly visible “subjective” violence, violence performed by a clearly identifiable agent” (1). This “subjective” violence becomes the first kind of violence theorised by Zizek. It is “the most visible portion of a triumvirate” that also includes the other two kinds of violence such as “symbolic violence embodied in language and its forms”, and “systemic violence...the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems” (1,2).

In a report in the 2021 National Center for Education Statistics, school shooting is defined as those in which “a gun is brandished or fired or a bullet hits

school property for any reason, regardless of the number of victims (including zero) (3). The report states:

Between 2000-01 and 2019-20, the number of school shootings with casualties per year at public and private elementary and secondary schools ranged from 11 to 75. In 2019-20, there were a total of 75 school shootings with casualties, including 27 school shootings with deaths and 48 school shootings with injuries only. There were an additional 37 reported school shootings with no casualties in 2019-20. The majority of the school shootings (including those with and without casualties) in 2019-20 occurred at high schools. Sixty-seven high schools had school shootings in 2019-20, compared with 32 elementary schools, 11 middle or junior high schools, and 2 schools of other types...Between 2000-01 and 2019-20, the number of casualties per year as a result of school shootings ranged from 15 to 182. In 2019-20, there were 120 casualties (32 deaths and 88 injuries) from school shootings (3).

In the systematic review of school-associated violent deaths, Anderson and colleagues find that “[i]n the latter half of the 1990s, the United States experienced a series of high-profile school shootings that generated considerable media attention and public alarm”. They state that it was only “in 1996” that “the first systematic review of school-associated violent deaths” began to be published, by “the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in conjunction with the US Departments of Education and Justice”. They find that “[m]ost events (of school shooting) occurred around the start of the school day, the lunch period, or the end of the school day.”

Mass shooting in school then becomes one of the most easily discernible forms of direct school violence. The disastrous phenomenon of school shooting has become increasingly popular in the United States of America despite schools being supposedly a centre for the elimination of such horrifying situations. The “traditional expectation that schools are safe places for children is changing” (Toby 2). Gun violence is the most visible and seen as the most horrifying kind of violence in the context of school. Harold H. Fairchild also observes that there are the “nauseating

recurrences of mass shootings in schools” in America (13). The effect of a targeted school shooting is enormous. Fairchild recognizes this problem, stating that “[t]he problem of GV (Gun Violence) is not limited to homicide. Indeed, for every death by handgun, six individuals survive their wounds and they often suffer lifelong physical and psychological traumas” (19). Its effect and consequences leave unwanted fear and trauma surrounding it which is evident as under:

According to a 2018 Pew Research Center Survey, a majority of American teenagers-especially those who are not white or are from lower income families-are worried about the possibility of a shooting happening at their school. Since the 1999 shooting at Columbine High School, almost all K-12 public school districts have developed and adopted procedures to follow in the event of a shooting, and most currently conduct active shooter drills...In addition to the loss of life often resulting from school shootings, a shooting that occurs in school can profoundly disturb a community’s sense of safety and security and may have lasting effects for students, teacher, principals and parents. As a result of their trauma, students can experience fear, anxiety, worry, difficulty concentrating, angry outbursts, and aggression. Students who experience the trauma of a school shooting might also perform poorly in school or attempt to harm themselves (United States Government Accountability 1).

The primary texts inhibiting direct violence where school shootings are analysed are all based on the Columbine School massacre in 1999 in Colorado. The characters themselves say it outright. For instance, in Todd Strasser’s *Give a Boy a Gun*, one of the shooters Brendan e-mailed his friend and ally Gary – “I will kill every...one of them. It’s gonna be Columbine all over again, only better. Harris and Klebold did it right. Blow the...school, then blow yourself away. I wish I could have met them” (71). Columbine High School shooting is not the first instance of a school massacre in the history of America. However, it has gained popularity and its narrative lives on to this day, unlike other school shootings. In The Washington Post published on 18th April 2019, Valerie Strauss published her study on the immense influence and popularity of the Columbine shooting. She questions why the “April 20, 1999, mass

shootings at Columbine High School in Colorado become a blueprint for future shooters” when “it was hardly the first time that shootings took place on school campuses”. She asserts that firstly, this is mainly due to the effect of media, and secondly, it is due to the role played by society and culture as well. She explicates the massive effect of the Columbine shooting:

Media coverage of the Columbine school shooting that took place in 1999 has ended up becoming a playbook for school shooters in the United States and beyond...When 12 students and one teacher were killed in Littleton, Colorado...it not only became what at the time was the worst high school shooting in U.S. history. It also marked when American society was first handed a script for a new form of violence in schools...Since the 1999 tragedy at Columbine High School, we identified six mass shootings and 40 active shooter incidents at elementary, middle or high schools in the United States. Mass shootings are defined by the FBI as an event in which four or more victims died by gunfire.

In nearly half of the 46 school shootings, the perpetrator purposely used Columbine as a model:

Columbine’s influence continues until this day. On April 17 – just three days ahead of the 20th anniversary of the Columbine shooting – authorities closed schools across Colorado due to a credible threat of a woman armed with a shotgun and who was “infatuated with Columbine.”...Several shooters...were fascinated with Columbine and researched the massacre before their own. This includes the Parkland shooter...and a 15-year-old who shot at his teacher after she refused to praise Marilyn Manson...who was erroneously blamed for inspiring the Columbine killers. (Strauss).

There still exist several other school shootings, like the Sandy Hook Elementary school shooting, the North Carolina, Santa Fe, Oregon and Washington which were all Columbine inspired shootings. Its effect is even felt abroad in the March 2019 shooting occurring in Brazil. Strauss asserts that “Columbine’s longevity was that its perpetrators created manifestos and home movies of their preparations in hopes that

their story would outlive them.” The Columbine shooting has a staggering effect on students across the nation. N.D. Brener, T.R. Simon, M. Anderson, and L.C. Barrios make use of the data collected in the Youth Risk Behaviour Survey of 1999 “to compare student attitudes across the nation before and after the shootings at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. Of the participating students, 3.9% reported that they felt too unsafe to go to school before the Columbine shootings. After the school violence at Columbine, 10.2% of students reported that they believed that it was too unsafe to go to school” (qtd. in Clark, 4). However, one interesting fact from this survey is that “there was no significant increase in weapon carrying, fighting, or being threatened or injured with a weapon on school property (Clark 4). However, the “percentage of students who reported making an injurious suicide attempt” increased from “2.5%” to “3.2%” after the Columbine incident (4).

Direct violence is violence easily seen and immediately felt as wrong and harmful. Robert Agnew’s general strain theory analyses the relationship between strain and violent behaviour asserting that only some strained individuals turn to delinquency and predicts that several factors condition the impact of strain. The strains increase the likelihood that individuals will experience a range of negative emotions:

GST recognises that only some strained individuals turn to delinquency and it predicts that several factors condition the impact of strain on delinquency...There are three major types of strain or negative relationships; others may (1) prevent individuals from achieving their positively valued goals, including monetary, status and autonomy goals; (2) remove or threaten to remove positively valued stimuli that individuals possess (e.g., the death of friends or family members, the loss of romantic partners); and (3) present or threaten to present individuals with noxious or negatively valued stimuli (e.g., verbal insults, physical assaults). These strains increase the likelihood that individuals will experience a range of negative emotions. These emotions create pressure for corrective action, and delinquency is one possible response (Agnew et al, 43).

These emotions create pressure that may result in violence. For instance, in *Give a Boy a Gun*, it is stated that “[f]ootball is part of the social fabric of this town” and that the players are “the ones that give Middletown a sense of accomplishment” (45). Gary and Brendan who are the shooters are not football players. Brendan and his family moves from Springfield to Middletown. In Springfield “[h]e was smart and funny and a pretty good athlete” (19) which all changed after moving to Middletown. “Brendan and Gary got picked on. That’s a fact. We all did” (37). Not being a part of socially celebrated community in the school and changing school create strain that eventually led them to violent outburst. A major challenge in general strain theory lies in the notion that some individuals despite experiencing strains do not engage in criminal behaviour or commit violence. Social learning theory suggests that violence is learned and that students replicate violent behaviours observed in their peers, family and media. Ruth Triplett states that the theory “assumes that people, at birth, have neither a motivation to commit crime nor to conform” (1). Whether a person commits a crime or conforms depends on the surrounding individuals from whom they learn and replicate their behaviours. In *Shooter*, the shooter Leonard Gray has already been exposed to the act of shooting through his father in “a camp where his father shot sometimes” (23). He has already learned to shoot pop-up targets and when the time comes when he wants to exact revenge on his bullies, he is not hesitant to pull the trigger. When physical violence takes place, a question arises as to how the perpetrators of violence are able to commit such crimes. The need for a broader look at the whole event arises, and in this vein, Zizek states: “We need to perceive the contours of the background which generates such outbursts (of violent acts (1). A step back enables us to identify a violence that sustains our very efforts to fight violence and to promote tolerance” (1). As such, Zizek claims that what seems to be the “irrational” explosions of subjective violence” is not so “irrational” when one looks beyond the surface and sees the other kind of violence at play (2). The obvious perpetrators of violence, like the shooters in *Nineteen Minutes*, *Give a Boy a Gun*, and *Shooter*, are also victims of violence such as name-calling, intimidation, and being pushed and shoved. Acts which seem as innocuous as name-calling is violent in the sense that it “presupposes a minimal recognition of the other party” (Zizek 60). This is termed “symbolic violence” by Zizek which is “violence

embodied in language and its forms” (1). In the 2002 report on Violence Theory Workshop, Robert Agnew clarifies that “[p]rovocations (such as pushing, shoving and kicking) make one aware of control imbalances, which ultimately result in violence” according to Charles R. Tittle’s control balance theory (National Institute of Justice 10). The study focusses on the how and why of youth violence through perpetrator-centred theories such as control balance theory as stated above. Strain theory is also utilized for such analysis in which Agnew elucidates that “[n]egative personal treatment may result in crime or violence” (10).

Valerie Strauss (Washington Post) asserts that the public contributes to school shootings:

Through our obsession with true crime and films, books, memes, and entire websites devoted to Columbine. By releasing CCTV footage of the shooting to the public. By running our children through regular lockdowns and active shooter drills starting in preschool through 12th grade. By sending them to school through secure entrances with clear backpacks and bullet proof binders. Society and culture have reared a Columbine generation, modeling that this is just part of childhood in America.”

When violence in school takes place, it is easy to put blame of the students’ inability to achieve academic success. However, academic failure may contribute to it yet it cannot solely be the reason for it. There will be reasons for their academic failure, and the personality and the environment in which they grow up contribute to it. They are all equally important to precipitate violent acts in the perpetrator. Johan Galtung asserts that personal violence such as school shootings, “to a large extent, is seen as subject to the whims and wishes of individuals” (*Violence* 173). Then, a question arises as to why the perpetrators develop such wishes to harm others. Moreover, when a shooting takes place, along with the ones shot, several other people are injured during the shooting. The epitome of Robert K. Merton’s strain theory is that “most people strive to achieve culturally recognized goals (“culturally defined goals, purposes, and interests”))” (672). A state of anomie develops when access to these goals is blocked to entire groups of people or individuals since “the acceptable

modes of achieving these goals” are beyond their reach (673). When such a situation arises, a person is prone to become strained or stressed, mentally as well as physically, resulting eventually in violent behaviour. Similarly, Albert Cohen also observed:

Much delinquency stems from the blockage of success goals experienced disproportionately by lower-class juveniles...Specifically, lower-class juveniles often arrive at school without the knowledge, values and skills necessary to achieve success through legitimate means. As a result, they fall behind their middle – class peers and fail to meet the expectations of their middle – class teachers. In short, these juveniles are unable to live up to the middle – class “measuring rod”. They are defined as problems by school officials and are effectively denied a legitimate pathway to middle – class status (qtd. in Bryant, 182).

In his pursuit of finding the reason why perpetrators commit violence, Merton reasons in his strain theory that it goes beyond innate man’s biological instinct which has always been considered to be its major source. Instead, he places the source of violent behaviour in social structure. He states:

There persists a notable tendency in sociological theory to attribute the malfunctioning of social structure primarily to those of man’s imperious biological drives which are not adequately restrained by social control. In this view, the social order is solely a device for “impulse management” and the “social processing” of tensions. These impulses will break through social control...(which) are held to be biologically derived. Nonconformity is assumed to be rooted in original nature. Conformity is by implication the result of an utilitarian calculus or unreasoned conditioning. This point of view, whatever its other deficiencies, clearly begs one question. It provides no basis for determining the nonbiological conditions which induce deviations from prescribed patterns of conduct...(but however), certain phases of social structure generate the circumstances in which infringements of social codes constitutes a “normal” response” (672).

What is most notable here is the fact that when social environment becomes too harsh and intimidating for a person, then that person reacts and retaliates in response to it, and when that happens, that response is not surprising or not understandable, but it is normal. Brezina states that “a defining feature of Merton’s strain theory is that it locates the origins of deviant behavior in a contradictory configuration of cultural and structural arrangements” (180). Merton argued that crime more often represented “the normal reaction, by normal persons, to abnormal conditions” (qtd. In Bryant, 181). The perpetrators of crime are normal people who are exposed to harsh and unlikely conditions to thrive. Like it is a known perception that when flowers wither, one changes the environment in which it grows, and not the flower itself.

The experience of strain is manifested across the select novels. In Todd Strasser’s novel *Give a Boy a Gun*, the author portrays instances occurring in the school of Middletown High. Among the students, the athletes are at the top of the hierarchy and considered to be “the dominant males”, and that it is in their “genes to keep the rest of the pack in line” (47, 48). So even when they resort to actions where they bully other students, the teachers make excuses for them such as Mr. Ellin, their new biology teacher who explains that it is their nature to display dominant actions by hurting others. The narrator Gary is hurt and says that the bully and athlete “Flach shoved me in the hall and called me a faggot right in front of Mr. Ellin” (47), and the teacher simply explains that it is their nature, and not even giving them punishment for their wrongful deed. Therefore being athletic, especially being on the football team becomes the culturally recognized goal in Middletown High in particular, and in America in general. There even exists an “unwritten law” as given in *Give a Boy a Gun*—

The (unwritten) law states that you may discipline a student athlete up to a point. But it must be an absolutely extraordinary situation for you to do anything that would impinge on that athlete’s ability to play for his team. To do so would be to invite the worst kind of scorn, not just from the football coaches, but from the administration, other teachers, and the town at large (65).

From the above extract, it becomes clear that being in the football team is the culturally recognized goal not only within the school but also in the town at large. This is evidenced in the statement of the townspeople – “Football is part of the social fabric of this town. It brings us together and gives us something to look forward to and talk about”, and that the players are “the ones that give Middletown a sense of accomplishment” (45). The students talked extensively about the popularity and importance of the footballers while considering the hierarchical status of the students. Emily Kirsch, one of the students states that “at the red - hot core were most of the football players and some of the guys from the other teams, and the cheerleaders and some of the pretty girls”, then she continues to proceed that the rest of the students do not matter to anyone, including “the teachers and the administrators” (41, 42). She also states that “even the grown – ups outside school, like the guy who pumped gas at the station and the lady who worked behind the counter at Starbucks. They all knew the football players by name, and they’d do extra things for them, like wash their windshield or slip them a free brownie” (42). She gives the distinction between the popular students and the rest of the students, stating that they are “like the Sun, and the rest of us (are) all these little planets stuck in orbits around them” (29). At the other end of the spectrum of the popular ones are the so – called “outcasts”, the “faggots”, the misfits (32, 70). It is also clear that academic success alone is not a culturally recognized goal in the context of American schools. This is clear in the instance stated by one of the students named Dustin Williams –

“At the end of the ninth grade we had this awards assembly. It was for everything, not just sports...Principal Curry announced the awards for the speech and debate team, and these kids started to go up on stage...these were brainy kids, and some of them looked okay, but a couple of them were wearing thick glasses and had funny builds. So the guys on the football team start booing...Could you imagine the speech and debate team booing when the football players got their awards? There would be a massacre (84, 85).

Agnew further implies that “adolescents will be more interested in the achievement of immediate goals rather than long – range goals like monetary success. The

immediate goals of adolescents may include such things as popularity with peers, good grades, doing well in athletics, and getting along with parents” (153). The perpetrators are not popular, maybe “really smart” like Leonard Gray who “read(s) a lot” but are not getting good grades nor getting along with their parents (Myers 37). All perpetrators in the texts analysed do not meet these immediate goals mentioned by Agnew, which contributes immensely to their experience of strain.

There exist other circumstances where the achievement of a valued goal is not blocked, but the source of strain is different. “Certain situations may be intrinsically aversive (e.g., the infliction of physical pain, the deprivation of sensory stimuli); they may be conditioned aversive stimuli (e.g., verbal insults); or the adolescent may simply be taught to experience these situations as aversive. The work of Schachter and Singer and Becker, for example, indicates that cues provided by the social environment may determine whether individuals experience emotionally arousing situations as pleasant or aversive. The inability to escape from these aversive situations will be frustrating, even though the achievement of valued goals is not threatened (Agnew 154-155).

The second major source of strain according to Agnew is “the blockage of pain – avoidance behaviour. Adolescents are compelled to remain in certain environments, such as family and school” (15). He further states:

Individuals...not only seek certain goals, they also try to avoid painful or aversive situations. According to Zillman, individuals engage in both reward – seeking and punishment – escaping behaviors. Like goal – seeking efforts, efforts to avoid painful situations may be blocked. Adolescents who find school aversive, for example, may be prevented from quitting school. This blockage of pain avoidance behavior is likely to be frustrating to the adolescent, irrespective of the goals the adolescent is pursuing. The blockage of pain avoidance behavior, then, constitutes another major source of strain...In particular, it is argued that adolescents are often placed in aversive situations from which they cannot legally escape. This blockage of pain –

avoidance behavior frustrates the adolescent and may lead to illegal escape attempts or anger – based delinquency (154).

In the three texts where mass school shooting is analysed, the perpetrators experience blockage of pain–avoidance behaviour. In Walter Dean Myers’ text *Shooter*, Leonard Gray and Cameron Porter are the perpetrators who suffer constant bullying in school. Sometimes they would be made “to get down on...knees and beg for mercy” by the jocks when they do not act the way they want (37). They often have to endure name – calling such as “Faggots, Pussies”, and the ones bullying them are mainly the jocks who like “slapping” them “around. Not hard. Just to show that they could” (37). Name-calling is disrespectful and deeply traumatizes the receivers, which is evident in Strasser’s *Give a Boy a Gun* when one of the students Ryan Clancy says that being called names such as “faggot...burned in your brain. It’s a permanent scar...It’s like torture. You know “Stick and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me”? It’s a load of crap. Names last a long time” (50). Amidst such a harsh environment in the school, dropping out of school is not an option for them. This is mainly due to their parents who are either absentee parents like the perpetrator in Jodi Picoult’s *Nineteen Minutes*; or too ambitious and competitive parents like Cameron Porter’s father in Walter Dean Myers’ *Shooter* who “would bring up the time” he “quit the basketball team” every time they “had a fight”, and even “elbowed” him “in the chest, really hard”, making him end up “with a bruise” on his face to make him learn a lesson (63). This theory is tested using data from a national sample of adolescent boys. Agnew states this data shows that “location in the aversive school and family environments has a direct effect on delinquency and an indirect effect through anger” (15). He further gives a differentiation between the two sources of strain already analysed. He asserts:

[O]ne way to keep the distinction between the two sources of strain clear is as follows. In the blockage of goal – seeking behavior, the individual is walking toward a valued goal and his or her path is blocked. In the blockage of pain – avoidance behavior, the individual is walking away from an aversive situation and his or her path is blocked. The two sources of strain are not incompatible and the same situation may be related to both types of strain. For example, an

adolescent picked on by teachers may be frustrated because there is no escape from this harassment or because the harassment interferes with the achievement of valued goals. The idea that the blockage of pain – avoidance behavior may lead to frustration and aggression is common in the physiological literature, and psychological research indicates that exposure to various types of aversive stimuli may lead to aggression, especially when the individual believes that the exposure is undeserved. These findings are paralleled in the sociological literature, where data indicate that delinquency is related to such aversive stimuli as parental rejection, unfair or inconsistent discipline, parental conflict, adverse or negative school experiences, and unsatisfactory relations with peers (155).

In a survey of data from the Youth in Transition Survey: a national survey of adolescent boys conducted by the Institute for Social Research by the University of Michigan in 1966, “[t]he data provide strong support for the idea that the blockage of pain – avoidance behaviour is a major source of delinquency” (qtd. in Agnew, 162). Timothy Brezina asserts that Robert Merton’s take on anomie – strain theory consists of “the notion of insatiable desires, but instead of rooting such desires in human nature they were now seen as products of culture and socialization. In particular, the cultural ethos known as the American Dream serves to promote ambition. Regardless of their current position in the stratification system, Americans are encouraged “never to stop trying and aspire to success, with an overwhelming emphasis on the accumulation of monetary wealth” (Bryant 180).

Agnew highlights two other categories of strain, including the loss of positively valued stimuli and the presentation of noxious or negatively valued stimuli. The loss of positively valued stimuli includes “a potentially wide range of negative events or experiences, including the theft of valued property, the loss of a romantic relationship, or the withdrawal of parental love” (qtd. in Bryant, 184). In Jodi Picoult’s *Nineteen Minutes*, Peter Houghton seems to experience additional strain when he loses his childhood friend Josie Cormier as she refuses to associate with him anymore. This is a massive loss for Peter since in his mind, she is also her potential lover. Cameron Porter in *Shooter* experiences withdrawal of parental love

when he “quit the basketball team” (63). This becomes a constant stressor for him since his father constantly brings this up in their fights, questioning “why he should pay” for his “college” since he said he “wasn’t even trying to get an athletic scholarship to help”, complaining “how many hours he was working to support” his “sorry ass” (64). For Brezina, the presentation of noxious stimuli also includes a wide range of negative experiences such as “harassment and bullying from peers, negative relations with parents and teachers, and criminal victimization” (qtd. in Bryant, 184). Harassment and bullying from peers are an everyday occurrence across the novels. In *Shooter*, Cameron Porter reports on how much bullying is going on in Madison High. He states: “It was pretty constant. Once you became a target, they kept zeroing in on you...Everywhere you turned, somebody was saying something or doing something. It got pretty intense...About the bullying. There are different parts to it. There’s the part where someone is pushing you around, or throwing your books on the ground” (47). Most of the time, from the texts analysed, bullying manifests in the form of pushing, shoving, name-calling, intimidating and so on. At other times, it can take an extreme turn, like the time the bullies “did the swirly” to Brendan Lawlor (Strasser 61). “They held him by the ankles and dunked his head in the toilet”, and that incident “really changed Brendan” (61).

Brezina asserts that Agnew “broadened the conception of strain to include a wider array of potential stressors” (qtd. In Bryant, 183). Agnew’s general strain theory include “[a]dditional goals and outcomes” that “appear to be especially important to young males, (which) include respect and masculine status (e.g., the expectation that one be treated “like a man”) (183). Respect is one of the most important elements in the context of human socialization. Even some of the students themselves realized the importance of showing respect to one another which is evident in the statement made by Emily Kirsch: “Maybe there should be a mandatory course in school that teaches kids to respect one another no matter what. I think that would be a lot more helpful than geometry” (Strasser 180-181). She makes these statements because she knows that the mass shooting would not have taken place if Brendan and Gary were shown respect and “accepted as people” even though they may be “different from other kids” (180). The perpetrators in the other primary texts

are also deprived of respect and are even considered not only not masculine but are deemed, homosexuals. There are names that recur throughout the texts analysed such as faggots, pussies, and homos. Then there are instances where Cameron Porter in Myers' *Shooter* is enquired by a psychologist named Dr. Richard Ewings whether he is a "closet gay" (31) or not, and whether he used to be close with his ally Leonard Gray who committed suicide after shooting his schoolmates because they were considered to be gays by their classmates. Therefore he assures him strongly: "I never thought of kissing him or any other guy...I'm not gay" (31).

An additional goal stated by Agnew that causes strain in adolescents if not acquired is "autonomy (e.g., the goal or desire to enjoy a certain amount of personal independence)" (qtd. in Bryant, 183). This is clearly evident in Emily Kirsch's statement in Strasser's *Give a Boy a Gun*. She states that "a lot of us didn't even want to be in that [popular] crowd. All we wanted was to be left alone (29). The perpetrators too want to be left alone. But they are deprived of the opportunity to do so doubly; firstly because they cannot simply drop off from school, and secondly, they are constantly picked on and bullied by the popular kids mainly the jocks, leading them to a state of constant strain where eventually they cannot control their own sanity anymore and commit horrendous crimes of mass murder. And lastly, another additional goal by Agnew is "the desire for thrills and excitement" (qtd. in Bryant, 183). There is no clearly stated evidence that the perpetrators in the texts analysed desire for thrills and excitement. However, traces of it may be seen in their actions. For instance, Brendan Lawlor is "seriously into first-person shooter video games" (Strasser 79). However, the affinity for playing video games is more likely to release their pent-up frustration by indulging in violent video games where they think they can reverse their role in real life by imagining the victims in the game to be their bullies, and then the shooters. This is evidenced in Peter, the perpetrator's statement in *Nineteen Minutes*: "That was the joy of a video game: watching someone who deserved it getting his comeuppance" (285). He becomes immensely immersed in this idea that he even attempts to create a video game called "Revenge of the Nerds...A fantasy world where the balance of power was turned on its head, where the underdog finally got a chance to beat the bullies" (285). However, it is already

stated that they are denied basic elements of living such as respect, therefore, the thought of thrills and excitement tends to be easily replaced by how they can avoid and free themselves from the constant bullying they have to face each day. In this regard, Charles R Tittle's control balance theory explains the reason for this occurrence. The perpetrators' lack of desire for thrill and excitement can be explained by control the bullies in particular, and culture as a whole exerts on them. Tittle explains: "Control does not imply complete prevention of the expression of behavioural motivations or goal achievements; rather, it implies that full realization of desires or impulses can be curtailed or limited...control does not necessarily involve conscious intent on the part of the one exercising it" (143, 144). The victims are repressed whether intentionally by the bullies, and unintentionally by society in general. They become so used to the kind of control exerted upon them that they tend to show lesser passion to chase thrill and excitement. They are limited to realize what makes them excited, and instead, their minds are saturated with thoughts and ways to overcome the injustice and how to free themselves. This mindset inculcated in them is evidenced in Cameron Porter when he is bullied by Brad Williams. He states that when he is pushed in the back, he feels like it is Brad's job to bully him and make him miserable, and his job is to simply take it (Myers 41).

In order to further reason why school shooters choose to commit violence, Charles R Tittle's control balance theory comes to the forefront. Braithwaite contends that the epitome of his theory is that "deviance is likely either when people are much more controlled than controlling or when they are much more controlling than controlled...it finds control ratios to influence motivation, provocation, opportunity and constraint" (77). Tittle defines deviance as "any behavior that the majority of a given group regards as unacceptable or that typically evokes a collective response of a negative type. In this definition, "unacceptable" means disapproved, wrong, shameful, pitiful, inappropriate, bad, abnormal, or loathsome – in short, behaviour that a group evaluates negatively. Majority means that over one-half of the people in a specified bounded group regard the behaviour as unacceptable. The arbitrariness of this cutoff point is tolerable because the main objective is not to classify behaviour as simply deviant or conforming but rather to array it on a

continuum from very nondeviant (almost nobody considers it unacceptable) to very deviant (almost everybody in the group considers it unacceptable), with all behaviour falling somewhere on the scale. “Collective response to a negative type” implies that the majority of the specified group typically does something to express its displeasure or that the officials who possess coercive power over the group typically respond to the behaviour in a way that expresses negative evaluation (125). He categorizes deviance, in which predation is the first. Homicide is included in this category which the chapter is focusing on. He states that “as a category, predation appears to be among the most serious of deviant acts. Most acts of predation are regarded as very wrong morally, and most people, including those with large capacities to emit controlling responses, regard them as threatening even if they are not themselves victims” (137).

When a school shooting occurs, one tends to look for answers as to what propels the shooter to get to the point of killing others. Tittle contends that the motivation for doing so firstly is “the individual’s perception or feeling that committing an act regarded by most others as inappropriate or unacceptable might allow that person to alter the balance of control he or she normally exercises relative to that which he or she normally experiences, even if temporarily” (145). The credibility of this notion is seen in Gary’s suicide note: “If I go this way, taking the people who made my life miserable with me, then maybe it will send a message. Maybe something will change, and some other miserable kid like me somewhere will get treated better and maybe find a reason to live” (Strasser 134). Here we see Gary’s desperate attempt to alter the balance of control bullied kids like him have by carrying out the unacceptable act of school shooting. The urge or desire to commit violence secondly, as Tittle contends, is “a basic desire for autonomy” (145). He explains the desire for autonomy as “escaping control over oneself and exercising more control over the social and physical world than one experiences,” further implicating that it is “almost universal among humans...the idea is not simply that people want to subdue their environment. Instead, they desire, first, to escape control, and second, to exercise more control than that to which they are subject; the two in combination constitute a desire for autonomy” (145, 147). This is all about the desire

to exert more control in their daily life, and experiencing lesser control people exert upon them. The desire to escape control exerted upon a person is prominently highlighted in Brendan's suicide note. He talks about how American parents want their children to look up to the same thing such as football, questioning students like him – "Why can't they go out for sports or at least root for our team?" (152). Then he questions his teachers why being different bothered them and tries to make them "conform to...narrow – minded expectations of how" they are "supposed to dress and act" even though they teach that "America is supposed to be about freedom" (153). He expresses his desire for autonomy by declaring that "not everybody has to do what" they "want them to do...but me and my friends chose not to...You ruined my life. All I've done is pay you back in kind" (153). Along this line, Tittle further states that, "we all hunger for mastery, and we harbor contempt for being ruled" (146).

Thirdly, the motivation for committing violence according to Tittle is "the person's control ratio, which is the amount of control to which the person is subject relative to the amount that he or she can exercise" (145). For him, a person's act of violence can be amounted to the balance between the amount of control he has in his life, and inevitably the amount of control others have over him. This implies that a school shooter has less control over his life affairs, and more control is exerted upon him by other people in his life, leading him to commit a horrendous act such as homicide. In Picoult's *Nineteen Minutes*, Peter's lack of control is portrayed through the constant bullying he has to face. One time the bullies hold his head "down in the toilet and they flushed it over and over just because they knew they could" (171). There are other instances where they beat him up on his way home from school to the point that he even needs "stitches" (171). His attempts to reclaim control by reporting to teachers or authorities are in vain. He says - "they tell you to ignore it. They say that they'll be watching out to make sure it doesn't happen, but they never watch" (172). Therefore, he tries to balance control through unconventional means when his attempt through conventional means fails miserably. Tittle further states that "the amount of control to which an individual is subject, relative to the amount of control he or she can exercise, determines the probability of deviance occurring as

well as the type of deviance likely to occur” (135). Therefore, the greater the gap between the amount of control one is exercising, and the control exerted on one, the greater the kind of violence that person will commit. This is clearly evidenced across the novels in which the perpetrators choose the most horrendous act to breach the gap between control they have and control exerted on them. What can be deduced is that a person is compelled to carry out violent act when the gap between control he can exert, and control exerted upon him is too wide that it becomes difficult for him to make adjustment to become a stable person with the ability to control his impulses and emotions. The control ratio then becomes extremely important in determining the well-being of a person. Tittle states:

The most important contributors to a person’s control ratio are the roles played and the statuses occupied. Every role implies some control to be exercised, both in a generalized sense and in the specific sense of how the role player is expected to relate to the reciprocal member or members of the role set...The role of child implies that parents, school officials, and others who deal with children will exercise substantial control over the child (148).

On the school premises, roles are assigned to each student or group of students, and they are treated based on the role they are assigned to. Cameron Porter states that “everybody gets sorted out after a while. And if you get a label - that you’re easy - then they’re going to find you. They push you and push you, just to see how far they can go” (Myers 39). This determination of role and assigning status is actively perpetuated in schools. For instance, children are tested, and once it is found out that they are passive, they belong automatically to the weaker group. Cameron Porter tells how kids are sorted into their roles. He states: “Say a kid is small. Well, you would think he would get picked on. But what really happens is that the kids who bully other kids sort of test them out. Then they find they can push you around and you, like, belong to them. Especially if you don’t hang with a crowd” (48). Similarly, regarding the notion of statuses children can have in school, Tittle contends:

[T]he statuses that one occupies imply degrees of control exercised and experienced, regardless of anything else...Racial statuses...and most

occupational statuses imply something about the ability to rule others or the likelihood of being dominated by others. For instance, most of the time high-status people, by virtue of their jobs as supervisors or decisionmakers or by their access to financial resources, which permit them to manipulate physical and social arrangements, can control as much or more than they are controlled (149).

In the texts analysed, the perpetrators belong to the lowest rung of the ladder in the school community, opening chances of being tormented and oppressed by other students. For instance, in *Give a Boy a Gun*, Brendan Lawlor and his family move to Middletown in “the middle of the school year” (25). This gives him the status of being a new kid which makes him vulnerable and makes him “seem kind of lost” (25). It is bad enough that Brendan has to shift school, but in addition, it is also the middle of the school year. One of the teachers Julia Reingold acknowledges the hardship faced by such students, stating that “no one comes into this school in the middle of the year without a lot of distress” (27). The new status he has been assigned to in the new school transforms him completely. He goes from being “one of the more vocal boys in the class” and “a very good student” who always has “his homework and projects in on time” in his former school to being a victim of bullying in the new school whose bitterness eventually drive him to the point of shooting his schoolmates (Strasser 19).

Another important element determining one’s control ratio is “a person’s reputation. Reputation represents the collective regard or prestige accorded to an individual by the people in a social context, as well as a collectively held configuration of expectations about that person’s behavior” (Tittle 150). A school is a place where “kids are making up stories left and right. It looks like if you put a microphone in front of a kid at Madison or point a camera at some kid, they become instant experts” (Strasser 56). Such is the culture of the schools across the texts analysed. Therefore, students often quickly gain reputations. This is also the case in Leonard Gray. He has the tendency to wear dark and black clothes, therefore he quickly gains the reputation of being “a certain kind of person...[someone] outside...[who] doesn’t want to fit in” (Myers 56, 57). Once their reputation is

established, they become victims of bullying or become popular based on the reputation they hold.

Another prominent factor to be considered when analysing a school shooter is the personality the shooter possesses at the time of the shooting. Tittle states:

These individual traits may be products of socialization, genetics, biological functioning, or some combination of the three, but their origins are not particularly relevant here. The important point is that they already exist in the psychic/emotional or physical makeup of the individual at the time that person comes into our range for explanation of deviant behavior...nearly everyone recognizes that individuals exhibit relatively stable patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting that apparently reflect some internal psychic/emotional structure or organization...In addition, some individuals have a high degree of interpersonal skill, usually accompanied by self-confidence, whereas others have little interpersonal skill or confidence. Hence, at least three “personality” traits - intelligence, interpersonal skill, and self-confidence interact with role-status configurations to alter the control ratios that would ordinarily be reflected by that role-status combination (151-152).

Hence, for Tittle, traits such as intelligence, interpersonal skill and self-confidence are the components of personality. From the texts analysed, it is evident that possessing only one or two of the three components and lacking in the others is not enough to have an outstanding personality. For instance, Leonard Gray reads books and is smart, suggesting that he is intelligent. However, he tends to lack self-confidence since he is “self-conscious about his body”, therefore he never “take(s) his shirt off, or let you see his arms or legs” because he is “uptight about being skinny” (Myers 56). In addition, he seems to lack interpersonal skills as well since he has few friends, and the only person he spends time with is Cameron, and that makes them seem like they are “closet gay” (31). Brendan Lawlor is intelligent and confident. His intelligence is evident in the fact that he is a “very good student” who always has his “homework and projects in on time” (Strasser 19). He is self-

confident and is able to stand up for himself when facing injustice. He is confident enough to even have the audacity to shout “right in the ref’s face” (21) while playing soccer when he senses that the referee is not fair. But he is lacking in interpersonal skills like Leonard Gray. This can be proved in his interaction with his new neighbour when they move to Middletown. He simply stares at his new neighbour, “no hello. No wave. No nothing” (25). His classmate also notices that he looks like “a rain – forest dweller dropped into the middle of New York City” (26) inside the class.

Lastly, provocations is the notion of the presence of triggers that propel the perpetrators to actually carry out their urge to act violently. Provocations can take the form of the specific incident “as a special convergence of controlling impingements, such as receiving a pile of bills, getting laid off of a job, and having the car break down within a short period of time” (Tittle 163). For Peter Houghton, provocation takes the form of a leaked e-mail where he confesses his feelings for Josie. Her friend Courtney has “gotten into her email account”, and on seeing Peter’s love confession she sends it out to be “spam[med]...out to the whole wide world” (Picoult 408). This incident leads to another incident where Peter’s pants are “yanked...down to his ankles” in the cafeteria, exposing his skin which looks “moon-white under the harsh fluorescent lamps of the cafeteria, his penis a tiny spiral shell on a sparse nest of pubic hair...The entire cafeteria began to spin like a carousel” (415). This propels Peter to “burst out of the cafeteria and careened down the narrow hallways like a pinball”, then banging “his head until it hurt(s)” (415, 416). He contends that “provocations...cause people to become more keenly cognizant of their control ratios and the possibilities of altering them through deviant behaviour – can take the form of specific behaviours by others, such as verbal insults, challenges, or displays of weaknesses” (163). For the perpetrators analysed, these forms of provocations such as verbal insults, challenges and displays of weaknesses are a constant occurrence in their school life. They become constant stressors culminating each day. When they keep on happening repeatedly over time, they pile up to become extremely toxic, resulting in a violent outburst. Tittle states:

Provocations can stem from direct communications reminding the person of subordination, for example, being told that he or she is not entitled to enter a building, issue an opinion, or enjoy certain perquisites...All of these circumstances are provoking because they arouse contemplation or thought about the overall state of one's life and they stimulate awareness that some actions can, at least temporarily, help rectify the control imbalance or help extend one's control. Thus, it is on these occasions that the deviance associated with a given control ratio is likely to occur (163).

By locating instances of direct violence in the schools of America through the frameworks of Slavoj Zizek and Johan Galtung, Chapter 2 highlights the physical and aggressive acts of violence that cause harm to the body in schools. Direct violence in the study ranges from small acts such as pushing, shoving, kicking to its most damaging form which is mass shooting. It is further located in physical acts of violence experienced by the body in the form of maiming, siege, imposing threats, causing misery, and shooting. The chapter also analyses the reasons the perpetrators resort to violent act among the sea of students in schools through strain theory, social learning theory and control balance theory. Analysing direct violence uncovers the hidden forms of violence taking place in the background that seems as natural as the air we breathe that are pushing perpetrators to their limit, causing them to have a psychological rupture which in turn makes them commit violent act. Zizek contends that "we need to perceive the contours of the background which generates such outbursts. A step back enables us to identify a violence that sustains our very efforts to fight violence and to promote tolerance" (1). Zizek insists on the exploration of other subtle forms of violence "inherent to... "normal" state of things...if one is to make sense of... "irrational" explosions of subjective violence" (2). When violence takes place such as school shooting, the shooters appear as the obvious perpetrators. However, a deeper analysis reveals that they are also victims of various forms of violence including name-calling, intimidation, and physical aggression. Bullying such as name-calling seems to be harmless but Zizek states that it is violent as it "presupposes a minimal recognition of the other party" (60). Zizek terms this concept as "symbolic violence embodied in language and its forms" (1). It is crucial to

understand that Galtung's concept of cultural violence is similar to the concept of Žižek's symbolic violence. Denny Wolfe also posits that "[l]anguage can be a catalyst for violence" (52). The next chapter shifts the lens to cultural violence operating in the background discreetly and is responsible for the perpetrator to succumb to pressure.

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CHAPTER 3
CULTURAL VIOLENCE IN CONTEXT

Chapter three focuses on locating cultural violence in American schools delving into American cultural elements, practices and traits through the select narratives. It highlights the nature of cultural violence which is so subtle that both the perpetrator and the victim are mostly unaware of the presence of violence. Cultural violence is defined by Galtung as “those aspects of culture...that can be used to justify or legitimise direct or structural violence...[t]he features mentioned above are ‘aspects of culture’, not entire cultures (291).

Cultural Violence refers to a form of violence that is embedded within a society’s norm, value system and perception. Cultural violence is seen when “culture preaches, teaches, admonishes, eggs on, and dulls us into seeing exploitation and/or repression as normal and natural, or into not seeing them at all” (295). One of the key elements of cultural violence is its ability to normalise exploitation and repression. It can also operate by concealing and downplaying exploitation which makes it hidden and not easily discovered by individuals. For instance, in *Shooter* (2004) one girl tries to provoke Leonard:

She pushed up on Len, got her face right into his, and he said something to her and some spit came out of his mouth. He didn’t mean to spit on her, but he was talking and some came out. She slapped him. Then he slapped her back. Then two jocks jumped him and started punching him out and some teachers broke it up...they surrounded us and started calling us names...Faggots. Pussies. They started slapping us around. Not hard. Just to show that they could. They told us to get down on our knees and beg for mercy. We didn’t do that and they forced us down (Myers 37).

Leonard and Cameron face direct violence through physical aggression, slapping and being pushed down on the floor. The cultural violence here is the legitimization of direct violence by Mr. Anders who “came into the hall...but he didn’t say anything...and he lets the jocks get away with everything” (37, 38). The subject of cultural violence is not an individual or group of individuals, but rather the subject here is the part of culture that “makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right – or at least not wrong” (291). Through his silence, Mr. Anders teaches that it is

not wrong for the jocks to push around other students, and this teaching constitutes cultural violence in this context. Galtung continues to state: “Entire cultures can hardly be classified as violent; this is one reason for preferring the expression ‘Aspect A of culture C is an example of cultural violence’ to cultural stereotypes like ‘culture C is violent’” (291). In this line of thought, it is not appropriate to say American culture is violent. Rather, the reality is that only some aspect of American culture can contribute to violence and not the whole culture. Normalization of bullying as part of growing up is the perception held even by adults. This cultural norm constitutes cultural violence. Even the teachers themselves such as Ruth Hollington in *Give a Boy a Gun* contends that it is normal for children to tease each other when recalling about Gary who participates in gun shooting in their school. She states, “I do recall that some of the children teased him about his weight. But you know how kids are at that age” (12). In the same narrative, F. Douglas Ellin who is the biology teacher also comments on his notion on the inherent and innate nature of bullying in the students:

Like all other animals, we are born with instincts and a genetic blueprint of what we must do to survive. The big difference is that humans possess the potential for becoming civilized, thinking, reasoning creatures. Eventually we are supposed to learn to suppress our animal instincts in order to meld with the society arounds us. But at what point is the process of suppressing our animal instincts complete? Seven years of age? Fourteen? Twenty-one? In other words, do we expect too much of teenagers? (63, 64).

For him, the tendency to bully and hurt others is a natural part of being a human and is merely a survival mechanism. His perspective still contributes to normalization of bullying which can eventually lead to unwanted outburst of physical violence. The ideology of a teacher such as Douglas Ellin contributes to the degeneration of schools as protective measure against youth crime. This is evident in David C. Anderson’s writing:

In the beginning, America’s public schools were supposed to be the cure for violence and social order. Under the leadership of the nineteenth-century

education reformer Horace Mann, a Massachusetts Senate Committee declared in 1846 that, while a poorly educated child might turn to delinquency, one placed under the care of judicious men, taught to labor, be furnished with a good moral and intellectual education...would, in nine cases out of 10, perhaps, become a good and useful citizen...The belief in schools as the antidote to delinquency persisted into the 1960s...By then, however, growing awareness of schools' evident failure to meet public expectations had engendered a new debate...In 1978, concern about safety led to a congressional commission and a study, "Violent Schools-Safe Schools: The Safe School study Report to Congress," prepared by the National Institute of Education". The primary objective of this study was to investigate the prevalence, causes, and consequences of violence in American schools and to explore ways to improve school safety. "The study found that about 13 percent of junior and senior high school students were victims of crimes like larceny, assault and robbery in an average month during the school year and that schools were the sites of about a third of all assaults and robberies suffered by urban teenagers. It also found 3 million students who said they avoided locations in school buildings for fear of attack and 5 million who said they were always afraid while at school" (317, 318).

In dealing with the United States of America, one aspect surfaces prominently as their goal which is the American dream. James Truslow Adams popularised this term in his book *The Epic of America*, stating that the American dream is-

That dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position (214).

Due to this concept, it can be stated that majority of Americans tend to be hard-working individuals striving for better living and opportunity as much as they can. This notion is seen in the parents of the students in the select texts which makes them emit the ethos of cultural priority on financial situation over empathy which reinforces emotional neglect. This in turn constitutes cultural violence. For instance, in Maciel's *Tease* (2014), Sara Wharton's mother is more concerned about their financial lack when her daughter is accused of bullying which leads to Emma's suicide:

I think mom believes that I didn't do anything wrong in this whole Emma thing. Or not wrong enough for criminal prosecution anyway. But costing us money we don't have, messing up my college admissions...Wrong enough (77).

Sara's mother is more concerned about the financial burden her daughter's action is costing them. She does not seem to care about the mental and emotional state of her daughter who might even go to prison if circumstances take a negative turn. In Jodi Picoult's *Nineteen Minutes*, the American societal code of parents focussing on reputation over forming real bonds with their children is noticeable. Josie is "one of Sterling High's princesses" (10). Her mother Alex Cormier who is a superior court judge is shown to embody a typical cultural priority on image and reputation: "Many of the accomplishments that Josie's mother was so proud of – Josie's grades, her looks, her acceptance into the 'right' crowd' – had not been achieved because Josie wanted them so badly herself, but mostly because she was afraid of falling short of perfect" (11). She is able to raise a perfect daughter at a glance. Josie is "a pretty, popular, straight-A student who knew better than most the consequences of falling off the straight-and-narrow. A girl who was destined for great things. A young woman who was exactly what Alex had hoped her daughter would grow to become" (6, 7). Even though Josie appears to be perfect, the tendency to raise a child to build up reputation tend to fall short on empathy. Over time their relationship also suffers:

Josie had once been so proud to have a mother as a judge. Alex could remember Josie broadcasting her career to the tellers at the bank, the baggers

in the grocery store, the flight attendants on planes. She'd ask Alex about her cases and her decisions. That had all changed three years ago, when Josie enters high school, and the tunnel of communication between them slowly bricked shut (7).

Alex Comier enjoys a high status and proposes to live the American dream. However, focussing solely on building reputation and chasing financial stability seems to be inadequate. Cultural violence in this context is embodied in the cultural priority of reputation which reinforces insufficiency in emotional intelligence, leading to strained relationships even between a mother and daughter. In a similar vein, the existence of a strained relationship between parents and children is also portrayed in Walter Dean Myers' *Shooter*. Cameron Porter, a high school student tends to be weak in sports. His father idealises achievements and building a good image for his son since those are culturally approved and established values. However, their relationship suffers as a result since compassion and understanding is lacking between the two, leading to emotional disconnection as evident in Cameron's report:

I had had a fight with my father. Another fight. Every time we got into it, he would bring up the time I quit the basketball team. It was like he couldn't get over it, like I had done something to him personally. We got into it when he asked me if I wanted to go to some club and play tennis with him and I said no. I knew what it would be about, some big competition thing. Then he went on about how I should pay more attention to sports and how a lot of big business deals were made in locker rooms. Then it was right back to how I had quit in basketball and how I was just a quitter. It was like he was beating me up without hitting me (63).

The notion around parental involvement in the select texts captures the unstable relationship between parents and children. As freedom and achievements are the value system ingrained in the culture, it becomes normal for one to witness the emergence of absentee parents who spend most of their time at work, or thinking about work even when they are at home. In Maciel's *Tease*, Sara's mother cannot be

fully present with her children even when they spend their time together in the morning. Her son Alex excitedly tells them about his baseball camp stories, but Sara states, “I don’t think she’s heard a word he’s said all morning – it’s dangerously close to eight, so I know she’s just desperate to get to work” (77). Absentee parents can take the form of divorce as well. In Strasser’s *Give a Boy a Gun*, Allison Findley states on the devastating effect the parents’ divorce have on Gary who pulls the trigger on his schoolmates : “He’d sometimes talk about what it was like when he was younger. About the divorce and how completely nasty it was, and how after it was over, his dad just left and never paid child support or called or anything. That was a huge thorn in Gary’s side. He just couldn’t get over that” (13).

Galtung states that the “psychological mechanism” of cultural violence is “internalisation” (291, 292). The internalization of a harmful cultural mindset plays a critical role in locating cultural violence. In *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson, the protagonist Melinda is a victim of rape. However, she internalizes the action as shame even though the act of rape is not her fault, leading to her downward spiral and forcing her to remain silent. The internalization of misleading cultural attitudes towards rape that tends to blame and label the victim as promiscuous is the cultural violence here. In Jay Asher’s *Thirteen Reasons Why* (2007), the protagonist Hannah Baker reaches her breaking point due to the mindset and beliefs of the people surrounding her especially her schoolmates. Hannah finds herself starting her life over in a new town and a new school. Before school starts, she has an affair with a boy named Justin Foley. She is portrayed to be a high school freshman which is the ninth grade in the Indian context. She imagines an innocent love story with him as a typical teenager and plans to meet for the first time in a park. She states her innocent desire:

I simply wanted a kiss. I was a freshman girl who had never been kissed. Never. But I liked a boy, he liked me, and I was going to kiss him. That’s the story – the whole story – right there (Asher 24).

Her narration reveals a simple fantasy of a teenage girl chasing relationship. Even when they plan to meet at the park for the first time, she merely wants to act out her dream:

The few nights leading up to our meeting in the park, I'd had the same dream...My old town had a park similar to Eisenhower Park in one way. They both had that rocket ship...in my dreams, my first kiss took place at the rocket ship. It reminded me of innocence. And I wanted my first kiss to be just that. Innocent (24, 25).

She states: "We just held our lips together...and kissed" (29). But Justin starts "bragging" (30) and rumour has it that she is "getting felt up at the rocket slide. And she was so new to school that the rumors overshadowed everything else...about her" (29). In this narrative Hannah refuses to internalise the label of a slut given to her. "Hannah Baker is not, and never was, a slut. Which begs the question, What have you heard?" (23). But the cultural violence here is the aspect of American school culture that believe in and shame people based on a rumour without trying to find out the truth. She is also listed by their classmate Alex Standall as "Best Ass in the Freshman Class" (48) which makes her suffer from harassment and sexual objectification. She retorts: "Alex, am I saying your list gave him permission to grab my ass? No. I'm saying it gave him an excuse. And an excuse was all this guy needed" (52). She becomes subjected to cultural violence through the objectification of women to a certain extent solidified by the formation of the list which is taken advantage by few perverts among the students themselves. She continues to face sexual harassment even when she tries to go on a date with Marcus Cooley at Rosie's, a small corner café:

See, when Marcus came into Rosie's, he wasn't alone. No, Marcus came into Rosie's with a plan. Part of that plan was to move us away from the to a booth near the back. Near the pinball machines. With me on the inside. Me, sandwiched between him...and a wall...At one point Marcus had me laughing so hard that my stomach hurt. I leaned over, touching my forehead to his shoulder, begging him to stop...And that's when his hand touched my

knee. That's when I knew... "Why are you doing that?" I asked... "Stop it," I said" (140-143).

He finally walks away. But what hurts her is the fact that as she is being molested, she looks to others for help and "a few people glanced over, but they all turned away...No one asked if there was a problem" (142, 143). The societal code that glorifies freedom leads to normalisation of intimate encounter even in public places such as a café. This further allows for sexual harassment and non-intervention even when the girl asks for help through body language.

Another instance of cultural violence is located in American cultural attitudes towards physically attractive and strongly built students by deeming them as superior. This is evident in *Give a Boy a Gun* by Strasser when one of the students Emily Kirsch elucidates:

At the red-hot core were most of the football players and some of the guys from the other teams, and the cheerleaders and some of the pretty girls...Next came the rest of the athletes and a few popular designer-label guys who weren't athletes but were just likeable, and the nicer girls and some of the pretty girls who were also popular and athletic. And then came the rest of us...And that wasn't only the way we outsiders saw it. It was the way everyone saw it...the teachers and the administrators. You'd get to class late, and they'd make you go back and get a pass. But Sam Flach would stroll in late and say he'd been talking to Coach Bosco, and that was just fine. Even the grown-ups outside school...all knew the football players by name, and they'd do extra things for them (41, 42).

The internalisation of the importance of football and the tendency to worship players is seen in Beth Bender in the same narrative. Beth serves as the counsellor in the school. She clearly highlights the glorification of the game and the players not only within the school but in the town as a whole. She states:

I love football. It's been a part of my life ever since I was small. My parents have had season tickets for the Marauders for nearly forty years. I can count on one hand the number of Friday nights we've missed. Football is part of the

social fabric of this town. It brings us together and gives us something to look forward to and talk about...I love the excitement and the crowd and the food. I love cheering for my students and the sons of my friends...I will be delighted if someday my own son plays for the Marauders (45).

Ryan Clancy also states, “Everyone around here knows the football players. Either they see them at the games or they read about them in the newspaper” (42). Deirde Bunson shows her appreciation by considering them as “the ones who are actually out there fighting for our school...It’s the players who give our school its pride. They’re the ones that give Middletown a sense of accomplishment” (44, 45). Due to this internalization of glorifying football and its players, the players tend to get away in instances when they participate in bullying, and they even tend to evade punishment by the teachers. This is evident in Brendan’s email to Gary:

Flach shoved me in the hall and called me a faggot in front of Mr. Ellin...He’s a new biology teacher. I think this is his first year. He’s one of those preppies in Gap chinos and a blue button-down shirt. Halfway between student and teacher. So he tells me I shouldn’t take it personally...I get slammed and dissed, and I’m not supposed to take it personally? (47).

This alludes to the existence of unwritten laws about football players in the school that do not get them punishment where other students would definitely get one. They are exempted from rules, operating at a level different from the rest of the students. This established cultural norm allows for bullying to take place reinforcing misery to the other students.

For high school students, the status of a person can be elevated even just by dating a popular and physically attractive partner, or being friends with one. This is evident in the case of Sara Wharton who is the narrator in Amanda Maciel’s *Tease*:

When I first started dating Dylan I used to like how people suddenly knew who I was, how I could talk to senior guys and they were nice – or nice enough – and I felt less like Brielle’s plus-one and more like an actual popular girl, a girl who’d be in those pages in the yearbook with the photos of people just having fun. These photos are always of the same few groups, the

kids who have shiny hair and nice cars and letter jackets. Brielle ends up on those pages sometimes, but the closest I've come was sophomore year, when half of my head was in one photo (263).

In the same narrative, Emma is labelled a slut by her schoolmates: "Someone has written SLUT in huge red lipstick letters down the door of Emma's locker...for being a boyfriend-stealing skank" (128). In this aspect, cultural violence takes the form of students using gossip as a weapon to reflect internalised gender norms that shame female sexuality by calling her a slut. This kind of derogatory sexual labelling legitimises harassment which eventually culminates into Emma taking her own life. The tendency of labelling is a form of cultural violence according to Johan Galtung who states that "a major form of cultural violence...is to blame the victim of...violence who throws the first stone, not in a glasshouse but to get out of the iron cage, stamping him as aggressor" (295). Cameron Porter in *Shooter* laments that "if you get a label – that you're easy – then they're going to find you. They push you and they push you, just to see how far they can go" (39).

Sara Wharton in Maciel's *Tease* who has lost her former partner to Emma takes charge as her main bully. She justifies her action by asserting that Emma deserves to be treated horribly since she first steals her boyfriend. She confesses her frustration over Emma even after her death, blaming her as the source of her troubles when her family is struggling financially due to criminal prosecution: "Yet another reason I just can't feel that bad about Emma. If she'd just sucked it up – or, whatever, gotten help, taken her meds, done anything else besides what she did – everything would be normal now" (77). Victim-blaming tends to be a cultural practice accepted and internalised by the students. She and her friends spread rumours about her and even resort to cyber-bullying to shame her. Sara states:

We spend another hour on the phone and on Facebook at the same time. Brielle makes up a profile for 'Fat Beyotch' and steals one of Emma's photos for it. She gives me the password so we can both go on to Emma's page and tag all the pictures of her with the fake name. Then I start friending everyone

we hang out with. Brielle and I are laughing so hard at the image of Jacob, Tyler, and Kyle getting Emma's picture with her new name attached (31).

Cultural violence is embodied in the acceptance of online harassment as typical teen behaviour minimising the seriousness of the impact it has on one's mind, making them live a miserable life. Due to the labelling and shaming Emma faces in school, male students start treating her as sexually available and she would be mocked and harassed. Male entitlement tends to be an on-going social practice where the girl is blamed for tempting even though the reality tends to be otherwise. In addition, there is the tendency in societal code to dismiss bullying by girls as typical girl drama. This is evident in Strasser's *Give a Boy a Gun*:

The boys call each other a few names, and in no time, unless one of them backs down, they're fighting. It's different with girls. It's all backbiting and nastiness. The popular girls wouldn't dream of fighting. They might chip a nail. They fight with words and looks and searing little offhand comments designed to cut your heart out (49).

This is in line with the case of Emma Putnam in *Tease*. The back-handed compliments, public-shaming, cyber-bullying and daily small talk-down by Sara and her friends eventually drive her to lose composure. If the bullying she faces constantly by her schoolmates due to the supposed boyfriend-stealing action by her is not pushed aside as typical teenage girls' drama, she might get the help she needed in time and she might be saved from committing suicide. The cultural violence in this context is the cultural trivialisation of female conflict which opens the way for cruelty, silencing the victim in the process. "One-way cultural violence works is by changing the moral colour of an act from red/wrong to green/right or at least to yellow/acceptable" (Galtung 292). Sara Wharton feels that she is wrongly accused. Natalie tells her "A girl is dead, and everyone wants to hold you and your friends accountable for what happened." 'But we're not,' I blurt out. 'We didn't do anything.'...I'm not sorry. Emma was a boyfriend-stealing bitch right up until the day in March when she killed herself" (Maciel 9). The component of cultural violence here is the attitude that when a person who has been hurting you becomes a

victim of violence, the hurt you have been imposing on the individual may still not be right but is acceptable because she hurt you as well. Bandura's moral disengagement theory as given by Luo and Bussey is that "people are motivated to abide by moral standards...Others, on the other hand, enact immoralities without remorse through enlisting justificatory mechanisms, known as moral disengagement" (4). This theory is critical for understanding how violence is rationalized by the students in the narratives, allowing for the generation of different kinds of violence.

One prominent component of cultural violence in the select texts is normalisation of bullying behaviour. It is considered as an established pattern in schools, that it is considered to be experienced by every student. It is assumed to be a normal part of schooling. This is evident in Sara's comment on Emma after she commits suicide: "If what happened with Emma pushed everyone to suicide, every high school in America would be empty" (Maciel 44). This is also the kind of perspective the parents have. For instance, in Strasser's *Give a Boy a Gun*, one of the students Deirdre Bunson recalls her conversation with her mother:

People talk like our school is this sick, depraved place. That's so wrong. I talked to my mom and her friends about it, and they say it was just like this when they went to school. It must be like this at every other high school. Yes, kids can be really mean to each other, really cruel. But that's the way it's always been. I mean, isn't part of growing up just learning to deal with it (36, 37).

Another instance of cultural violence is portrayed in *Shooter* where Cameron Porter is the accomplice of the school shooter Leonard Gray. And since Leonard commits suicide, Cameron is questioned repeatedly by the police and reporters. In the interview done by Dr. Richard Ewings who is a Senior County Psychologist, Cameron's internalisation of the school culture that bullies and demeans him constantly is seen when he feels that it is his job to simply take the unfair treatment by his peers. This internalisation is cultural violence and makes one believe that bullying is acceptable. "One of the other jocks pushed me", he states, and "got into my face and started calling me names" (Myers 41). When Dr. Richard asks him how

he felt at that time, he reveals that “[i]t was like it was my job or something. He was supposed to stand there and make me feel bad, and my job was to stand there and take it” (41).

In Laurie Halse Anderson’s *Speak*, Melinda suffers cultural violence through the cultural assumption that she is at wrong for calling the police at an end-of-summer party by her schoolmates, thereby silencing her. No one asked the reason she called the police. She is simply seen as someone violating their code of conduct while partying and is blamed and eventually ostracised by peers. The school becomes an intolerable space for her as she is rejected and socially punished even though she is the victim of rape. She states, “It happened. There is no avoiding it, no forgetting. No running away, or flying, or burying, or hiding” (198). She can be said to be silenced by the cultural practice that condition women to endure, downplay and to not make a scene even though her rights are violated. Mr. Freeman who is the art teacher offers support. Melinda states, “He says I’m his most inspired student. He writes the letters INSPIRATION across the top of my tree-drawing. He loves it. WOW” (32). Melinda herself is happy to get the validation. A deeper issue here is the fact that Melinda internalises the approval of a male which is an already established pattern in society. Another instance of cultural violence in the narrative is seen in the importance placed on superficial identity politics while ignoring the real suffering and trauma faced by the students. “The Ecology Club is planning to protest the mascot. They say the name ‘Hornet’ is offensive to people with insect phobias” (Anderson 40).

In *Nineteen Minutes* by Jodi Picoult, cultural violence is seen through ignorance of victims. Peter Houghton has been a victim of bullying since kindergarten. He used to be bullied even before reaching the school on the bus.

‘Peter!’ He turned and saw Josie patting the empty seat next to her... ‘I saved it for you,’ Josie said. He sat down next to her, feeling better already. He was riding inside a bus. And he was sitting next to his best friend in the whole world. ‘Cool lunch box,’ Josie said. He held it up, to show her the way that you could make Superman look like he was moving if you wiggled it, and

just then a hand reached across the aisle. A boy with ape arms and a backward baseball cap grabbed the lunchbox out of Peter's grasp. 'Hey freak,' he said, 'you want to see Superman fly?' Before Peter understood what the older boy was doing, he opened a window and hurled Peter's lunch box out of it...He could hear the boys and his friends laughing (84, 85).

The kind of bullying Peter faces upsets his friend Josie, who complains to her mother how the teachers do not seriously try to intervene and stop humiliation and teasing among the students. She states: "Drew picks on him all the time and Peter gets hurt, so today I wanted it to be the other way around...We went to the aides...They told Drew and the other kids to leave Peter alone, but they never listen" (90). The cultural violence here is the established pattern that teachers have of not taking real actions to stop bullying. Victims like Peter are taught to speak up and raise their voice. However, even if they do, or their suffering are made known, action is rarely taken to stop the bullying behaviour. Peter laments on this, saying, "No one gives a crap...They tell you to ignore it. They say they'll be watching out to make sure it doesn't happen, but they never watch" (66). When his mother Lacy confronts their teacher, even the teacher categorises Peter: "He's sensitive, and he's sweet. But that means he's far less likely to be running around with the other boys playing police chase than he is to be coloring in a corner with Josie. The other children in the class notice" (92). Here the social practice which categorises people and cast out the ones who deviate from the social norm is narrated regarding masculinity. This practice of rejection and shaming those outside culturally established qualities of being a man as seen in Peter constitutes cultural violence. This notion is further strengthened by the teacher who states that bullying is a part of growing up and that it is "the reality of grade school" (93). When the school ignores bullying and does not take action even when instances of bullying are reported, it sends a message that the school endorses it and that students who are capable can take advantage of the ones who seem helpless and weak. Cultural violence is also seen in schools where identity labels are forced on the students. "Every kid in this school played a role: jock, brain, beauty, freak" (441).

In Amanda Maciel's *Tease*, one aspect of cultural violence that stands out is absence of parental support especially in terms of mental and emotional. Sara Wharton, the girl who has been accused of being responsible for their classmate's suicide still has both her parents, yet their support for her is minimal. In American culture, in order to achieve their American dream hard-work is glorified yet on the other side, their personal lives suffered. They exhaust themselves at work having no reserved energy for their children. This concept is seen when Sara comments on her relationship with her mother: "We were never one of those, like, crime-fighting mother-daughter teams on TV who tell each other everything about their days. And now we don't see each other much at all. Even when we're in the same room" (42). Even when Sara is accused of being the reason for Emma's suicide, her need for emotional support cannot be met by her mother. She claims that she cannot even support her through her physical presence when legal meetings are required. She tells her daughter, "I'm sorry I can't always be there for your meetings" (41). Moreover, Sara receives scorn and judgement even when she needs support mentally and emotionally. "Sara! Thump thump thump... 'Sara, your car is blocking my – oh. Are you sleeping?' 'No,' I say, my voice muffled by my pillow. And by a couple thousand layers of sarcasm. My mom heaves this really big sigh and goes, 'It's the middle of the afternoon'" (40). She does not have the energy to go out and participate in activities suggesting her emotional fatigue. But her mother cannot even see how her daughter is suffering, and even suggests her to go outside and help her in grocery shopping. Amidst the trial going on, Sara hesitates: "'I'm supposed to do the grocery shopping now? This is a new one. I mean, run to the store for extra supplies, sure, but-' (41). She hesitates. Sara's mother could not comprehend the shame and public judgement her daughter would have to endure by going out. Her relationship with her father is the same. "Dad didn't really know how to talk to me, or hadn't wanted to. We'd just eaten in silence, then gotten back in the car to drive home" (43). Her mother's absence emotionally for her and her siblings is also seen in the lines when her brother chats happily reporting on his baseball camp. She says,

I don't think she's heard a word he's said all morning – it's dangerously close to eight, so I know she's just desperate to go to work'... 'So can we invite him in? Can we? Can we?' Mom doesn't even answer him this time (77).

The notion of absentee parents at the emotional level even though they are present physically and still alive is seen for other students as well. This can be seen from Sara's comment on her friend Brielle. She states:

I have to pick up the boys from school, but as soon as Mom gets home I go over to Brielle's. Her parents are out at some fund-raiser thing, as usual. She always calls herself Poor Little Rich Girl – she has a tank top with that bedazzled on it – and everyone knows she's bragging. Once my mom said she felt sorry for Brie, that she seemed lonely. But she never seems lonely to me. Besides, I'm almost always here (Maciel 89, 90).

American culture tends to normalise absentee parents if the reason for their absence is to provide for their family. This notion is also seen in Sara who seems to feel that it is normal for parents to be away from their children in order to provide. Brielle even seems to delight in the comfort her parents are able to bring her despite their absence most of the time in her every day life. And the irony in Sara's mother is that she seems to sense Brielle's loneliness while pushing aside her daughter's feelings. But the tendency to prioritise financial gain and security over emotional presence for the family seems to loom large in the society. Cameron Porter in Myers' *Shooter* can also be said to have absentee parents, yet he seems to internalize the cultural violence of chasing the American dream of living a prosperous life at the expense of emotional connection in the family that they do not even know what to say to each other. He states:

My father travels a lot. He's away about a week and a half every month. Maybe more, I don't know. We sort of – I wouldn't say that we talk a lot. I wouldn't say that we don't talk a lot, either. We go out – we used to go out to eat once a month...I guess we don't really talk that much. When we do talk – usually it's about something – maybe about their jobs or something. They talk about their jobs a lot. They're trying to – they have these goals they work on.

You know, what they want to accomplish every year, that sort of thing... Their goals? They're okay. They have things they want to do. Financial security – that sort of thing. They're like, doing the right things (12, 13).

The impact of parents being absent even literally impacts the children in negative ways. Gary in *Give a Boy a Gun* is the one who pulls the trigger on his schoolmates. Even though Gary does not directly talk about his parents' divorce, the impact it has on him is clear from Allison Findley who is her girlfriend, and his mother Cynthia Searle. He seems to confide in Allison about the divorce and she says, "After we started hanging out, he'd sometimes talk about what it was like when he was younger. About the divorce and how completely nasty it was, and how after it was over, his dad just left and never paid child support or called or anything. That was a huge thorn in Gary's side. He just couldn't get over that" (13). Gary's mother also talks about how their divorce impacts him, stating:

It was an ugly divorce. All that yelling and fighting. Arguing over money. Gary was caught in the middle, and sometimes, I guess I used him to get what I thought I needed. What we both needed. It's a terrible thing to put a child through, but I didn't know what else to do (13).

After the divorce, Gary's mother is left with the children as well as shame, guilt and poverty while the father walks away. The cultural violence here is the legitimization of abandonment by the father and in the process, making single motherhood, shaming and even financial ruin on the part of the mother acceptable.

In academic environments such as schools, labelling is a product of cultural violence. In Picoult's *Nineteen Minutes*, Peter has been labelled as gay solely due to his personality. Society has a rigid gender norm where masculine men are supposed to act in a certain way such that when a man deviates from that supposed masculine behaviour as accepted by society, he is given derogatory label such as gay. Peter is described as a sweet and kind boy. His teacher says that he is the kind of boy that would draw with Josie instead of playing catch with the other boys. His mother also notices that he is different:

He'd get picked on because he wasn't like them. He wasn't very athletic. He didn't like to play cops and robbers. He was artistic and creative and thoughtful, and kids made fun of him for that (537).

And since he does not seem to conform to societal expectation of someone who is masculine he is called gay by his peers. He becomes subjected to teasing as gay in such a consistency that he is not even sure of himself. He becomes confused of his own identity. This led him to go to a gay bar called the Front Runner. He has to take a bus since he does not have a driver's license yet. His sense of confusion echoes the whole time he is there:

He still wasn't sure why he was there – it was like an anthropology experiment, in his mind. See if he fit in with this society, instead of his own. It wasn't that he wanted to fool around with a guy – not yet, anyway. He just wanted to know what it was like to be among guys who were gay, and totally okay with it. He wanted to know if they could look at him and know, instantly, that Peter belonged. He stopped in front of a couple that was going in at it in a dark corner. Seeing a guy kiss a guy was strange in real life...He waited to see if his heart started pounding a little harder, if it made sense to him. He didn't feel particularly excited, though. Curious, sure...but Peter couldn't say he felt with any great conviction that that was something he wanted to try, too (297, 298).

The cultural violence in this context is the internalization of societal code that expects a man or boy to behave in a way that makes him look bold and act with strength. If not, he is labelled as gay and if that continues long enough, it is enough for a boy to question even his identity as seen in the case of Peter. It is evident that Peter does not really like another boy for his mate. It is only due to societal pressure through mockery that brings him confusion and makes him test whether he is really gay or not. In the Front Runner, Peter runs into his teacher who has a same-sex partner Philip O'Shea. Philip talks about how his partner tries to make Peter open up to him and offer support. He comments on how Mr McCabe sees Peter as his teacher:

Being a bit of a lost soul, I think. Teens are always trying to fit in. If you don't fit into the popular crowd, you try the athletic crowd. If that doesn't work, you go to the drama crowd...or to the druggies,' he said. Ed thought that Peter might be trying out the gay and lesbian crowd (322).

He continues to state how someone who is attracted to the same sex can also somehow detect someone who has the same orientation as them. He says:

You've heard of gaydar?...Gay people don't come clearly marked – it's not like having a different color skin or a physical disability. You learn to pick up on mannerisms, or looks that just last a little too long. You get pretty good at figuring out if someone's gay, or just staring at you because you are...Peter may have been confused about his sexuality, but it was crystal clear to Ed...That boy is straight (323).

It can be said that Peter seeks to explore his sexuality due to the societal assumption that he might like someone of the same sex since his mannerism tends to exhibit those with a certain sexual orientation. The cultural violence here is the internalisation on the part of Peter that he might, in fact be attracted to others of the same sex solely due to societal assumption about him. It makes him confused to the point that he has to find proof of whether it is true or not.

In addition, Peter suffers from cultural violence through cyber-bullying. He sends an electronic mail to Josie confessing his love for her. At that moment, Josie is in the shower and could not see Peter's mail before her friends who are with her in her room.

Courtney clicked on the link...The mail opened, and Courtney started to read. 'Oh my God,' she murmured. This is too fucking good.' She swiped the body of the email and forwarded it to RTWING90@yahoo.com. Drew, she typed. Spam this out to the whole wide world (408).

Peter faces public shaming and this is cultural violence where humiliating a person is normalised, a form of social bonding and entertainment as well. Peter's love

confession to Josie is sent to every student of Sterling High. His genuine feelings are turned into a spectacle for ridicule and sarcasm. As she reads the email:

Josie hesitated, "I know you don't think of me. And you certainly would never picture us together." The words felt like stones in her throat. She stopped speaking, but that didn't matter because Drew and Matt were reciting the email word for word. "By myself, I'm nothing special," Matt said. "But with you...I think..." Drew convulsed, laughing, the weights falling hard back into their cradle. 'Fuck, I can't do this when I'm cracking up.'...Josie's face reddened. She could not believe that Peter had written these things to her...She couldn't believe that the whole school knew that Peter Houghton liked her. She couldn't afford for them to think that she felt anything for him (409, 410).

The digital space becomes a site for violence here as Peter's confession is made public to everyone in their school. Everyone who gets the email participates in the shaming through spectacle and silence. The cultural violence in this context is the perception that digital space is not a real-life experience and therefore, must be dismissed as something happening online only. This normalises the cruelty of online shaming and reinforces the notion that bullying in the digital space is not as cruel as bullying in real life. In such cases, the victims are often blamed for posting or doing things online.

In school setting, various instances of violence tend to suggest that there are certain sections of people who are exercising power. Michel Foucault's notion of power tends to be different from traditional concept of power. According to Foucault, "Power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (*Sexuality* 93). For Foucault, power in modern time operates through surveillance, discipline and classification such as schools and prisons by creating normal or obedient individuals. He states:

We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains

of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production (*Discipline* 194).

Power does not necessarily involve forcing others. It does not mean to dominate or punishing others. It rather creates rules and norms for others to follow. It operates subtly and not forcing others directly. For Foucault, power does not belong only to those holding the top positions. It disperses and is distributed around us. He states:

Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (*Sexuality* 93).

In academic context, this means that power does not belong only to the teachers or administrators. He also asserts that power is not something one can have. It is not something one has, but that power comes from action:

Power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the ‘privilege’ of the dominant class, which they can ‘hold’ or ‘relinquish’ at will; it is the overall effect of its strategic positions – an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated (*Discipline* 26, 27).

He also contends that power works through discipline. In academic institutions, students are observed and depending on their behaviour, they are disciplined. This makes the students follow rules even in circumstances where they are not directly observed. He states:

The perfect disciplinary apparatus would make it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly. A central point would be both the source of light illuminating everything, and a locus of convergence for everything that must be known: a perfect eye that nothing would escape and a centre towards which all gazes would be turned (*Discipline* 173).

He argues that power does not come only from the supposed higher statuses such as leaders, kings, governments or institutions. For him, power is not possessed, but power comes from action. Foucauldian concept of power asserts that power is not only possessed by people in positions of power:

Power must be analyzed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application (*Knowledge* 98).

When referring to academic institutions, at a glance, power tends to be concentrated at the faculty or administrative level. However, Foucault's perception of power contends that power is distributed. Power resides on the teachers, on the institution itself, and even on the students. This is evident in the how the footballers in the select narratives have the power to evade punishment that are supposed to be inflicted on the students. For instance, during class hours, students walking in the school hall outside class are supposed to have a permission slip with them granted by teachers. While the footballers escape punishment, the rest of the students get punished. Emily Kirsch in Strasser's *Give a Boy a Gun* states:

You'd get to class late, and they'd make you go back and get a pass. But Sam Flach (a footballer) would stroll in late and say he'd been talking to Coach Bosco, and that was just fine. Even the grown-ups outside school, like the guy who pumped gas at the station and the lady who worked behind the counter at Starbucks. They all knew the football players by name, and they'd do extra things for them, like wash their windshield or slip them a free brownie. There were days when you just felt like it was their world (42).

Foucault's notion of power is that it is not possessed but found in the norms and daily activities: "Power is not something that is acquired, seized or shared, something one holds on to or allows to slip away" (*Sexuality* 94). He also contends that, "There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge" (*Discipline* 27). This alludes to the notion that power and knowledge are like two

sides of a coin. Knowledge is a product of power and becomes a tool for exercising it. The footballers in the select narratives have the knowledge that their societal code deemed them valuable. This enables them to take actions other students do not dare to take such as ignoring school rules and taking advantage of weaker students which make them walk in power compared to the rest of their schoolmates.

Foucault asserts on the emergence of resistance in the presence of power: “Where there is power, there is resistance” (*Sexuality* 95). Resistance can take the form of disobedience, contempt, refusal to obey, silence, or raising voice against it. For instance, certain students speak out against the power of the footballers. Dustin Williams in *Give a Boy a Gun* states:

Being on the football team made you special, and some guys definitely took advantage of that. They’d be late for class or curse right in front of a teacher, even in front of an administrator, and nothing serious would happen. Some of these guys acted like they ruled the school...It was like, “Hey, if I make the team, I can get away with that stuff too” (100).

Power becomes contested by acts of resistance whether in a big-scale or in a small-scale. The footballers are met with resistance through the other students speaking out against them and what they deem as unjust. Some take a larger form of resistance that manifest as physical assault when they resort to pull the trigger on the footballers. In Strasser’s *Give a Boy a Gun*, Brendan and Gary are the perpetrators who try to get their revenge on their bullies, especially Sam who is a footballer. Paul Burns, a student and witness recounts of the incident:

They were talking about what they were going to do with Sam. And they were talking loud because they wanted everyone to hear. They wanted him to roll over in his back so they could shoot him in the knee. They didn’t want to shoot him in the back of the knee, because they weren’t sure if that would cripple him or not. They wanted to shoot him in the kneecap. They wanted to make sure he’d be ruined for life (139).

Brendan and Gary are bullied almost everyday in their school. Life has become dreadful to the point that Gary even breaks to the point of pulling the trigger on his

schoolmates. This act of shooting is a form of resistance on a large-scale, having a huge impact on everyone.

In Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why*, the protagonist Hannah Baker experiences bullying, exclusion and sexual harassment in her new school. Even before starting school, she is already labelled a slut due to lies spread by a boy with whom she shares only a kiss. As school starts there is already a weight pulling her down due to the rumour spread about her. What really makes her reach her breaking point is not only the bullying and harassment she faces, it is the gaze, the weight of being gazed but not really being seen and known. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault highlights the functioning of modern society through surveillance which trains people by employing the metaphor of the panopticon:

The Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen...He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself, he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection (200, 202).

In contemporary society, Foucault asserts that the realisation of being watched makes one behave. One becomes his own watch-guard. This can be regarded as internalized discipline. The notion that others are seeing or watching us which may not be always true in reality makes a person control his or her behaviour. In prior generations discipline used to be cruel and punishment tend to be physical. Yet for Foucault, in modern society, due to the fear of being watched by others, one disciplines oneself. Therefore, in Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why*, rumour acts as a surveillance agent for Hannah. She is watched and analysed through rumour which shows only the tip of the iceberg. She is not really seen for who she is all because of a rumour when school starts: "A rumor based on a kiss ruined a memory that I hoped would be special. A rumor based on a lie. A rumor, which someone like you chose to believe" (30). Here she reveals how everyone somehow becomes responsible by choosing to

believe the rumour or being silent about it. She also laments on how she feels like she is being watched constantly:

Everywhere I went, someone was watching. Judging. And I started thinking about how many other girls must feel this same way. Scared. Exposed. Like we're all on display, twenty-four-seven (118).

Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* highlights that power in modern society does not usually give punishment physically anymore. It does not tend to discipline through a rod anymore, yet -

The judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the 'social worker' – judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based (304).

Foucauldian concept of power uses the notion of being normal as the yardstick for one to live life. And if deviations occur from that notion of being normal especially on the negative side, judgements are made on him by others, and is made even by oneself. In Myers' *Shooter*, the narrator Cameron is one of the closest friends of Leonard who pulls the trigger on his schoolmates. He is a shy young man, usually silent if not talked to, but he is already being judged on the outside on what others can see even though they do not know his thoughts or who he really is. "They had already decided who he was. All the questions – they weren't really questions. They were just boxes to check" (Myers 138). Leonard is also constantly judged and seen as an outsider, someone who tends to be violent. Cameron raises his concern. "Sometimes he'd say things and I couldn't tell if it was a joke or if he really meant it. Like he knew they thought he was dangerous, and he was just leaning into it" (95). Leonard begins to take on the persona others are constructing for him through gazing and watching. He states, "I just wanted to stop feeling like a target. Like I was marked somehow. And nobody ever said it out loud, but I could tell – they were all waiting for me to explode" (102). Foucault highlights the formation and construction of what is regarded as normal as:

The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes (*Discipline* 183).

His notion alludes to the process on how the yardstick of normal is formed through comparing others, differentiating what can be considered as acceptable or unacceptable, forming hierarchies and eventually excluding others that fall outside of the supposed normal. In Amanda Maciel's *Tease*, Emma Putnam falls outside the constructed normal for her classmates. She does not conform by expressing sexuality on her own term through engaging in sexual activities even with a guy that already has a girlfriend. That is unforgivable for youth discipline. Therefore she is punished not physically but through rumours, harassment and exclusion. "You didn't have to say it. The way you looked at her in the hallway, the way everyone looked, it was enough" (Maciel 203). The school can be said to become a Foucauldian panopticon where students watch each other, compare and generate what actions are acceptable and unacceptable; disciplining and excluding those that do not conform.

In Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*, Melinda becomes a social outcast amongst her peers and schoolmates. By calling the police at a summer party, she becomes judged and disciplined through exclusion, shaming and peer rejection. Foucauldian gaze gives her discipline without physical punishment. She becomes constantly watched not only by her peers but even by the teachers. "There is no place where one is not watched; and this constant watching is what ensures conformity" (Foucault *Discipline*, 201). She does not explain herself and instead becomes silent on the matter. Her silence embodies her resistance on power exercised upon her. She states:

It's easier not to say anything. Shut your trap, button your lip...All that crap you hear on TV about communication and expressing your feelings is a lie. Nobody really wants what you have to say (9).

Under the Foucauldian gaze, even her silence is considered to be outside what is deemed to be normal. The school counsellor wants her to approach him under the pretence of wanting to heal her, but it is done with the intention of trying to correct her and guide her to become what is considered as normal again.

Foucault's notion of power depends on the idea that through discipline enacted by the ones watching or the ones acting as surveillance system, a person is judged and categorised based on what is seen about their behaviour and personality. They become labelled or judged and sorted. In academic setting such as schools, the students are categorised and ranked into jocks or footballers, the ones on the top, then the rest follows with the ones labelled nerds or losers at the bottom. Foucault states: "Discipline 'makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise" (*Discipline* 170). The students themselves observe, categorise and label each other becoming both the object and instrument for the exercise of power. In Picoult's *Nineteen Minutes*, Peter states, "In a small town, you are either invisible or you're in the spotlight. There is no in-between" (27). This highlights Foucault's theory of how in disciplinary institutions such as schools, identities are created which enables for control. The identities are given by social surveillance, on what the people around are labelling them. The identities are not chosen, but are given. It becomes a form of internalised surveillance as well. The school becomes a Foucauldian panopticon. Students watch themselves or monitor themselves. "You don't need a metal detector when you have mean girls" (Picoult 151). Under the watchful surveillance of the group of girls labelled mean by other students, the other students behave for fear of further deteriorating their status through the peer surveillance. Foucault's concept of a docile body is not embodied by Peter Houghton in *Nineteen Minutes*. Foucault states, "A body is docile that may be subjected, transformed and improved" (*Discipline* 136). Peter's mind and body are disciplined through peer surveillance for appearing weak and fragile. He then shrinks and believes the social narrative of him as well. He becomes the opposite of the Foucauldian docile body that undergoes surveillance and improvement. However, Peter is labelled into the category of nerds and losers. He does not improve his image in the eyes of his peers thereby he is given punishment through various instances of peer rejection. The weight of this rejection becomes too much for him to bear, making him lose composure and eventually pulls the trigger on his schoolmates. His act of violence is an act of resistance against the surveillance and discipline he experiences in the school. Foucault states, "Where there is power, there is resistance" (*Sexuality* 95). Peter laments, "If you'd just told

me I was good at something, maybe I wouldn't have had to show you I was good at this" (293). The act of normalisation, of trying to place people in the category of being normal hurts both ends. On the one side, is someone like Peter who faces scorn and punishment for not being able to reach the category of being normal. On the other side is someone like Josie Cormier, Peter's childhood friend who is categorised beyond the embodiment of normal. Through peer surveillance and categorisation, she becomes one of the most perfect students in the school – "a pretty, popular, straight-A student" (6). However, she also feels the weight of the burden of constantly keeping up with her perfect image. She fears falling out of perfection to the point that when such a time comes, she considers committing suicide and has plans already:

She sank down onto her bed and rummaged underneath the nightstand for the Ziploc sandwich bag that she'd tacked to the wooden frame. Inside was a stash of Ambien – pirated one pill at a time from her mother's prescription for insomnia, so she'd never notice. It had taken Josie nearly six months to inconspicuously gather only fifteen pills, but she figured if she washed them down with a fifth of vodka, it would do the trick. It wasn't like she had a strategy, really, to kill herself next Tuesday...It was more like a backup plan: When the truth came out, and no one wanted to be around her anymore, it stood to reason Josie wouldn't want to be around herself either (11).

She dreads the discipline and punishment she would have to endure from her peers through the surveillance system if ever she falls short of perfect. She wants to commit suicide rather than living and having to endure the discipline she would have to endure.

In Strasser's *Give a Boy a Gun*, Brendan and Gary are the opposite of Foucauldian docile bodies. They do not fit into the category of normal through peer gaze and surveillance. They are trained to behave inside schools. They are trained to follow rules, to have good grades, to have the social grace and ability to present themselves properly, talk and use proper language, and be extroverted enough to function according to the standard the students make on themselves through surveillance. When Brendan and Gary fall short of the standards, they are

disciplined. The constant bullying and ridicule they face in school becomes the agent of discipline enacted on them for failing to meet the standard of being a normal student. They also internalize the feeling of being unimportant. “The worst thing is not the physical stuff, it’s that no one stops it. It’s like, you don’t even exist” (Strasser 47). This is not being unseen. It is rather being seen and categorised as being so irrelevant and unimportant that they become ignored. They do not become docile bodies. And the schoolmates and even the teachers respond by categorising them among the failing students and discipline them through ignorance and rejection. Gary eventually becomes the tragic resistor of the discipline and of the surveillance that categorises and demeans him by pulling the trigger on his peers. His violent act may be seen as irrational yet, it may be a response to a mechanism of surveillance that disciplines him which becomes too unbearable for him.

This chapter has highlighted instances of cultural violence which is often invisible and subtle in the select texts. Drawing from Johan Galtung’s concept of cultural violence which is similar to Zizek’s notion of symbolic violence, each text reveals situations where violence is legitimised through normalization of cultural norms, established patterns, societal code, assumptions, views, value systems and perspectives that are harmful, demeaning and generates suffering to others. Analysis of these texts reveal that violence is often concealed as tradition, cultural practices, humour or world-view. In the texts *Thirteen Reasons Why*, *Tease* and *Speak*, it is observed that female teenagers are often silenced when they become victim to personal aggression such as rape and sexual harassment. Their silence is the result of cultural violence that make them internalise cultural norm of shame and guilt when faced with sexual assault. The societal shame regarding the topic of sexual assault and harassment silenced the victim even though the victim is not at fault. The victims then turn violence inward eventually making them commit violence on themselves through suicide. In the texts *Nineteen Minutes*, *Give a Boy a Gun* and *Shooter*, the teenage male characters are often shamed and subjected to ridicule for not attaining societal expectation of what constitutes a man. They are pushed into hyper-masculine roles either by their parents or peers. If there is deviation in their character from the cultural norm of a straight masculine man, they are often punished through peer

rejection which tends to be a heavy burden for young boys to carry. Across all six works, cultural violence is manifested and highlighted as embedded in the societal code, societal value system and cultural norm that makes it difficult to address. A Foucauldian reading of the select texts analyses the power that circulates through surveillance, categorisation and discipline. Schools become a place where Foucauldian concept of docile bodies are formed, or the opposite of it is formed and punishment is thus inflicted. School reflects a Foucauldian concept of a panopticon which works by peer surveillance. These select texts become a witness to how cultural violence produces a social world in the context of academic institutions where harm is not only allowed but expected and accepted. The two approaches of cultural violence and Foucauldian power highlight the invisible nature violence. Its effect does not produce bruises and scratches on the physical body. But it is felt on the mind by inflicting pain psychologically through language, societal expectation, cultural norm and silence on the part of watchers who does nothing. Through the examination of these select texts, students in schools suffer not only from the physical aggressions directed at them, but also from the very culture they are in through traditions, practices and beliefs that either glorify them when they are in line with cultural expectations, or otherwise when they fall short of cultural expectation. Both ends ironically are weighing on the young. The weight might differ in terms of intensity and positivity, but they both generate suffering through the effort to keep the reputation or to upgrade their reputation on the other end.

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CHAPTER 4

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

This chapter undertakes analysis of structural violence by locating them in academic setting within the select literary texts. Juanita Ross Epp states that structural violence “is not the intentional harm visited on the unlucky by vicious individuals...it is the unintentional consequences of procedures implemented by well-meaning authorities in a belief that the practices are in the best interests of students” (1). Johan Galtung’s notion of structural violence is that it is “a structure” that is “churning out harm” and “causing basic human needs deficits” (36). This chapter highlights one of the most invisible forms of violence projected unintentionally to students. The chapter analyses how the school itself inflicts harm on its students through curriculum and system which are meant to provide education and advancement to students. Using Galtung’s framework helps in categorising and locating instances of structural violence in academic environment. The chapter also engages in Hannah Arendt’s notion of violence. She puts forward the idea that violence is not the same as power. For her, “Violence can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it” (53). Emphasising that power comes from people acting together, she states:

Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together (44).

She contends that violence arises when power is weak or failing. This suggests that where there is power, the occurrence of violence will be lesser. She asserts that “Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power disappearance” (56). This chapter interrogates not only the what of violence in schools, but also the why of violence through the employment of Galtung’s notion of violence and Hannah Arendt’s notion of violence and power. This chapter reveals the representation of one of the most hidden forms of violence in literature through the select texts and how structural violence exploits and harms students unintentionally.

Structural violence within the select literary texts reveals a structure and

system in academic setting that hides exploitation and injury, causing hopelessness and psychological disorientation. Structural violence in schools occurs when a person or group of people's needs are deprived or unfulfilled but are "unintended" (Galtung 26). When their wellness need is deprived, structural violence is experienced by being "in a permanent unwanted state of misery" (26). This state of misery is perpetrated through the inadequacy of the school system in preventing and responding meaningfully to ongoing bullying, shaming and harassment experienced by students. Structural violence is not generated through personal failings, but it is brought about by harmful systems that do not bring positive outcome to people. Along this line, Paul Farmer states:

Structural violence is one way of describing social arrangements that put individuals and populations in harm's way. The arrangements are structural because they are embedded in the political and economic organization of our social world; they are violent because they cause injury to people...neither culture nor pure individual is at fault; rather, historically given and economically driven processes and forces conspire to constrain individual agency (40).

The normalization and invisibility of structural violence is also observed by Nancy Scheper-Hughes and she locates it in the inequalities embedded in everyday life as:

Structural violence erodes human dignity through poverty, social inequality, racism, and brutal bureaucracies. It is silent, invisible and insidious, embedded in social structures and accepted as the 'normal' way of life (38).

James Giligan reflects on how inequality translates into life and death consequences especially for marginalised population as: "Structural violence is the increased rates of death and disability suffered by those who occupy the bottom rungs of society as compared to the relatively better-off" (192).

Structural violence is located in the lack of serious intervention of "every teacher who saw it happen day after day and never did anything more than tell those morons to stop horsing around" (Strasser 70). In addition, only a few or one school counsellors are assigned to a school since school counsellors in the select narratives

are responsible for a large number of students hindering their efficacy. For instance, Beth Bender, the High School Counsellor in *Give a Boy a Gun* recounts her experience.

Julia is a close friend and has amazing radar for the kids who are going to need support but might otherwise fall through the cracks. One of the kids she mentioned was Brendan (the shooter), so I made sure he was one of mine. I got him into my office one day, and he just “yes, ma’amed” and “no, ma’amed” me to death. “Yes, ma’am, everything’s fine.” “No, ma’am, I don’t have a problem with anyone. But you could see the pain and anger in his eyes. Of course, I had fifty boys and girls like that, all of them feeling more or less the same thing. And I was responsible for another 350, so what could I do?” (38).

A close reading of the select texts reveal multiple layers of structural violence operating through neglect and silence. Structural violence is located in the ignorance or the inefficiency of school counsellors provided by the school system. In *Thirteen Reasons Why*, structural violence is located in the assignment of an English teacher Mr. Porter who is merely “moonlighting as a counsellor” (275). This alludes to the fact that not even a professional is hired to be the guidance counsellor in the school. This leads to the inability of the school counsellor to help Hannah even when she seeks help. In a similar vein, Myers highlights how institutional neglect in the form of counsellors, teachers and peers contribute to student’s feeling of alienation and loneliness that proves detrimental to a person’s well-being. Cameron Porter states:

Nobody talked to Leonard. Not the teachers, not the guidance counsellors, not the other kids. He just walked around in this fog, like he wasn’t even there. You think that doesn’t mess you up? When everybody pretends you don’t exist? When all anybody ever does is ignore you or make jokes behind your back? The school should have seen it. Somebody should have seen it (Myers 125).

Cameron Porter is a close ally of Leonard who pulls the trigger eventually when the weight of everyday bullying and exploitation becomes too heavy for him to

bear. Cameron is able to see the invisibility of his friend Leonard to others due to the categorisation of students that label him as a loser. His invisibility is due to a combination of several factors including the school's inability to provide guidance and counselling as well as support in general. Leonard writes in his personal diary on how his emotions and feelings are neglected by the school system as:

They didn't want to hear anything about how I felt. They just wanted to know if I was a problem. I guess if you don't make trouble, they just let you disappear. Like you don't matter. Like you're not even there (98).

The structural violence here is the silencing of minority voice like Leonard who is barely visible to the teachers and even peers. Galtung's notion of violence that hurt the spirit through generation of hopelessness by the school system is portrayed in this context. Likewise, in the text *Tease* by Amanda Maciel, the students experience structural violence in the school's unwillingness to stop bullying even though students used to report of its presence. When Sara Wharton and her friends are made to go through counselling in the aftermath of their classmate Emma Putnam's suicide because she is claimed as the main reason for Emma's suicide, she reveals:

Nobody told us to stop. Not the teachers, not the counsellors, not even our parents. Everyone knew what was going on. They just looked the other way, like it wasn't their problem. And I thought that meant it was okay (207).

Sara acknowledges how the adults around her fail to intervene in the bullying that takes place right in front of them. The structural violence here is the system that perpetuates silence in the face of harm experienced by the students such as Emma who eventually resort to committing violence. The inaction on the part of the teachers aligns with Nancy Scheper-Hughes' observation of structural violence as "silent, invisible and insidious – embedded in social structures and accepted as the normal way of life" (25). It also reflects Galtung's notion of violence as preventing a person from realising his or her full potential. Another instance of institutional neglect is highlighted in Sara's confession:

There were teachers in the hallway when we taped those notes to Emma's locker. They saw. They saw and didn't say anything. Not one word. And

when she missed school for days, nobody asked why. Nobody cared (Maciel 178).

In this instance, Sara and her friends publicly shame Emma by writing the word slut on her locker. This reveals the silencing of harm suffered by Emma and the lack of support by the school system for her suffering. Structural violence is also manifested in the school system's failure to provide safe classroom environment. In *Speak* by Anderson, this failure to foster safe environment by their teacher Mr. Neck is narrated in one of Melinda's social studies:

Mr. Neck storms into class, slams the door, and turns off the light. The room is half-dark and uncomfortable. He sits heavily in his chair. We are silent. It's not the cool kind of quiet that means the class is thinking. It's the kind of quiet that sucks out your bone marrow, that leaves your ears ringing and your eyes shriveled in their sockets (56).

The atmosphere of fear and coercion engulfs the classroom. This kind of environment causes harm and psychological suffering, making one unable to attain their sense of well-being. The structural violence here is the system that perpetuates psychological and emotional harm by allowing such instances to occur instead of providing safe learning experience to the students. And since Melinda faces social exclusion and rejection for calling the police at the end of a summer party, she feels alienated and lonely. Her sense of alienation is observed in the lines:

It's easier to stay inside. Sit in my closet. It's the closet in the abandoned art room. The closet has no purpose, no name. It is the closet where they put the overflow of school junk – old textbooks, cracked calculators, used-up erasers, a few chipped chairs. It's the closet where I go when I want to disappear (52).

Melinda is raped at the party. She is the victim yet no one cares to understand the reason she calls the police and is rather pushed into isolation, suffering alone. Her retreat into an old janitorial closet during school hour reflects the inability of the school system to provide care and support to those in need. Systemic neglect of bullying and its non-intervention is a theme that is manifested across the select texts. This systemic neglect becomes one of the most prominent reason marginalised

students feel powerless. Violence in schools is often a manifestation of power struggles between peers, students and teachers, or marginalised section of students and the broader school system. A bullied or socially marginalised student may turn to violence not simply out of rage, but as a performance to take back control in whatever way they think is possible, an attempt to be seen, heard, or even feared. Students like Peter, Gary and Leonard are often socially fragmented and treated as others. Their eventual violent acts of shooting represent a desperate reclamation of power over a system that has rendered them powerless. When students feel unheard, unseen and powerless, violence can emerge as the last resort to take back control or to take revenge. Systemic neglect of bullying and its non-intervention is portrayed clearly in Picoult's *Nineteen Minutes*:

Everyone knew that Peter was picked on. They saw it happening in the hallways, in the cafeteria, even in classrooms. But it wasn't their problem. Teachers didn't want to get involved, administrators said it was part of growing up, and the other students...well, they were just glad it wasn't happening to them (139).

The structural violence in this context is the normalization of bullying through the non-intervention of authority figures in the form of teachers and administrators. The suffering Peter faces does not only come from the ones bullying him, but from the system that fail to protect him through neglect. The emotional and psychological suffering of the students are unaddressed. The narrative criticises the school's misplaced priority on the functioning of the school while failing to protect the ones it is supposed to protect:

If someone had just paid attention – really paid attention – to what was happening to Peter every single day, maybe things would have been different. But the school was more concerned with test scores and hallway passes than with whether its students were actually safe (213).

Instances of harm done on students through systemic neglect and avoidance of responsibility echoes throughout Strasser's *Give a Boy a Gun*. Bullying becomes a part of everyday life for most of the students:

It wasn't like nobody knew. People saw Brendan and Gary getting picked on every day – pushed in the halls, laughed at, called fags and freaks. Some teachers saw it too. They'd look the other way or pretend they didn't hear it. You could tell they just wanted to get through the day (95).

The structural violence here is the conscious choice not to act. Teachers enable bullying yet they also avoid confrontation. This institutional silence and normalization of abuse which makes students feel miserable inhibits them from achieving their full potential is structural violence. Another instance of structural violence is embodied in the suppression of voices from the students and in the process, diminishing their dignity as human. This notion is reflected in Brendan's interaction with a teacher:

I remember one day in English, Brendan tried to say something about how he felt like school was just a prison where they trained you to be a mindless worker drone. The teacher totally blew him off. I could see it in Brendan's face – he was done trying after that" (74).

Brendan's interaction with his teacher clearly shows the suppression of voices and creativity of students. When student's creativity and voices are silenced, they are robbed of one of the core principles of who they are as a human being. This is structural violence as suppression of creativity and voice leads to spiritual numbness that make people feel invisible and hopeless.

When the need for freedom is lacking, structural violence is experienced as "fragmentation" and "marginalisation" (Galtung 36). And lastly, when the need for identity becomes unfulfilled, structural violence is experienced through "penetration" and "segmentation" (36). Hence, instances of structural violence in schools are located in a group of people or individuals experiencing fragmentation, marginalisation, penetration, segmentation, misery and even death due to institutionalised practices, policies and norms in educational settings. It is systemic and perpetuates through institutional mechanisms such as curriculum design and policies. The subject of violence in structural violence is "a structure at work, churning out harm, causing basic human needs deficit" (35).

The concept of fragmentation is defined by Galtung as the process of “keeping the underdogs away from each other” (38). In the context of America, Kevin K. Kumashiro asserts that the disadvantaged students consist of:

Those groups that are traditionally marginalized in society, i.e., that are other than the norm, such as students of color, students from under or unemployed families, students who are female, or male but not stereotypically “masculine,” and students who are, or are perceived to be, queer (26).

In a school setting, fragmentation could manifest through tracking systems that disproportionately place students from underprivileged backgrounds into lower-level courses while affluent or majority- group students are placed in advanced classes. Epp calls it “tracking or ability grouping. Once a student has been assigned to a particular track, his or her place in the social order has been established. Children assigned to classes for the ‘less able’ or the ‘less intelligent’ are handicapped...by the type of education they get” (6). Darder states that the type of education they get is also inferior in terms of “curriculum content, type of instruction, degree of selection, frequency and type of teacher-student interaction and available educational resources” (16). In Myers’ *Shooter*, Leonard can be said to be socially fragmented from the school community:

Leonard didn’t belong to anything. Not a club, not a team, not even a lunch table. He was like this ghost who floated through the hallways, always alone. People either ignored him or acted like he was weird. And after a while, I guess he just gave up trying to connect with anybody (118).

This quote reveals how Leonard is cut off from relationship, connection and support system that allow human to flourish and achieve their full potential. His experience of the concept of fragmentation is not accident. It is allowed by the school culture that labels him as weird and not friendly. Structural violence is experienced in this context by Leonard in the blockage of the potential of his integration into the school community which makes it normal to exclude someone like Leonard from forming friendship. Galtung’s notion of fragmentation can allude to the disconnect between what the school claims to value and what it really practices:

You know what I remember the most? How the school always talked about character and values and respect, but they didn't even notice when a kid was falling apart right in front of them. Leonard was slipping away and nobody said a word. Nobody reached out. Not once (135).

The above quotation reveals a deeper institutional fragmentation where the school is incapable or unwilling to provide the necessary care and counselling the student needs. Leonard is not just emotionally and physically isolated, the system enables to cut him off from any kind of lifelines that are within reach for him. Galtung's idea of fragmentation in the form of breakdown of meaningful human connection and community is reflected in Peter Houghton in Picoult's *Nineteen Minutes*:

Peter sat alone at lunch every day. Not just for a week, or a month – but for years. If someone sat near him, they'd get up and move. The teachers must have seen it, but they never said anything. It was like he was invisible. Or maybe like he was supposed to be (109).

Peter's isolation is highlighted here which is not only a personal issue but it is structurally reinforced. The fact that isolation faced by students like Peter goes unchecked for years shows how the school fragments vulnerable individuals from school community leading to their feeling of hopelessness. Galtung's notion of fragmentation can be regarded to embody situations where human beings are separated from relationships or supportive community that will contribute to their sense of well-being:

It wasn't that Peter didn't want to tell anyone what he was going through. It was that there was no one to tell. His parents were busy. His teachers were distant. And his classmates had made it very clear: he didn't belong (178).

Peter's emotional sense of fragmentation is reflected in this context. He is cut off from all possible sources of support such as from peers and teachers, and even his family. He has a brother named Joey who was a bright and popular student who passed away in a car accident. His grieving parents become emotionally absent for Peter. Here, the harm comes from the silence and neglect that render Peter emotionally adrift in a system that offers no refuge or repair. In this regard role of

parenting is crucial to understand the cause of his sense of alienation. Parents are important especially in early stages of development. It is estimated that children who form secure attachments to their parents or caregivers are more likely to develop the skill of emotional regulation; and neglectful parenting can lead to emotional dysregulation, low self-esteem and can even lead to aggressive behaviour. Lack of discipline or giving overly harsh punishment tend to lead to behavioural issues as well. Parental monitoring is associated with lower rates of youth violence. In most cases parents set the emotional and behavioural tone of children. James Garbino asserts that violent individuals grow up in a home where their emotional needs are unmet:

When you look closely at violent boys, what you find are children who were trying to survive in an emotional desert. Violence grows out of their unmet needs – for love, for safety, for a sense of connection to others (27).

In the select texts, the characters that lose their composure and react by shooting their schoolmates such as Gary in *Give a Boy a Gun*, Peter in *Nineteen Minutes* and Leonard in *Shooter* are portrayed to be raised by parents who do not meet the emotional needs and connection they thirst for. Garbino continues to state that, “The most dangerous children are those who feel they are not noticed, not valued, not connected to anything or anyone (47). He also contends that, “A nurturing parent, even just one, can act as a lifeline for a troubled boy. Without that, he is at the mercy of a violent world” (125). This lack of nurturing parents is seen in all the parents of the shooters in this study. Peter’s father is immersed in his job in addition to grieving the loss of his other son. Peter’s mother is shown to try to connect with him but the effort remains unfruitful. Gary’s parents have an “ugly divorce” (13), making his mother emotionally unavailable to him. Leonard’s mother is portrayed to be emotionally detached from her son. “His mother never understood him. She didn’t want to understand him. He was just this weird kid she had to deal with” (46). However, parents are not the only influence in children’s lives. Children’s character and behaviour is influenced by peer pressure, school dynamics, media and technology and they can even have psychological disorders. Psychological disorder in some cases of violent individual may be the most prominent reason a person

shows violent behaviour. However, the characters on the texts analysed tend to deviate from this analysis. Garbino states: “Violent behaviour is learned behaviour. When violence is modelled in the home, on the street, or in the media, children absorb it as a way to deal with conflict” (80). Along similar lines, Deborah Prothro-Stith asserts that violence is also a learned behaviour, and that “we can unlearn it through public health approaches involving families, schools and communities” (45).

Galtung’s fragmentation within a system is reflected in the disconnect between what the school claims to value and what it actually does:

The school had anti-bullying posters on every wall, zero-tolerance policies in every handbook and assemblies about kindness every semester. But when it really mattered – when Peter was shoved into lockers or tripped in the halls – there was no one to enforce any of it. Rules didn’t mean anything if nobody cared enough to follow through (234).

This discord is a form of structural violence in the sense that it constitutes institutional failure that severs students from meaningful protection.

In Strasser’s *Give a Boy a Gun*, Galtung’s notion of fragmentation is reflected in student’s experience of exclusion from their peers as:

They were the kind of kids nobody wanted to sit with. Brendan told me he stopped trying after a while. He said, ‘What’s the point? You ask someone if you can sit at their table and they look at you like you crawled out of a skewer (61).

Fragmentation is structural violence in the sense that even when students are fragmented into categories, the institution does nothing to solve the existing inequalities. The silence and inaction on the part of the educational institution leads to spiritual harm making people feel hopeless which is structural violence. Fragmentation can be said to be experienced at different levels. Gary who is the shooter’s experience of emotional fragmentation and his eventual reaching of his breaking point is reflected in the narrative as:

Gary said it was like he wasn’t part of the same world as everyone else. That

he was just floating through school in some kind of fog. He told me, ‘You’re there, but

you’re not there. No one sees you. You don’t matter. And after a while, you start to believe it (77).

Gary’s feelings of being invisible and under-valued reflect a profound emotional fragmentation. His feeling of disconnect is a result of the school’s environment that denies him inclusion and acceptance. The narrative also reflects institutional fragmentation which is the gap between what school authorities claim to stand for and what they actually practice as:

All the teachers acted like they cared. But when Gary was getting slammed into lockers or called names, none of them did a thing. They just walked faster, like they didn’t see it. Then when the shooting happened, suddenly they were full of speeches and grief (104).

In Asher’s *Thirteen Reasons Why*, Galtung’s notion of fragmentation is constituted in the form of break down of human relations and solidarity:

No one knows for certain how much impact they have on the lives of other people. Oftentimes, we have no clue. Yet we push it just the same. Hannah was always there, walking the halls with us, but she might as well have been invisible. Until she wasn’t (193).

Hannah’s isolation is silently accepted by her peers. Her growing isolation from the school community that renders her almost invisible even though she is physically present in the school vicinity highlights how social neglect becomes normal and accepted, contributing to the structural harm that ultimately leads to her suicide. Her fragmentation from the school social community is a key expression of structural violence in this context. Hannah further experiences emotional fragmentation amplified by the school’s failure to render her help before it gets too late. She explains:

I went to Mr. Porter. I gave him a chance. I walked into his office, sat down, and told him everything. And what did he do? He told me to move on. To

forget. How do you forget a rape? How do you just walk away from that? (257).

This becomes one of the most powerful instances of structural violence through fragmentation in the novel. Hannah finally seeks help but the school counsellor fails to act, leaving her abandoned and isolated. This instance can be seen as severance of student from institutional care where the school's system fails to connect with or protect students in need of help. The system's inaction leaves Hannah emotionally and structurally unsupported. The concept of disconnect and discord between how the school presents themselves and what it really does seem to echo in all of the literary texts analysed. In this narrative, Hannah's recollection of her experience reflects it as:

Everyone was always smiling. Laughing. Walking through the halls like life was perfect. But if you stopped and looked – really looked – you'd see it. The cracks. The people falling through them. Like I did (179).

Hannah's metaphor of falling through the cracks represents how students are cut off from meaningful help and aid or connection which is structural in nature.

In the same vein, fragmentation at the social level is seen in Maciel's *Tease*. Emma Putnam, the girl who eventually commits suicide becomes excluded from social life of the school since she chooses to express her sexuality differently by having an affair with her classmate's boyfriend: "Emma was a joke. We all made her one. But nobody said, 'Hey, stop.' Not a teacher, not a parent. And when she started missing school, no one asked why. Not even once" (189). Emma's sense of alienation is compounded by institutional silence which is a key characteristic of structural violence. In the narrative, fragmentation at the emotional level and in terms of absence of the necessary help is reflected in Sara's recollection when no adult intervention is seen. She states:

I kept waiting for someone to tell us to stop. For a teacher to notice. For someone to care that we were making her life miserable. But no one did. So I thought it didn't matter (207).

The absence of feedback to the suffering individual in school leads to cruelty being normalized. This instance can be posited within Galtung's notion of fragmentation where support systems are detached from those in distress, thereby perpetuating suffering as structurally sanctioned.

In Anderson's *Speak*, fragmentation at the societal level is experienced by Melinda which she reflects in her words: "All the kids are laughing and talking. But not to me. I'm a nobody. I'm a shadow walking through the halls" (37). Here, Melinda's metaphor of being a shadow is a reflection of her state of exclusion from peer community and relationship. For Galtung, when people are cut off from a sense of belonging, their potential is stifled and their well-being undermined and this constitutes structural violence.

In Galtung's theory of structural violence, marginalisation refers to the process of pushing certain individuals or groups to the periphery of a school system, thereby preventing them from fully participating or accessing resources. He defines it as "keeping the underdogs on the outside, will impede mobilisation" (38). For instance, in *Give a Boy a Gun*, football players are the top dogs for whom the school "hired a private plane for \$25,000 to take the team to a game" (98). The others who are not playing football are denied access to the school resources allocated only to a certain segment of the students. In addition, student leadership roles such as class president, student council member, or club leader are typically filled by students who are academically high-performing, outgoing, or from more affluent backgrounds. Students from marginalised groups, particularly those from lower-income families or minority- racial groups, are often overlooked for these positions regardless of their potential. Epp also asserts that structural violence "encourages disadvantaged students to disappear from the school system and competition for economic success" (4). The most extreme form of marginalisation in a school setting would be expulsion from school or removal from academic institutions. Epp states that students most damaged by structural violence "are removed from school, or remove themselves, and suffer the lasting disadvantages of an incomplete education" (2). *Give a Boy a Gun* also reflects marginalisation through the pushing out of students like Brendan and Gary from peer groups because their differences are not accommodated leading

to social expulsion: “They were the kind of kids nobody wanted to sit with” (61). The school’s indifference further marginalises the students who are victims of bullying. The students are aware of it: “Teachers saw it too. They just walked faster” (95). In *Thirteen Reasons Why*, structural violence takes a toll on Hannah enormously, culminating in death. Her pain and presence go unnoticed by the system even though it presents itself in plain sight: “She was always there...but she might as well have been invisible” (195). Hannah’s final attempt to seek help is dismissed. The school counsellor’s failure to help her further marginalises her, reflecting institutional failure to provide help to students in need. Peter Houghton also suffers due to structural violence in the form of the absence of necessary interventions and help from his school counsellor. This leads him to shoot his peers, and the possibility of him enrolling in school again is slim, as he has to serve in prison for some time. Epp also adds that underprivileged students are further marginalised by teachers and principals when “[i]nclusive policies, intended to allow ‘disadvantaged’ students more access to education are often scorned as a diminution of this standard” (5). Galtung’s concept of marginalisation is experienced in the novel through Peter’s experience of ostracism: “He sat alone at lunch every day...but no one intervened” (107). Peter experiences ostracism both at the social and institutional level as teachers and administrators passively allow his exclusion. He is further denied support from his family. “There was no one to tell. His parents were busy. His teachers were distant (174). Peter is denied access to support systems making him excluded from communal recognition, highlighting emotional and familial marginalization. In *Tease*, Emma is pushed to the margin and denied access to peer community. “We all made her one [a joke]. But nobody said, ‘Hey, stop...And when she started missing school, no one asked why. Not even once” (189). The school’s social environment robs her of her dignity as a human being making her live a miserable existence. In Anderson’s *Speak*, Melinda experiences emotional marginalisation and is discouraged from expressing herself. She claims that “Nobody really wants to hear what you have to say” (9). She also talks about a closet she used to hide in: “It’s the closet where I go when I want to disappear” (50). Her retreat to a closet is both literal and symbolic representing the school system’s failure to re-integrate her after the incidence where she calls the police at a party. Leonard in

Shooter by Myers is pushed to the margin by his peers and even the school structure ignores his existence. “Nobody talked to Leonard. Not the teachers, not the guidance counsellors, not the other kids” (123), his voice and presence are ignored which marginalises him from his peers and school community.

Penetration in Galtung’s framework of structural violence refers to the process of “implanting the top-dog mind inside the underdog” (38). Galtung’s concept of penetration helps in locating structural violence not in random acts of cruelty but in the penetrated belief generated by the system that is accepted as normal by the victim. Peter Houghton in *Nineteen Minutes* internalises the belief that violence is the only way to attain freedom and power, even for just a brief moment. Years of bullying convince him that kindness is weakness and that vengeance will restore his status. Structural violence is located in the celebration of the jocks who are mainly bullies by the school system, and in the passivity of the teachers and administrators in reducing harassment. In Myer’s *Shooter*, Leonard internalises the school community’s rejection of him. He starts to believe that he is the defect and starts to have the perception that he is the problem and not the system:

Leonard kept talking about how the world didn’t want him. That people like him didn’t belong anywhere. He started saying maybe it was his fault – that maybe if he was more normal, more like the other kids, he wouldn’t get picked on (119).

The narrative highlights how the school normalises dehumanisation. Leonard also absorbs and accepts mistreatment and bullying as something that should happen in a school, showing deep internalisation of the concept of penetration within structural violence as evident in Brendan’s observation: “The thing is, after a while, you stop expecting people to treat you decent. You stop thinking it could even be different” (136). Similarly, in Picoult’s *Nineteen Minutes*, Peter internalises the bullying and begins to conform to the narrative that he is worthless portraying an example of how structural ideology becomes personal identity through penetration: “Peter didn’t believe he deserved kindness. He thought, if everyone treated him like trash, maybe he was trash. The more he heard it, the more it felt like truth. It sank into his bones

(145). The dominant culture's dismissal of bullying becomes Peter's own justification for accepting and minimising his pain, showing how he absorbs the societal oppressive code through penetration. "Every time Peter tried to fight back, he felt guilty. Like maybe he was the one overreacting. Like the school said – boys will be boys" (160). The concept of penetration is also observed in Strasser's *Give a Boy a Gun* when Brendan internalises the assumption that his suffering is invalid, adopting the belief that his pain is weakness:

Brendan told me once he didn't think he had the right to complain. That other people had it worse. That maybe he just wasn't tough enough. That's what people told him, and he started to believe it (87).

This reflects ideological penetration on the part of Brendan. In addition, repeated bullying results in self-stigmatisation. "They kept calling him a freak. And after a while, he stopped defending himself. He just shrugged like it was true. Like it didn't matter anymore (74). Brendan starts accepting the identity forced upon him highlighting Galtung's concept of penetration within structural violence. Similarly, in the narrative *Tease* by Maciel, Sara internalises the gendered and toxic social norms:

We thought it was just drama. That's what girls do, right? We're supposed to talk behind backs, start rumors, fight over guys. It's what everyone expected, so we didn't even think it was wrong (136).

Bullying is normalised and seen as typical girl behaviour showing the oppressiveness of societal codes ingrained in the school system. In the narrative, Maciel also highlights how victim blaming is internalised by Sara through her internal conflict – "Even now, I still wonder – was it really that bad? Or was Emma just too sensitive? I mean, if she hadn't killed herself, would any of this matter?" (217). She doubts Emma's pain and maintaining the harmful established pattern. Anderson in *Speak* also draws attention to Melinda's acceptance of the school's silence and neglect as normal and believes it as a survival strategy. She says, "I dive into closet and slam the door. There is nothing wrong with me. These are the rules. This is how you survive" (50). Melinda also internalises shame and self-blame from the school's failure to give her protection highlighting penetration. She asserts, "I want to confess

everything to Mr. Freeman, to see if he can guess the truth. But I don't. Because it's easier not to. Because I don't want to be wrong again (96). She fears that seeking help will backfire again showing how the system fails her. Along the same line, Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why* portrays how the protagonist Hannah adopts the logic of victim-blaming as she asserts, "I started to believe that maybe I was the problem. That maybe if I smiled more, dressed differently, kept my head down, people wouldn't treat me that way" (174). She alters her behaviour to conform to the system's cruelty, and this shows how dominant norms penetrate an individual. Even after experiencing trauma in the form of sexual harassment, she continues to doubt herself since the school structure tends to minimise her pain – "Mr. Porter said I could choose to let it go. As if what happened to me was something I should just file away and forget. And part of me believed he was right" (254). This quotation highlights the penetration of dominant narrative even through suffering.

Galtung's concept of segmentation in structural violence is "giving the underdog only a very partial view of reality, will impede consciousness-formation" (38). It refers to the act of restricting the underprivileged or marginalised to a partial or distorted view of reality, limiting their awareness of broader possibilities or alternative structures. In *Thirteen Reasons Why*, Hannah suffers from segmentation in the form of her identity being reduced to "a slut" (23) after rumours spread. She develops a very partial view of her reality, leading to negative thinking, which spirals into her ruin. Structural violence, therefore, manifests in the normalisation of slut-shaming and the school's inability to help her when she reaches out for help through the school's counsellor. She laments, "They say I was easy. That was it. The whole story as far as anyone cared" (143). Hannah becomes flattened to a rumour. No one cared to explore the full narrative. She experiences dehumanising simplification and segmentation where she is seen only through a partial view. The whole dimension of her character and personality as a human being becomes erased by gossip culture. "Once the rumours started, nothing else mattered. Not what I said. Not what I did. I was just the girl everyone whispered about" (157). She is reduced to an object of scandal. In the same vein, *Tease* by Amanda Maciel highlights how Emma is reduced to a sexualised stereotype. Her whole life in the school is reduced to a label – "Emma

was the slut. That's what we called her. We didn't care about anything else – what books she read, what made her laugh. Just that (192). She continues to be judged based on the visible trait of what she wears denying her full complexity as a human being. Sara says, "We told ourselves she deserved it because of how she dressed. As if that was all she was" (197). In *Speak*, Anderson highlights the notion that Melinda is seen as a disciplinary problem and not as a victim who is falsely blamed. The ignorance of her reality is ignored by her peers and even the teachers in the school. She explains: "They think I'm just being difficult. They don't see that I'm hurting. Just that I'm failing" (62). Her identity is reduced to a single moment in her life. This cuts her off from receiving empathy and understanding. She says, "I'm the girl who called the cops. That's how they see me now. Nothing else" (33). In *Give a Boy a Gun*, Strasser highlights how Gary's complex personality and character as a human being is reduced to insults. He becomes dehumanised through segmentation within structural violence. "All they ever called him was 'weirdo' or 'psycho.' Gary stopped correcting them because that's all anyone saw" (88). In addition, Brendan's identity is also reduced through the school's complicity in normalisation of dehumanisation. "When Brendan talked about science or politics, people just laughed. No one wanted to hear that part of him" (71). His schoolmates refused to see his intelligence but chose to see him only through the lens of mockery. In a similar vein, Picoult highlights how Peter is reduced to a single identity after pulling the trigger on his schoolmates. She states: "People wanted to know how a monster like Peter could sit beside them in math class. But they never saw Peter. Just the shooter" (204). The school system allows for the perpetuation of reducing Peter to a bullied kid before the shooting, and a criminal after the incident. "To his classmates, he was the nerd. The punching bag. The loser. No one ever asked what he liked or what he felt" (114). Even before and after he pulled the trigger, Peter's identity is always reduced to stereotypes. This erases his full range of complex character and personality as a person under the school's system that enables such dehumanization and belittling which further robs him of the opportunity to participate fully in the school community. In *Shooter* by Myers, segmentation is experienced by Leonard by reducing him to his attire. "All they saw when they looked at Leonard was trouble. Black trench coat, headphones, head down. They didn't see a kid. They saw a threat"

(123). His real identity seems to be ignored and people around him try to box him into stereotypes. “The cops kept asking about gangs. Leonard wasn’t in a gang. He was in the AV club. But they didn’t care about that part” (132).

A deeper analysis of the literary texts calls for the employment of Hannah Arendt’s notions of violence and power. For her, power comes from people acting together which parallels Foucault’s notion that power is not concentrated in the top only. Arendt puts forward the idea that power is not held by an individual and it does not rely on violence. It is rather created and sustained by collective will when people agree and act in unison. According to her analysis, once people stop co-operating, power disappears. She states:

Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual. It belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together. When we say of somebody that he is ‘in power’ we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name (44-45).

She contends that violence is not the same as power. She draws attention to her analysis that violence often appears where power breaks down. It is instrumental, a means to an end and never an end in itself. She claims that violence may be efficient in the short-term, but it cannot generate legitimacy or real power. She explains:

Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power’s disappearance. Violence can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it” (56).

She remarks that violence is destructive. It may silence or suppress. But it cannot generate power or real authority since authority tends to require the consent of others and is not attained through coercion or weapons. She claims that even when violence generate authority, it is short-lived and create only short-term obedience:

Violence can always destroy power; out of the barrel of a gun grows the most effective command, resulting in the most immediate and perfect obedience.

What can never grow out of it is power (54).

Her assertion is that power can only come from human obedience and not through their domination.

Arendt's notion of power is based on collective will and co-operation. "Power is never the property of an individual. It belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together (44). When this collective co-operation breaks down, that is when individuals are pushed into isolation or they are cut off from their supportive network such as peers and family, violence tend to take place. This notion is reflected in Leonard in Myers' *Shooter*: "The thing is, after a while, you stop expecting people to treat you decent. You stop thinking it could even be different" (136). Leonard loses any sense of collective support from school community, family and even from the school itself through lack of inappropriate guidance when in need. School, peers, and authorities isolate him, and his response turns violent making him pull the trigger. Similarly, in Picoult's *Nineteen Minutes*, "Peter didn't believe he deserved kindness...It sank into his bones" (145). His sense of alienation and isolation shows the collapse of collective will through lack of co-operation. Without affirmation from his peers or community, he enacts violent revenge. In the same spirit, Strasser's *Give a Boy a Gun* reflects the same sense of alienation in Gary. "They kept calling him a freak. And after a while, he stopped defending himself" (76). The collapse of collective will is portrayed by rejection of Gary by his peers and their eventual labelling and de-humanizing action towards him. Violence then fills the space left by the failed systems. In Maciel's *Tease*, Emma's suffering becomes normalised. "We thought it was just drama...It's what everyone expected, so we didn't even think it was wrong" (134). No structure or person intervened in her suffering to restore her dignity. Her suicide then reveals violence in place of power. Likewise, in Anderson's *Speak*, Melinda conforms to a system that silences rather than empowering her: "There is nothing wrong with me. These are the rules. This is how you survive" (50). Also, in Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why*, Hannah's isolation due to break down of collective will to co-operate and help each other out leads to violence directed at herself. She remarks: "I started to believe that maybe I was the problem...people wouldn't treat me that way" (171). Suicide

becomes her response to the absence of power, connection or validation from the communities surrounding her.

Arendt holds on to the notion that true power arises from people working together, supporting one another and rendering validation and connection. She states: “Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert” (45). This notion is reflected in the select texts. In *Shooter*, Leonard acts alone. He never finds a group or individual who validates him and he is thus, stripped of power. In *Nineteen Minutes*, Peter is continually isolated and rejected by his peers, the school system and even his family. His lack of communal participation reflects powerlessness which eventually results in violence. In *Give a Boy a Gun*, Gary and his close friend Brendan are isolated and segmented from the school community. Their participation in a network of dialogue with their peers is minimal. The sense of community is lost to them, thereby rendering them powerless and violence takes over through Gary’s action of shooting at his peers. In *Tease*, Sara and her friends enact group behaviour but it is not power in Arendt’s sense because it excludes others and rests on violence. It is not power in the sense that there is no shared purpose. In *Speak*, Melinda loses all her friends after the party incident where she calls the police. No one acts in concert with her. She recovers some power only when she breaks the silence and reclaims speech, narrating the reason why she called the police and how she is indeed a victim of rape. In *Thirteen Reasons Why*, Hannah experiences a breakdown of community. Her tapes try to re-build her narrative but only after power has already vanished, that is only after her suicide.

Arendt, drawing attention to her analysis that violence cannot generate legitimacy argues:

Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy. This implies that it is not correct to think of the opposite of violence as nonviolence: to speak of nonviolent power is actually redundant. Violence can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it. The most radical revolutionary will become a conservative the day after the revolution. What can never grow out of it is

power (57).

Analysis of the literary texts reflects this notion clearly. *Shooter* portrays that Leonard's action of shooting does not win understanding, compassion or change. It simply destroyed what little remained of his connection to others. *Nineteen Minutes* reveals that Peter's mass shooting is interpreted as monstrous and not meaningful as he has intended. No healing and no structural reflection takes place. *Give a Boy a Gun* reflects that the school is only left in horror with no transformation afterwards. Brendan and Gary's actions do not build power. Instead, they reflect its total loss. *Tease* reveals that Emma's suicide note does not inspire institutional change. It only provokes guilt and silence. Her voice is still missing. *Thirteen Reasons Why* reveals that Hannah's tapes are a violent gesture of narration, but they do not restore the power she was denied in life. *Speak* portrays that Melinda's silence is a loss of power. But her final act of speaking up the truth is more powerful than resorting to violence unlike the other texts analysed, aligning with Arendt's concept of power and violence.

Arendt harps on the notion that speech and visibility are sources of power. Power depends on being seen, heard and acknowledged:

Power springs up whenever people get together and act in concert, but it derives its legitimacy from the initial getting together rather than from any action that may then follow. Wherever people gather together, it is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily. To be actualised, power requires visibility (44).

Denying someone's voice or visibility is a form of disempowerment. This notion is reflected in the select texts. *Shooter* reveals that Leonard is not seen for who he is, and is rather seen only through what he appears to be. His voice is silenced until it erupts in violence. He lost his power through invisibility by his peers, family and the school authorities. *Nineteen Minutes* reflects Peter's thoughts and feelings which are ignored and mocked. He is not granted legitimacy through listening or visibility. *Give a Boy a Gun* portrays Gary and Brendan's experience of isolation, pain and shame. Their pain is invisible until they reach their breaking point which erupts into

violence. *Tease* reveals that Emma is spoken about, but not spoken with. Her lack of voice renders her powerless which leads to a death no one truly understands. *Thirteen Reasons Why* reveals that Hannah's tapes are an attempt at posthumous speech. Yet they come too late. Her visibility in life was lost, rendering her powerless which results in suicide. *Speak* reflects the restoration of power through Melinda's speech when she chooses to speak up on what has really happened at the party. Her speech renders her power again which she has once lost.

While Arendt's distinction between power and violence highlights how violence emerges from the breakdown of collective will and legitimacy, Galtung extends this discussion by offering a structural model that situates violence within broader societal systems. His concept of violence triangle locates the source of violence in violence itself. The notion of violence breeds violence is implied throughout his works. Žižek's notion of violence echoes Galtung's notion of violence triangle where when one type of violence is taking place, it is mainly due to the working of the other types of violence. He states:

At the forefront of our minds, the obvious signals of violence are acts of crime and terror, civil unrest, international conflict. But we should learn to step back, to disentangle ourselves from the fascinating lure of this directly visible "subjective" [direct] violence, violence performed by a clearly identifiable agent. We need to perceive the contours of the background which generates such outbursts. A step back enables us to identify a violence that sustains our very efforts to fight violence and to promote tolerance (1).

Žižek puts forward the notion that subjective (direct) violence is generated by objective (indirect) violence such as symbolic (cultural) violence and systemic (structural) violence. Galtung then asserts that, "Violence can start at any corner in the direct structural cultural violence triangle and is easily transmitted to the other corners" (58). Galtung's concept of violence triangle denotes that these three types of violence work together like the three corners of a triangle. It emphasizes the notion that the most visible type or direct violence such as killing, shooting and rape is only like the tip of the iceberg. Structural violence hides underneath it and remains

invisible such as inadequate system that produces frustration and hopelessness. Cultural violence makes the other kinds of violence seem and look normal by giving explanation saying that those are societal codes or cultural values so their existence becomes justified. The interaction of the different kinds of violence can best be illustrated from the select texts. In *Shooter*, direct violence is seen in Gary's mass shooting at school, and commits suicide as a final act of violence. The structural violence is embodied in the school system that does not care about their emotional needs. Cultural violence in this context is the normalisation of toxic masculinity. Leonard is praised for his interest in guns yet his emotional traits are mocked. The culture he is in hides the warning signs of violence. In *Nineteen Minutes*, Peter losing his composure and killing his schoolmates is direct violence. The structural violence is the school system that fails to protect him from years of bullying, and the unmet needs of emotional support from the school and from his parents. Cultural violence is the glorification of jocks and footballers, dismissing nerds and students occupying the lower rungs of the school community. The culture also normalises bullying as a part of growing up. This leads to Peter's isolation and makes the people around him excuse his suffering until it explodes. In *Tease*, bullying takes place by Sara on Emma through texts, rumours and public shaming. Structural violence is the school's slow response to Emma's suffering, and even the legal system punishes only some of the students who participate in bullying and thus creating an unequal treatment. Cultural violence in the text consists of blaming victims. Emma is blamed for expressing her sexuality and is shamed for it. This perception makes others see her suffering as justified and deserved. In *Speak*, direct violence manifests in Melinda getting raped at the end of summer party. Structural violence is the school system that ignores and offer no support for her suffering. Cultural violence consists of the shaming of victims propelling them to be silent yet protecting the popular boys in the school. The most prominent instance of direct violence in *Thirteen Reasons Why* is the suicide of Hannah which is the ultimate form of self-directed violence. Structural violence is the inadequacy of the school system in providing help to Hannah. She confides in the school counsellor to seek help but the counsellor ignores her suffering, failing to offer her a safe learning space. Cultural violence here is the normalisation of sexual harassment Hannah faces, and the eventual spreading of

rumour and victim blaming instead of supporting the one suffering. This toxic element of the culture she lives in makes her feel invisible and hopeless. Analysis of the select narratives using Galtung's concept of violence demonstrates how one type of violence generates the others forming a vicious cycle. Galtung asserts:

Cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look and feel right, or at least not wrong...The study of cultural violence highlights the ways in which the acts of direct and structural violence are legitimized, internalized, and thus rendered acceptable in society (39).

Building upon Galtung's concept of violence triangle comprising of direct, cultural and structural violence to unmask the different kinds of and instances of violence in schools, it becomes increasingly imperative to interrogate remedial measures to prevent further instances of violence happening. Complete erasure of violence may not be possible since systems tend to have gaps in its law and enforcement, and individuals come with varying personalities and varying degree of mental health. However, drawing upon critical theorists and influential critics become important with the hope of reducing violent occurrence. To combat the invisible and subtle forms of violence, Galtung seems to propose the unmasking of cultural assumptions that make certain kinds of harm invisible and normal. His works reflect the workings of violence and tend to provide one of the deepest analyses of the different kinds of violence that can occur. On the other hand, Paulo Freire calls for empowering learners to question and transform the parts of reality that is unfair and contain exploitation. He states:

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system...or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world (34).

Freire harps on the insistence of teaching students not only what to learn and study, but how to read their lessons and books critically and creatively. He emphasizes on the notion of teaching students to think creatively so that they will be able to develop

the cognitive to see the injustices which tend to be filled with the invisible codes of domination embedded in language, manners, gesture and content. Along similar lines, bell hooks suggests inclusivity in classrooms to develop learning spaces that honour lived experiences. She states:

To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin (13).

bell hooks tends to suggest the creation of classrooms with safe learning space that centre on diverse identities. Likewise, Foucault reveals through his concept of power that schools are not creating students that are different since they are trained to act and behave according to established norms of the schools which suppress difference. He states that discipline “makes individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise (170). His concept suggests the generation of docile bodies or students and this process hinders the generation of creative and unique individuals.

Drawing upon critical theorists’ suggestions for remedial measures, it is imperative to analyse what American experts in public health and violence prevention are suggesting. Dewey G. Cornell focusses on behavioural threat assessment and supportive intervention. She explains:

Every kid who makes a threat is waving a red flag that says, ‘I’ve got a problem I don’t know how to solve,’...Threat assessment and management is not an adversarial process and is most effective when it is not framed or approached as adversarial (qtd. in Strauss).

This approach encourages a safe and supportive school environment where if there are students showing concerning behaviour, they would be given mental health support instead of neglecting and labelling them as troubled students. Concurrently, Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Stith recommends implementing of school-based violence prevention programs that include all students and not only students with risky and concerning behaviours. In an interview, she claims:

We should have a requirement in this country...to have in every school...a universal violence prevention program. And by universal, it is understood that it's for all students, not for the bad students...the school benefits from some universal violence prevention program with...an average reduction in fighting of 15%.

She emphasizes the need to heal children rather than categorizing them and criminalizing them when they show problematic behaviour. In addition, she suggests employing health care community for school violence prevention as-

Violence and its consequences must be perceived as a serious and large-scale problem that needs to be addressed by the health care community...support be developed for experimental efforts (24).

Meanwhile, Jackson Katz states:

If it takes a village to raise a child, it also takes a village to raise a rapist. Perpetrators aren't individual monsters; they are people reflecting a system. We need to address that system.

He further states, "Most people think they only have two choices for intervention...intervene physically right at the point of attack, or do nothing. And that's a false set of choices" (1). Katz recommends addressing the system that perpetuate harm, inequalities and exploitation. He recommends training students and staff to recognise risky situations and provide the necessary intervention. These voices shift the emphasis from punishment to support, from silence to active responsibility, and from crisis response to systemic prevention. American experts such as Dewey Cornell, Deborah Prothrow-Stith and Jackson Katz suggest helpful remedial measures to prevent violence in schools. They portray the tendency to shift focus from taking action after violence takes place to address root causes. Many forms of harm in schools are related to ideas about what it means to be a boy or a girl, how people are expected to behave, and how those who do not fit in are often punished or ignored. To better understand these hidden causes, the next section analyses the primary texts on how gender plays a role in bullying, humiliation, isolation and exploitation. This gendered reading becomes necessary in portraying

how schools can become places where harmful gender norms are repeated and sometimes resisted.

Analysis of the six select texts reveal gendered patterns across all the novels. Bullying tends to be the most prominent theme that stands out. It enforces gender conformity especially in punishing femininity in boys or sexual agency in girls. Raewyn Connell states:

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (77).

Here Connell posits that certain traits of masculinity are accepted while others are not. This helps in explaining why boys who do not fit the dominant masculine type such as the emotional and quiet ones in *Shooter*, *Give a Boy a Gun* and *Nineteen Minutes* are punished and are often bullied or rejected by peers.

Across the select literary texts, femininity is controlled through appearance and sexual behaviour. Sandra Bartky contends that-

Under the current tyranny of slenderness women are forbidden to become large or massive; they must take up as little space as possible...If a woman chooses to violate these norms, she risks being labelled as deviant, as a loose woman (72).

Bartky shows how women's bodies are controlled through social expectations. In novels like *Tease* and *Thirteen Reasons Why*, young girls are judged and bullied based on how they look or act, especially if they are seen as sexually available or non-conforming.

In the texts analysed, girls are often silenced after trauma and boys are discouraged from expressing vulnerability. Judith Butler posits that-

The misapprehension about gender performativity is this: that gender is a choice, or that gender is a role, or that gender is a construction that one puts on, as one puts on clothes in the morning, that there is a 'one' who is prior to

this gender, a one who goes to the wardrobe of gender and decides with deliberation which gender it will be today (39).

Butler contends that gender tends to be derived from what we do. This helps in understanding how gender roles are formed by peer interactions and rules in the academic space, punishing those who do not conform. Butler further claims that, “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results (25).

In examining the six select novels through the lens of structural violence, it becomes evident that the violence committed by students in schools is rarely spontaneous or isolated. It is rooted in a network of systemic neglect, social marginalisation and emotional abandonment. Galtung’s concept of structural violence provides a framework to understand how the denial of basic psychological and social needs such as belonging, recognition and safety creates the conditions under which direct violence such as school shooting emerge. A gendered reading further complicates this matter by revealing how constructions of masculinity intersect with structural violence to shape how young men are to carry themselves, and if they act otherwise, they become marginalised. In some cases the act of asserting dominance through violent action is seen as the only remaining path to gain back respect or even power. Female characters endure a different form of the subtle forms of violence through silencing, sexual shaming, toxic group dynamic and social exclusion as seen in *Thirteen Reasons Why*, *Tease* and *Speak*. Hannah Arendt’s insight helps in understanding how violence emerges when power is denied, and that violence tends to emerge when individuals are excluded from a community of shared power and meaningful participation. Likewise, Foucault’s analysis of power and discipline exposes how schools, families and peer groups become sites of control and normalisation, and how young individuals tend to react with violence when subjected to continuous surveillance and suppression. This chapter argues that violence as portrayed in these novels should not be viewed as moral failure or individual pathology, but as the outcome of structural failures where institutional neglect, injustice, gender expectations and broken systems converge to push vulnerable individuals toward violence self-expression.

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CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

This concluding chapter reflects upon the key insights drawn from the thematic analysis of select six novels highlighting the school-life of American students and the hurdles they go through in navigating the halls of their schools. The study sets out to explore how schools, instead of protecting students from harm often function as sites of exploitation through mechanisms such as suppression, exclusion, silence and neglect. Guided by Johan Galtung's theory of violence, Zizek's notion of violence, Hannah Arendt's critique of violence and power and Foucault's concept of power, alongside a gender-conscious reading, this thesis has demonstrated that the violence experienced by students in school settings is varied and complex. It is hardly limited to physically aggressive type of violence such as hitting, pushing, shoving and shooting inside schools culminating as the most aggressive form of violence that has happened in schools. Violence is rather embedded in everyday activities on the part of students, teachers and authorities in schools. It is expressed in the cultural norms, practices, established pattern, societal code, assumptions and perspective of the culture they are in which Galtung termed as cultural violence. It is also expressed in the system and structure of the school itself which block the students from attaining their highest-self, called structural violence. The literature analysed offers not only a reflection of these dynamics but also a powerful critique revealing how violence is embedded in everyday reality in schools and how violence is normalised and remains unseen due to its undetectable nature as it is embedded in the culture and structure of the school itself.

The findings of this research underscore the argument that schools in America as portrayed in literature often operate as a cocoon brewing violence through a collection of small acts of bullying such as pushing, shoving, verbal assaults, intimidation and threats among students and staff; the school system and structure itself that deny students their well-being through discrimination, ignorance and neglect; and the culture that perpetuates violence through normalising instances of violence happening. Through a close textual analysis of *Shooter*, *Give a Boy a Gun*, *Nineteen Minutes*, *Thirteen Reasons Why*, *Tease* and *Speak*, the study reveals using Galtung and Zizek's theory of violence how schools become playgrounds for generation of violence even though it seems to protect and shield students from

harm. Further analysis reveals the subtlety of violence such as cultural and structural violence as they are hidden under the disguise of normalcy and system that seem unchallenging.

The central finding of this research contends that emotional literacy is a missing curriculum in schools in America. A close reading of the select texts reveal how schools prioritise academic achievement and compliance on the part of students, but they often neglect the emotional development of students. A meticulous reading of the select texts reveal characters that do not know how to process their own emotions. The texts dealing with school shooting such as *Give a Boy a Gun* and *Shooter* portray that the shooters Gary and Leonard respectively are dealing with bullying as they shift schools due to family re-location in different areas. The study reveals their inability to cope with the stress of being the new kids in schools combined with bullying behaviour they are tolerating daily along with lack of emotional support from friends and family. *Nineteen Minutes*, on the other hand reveals Peter's experience of bullying since his very first day of schooling. The instances of bullying they face such as pushing, intimidation, ridicule and threats when taken in isolation may seem harmless. Yet this research concludes that such acts of violence that seem small in isolation is not small and they accumulate as mental torture that propel the victims of such bullying to lose composure leading to violent outbursts. It can be estimated that almost all the students face bullying even though the type and intensity may vary. It is perplexing as to why some students resort to violent outburst while others seem to navigate their school life with ease compared to the shooters. This research posits the importance of having emotional strength and support system to build emotional resilience. Support system becomes important as the shooters in the texts analysed are portrayed as having one or two friends and belonging to the lowest rung of the school community, in addition to having parents that are emotionally distant due to their own problems such as grief and chasing financial stability. The remaining texts deal with female experience of violence. Hannah in *Thirteen Reasons Why* and Melinda in *Speak* portray characters that are victims of rape. The texts become riddled with the emotional turmoil they have to endure because of the sexual assault. Emma in *Tease* is driven to commit

suicide due to her inability to handle bullying. These characters experience emotional pain and distress. While the schools prioritize getting good grades and rewarding students who comply, the emotional development of students is neglected which is evident through the inefficiency of school counsellors which is structural violence for Galtung. This study finds that curriculum that prioritise the mental and emotional well-being of students is lacking. This finding is unsurprising and is consistent with the country where the National Institute of Mental Health reveals that more than one in five U.S. adults live with mental illness. The absence of structured emotional education leaves the students vulnerable to internalised harm and mental health crises. This thesis has demonstrated that institutional failure to provide emotional literacy which is one of the most necessary tools to combat mental illness, contributes directly to the normalisation of emotional torture students suffer in schools, generating harm and damaging outcome.

Another significant finding of this research highlights that extroversion is valorised, while introversion is devalued. As seen across the select texts, traits such as sociability, assertiveness and verbal participation are rewarded while introverted behaviours are often misread as disengagement or defiance. This forces a narrow definition of ideal students in academic settings. From the texts analysed the jocks tend to be favoured by both the students and teachers alike. They are portrayed to possess assertiveness and boldness which earns them favour and make them evade punishment from teachers through their boldness to engage and converse which the other end of the spectrum refrains from. The more introverted ones such as Gary in *Give a Boy a Gun* needs to be probed by teachers to which he can only answer vaguely. The introverted ones tend to become marginalised and outcasted by their own peers and unfavoured by teachers. Melinda's introversion in *Speak* is demonstrated from her hesitancy to speak out the truth even if the truth is for her liberation from social scorn and judgement. The shooters from the texts analysed are portrayed to be reserved, quiet, reticent and aloof with fewer friends. Viewed through Galtung's framework, this bias constitutes a form of cultural violence where conventional value system elevates extroversion at the cost of alternative personalities.

An additional key insight from this study is that creativity is a silenced capacity in school culture. Schools prioritize academic achievement, standardization and conformity instead of creative expressions of students. Across the select novels, only two characters are given creative and artistic self-expression. The fact that only two characters are shown to be artistic out of the select six novels portraying the lives of students in America is proof of the neglect and suppression of creativity in schools. In *Speak*, Melinda's artistic talent of drawing and creating visual art becomes her only outlet for processing the trauma of sexual assault and peer rejection. Leonard in *Shooter* derives passion for photography. However, these forms of creative expression in both the texts remain unsupported by the school's rigid structure that focusses on outcome that can be calculated and graded. These narratives reveal that creativity is undervalued and is treated as disruptive. Drawing from Galtung's theory, such suppressions of creative faculty constitute both structural and cultural violence as the system stifles creative expression and cultural norm scorns it for lack of merit. The institutional and cultural devaluation of creativity silences individuality and stifles the prosperity of certain personalities leaning towards artistic creativity.

A further noteworthy observation from a close analysis of the select texts underscore the argument that break down of human bonds lead to generation of violent individuals drawing from Hannah Arendt's notion of power and violence. From her conception that power belongs to a group, it can be estimated that a person who has power derives his power from his support system of individuals with whom he has strong bonds. A person in power is backed up by individuals who see themselves as belonging to one group. Individuals belonging to a group tend to have strong human bond enforcing strong human connection. When this sense of human bond is broken down and replaced by a sense of isolation and alienation as is portrayed by the characters in the texts analysed, the characters resort to violence. For instance, in *Nineteen Minutes*, Peter does not seem to have any friend anymore after his childhood best friend Josie cuts off communication with him and rejects him as her friend. He does not culminate strong bond and communication with his parents as they are grieving the loss of his brother and emotionally shut themselves.

Similarly, in *Tease*, Emma seems to lack friends and becomes victim of bullying and public shaming. She becomes isolated and does not belong to any group. Peter eventually loses composure and pulls the trigger. Emma breaks down and commits suicide. However, a related discovery highlights that peer loyalty and group dynamics is a two-edged sword and has the capability of protecting and harming at the same time. While friendship groups can offer human bond and enforce connection necessary to survive with less misery as a human being, at the same time, these same dynamics tend to reinforce exclusion, bullying, silence and isolation. In *Tease*, the group loyalty among the group of popular girls in the school becomes a vehicle to perpetuate harm and bullying to others outside the group. Similarly, the other literary texts analysed all show instances of group dynamic among popular students who tend to participate in bullying their peers outside their group, evoking discrimination and isolating vulnerable students.

A close reading of the texts reveals that schools function as disciplinary institutions in the Foucauldian sense. Schools become spaces where power is exercised not through force but through surveillance, normalization and internalised control. In *Shooter* and *Nineteen Minutes*, students exist under constant monitoring by peers, teachers, and even themselves, thereby creating a culture of self-surveillance that punishes difference from established norms. Foucault's concept of the panopticon suggests that even just the possibility of being watched leads students to regulate their own behaviour. In *Tease*, victim-blaming and reputation policing portrays how power circulates among students and not just through authorities. However, in *Speak*, Melinda's silence highlights how disciplinary power isolates and punishes those who resist conformity. The select novels suggest that schools, apart from imparting education, produce docile bodies or students who are shaped to conform social expectation but those that deviate from the cultural norm or established pattern are punished.

A close reading of the texts has brought to light a key thematic concern that violent outburst is a response and not innate aggression. In the texts analysed, violence is portrayed as a reaction to consistent and on-going bullying and systemic harm that takes toll on a person leading to violent outburst. Gary in *Shooter* and

Brendan in *Nineteen Minutes* are not portrayed as violent individuals from their childhood. The study reveals that Gary used to be academically gifted and thrives in his school during his childhood but shifting of school tends to isolate him from group dynamic and he reaches his breaking point due to the stress of constant bullying and system that fails to protect him. Peter reacts violently due to years of bullying accumulating and becoming such a heavy burden for him that propels him to pull the trigger. While their acts are horrifying, they are responses to long-term mental torture and psychological harm. Drawing from Galtung's notion of violence, the violent outburst or direct violence is the result of years of both cultural violence and structural violence that the individual experiences.

The analysis of the select six novels reveal that schools are portrayed not only as spaces of learning but as institutions riddled with exploitation, exclusion and neglect. Using Galtung's concept of structural violence, the working of and instances of structural violence are located and highlighted. Characters like Leonard in *Shooter*, Gary in *Give a Boy a Gun*, Peter in *Nineteen Minutes*, Emma in *Tease*, Melinda in *Speak* and Hannah in *Give a Boy a Gun* experience structural violence not through aggression but through lack of emotional support, neglect and institutional indifference. For instance, in *Thirteen Reasons Why*, Hannah's isolation and mental distress is not addressed by the school system even though she tries to get help through the school counsellor. The school's inability to give help to students produces harm.

Another emerging insight across the texts is cultural violence and the normalisation of harm through it. Cultural violence exists through cultural norm, societal practice, established pattern, conventional value system, assumptions and practices that make harming others seem normal and invisible. In *Tease*, victim-blaming becomes a socially accepted behaviour. In texts such as *Thirteen Reasons Why*, *Shooter*, *Give a Boy a Gun*, and *Nineteen Minutes*, institutional response to students who are vulnerable and prone to mental breakdown is inadequate, and this inadequacy is a socially accepted perspective that makes it normal for school's inability to render help to students in need.

This study has demonstrated that female protagonists like Melinda in *Speak* and Hannah in *Thirteen Reasons Why* reveal how gendered violence is often silenced or minimised. Both are victims of rape yet they internalise the cultural perspective that when such violence occurs, it is the fault of the women. Female trauma is dismissed and silenced. A parallel finding reveals that women tend to resort to non-violent but equally destructive behaviours such as backbiting, bullying, isolation, victim-shaming, and they tend to take advantage of group dynamic to bully the other as a group, further isolating and inflict suffering to their victim as evident in the popular group of girls bullying another girl driving her to commit suicide.

The study has also revealed that the damage caused by violence in schools is not just physical. It causes distress psychologically and emotionally as Galtung has asserted. Across the novels, students suffer from isolation, mental distress, tendency to commit suicide and breakdown of self-worth. These emotional states and psychological sufferings are often due to long-term bullying, humiliation, neglect and systemic inadequacy. A related discovery highlights silence as not merely passive but used as a source to produce distress, thereby harming the well-being of others. The non-intervention of schools in the face of bullying and its inability to help vulnerable students and to dismiss complaints by students becomes a form of violence. In *Speak*, Melinda's suffering is compounded not just by the assault but by the silence of adults who ignore her suffering. This aligns with Galtung's notion of structural violence that remains hidden in the structure of the school itself.

The integration of Galtung, Arendt and Foucault offers a rich lens through which violence can be understood as cultural and structural that are often invisible and embedded into the culture and structure itself lending to their subtlety. Galtung helps reveal the deeply embedded inequalities and normalised harms that students are suffering from. Arendt's political philosophy on notions of power and violence reminds one that real power is built through shared action of community, and not authority or control. Foucault's work enables one to see the disciplinary nature of schools where surveillance and normalisation produce docile bodies or conformity at the expense of creativity and individuality. Together these theories allow for a more layered reading of how harm operates and is made to look normal in educational

settings.

While this research provides meaningful insights into how violence is portrayed in literature dealing with violence in schools in America, several limitations must be considered. The study focusses on only six novels which cannot represent the full range of youth experiences in schools or literary voices available. Since the research is qualitative in nature and text-based, the interpretations are shaped by the researcher's own readings and critical perspective. It does not include real-life data such as interviews or classroom and school observations which limits how far the findings can speak to actual school environments. Additionally, while theories from Galtung, Arendt and Foucault provide valuable frameworks, they also shape the lens through which the texts are read which might exclude other relevant viewpoints. Lastly, by focussing on violence, the study may not give attention to moments of healing appearing in the stories. These limitations open up new opportunities for future research that could include broader cultural settings or alternative theoretical models.

The findings of this research point toward urgent questions for educators and policy makers. If schools suppress creativity and individuality, silence and neglect emotional needs, and reward conformity over difference, then schools tend to be lacking in providing all-round development. This study suggests that emotional literacy and creative expression also need to become central to the curriculum. It also calls for a re-evaluation of disciplinary systems that treat students as problems to be managed rather than people to be understood and helped.

The study is significant for educators, researchers or policymakers by providing deeper analysis of violence in schools and pin-pointing where violence can take place. This is detrimental to understand the kinds of violence that can take place in academic atmosphere so that policymakers can curb violence that can take place in the future. This study opens up the way to analyse and build preventive measures so that violence happening in schools will be curbed to a great extent. Even though this study deals with violence in American schools, the issues explored are not just American problems. What is happening in the schools in America can be said to be

happening in every other school in any other countries. Instances of violence portrayed in American schools such as bullying, name-calling, pushing and shoving are also happening even in the context of the schools in Mizoram. Even though outburst of violence such as school shooting has not happened yet, bullying has been a part of everyday life of students in Mizoram. What is already happening in developed countries like America tend to be the plight of developing countries like India. This study then offers a chance to learn from experience through recognising and analysing early signs on students prone to violence to build safer school communities.

Though this study has explored important ideas about violence in schools in America through select literary texts, there are still many areas that future research can explore. One suggestion is to include books from diverse areas such as stories from India, indigenous or non-American writers for better understanding of how violence is shown in different cultures. Future studies could also include real-life experiences by interviewing students, teachers, counsellors or school authorities to compare them with what is seen in literature. Future studies could also make comparisons between different school systems from different countries. It would also be helpful to explore how violence in schools penetrate into the digital spaces such as social media.

While this thesis has primarily examined direct, cultural and structural violence in literary contexts, it also points to the broader need for systems of care not only at the mental and emotional level but at the physical level as well. Galtung has already established that violence can be felt at the physical, mental and spiritual level. At the physical level, violence is usually inflicted by others which might be difficult to prevent oneself from since one does not have control over others. However, at the mental and spiritual level, a person can take preventive measures by being aware of their condition in that area and seeking professional help. Additionally, the mental or emotional state of a person can be improved by taking care of physical health. For instance, common mental health problems such as depression and anxiety are related to gut health as seen in Harvard Medical School publication:

The brain has a direct effect on the stomach and intestines. For example, the very thought of eating can release the stomach's juices before food gets there. This connection goes both ways. A troubled intestine can send signals to the brain, just as a troubled brain can send signals to the gut. Therefore, a person's stomach or intestinal distress can be the cause or the product of anxiety, stress or depression. That's because the brain and the gastrointestinal (GI) system are intimately connected.

Taking care of one will benefit the other which might prevent even the most extreme form of self-inflicted violence such as suicide. The reason for suicide and other mental health problems are varied and influenced by social, cultural, psychological, biological and environmental. It becomes imperative as an individual to take the necessary step towards remedy even though the only immediate step that can be taken is at the personal level by taking care of physical and mental health. Finally, in confronting the layered violences experienced in schools in select narratives, it becomes evident that the path to healing lies not only in reforming the system and culture but in nurturing the self; a path that can be taken effectively and immediately. Attending to one's own physical and mental well-being becomes a quiet yet radical act of claiming the highest sense of self, dignity and hope.

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OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION

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1. Presented a paper titled, “Exploring Female Experience of Violence in Jodi Picoult’s *Nineteen Minutes*” in the International Virtual Conference on Literature, Language, Linguistics and Culture organised by the Department of Languages, St. Francis College, Koromangala, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India in Collaboration with Cape Comorin Trust, India on 27 March 2023.
2. Presented a paper titled, “Aspects of Violence in Jay Asher’s *Thirteen Reasons Why* in the International Conference on Language, Literature and Humanities organised by Government Degree College Rajpora, Pulwama, Jammu and Kashmir, India in Collaboration with Cape Comorin Trust, India from 26-27 August 2023.
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4. Published an article titled, “Examining the Theme of Violence in *Thirteen Reasons why* by Jay Asher” in the *TIJER – International Research Journals*, a refereed journal. ISSN: 2349-9249.
5. Published an article titled, “Navigating Varied Dimensions of Violence in Educational Institutions: An Analysis of *Shooter* by Walter Dean Myers” in *Mizo Studies*, a quarterly refereed journal. ISSN: 2319-6041.

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ABSTRACT

**LOCATING VIOLENCE: EXPLORATION OF AMERICAN
SCHOOL CULTURE IN SELECT NARRATIVES**

**AN ABSTRACT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF
PHILOSOPHY**

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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND CULTURE STUDIES

SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND LANGUAGES

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**LOCATING VIOLENCE: EXPLORATION OF AMERICAN SCHOOL CULTURE
IN SELECT NARRATIVES**

BY

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Submitted

**In partial fulfillment of the requirement of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
English and Culture Studies of Mizoram University, Aizawl.**

This study locates the various manifestations of violence within the school environment in the United States, drawing upon the select works of American authors dealing with violence in schools. The primary texts for the present study encompass six novels, three of which are based on the Columbine High School shooting, namely *Give a Boy a Gun* (2000) written by Todd Strasser, *Nineteen Minutes* (2007) written by Jodi Picoult, and *Shooter* (2004) written by Walter Dean Myers. The remaining three include *Thirteen Reasons Why* (2007) written by Jay Asher, *Tease* (2014) written by Amanda Maciel and *Speak* (1999) written by Laurie Halse Anderson.

The concept of violence requires the understanding that it extends beyond physical aggression. One of the attributes of violence stated by the World Health Organization is that it is “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group of community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation” (5). This definition posits threat as a form of violence, thereby helping in locating violence within threat itself, independent of any violent action since it generates fear and psychological distress. Therefore, violence can be located through the resulting consequences which manifest not only as physical injuries but also as psychological and spiritual distress.

Johan Galtung asserts that violence constitutes “any avoidable insult to basic human needs” (35). This concept serves as a foundational element in the study of violence. His theory of violence serves as the overarching framework for understanding violence beyond physical acts. It has been widely acknowledged that each manifestation of violence in schools can be categorised through this lens. He classifies these basic needs into four categories: survival, wellness, freedom, and identity (35). Galtung contends that violence emerges when the attainment of these needs is obstructed to the extent that they are not satisfied, or when the potential for their attainment of these needs is “lowered below what is potentially possible” (35). Consequently, the obstruction of these essential needs precipitates acts of violence.

His framework enables one to locate the different forms of violence within academic environments, categorising the various forms of violence into direct, structural and cultural violence. The author asserts that the nature of these forms of violence differs depending on the subject or perpetrator, which encompasses both human entities and non-human elements such as structure or culture. For him, “the object of violence is any carrier of life, particularly a human being, an actor, individual or collective” (36). Violence is defined as the misuse of strength and capacity to inflict pain and distress on the mind, body and spirit, whether intentionally or unintentionally. In the context of educational institutions, violence encompasses various forms of violence that manifest both within the school campus and in external settings where school related activities occur. It is essential to recognise that violence in schools is a multi-dimensional and complex phenomenon. It extends beyond incidences of violence occurring within educational environments; it also includes the behaviours and attitudes that schools normalises, overlooks, or perpetuates. The select works are representations of bullying, harassment, physical attacks and fights, verbal abuse, intimidation, cyber-bullying, school shootings, exclusion and exploitation. The presentation of school shootings as one of the most extreme forms of violence in school tends to be predominant, which characterises school shootings as the most visible and most damaging. This condition of predominance provides a foundational basis for the study as it evokes the need to bring into the limelight subtle forms of violence which can be even more detrimental than school shootings, even though the consequential result may not directly lead to death. The detrimental effects of subtle forms of violence lie in the accumulation of what appear as small events of violence, such as name-calling, shaming, intimidation, bullying, punching and shoving. “It may seem like a small role now, but it matters. In the end, everything matters” (Asher 13). Ryan Clancy in *Give a Boy a Gun* recalls why Brendan resorted to a school shooting in the end. He recounts the damaging consequences of subtle forms of violence that accumulate over time, causing silent pain and inner turmoil that can further explode into fatal incidents. He states, “It’s stupid to point at one incident and say, “It’s all because of this.” It has to be something that builds gradually and eats at you for a long time until you go psycho” (Strasser 61). The study identifies and detects different manifestations of violence in the American academic context that

harm the body, mind and spirit by delving deeper into the cultural aspect that sustains forms of violence that are difficult to detect through their teachings and practices, and the institutional aspect that harm students unintentionally through their system. This study provides a ground on which the nuances of violence can be studied and located within the school environment in the United States of America. Also, this research articulates literary accounts of representations that focus on forms of violence looming large in the schools of America.

Power as conceived by Michel Foucault and Hannah Arendt offers a crucial interpretive framework for understanding the invisible forms of violence within the schools. Foucault's notion of power shows how disciplinary techniques in schools operate through surveillance, classification and normalisation. The school in his view becomes the manifestation of the panopticon where students learn to monitor themselves, internalising institutional expectations as natural law. Hannah Arendt's understanding of power emerges from the collective and communicative actions of individuals, grounded in the ability to act in concert. Where Foucault shows how institutions govern the body and mind through subtle controls, Arendt demonstrates that genuine power lies in collective agency.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The introductory chapter explains the historical background and concepts of school culture in the United States of America. In doing so, the chapter reflects important historical events of violence taking place in the schools of America. From 1600 to 1800, only small private schools seemed to provide education to children. In colonial times, young boys learned core subjects such as reading and math, and young girls learned domestic arts. Public schools seemed to be non-existent during the colonial era, and there was no compulsory education. Schools were established where there was a need for them, such as in Boston and Philadelphia. Otherwise, children were home-schooled. The first private schools were established by the Roman Catholic Church. Public education began to be established in 1840. At present, around eighty per cent of American children access education through public schooling (Kennedy). With the emergence of the public school system, it has been

relied on to generate patriots and reputable individuals who will be beneficial to the community. As early as 1779, there was a nationwide awakening to educate children of all social standing in the hope of producing future leaders and responsible citizens.

Before 1800, the privilege of schooling seems to have been open only to elite white men Americans (Kew 33). Tyack and Cuban observed that there is a focus on core subjects such as “math, English, science and history” (453). Metz describes the nature and characteristics of American schools, highlighting their defining features:

There was little variation in the school schedule and all schools had long hallways with nearly identical classrooms lined up along them. Class size and teachers' normal assignment to meet five groups of students for instruction five times a week varied little. The scope and sequence of curriculum differed only in detail from school to school though the number of sections available in subjects like advanced foreign language or vocational education varied significantly. Students were expected to attend all their classes promptly every day. There were extracurricular activities after school, or occasionally during the last hour of the day (76).

Ambiguity and vagueness tend to characterise the concept of school culture. In an article titled “Improving School Culture for a Better Learning Environment,” the American University’s School of Education notes the nature of American school culture as -

How the school is structured, including its educational aims. Involvement in the community in caring for the school. Community values concerning what’s good, what’s bad, and what’s wrong. The enjoyment and respect of school community members. The satisfaction of its learners. Expectations of students’ and staff behaviour. Collaboration to develop a vision for the school. Respect for each person’s beliefs. Actual student and staff behaviour (3).

Along with the existence of schools, whether private or public, is the existence of violence in schools. It is not a new phenomenon and it can be traced back to colonial

times, continuing to manifest in various forms at the present. For this study, violence in schools refers to acts of violence where the perpetrators and victims involved belong to the institution itself. During the colonial period, violence in schools usually took the form of students rebelling against teachers and authority. Physical confrontations became more common in the nineteenth century. For instance, in 1853, a Louisville High School student murdered their Principal William H.G. Butler for disciplining his younger brother. In the mid-twentieth century, the 1927 Bath School bombing in Michigan and a 1959 bombing in Texas marked early examples of fatal school violence. The late twentieth century and beyond saw other prominent school shootings like Columbine. Valerie Strauss gives the reason for Columbine High School shooting popularity:

It was one of the first to take place after the advent of 24-hour cable news and during ‘the year of the net’...This was the dawn of the digital age of perfect remembering, where words and deeds live online forever. Columbine became the pilot for future episodes of fame-seeking violence (5).

This led to the emergence of several narratives based on this incident. Three of the primary texts dealing with school shootings for this study are based on or influenced by the Columbine High School shooting. Firstly, *Give a Boy a Gun* is inspired by the Columbine High School shooting though it is not a direct retelling. Todd Strasser wrote the novel in the aftermath of Columbine using fiction to process and critique the cultural, psychological and systemic factors that led to school shootings. The novel explores the experience of two teenage boys Gary and Brendan in school which ultimately leads to violent death. Both are subjected to social exclusion, systemic indifference and bullying almost daily. Their unresolved pain festers silently leading them to exact revenge on their bullies and teachers who fail to intervene and stop their mistreatment by shooting them in the school building. This novel is an autopsy of the causes of violence in schools such as unchecked cruelty among peers, normalisation of violence among youth and absence of adult intervention. It allows for the exploration of cognitive and neurobiological dimensions of school violence. Secondly, *Nineteen Minutes* by Jodi Picoult centres

on Peter Houghton, an introvert and a quiet young boy who has to endure years of bullying and social humiliation. The pain emanating from his negative experiences in school culminates when one morning, in a span of nineteen minutes, he brings a gun to his school and executes a planned mass shooting killing ten and wounding many. The novel then unfolds an exploration of guilt, shame, trauma and the eventual process of how he becomes a violent individual through persistent cruelty, rejection and bullying from his peers. The novel is also told through the eyes of Josie, a popular girl who does not directly experience violence from her peers but experiences mental torture. The novel is not simply a novel about school shootings but is an exploration of how negative thinking without the necessary intervention can erupt into mass violence. It exposes the fact that school violence is rooted in individual suffering and societal failure. Thirdly, *Shooter* by Walter Dean Myers centres on Leonard Gray or Len, a high school student who commits a school shooting and dies during the incident. The story is told through interviews, journals and reports as investigators try to understand why he did it. Two other students Cameron and Carla share what they knew about Len before the shooting. Len was bullied for years. He dressed differently. Acted differently and did not fit in. Over time, he became isolated and started to write in his journal about how angry and hopeless he felt. He also became obsessed with guns and revenge. No one paid attention to the warning signs. This shows how negative thinking, social rejection and lack of support can lead to violence. It is a demonstration of how psychological suffering, if ignored, can become deadly.

In *Thirteen Reasons Why*, Clay Jensen receives a mysterious package containing thirteen cassette tapes recorded by Hannah Baker, a classmate who recently died by suicide. On the tapes, Hannah explains the thirteen people and events she believes contributed to her decision to end her life. Each tape reveals moments of sexual harassment, betrayal, indifference, cruelty and rumours which are all seemingly small actions that eventually overwhelm her as time passes. In Anderson's *Speak*, Melinda Sordino starts her freshman year at Merryweather High as a pariah. Over the summer, she calls the police during a party but no one knows why and she refuses to explain. Her former friends abandon her and the attitude of

the teachers towards her is condescending and indifferent. She withdraws into silence and self-doubt. The truth is eventually revealed. She has been raped by a popular senior Andy Evans at the party. She spirals into depression and alienation. However, as time passes, through her art and introspection, she is finally able to confront her rapist and starts to speak out about her experience, reclaiming her voice and sense of self. *Tease* by Amanda Maciel portrays the perspective of Sara Wharton after her classmate Emma Putnam commits suicide. Sara along with her best friend Brielle is facing criminal charges for harassment. Initially, she feels that she is unfairly targeted. However, she eventually realises that she also participates in carrying out violence eventually leading to the death of Emma Putnam.

This chapter has laid the foundation for the understanding of instances of violence in American schools. It shows the necessity of a deeper analysis of violence that do not only lead to outburst or extreme aggression such as school shooting as there are deeper layers that are responsible for such outburst of violence. While violence in schools is often portrayed through instances such as pushing or shoving or causing physical pain, this study argues that violence can take many forms and physical aggression is only the tip of the iceberg.

Chapter 2: Locating Direct Violence

This chapter locates the different kinds of direct violence in school settings. For Galtung and Dietrich, direct or personal violence “refers to the type of violence where there is an actor that commits the violence” (170). Direct violence for Galtung is a survival needs deficit resulting in death. Well-being needs deficit results in maiming and siege. Identity needs deficit results in desocialization and resocialization. Freedom needs deficit results in repression, detention and expulsion (292). This chapter also analyses the perpetrators’ violent behaviour by employing general strain theory and social learning theory.

In a school setting, school shootings resulting in deaths and suicide are examined using Galtung's concept of survival need deficit resulting in death. Survival needs refer to the basic requirements for physical safety and security. In

Nineteen Minutes, Peter kills nine students and one teacher. In *Shooter*, “a student was killed on the spot; several other students were wounded” (Myers 139). The student killed is Brad Williams, and Leonard also takes his own life after the shooting. “From the positioning of the wounds it appeared that Gray had placed the muzzle of the rifle in his mouth and self-inflicted a fatal wound” (160). From the major findings of the School- Associated Violent Death study, it is discovered that “[h]omicide is the second leading cause of death among youth aged 5-18. Data from this study indicate that between 1% and 2% of these deaths happen on school grounds or on the way to and from school” (Conley 7).

Maiming as direct violence is located in *Give a Boy a Gun* where Ryan Clancy, a popular jock who was known for bullying Brendan and Gary is shot in the knee and left paralyzed. “They wanted him to roll over on his back so they could shoot him in the knee. They didn’t want to shoot him in the back of the knee, because they weren’t sure if that would cripple him or not. They wanted to shoot him in the kneecap. They wanted to make sure he’d be ruined for life” (139).

Siege is another form of direct violence caused by a well-being needs deficit. In *Give a Boy a Gun*, the concept of siege and therefore, violence is located in the school shooting incident where “two heavily armed young men...rigged booby-trap bombs in a way that kept us from getting to the doors from the outside. Inside they chained the doors shut” (121).

Galtung’s concept of imposing sanctions refers to threatening others. In *Shooter*, Cameron continually faces threat from his peers even when he does nothing, saying “Hey Cameron, what are you looking at? Look someplace else or I’ll beat the crap out of you” (Myers 97).

Misery is another form of violence caused by a well-being needs deficit. It manifests as bullying or harassment that goes unaddressed by the school administration. Dan Olweus states that “[a] person is being bullied or victimised when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons. Negative actions include things like hitting, name-

calling, or other forms of verbal or physical aggression” (35). In *Nineteen Minutes*, Peter faces bullying constantly trapping him in a state of misery. Josie laments to her mother that “Drew picks on him all the time and Peter gets hurt” (90). The constant state of misery leads to desocialization and repression which fall under direct violence according to Galtung. Peter is pushed into a state of desocialization through peer rejection. Since he was bullied constantly, even his childhood friend Josie refuses to be his friend anymore, telling him to back off when he tries to help her saying “Don’t ever talk to me again” (Picoult 271). Repression is the suppression of freedom. Peter is bullied “outside of school, too” (171) resulting in his freedom-need deficit.

Direct violence is violence easily seen and immediately felt as wrong and harmful. When direct violence such as school shootings takes place, a question that instantly arises is how and why the perpetrator can commit such aggressive action. General strain theory by Robert Agnew analyses the relationship between strain and criminal behaviour.

GST recognises that only some strained individuals turn to delinquency and it predicts that several factors condition the impact of strain on delinquency...There are three major types of strain or negative relationships; others may (1) prevent individuals from achieving their positively valued goals, including monetary, status and autonomy goals; (2) remove or threaten to remove positively valued stimuli that individuals possess (e.g., the death of friends or family members, the loss of romantic partners); and (3) present or threaten to present individuals with noxious or negatively valued stimuli (e.g., verbal insults, physical assaults). These strains increase the likelihood that individuals will experience a range of negative emotions. These emotions create pressure for corrective action, and delinquency is one possible response (Agnew et al, 43).

In *Give a Boy a Gun*, one of the positively valued goals in the school is being a football player. The students accept that “[f]ootball is part of the social fabric of this town” and that the players are “the ones that give Middletown a sense of

accomplishment” (45). Gary and Brendan who are the shooters are not football players. Brendan is removed from his positively valued stimuli when his family moves from Springfield to Middletown. In Springfield “[h]e was smart and funny and a pretty good athlete” (19) which all changed after moving to Middletown. “Brendan and Gary got picked on. That’s a fact. We all did” (37). This statement proves the presence of negatively valued stimuli in their school life further strengthening their reason to lash out eventually.

A major challenge in general strain theory lies in the notion that some individuals despite experiencing strains do not engage in criminal behaviour or commit violence. Social learning theory suggests that violence is learned and that students replicate violent behaviours observed in their peers, family and media. Ruth Triplett states that the theory “assumes that people, at birth, have neither a motivation to commit crime nor to conform” (1). Whether a person commits a crime or conforms depends on the surrounding individuals from whom they learn and replicate their behaviours. In *Shooter*, the shooter Leonard Gray has already been exposed to the act of shooting through his father in “a camp where his father shot sometimes” (Myers 23). He has already learned to shoot pop-up targets and when the time comes when he wants to exact revenge on his bullies, he is not hesitant to pull the trigger.

By locating instances of direct violence in the schools of America through the frameworks of Slavoj Zizek and Johan Galtung, Chapter 2 highlights the physical and aggressive acts of violence that cause harm to the body in schools. Direct violence in the study ranges from small acts such as pushing, shoving, kicking to its most damaging form which is mass shooting. It is further located in physical acts of violence experienced by the body in the form of maiming, siege, imposing threats, causing misery, and shooting. The chapter also analyses the reasons the perpetrators resort to violent act among the sea of students in schools through strain theory, social learning theory and control balance theory.

Chapter 3: Cultural Violence in Context

Chapter three focuses on locating cultural violence in American schools delving into American cultural elements, practices and traits through the select narratives. It highlights the nature of cultural violence which is so subtle that both the perpetrator and the victim are mostly unaware of the presence of violence. Cultural violence is defined by Galtung as “those aspects of culture...that can be used to justify or legitimise direct or structural violence...[t]he features mentioned above are ‘aspects of culture’, not entire cultures (Galtung 291). For instance, in *Shooter* one girl tries to provoke Leonard:

She pushed up on Len, got her face right into his, and he said something to her and some spit came out of his mouth. He didn’t mean to spit on her, but he was talking and some came out. She slapped him. Then he slapped her back. Then two jocks jumped him and started punching him out and some teachers broke it up...they surrounded us and started calling us names...Faggots. Pussies. They started slapping us around. Not hard. Just to show that they could. They told us to get down on our knees and beg for mercy. We didn’t do that and they forced us down (Myers 37).

Leonard and Cameron face direct violence through physical aggression, slapping and being pushed down on the floor. The cultural violence here is the legitimization of direct violence by Mr. Anders who “came into the hall...but he didn’t say anything...and he lets the jocks get away with everything” (37, 38). The subject of cultural violence is not an individual or group of individuals, but rather the subject here is the part of culture that “makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right – or at least not wrong” (291). Through his silence, Mr. Anders teaches that it is not wrong for the jocks to push around other students, and this teaching constitutes cultural violence in this context.

Galtung states that the “psychological mechanism” of cultural violence is “internalisation” (291, 292). The internalization of a harmful cultural mindset plays a critical role in locating cultural violence. In *Speak*, the protagonist Melinda is a

victim of rape. However, she internalizes the action as shame even though the act of rape is not her fault, leading to her downward spiral and forcing her to remain silent. The internalization of misleading cultural attitudes towards rape that tends to blame and label the victim as promiscuous is the cultural violence here.

Another instance of cultural violence is located in American cultural attitudes towards physically attractive and strongly built students by deeming them as superior. This is evident in *Give a Boy a Gun* when one of the students Emily Kirsch elucidates:

At the red-hot core were most of the football players and some of the guys from the other teams, and the cheerleaders and some of the pretty girls...Next came the rest of the athletes and a few popular designer-label guys who weren't athletes but were just likeable, and the nicer girls and some of the pretty girls who were also popular and athletic. And then came the rest of us...And that wasn't only the way we outsiders saw it. It was the way everyone saw it...the teachers and the administrators. You'd get to class late, and they'd make you go back and get a pass. But Sam Flach would stroll in late and say he'd been talking to Coach Bosco, and that was just fine. Even the grown-ups outside school...all knew the football players by name, and they'd do extra things for them" (41, 42).

The tendency of labelling is a form of cultural violence according to Johan Galtung. He states that "a major form of cultural violence...is to blame the victim of...violence who throws the first stone, not in a glasshouse but to get out of the iron cage, stamping him as aggressor" (295). Cameron Porter in *Shooter* laments that "if you get a label – that you're easy – then they're going to find you. They push you and they push you, just to see how far they can go" (39).

"One-way cultural violence works is by changing the moral colour of an act from red/wrong to green/right or at least to yellow/acceptable" (Galtung 292). In the narrative *Tease*, Sara Wharton feels that she is wrongly accused. Natalie tells her "A girl is dead, and everyone wants to hold you and your friends accountable for what

happened.’ ‘But we’re not,’ I blurt out. ‘We didn’t do anything.’...I’m not sorry. Emma was a boyfriend-stealing bitch right up until the day in March when she killed herself’ (9). The component of cultural violence here is the attitude of justifying harming those who hurt others. Bandura’s Moral Disengagement Theory states that, “Moral disengagement is a social cognitive theory of the moral control of behavior. In this approach, self-reactive moral agency operates through self-regulatory mechanisms rooted in moral standards and self sanctions” (102). Luo and Bussey explain that “people are motivated to abide by moral standards...Others, on the other hand, enact immoralities without remorse through enlisting justificatory mechanisms, known as moral disengagement” (4). This theory is critical for understanding how violence is rationalized by the students in the narratives, allowing for the generation of different kinds of violence.

Another instance of cultural violence is portrayed in the text *Shooter* where Cameron Porter is the accomplice of the school shooter Leonard Gray. And since Leonard commits suicide, Cameron is questioned repeatedly by the police and reporters. In the interview done by Dr. Richard Ewings who is a Senior County Psychologist, Cameron’s internalisation of the school culture that bullies and demeans him constantly is seen when he feels that it is his job to simply take the unfair treatment by his peers. This internalisation is cultural violence and makes one believe that bullying is acceptable. “One of the other jocks pushed me”, he states, and “got into my face and started calling me names” (Myers 41). When Dr. Richard asks him how he felt at that time, he reveals that “[i]t was like it was my job or something. He was supposed to stand there and make me feel bad, and my job was to stand there and take it” (41).

This chapter highlights instances of cultural violence which is often invisible and subtle in the select texts. Drawing from Johan Galtung’s concept of cultural violence which is similar to Zizek’s notion of symbolic violence, each text reveals situations where violence is legitimised through normalization of cultural norms, established patterns, societal code, assumptions, views, value systems and perspectives that are harmful, demeaning and generates suffering to others. Analysis

of these texts reveal that violence is often concealed as tradition, cultural practices, humour or world-view. This chapter also employs a Foucauldian reading of the select texts that analyses power circulating through surveillance, categorisation and discipline. Through the examination of these select texts, it is highlighted that students in schools suffer not only from the physical aggressions directed at them, but also from the very culture they are in through traditions, practices and beliefs that either glorify them when they are in line with cultural expectations, or otherwise when they fall short of cultural expectation.

Chapter 4: Structural Violence in Schools

Juanita Ross Epp states that structural violence “is not the intentional harm visited on the unlucky by vicious individuals...it is the unintentional consequences of procedures implemented by well-meaning authorities in a belief that the practices are in the best interests of students” (1). Using Johan Galtung’s notion of structural violence that is “a structure” that is “churning out harm” and “causing basic human needs deficits” (Galtung 36), one of the most invisible forms of violence projected unintentionally to students. The chapter also analyses how the school itself inflicts harm on its students.

Structural violence in schools occurs when a person or group of people’s needs are deprived or unfulfilled but are “unintended” (26). When their wellness need is deprived, structural violence is experienced by being “in a permanent unwanted state of misery” (26). This state of misery is perpetrated through the inadequacy of the school system in preventing and responding meaningfully to ongoing bullying, shaming and harassment experienced by students. Structural violence is located in the lack of serious intervention of “every teacher who saw it happen day after day and never did anything more than tell those morons to stop horsing around” (Strasser 70). In addition, only a few or one school counsellors are assigned to a school since school counsellors in the select narratives are responsible for a large number of students hindering their efficacy. For instance, Beth Bender, the High School Counsellor in *Give a Boy a Gun* recounts her experience:

Julia is a close friend and has amazing radar for the kids who are going to need support but might otherwise fall through the cracks. One of the kids she mentioned was Brendan (the shooter), so I made sure he was one of mine. I got him into my office one day, and he just “yes, ma’amed” and “no, ma’amed” me to death. “Yes, ma’am, everything’s fine.” “No, ma’am, I don’t have a problem with anyone. But you could see the pain and anger in his eyes. Of course, I had fifty boys and girls like that, all of them feeling more or less the same thing. And I was responsible for another 350, so what could I do?” (38).

Structural violence is located in the ignorance of the inefficiency of school counsellors provided by the school system. In *Thirteen Reasons Why*, structural violence is located in the assignment of Mr. Porter as the school counsellor. He is an English teacher who is merely “moonlighting as a counsellor” (275). This alludes to the fact that not even a professional is hired to be the guidance counsellor in the school. This leads to the inability of the school counsellor to help Hannah even when she seeks help.

When the need for freedom is lacking, structural violence is experienced as “fragmentation” and “marginalisation” (36). And lastly, when their need for identity becomes unfulfilled, structural violence is experienced through “penetration” and “segmentation” (36). Hence, instances of structural violence in schools are located in a group of people or individuals experiencing fragmentation, marginalisation, penetration, segmentation, misery and even death due to institutionalised practices, policies and norms in educational settings. It is systemic and perpetuates through institutional mechanisms such as curriculum design and disciplinary policies. The subject of violence in structural violence is “a structure at work, churning out harm, causing basic human needs deficit” (35).

The concept of fragmentation is defined by Galtung as the process of “keeping the underdogs away from each other” (38). In the context of America, Ellsworth asserts that “the disadvantaged students (or the so-called underdogs) might include all students who are not white, heterosexual, Christian, able-bodied,

intelligent, thin, middle-class, English speaking and male (321). In a school setting, fragmentation could manifest through tracking systems that disproportionately place students from underprivileged backgrounds into lower-level courses while affluent or majority- group students are placed in advanced classes. Epp calls it “tracking or ability grouping. Once a student has been assigned to a particular track, his or her place in the social order has been established. Children assigned to classes for the ‘less able’ or the ‘less intelligent’ are handicapped...by the type of education they get” (6). Darder states that the type of education they get is also inferior in terms of “curriculum content, type of instruction, degree of selection, frequency and type of teacher-student interaction and available educational resources” (16).

In Galtung’s theory of structural violence, marginalisation refers to the process of pushing certain individuals or groups to the periphery of a school system, thereby preventing them from fully participating or accessing resources. He defines it as “keeping the underdogs on the outside, will impede mobilisation” (38). For instance, in *Give a Boy a Gun*, football players are the top dogs for whom the school “hired a private plane for \$25,000 to take the team to a game” (98). The others who are not playing football are denied access to the school resources allocated only to a certain segment of the students. In addition, student leadership roles such as class president, student council member, or club leader are typically filled by students who are academically high-performing, outgoing, or from more affluent backgrounds. Students from marginalised groups, particularly those from lower-income families or minority- racial groups, are often overlooked for these positions regardless of their potential. Epp also asserts that structural violence “encourages disadvantaged students to disappear from the school system and competition for economic success” (4). The most extreme form of marginalisation in a school setting would be expulsion from school or removal from academic institutions. Epp states that students most damaged by structural violence “are removed from school, or remove themselves, and suffer the lasting disadvantages of an incomplete education” (2). In *Thirteen Reasons Why*, structural violence takes a toll on Hannah enormously, culminating in death. Peter Houghton also suffers due to structural violence in the form of the absence of necessary interventions and help from his school counsellor. This leads

him to shoot his peers, and the possibility of him enrolling in school again is slim, as he has to serve in prison for some time. Epp also adds that underprivileged students are further marginalised by teachers and principals when “[i]nclusive policies, intended to allow ‘disadvantaged’ students more access to education are often scorned as a diminution of this standard” (5).

Penetration in Galtung’s framework of structural violence refers to the process of “implanting the top-dog mind inside the underdog” (38). Galtung’s concept of penetration helps in locating structural violence not in random acts of cruelty but in the penetrated belief generated by the system that is accepted as normal by the victim. Peter Houghton in *Nineteen Minutes* internalises the belief that violence is the only way to attain freedom and power, even for just a brief moment. Years of bullying convince him that kindness is weakness and that vengeance will restore his status. Structural violence is located in the celebration of the jocks who are mainly bullies by the school system, and in the passivity of the teachers and administrators in reducing harassment.

Galtung’s concept of segmentation in structural violence is “giving the underdog only a very partial view of reality, will impede consciousness-formation” (38). It refers to the act of restricting the underprivileged or marginalised to a partial or distorted view of reality, limiting their awareness of broader possibilities or alternative structures. In *Thirteen Reasons Why*, Hannah suffers from segmentation in the form of her identity being reduced to “a slut” (23) after rumours spread. She develops a very partial view of her reality, leading to negative thinking, which spirals into her ruin. Structural violence, therefore, manifests in the normalisation of slut-shaming and the school’s inability to help her when she reaches out for help through the school’s counsellor.

The chapter also engages in Hannah Arendt’s notion of violence. She puts forward the idea that violence is not the same as power. A gendered reading is also employed which reveals how constructions of masculinity intersect with structural violence to shape how young men are to carry themselves, and if they act otherwise, they become marginalised. The chapter further employs a Foucauldian reading where

power and discipline expose how schools, families and peer groups become sites of control and normalisation, and how young individuals tend to react with violence when subjected to continuous surveillance and suppression.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The concluding chapter sums up the findings of the preceding chapters. This chapter reflects upon the key insights drawn from the thematic analysis of select six novels highlighting the school-life of American students and the hurdles they are going through in navigating the halls of their schools. The study sets out to explore how schools, instead of protecting students from harm often function as sites of exploitation through mechanisms such as suppression, exclusion, silence and neglect. The findings of this research underscore the argument that schools in America as portrayed in literature often operate as a cocoon brewing violence through a collection of small acts of bullying such as pushing, shoving, verbal assaults, intimidation and threats among students and staff; the school system and structure itself that deny students their well-being through discrimination, ignorance and neglect; and the culture that perpetuates violence through normalising instances of violence happening.

The central finding of this research contends that emotional literacy is a missing curriculum in schools in America. A close reading of the select texts reveal how schools prioritise academic achievement and compliance on the part of students, but they often neglect the emotional development of students. Another significant finding of this research highlights that extroversion is valorised, while introversion is devalued. As seen across the select texts, traits such as sociability, assertiveness and verbal participation are rewarded while introverted behaviours are often misread as disengagement or defiance. An additional key insight from this study is that creativity is a silenced capacity in school culture. Schools prioritize academic achievement, standardization and conformity instead of creative expressions of students. A further noteworthy observation from a close analysis of the select texts underscore the argument that break down of human bonds lead to generation of

violent individuals drawing from Hannah Arendt's notion of power and violence. A close reading of the texts reveals that schools function as disciplinary institutions in the Foucauldian sense. Schools become spaces where power is exercised not through force but through surveillance, normalization and internalised control. A close reading of the texts has brought to light a key thematic concern that violent outburst is a response and not innate aggression. The analysis of the select six novels reveal that schools are portrayed not only as spaces of learning but as institutions riddled with exploitation, exclusion and neglect. Another emerging insight across the texts is cultural violence and the normalisation of harm through it. This study has demonstrated that female protagonists like Melinda in *Speak* and Hannah in *Thirteen Reasons Why* reveal how gendered violence is often silenced or minimised. The study has also revealed that the damage caused by violence in schools is not just physical. It causes distress psychologically and emotionally. These narratives also critique the negligence of mental health support in schools in a country where "it is estimated that more than one in five U.S. adults live with mental illness (59.3 million in 2022)" according to the National Institute of Mental Health.

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