Tribhuvan University

Echoes of Silence: Role of Cultural Attitudes in Adolescent Trauma in Jay Asher's *13 Reasons Why* and Naoko Yamada's *A Silent Voice*

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By

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation entitled "Echoes of Silence: Role of Cultural Attitudes in Adolescent Trauma in Jay Asher's *13 Reasons Why* and Naoko Yamada's *A Silent Voice* submitted to the Office of the Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University is an entirely original work, and I have made due acknowledgement to all ideas and information borrowed from different sources in the course of writing this dissertation. The results presented in this dissertation have not been presented anywhere else for the award of any degree or for any other reasons. No part of content of this dissertation has ever been published in any form before. I shall be solely responsible if any evidence is found against my declaration.

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Yzunchho Limbu

Approval Letter

This research work "Echoes of Silence: Role of Cultural Attitudes in Adolescent Trauma in Jay Asher's *13 Reasons Why* and Naoko Yamada's *A Silent Voice*" submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Yzunchho Limbu has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the interplay between adolescent trauma and cultural frameworks by examining the Western paradigm of individualism and the Eastern paradigm of collectivism through a comparative analysis of Jay Asher's novel *13 Reasons Why* and Naoko Yamada's animated movie *A Silent Voice*. The adolescents depicted in *13 Reasons Why* and *A Silent Voice* come from a culturally distinct backgrounds, one rooted in individualism and the other in collectivism. However, their voices are similarly silenced by social structures, cultural expectations, and institutional failures, raising critical questions about how adolescent trauma is shaped and suppressed across different cultural contexts. Centering on Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, particularly focusing her emphasis on belatedness and the necessity of acknowledgement, the study interrogates how trauma is voiced and silenced in narratives about adolescents. The research further draws on the theories of Jeffrey C. Alexander and Ron Eyerman to contextualize adolescent psychological responses and social roles within their respective cultural frameworks. The study reveals how the Western narrative privileges self-expression and vocal autonomy, as seen through Hannah Baker's posthumous tapes, whereas the Eastern narrative prioritizes group harmony and silent endurance as illustrated by Shoya and Shoko's reticence. By analyzing the motif of silence versus voice, the research highlights how cultural norms either inhibit or enable trauma expression and recovery. This qualitative study incorporates close analysis, with attention to guilt, shame, institutional complicity, and the redemptive potential of listening and acknowledgement. This research contributes to trauma studies by foregrounding adolescence as a culturally sensitive and under-theorized site of trauma articulation.

Keywords: Adolescence, trauma, culture, silence, voice, individualism, collectivism

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Chapter I: Representation of Adolescent Trauma in *13 Reasons Why* and *A Silent Voice*

Background Overview

This dissertation explores how trauma caused by bullying and social isolation manifests psychological consequences such as depression, suicidal ideation, guilt, and the pursuit of redemption in Naoko Yamada's Japanese animated movie *A Silent Voice* (2016) and Jay Asher's novel*13 Reasons Why* (2007). It analyzes the fragility of adolescent mental health while observing the trauma experience, indicating the silence and voice in contrasting narrative structures and cultural contexts. The research investigates how *13 Reasons Why* and *A Silent Voice* represent adolescent trauma through fragmented narratives and unspoken experiences shaped by culture. *A Silent Voice* centers on Shoya Ishida's quest for redemption, as narrated by the perpetrator, emphasizing his guilt and empathy towards his deaf classmate, Shoko Nishimiya. *13 Reasons Why* employs Hannah Baker's posthumous tapes, which reveal her account of her life and highlight systemic failures. By analyzing the axes of perpetrator-victim dynamics, the roles of silence and voice in trauma expression, and the cultural paradigm influencing resolution, it aims to highlight the understanding of adolescent bullying, not as a normal childhood experience but as a trauma and its potential consequences.

Adolescence is a developmental period where psychological vulnerability is heightened, making experiences such as bullying and social isolation especially damaging. *A Silent Voice*, set in a Japanese school and high school setting, portrays Japanese collectivism, while *13 Reasons Why* depicts Western individualism in a contemporary American context. One seeks atonement, and the latter relies on the

denunciation of convicts. The divergent approaches raise critical issues about the cultural ideologies and influence on trauma and guilt in their narratives.

The research is based on the motifs of silence and voice as central narrative devices, shaping the emotional journey. The silence in *A Silent Voice* is represented in the social isolation experienced by Shoko Nishimiya and her perpetrator, Shoya Ishida. Similarly, in *13 Reasons Why*, the motif of voice is conveyed through the cassette tapes recorded by Hannah Baker, whose real voice is silenced by her death but revived through the recorded voice to narrate her trauma. Her listener, Clay Jensen, in the novel, and her perpetrators not just portray individual perpetrators but represent systemic silence and failure. In this way, the voice becomes a tool of agency for the characters to reclaim narratives, and silence represents the consequences of neglect and isolation.

The study aims to focus on the narrative structure of both *A Silent Voice* and *13 Reasons Why* as a medium through which the psychological and emotional landscapes of the characters are revealed and understood. Both rely on flashbacks as the non-linear narrative traces Shoya Ishida's journey from childhood to adolescence, while Hannah Baker adopts a retrospective narrative structure in fragments in her recorded tapes into thirteen interlinked accounts of betrayal, bullying, and neglect. The introspective narration in *A Silent Voice* emphasizes personal accountability, while *13 Reasons Why* implicates the listeners and audience. The research focuses on the importance of narrating for processing trauma trauma, empathy, and awareness.

Despite cultural differences in emotional expression, adolescent trauma in *13 Reasons Why* and *A Silent Voice* is similarly shaped by neglect and social silencing, suggesting that the struggle to articulate pain is a shared experience. While much scholarship tends to contrast the immediate cultural responses to trauma, there is a

limited exploration of how adolescent trauma narratives across this context reveal shared patterns of silence, guilt, and institutional failure. This research addresses the need to understand how silence and voice function not as culturally fixed opposites but as complex, overlapping responses to unacknowledged suffering.

This research employs valuable insights into the representation of deeply rooted individual psychological experiences along with cultural trauma. It deals with the lens of various theorists, specifically Cathy Caruth, incorporating collective memory and identity shaped by unresolved suffering. Trauma is represented not merely as a private affliction but a reflection of broader societal dysfunctions, which suggests trauma has the power to disrupt history and demand a rethinking of communal responsibility. Both stories challenge us to re-evaluate how they contribute to the failure of the system. Shoko's bullying in *A Silent Voice* reflects a discomfort and personal shortcoming in Japanese society. Similarly, *13 Reasons Why* portrays denial in which peers, family, and schools do not take action in response to Hannah's suffering. The delayed narrative revelation demands not just to recover the past but to disrupt the present and challenge the ethical frameworks of the interpreted past.

Synopsis of *13 Reasons Why*

Jay Asher is an American author best known for his debut novel, *13 Reasons Why* (2007), which became a widely discussed work in young adult literature for its portrayal of suicide, guilt, and adolescent trauma. Asher, who is of half-Jewish descent, may have shaped his sensitivity to themes of exclusion, moral responsibility, and the long-term psychological effects of social judgment. While the novel does not directly address Jewish identity, Asher's background may have influenced his portrayal of a protagonist, highlighting the consequences of social silence and moral neglect.

Set in a contemporary American high school, *13 Reasons Why* explores adolescent traumatization through Hannah Baker, a teenage girl who commits suicide and leaves behind a series of cassette tapes, blaming the people and events that led to her decision. The tapes act as a narrative device that transfers Hannah's silence in life into voice in death, which disrupts the silence of her peers. Clay Jensen, the immediate listener of the tape in the novel, explores guilt, moral confusion, and the ignorance of institutional and social systems to listen before it is too late.

Asher portrays Hannah's visibility as her existence in the public as the subject of gossip and judgment and her invisibility in her suffering, which remains unacknowledged. Her mental health and isolation reveal her emotional neglect, compounded by bullying and betrayal, can lead to a psychological breakdown. Through her recorded tapes, Hannah shows the fragments of her internal struggle marked by confusion, helplessness, and invisibility within her social environment. Her traumatic experience is an accumulation of rumors, objectification, loss of trust, and abandonment, which question her self-worth. The absence of support from her parents, friends, and teachers isolates her more. This reflects a cultural failure to recognize and respond to mental struggles among adolescents.

Silence functions as a metaphor for societal and institutional failure. Hannah reaches out multiple times to guidance counselors, teachers, and peers, but they are indifferent towards her. These silences are not passive but active forms showing her social dismissal. The culture rooted in Western ideals of self-reliance and emotional restraint contributes to her emotional vulnerability.

The controversial appeal stems from its bold narrative strategy using the posthumous voice of Hannah Baker as victim and narrator, which may be perceived as emotionally provocative or ethically complex. Nevertheless, the author seeks to

pursue a global concern about bullying and its consequences. The novel also taps into the cultural perspective and widespread concerns about adolescent mental health, school bullying, and moral responsibilities of individuals and institutions, which go beyond the pages to public discourse. It exemplifies fiction that prompts adaptation, public debates, and critical coverage of cultural impacts. The novel has been adapted into a Netflix series released on March 31, 2017, in the USA as a popular adolescent drama.

Synopsis of *A Silent Voice*

In *A Silent Voice* (2016), she deals with characters' silence and shame and turns them into powerful narrative tools, reflecting a culture in which emotional expression is restrained.

Set within a Japanese culture of social harmony, *A Silent Voice* follows the protagonist, Shoya Ishida, whose guilt and self-isolation are shown. It resulted from his earlier bullying of Shoko Nishimiya, a deaf classmate. After Shoko's transfer, Shoya is abandoned by his peers and scapegoated by the very group that had once encouraged his behavior. This social rejection results in a period of self-imposed isolation and emotional detachment. These are his withdrawals from human connection. He wants to reconcile with his victim and seek forgiveness. His journey shows memory, remorse, and redemption.

A Silent Voice presents mental health as trauma trauma lingering that disrupts the mind and resists immediate comprehension. The psychological scars are not limited to a single incident; rather, they linger over time, emerging in unpredictable ways and influencing how they view themselves and others. Instead of viewing trauma trauma as a past event that must be resolved, the story relates how its consequences manifest suicidal thoughts, social disengagement, and self-blame. In a

way, *A Silent Voice* dramatizes the ethical demand of trauma trauma to be acknowledged, not interpreted.

A Silent Voice gradually introduces communal healing as an essential requirement. While Shoya and Shoko initially attempt to manage their suffering in solitude, the narrative suggests that recovery occurs with self-acknowledgment. The movie displays trauma trauma, not erased but shared and slowly re-narrated. In this way, the movie expands the discourse on trauma by illustrating how narrative, memory, and emotional responsibility function within the communal framework as a shared topic.

The movie *A Silent Voice* conveys trauma trauma through techniques like fragmentation, silence, and deferred recognition. The movie uses imagery to visualize the environment instead of relying on dialogue, showing the effects of trauma trauma. The viewers can notice the frequent appearance of large 'X' marks over people's faces, which illustrates Shoya's detachment from human connection. Flashbacks and sudden shifts in tone interrupt narration, reflecting trauma trauma as a memory returning belatedly and involuntarily. The movie positions visual storytelling as a vital medium for accessing and communicating the invisible wounds of trauma, drawing the importance of media and cultural understandings of emotional suffering.

Cultural Dimensions of Adolescent Trauma: A Theoretical Literature Review

Since no other study has brought these two primary texts together within the same study in relation to adolescent trauma, the empirical literature review has been carried out. Whenever the situation demands, the opinions of other scholars on these two texts have been discussed in textual analysis. Since several studies on adolescent trauma have been carried out through the analysis of novels and films, the present research surveys the existing scholarly discourse surrounding adolescent trauma,

silence, and voice and the role of cultural attitudes in narrative responses to psychological distress. Situating *13 Reasons Why* and *A Silent Voice* within trauma studies, the literature review identifies how previous researchers have examined adolescent trauma trauma as a personal and socially constructed experience. It explores how theorists such as Cathy Caruth, Ron Eyerman, Jeffrey C, and Alexander conceptualize trauma, memory, and representation and how their theories have been applied to Western and Eastern contexts. However, limited scholars have analyzed how cultural attitudes mediate adolescent trauma trauma in individualistic and collective settings, particularly through silence and voice. The research outlines the academic groundwork while positioning the present research as a cross-cultural investigation into how trauma is both experienced and expressed by adolescents within a shaped system.

The approach to Hannah Baker's trauma experience is termed depression or psychological diagnosis, as reviewed in other scholarly work. This study emphasizes the cultural roles of the narrative conditions, especially societal silencing and institutional neglect. In her article "Impact of the Protagonist's Depression in Jay Asher's Novel Thirteen Reasons Why," Nada Febriansyah Putri analyzes Hannah's condition only as "the impact of depression so severe that the affected person may consider or have thoughts of harming themselves, including the urge to terminate their life" (8). She elaborates on the mental state of the types of depression and the impacts of depression ultimately leading to suicide, while this particular dissertation is based on the role of cultural attitudes in adolescent trauma, which distinguishes it from Putri's research as she does not focus on cultural attributes. However, she provides important insights into the emotional impacts of depression towards self-blame, inferiority, and suicide ideation (10-11). Rather than viewing Hannah's experience as

purely psychological breakdown, the particular dissertation approaches it as a narrative of silenced pain, a trauma unfolded and sustained by cultural attitudes towards emotional expression and acknowledgment.

Violence is another talked about issue represented in *13 Reasons Why*, which starts with bullying and proceeding against social norms and expectations. Via Oktaviani bases her argument on how cultural violence subtly justifies structural violence through societal judgment. She argues that "cultural violence was the justification for acts of structural violence as well as direct violence. Specifically, the central aspect of violence in culture might not be easy to see. For the most part, social opinion was a judgment or estimate of someone or something with respect to their character, attitudes, and views in society" (258). She depicts the invisible systems of harm based on character and social roles. She has only mentioned a subtle part of cultural attitudes, whereas this dissertation examines the adolescent trauma shaped and silenced through culture and narrative structures. While Oktaviani centers on violence legitimized through culture, this research explores how trauma is expressed or repressed in culturally distinct environments through neglect and narratives.

The violence leads to juvenile delinquency, as adolescent trauma is frequently labeled with delinquent behavior. This dissertation examines the emotional suffering of Hannah Baker in an individualistic culture. Though violence and delinquency can add up more to individualism, Alda Dwi Afangka and Purwarno Purwarno, in their article "Juvenile Delinquency in Jay Asher's Novel *Thirteen Reasons Why*," do not approach this framework. They are more into identifying acts of juvenile delinquency such as bullying, alcohol abuse, and sexual harassment as evidence of deviant behavior. Their article mentions, "The novel has a great story that contains the values of daily life. The readers can take the lessons about juvenile delinquency from the

experiences of the characters in the novel" (36). Their analysis emphasizes categorizes characters based on deviance theory. Their identification with such behavior is evident in their writing, where they claim:

> Bullying is a delinquency that can be considered an ordinary acquaintance since it has a serious impact on the victims, and even if the victims cannot handle it, it is not uncommon for them to make the decision to commit suicide. Drinking alcohol underage has a negative impact on adolescents themselves, either in the short term or in the long term. It can make a person become an alcoholic. Free sex is considered a social problem for society and the state because it is done before marriage. It breaks social norms as well as religious law. Teens who have had free sex at a young age tend to become accustomed to doing it. This can have adverse effects, which can lead to addiction to doing it, becoming depressed, or attempting suicide. Apart from that, they will also be exposed to various types of sexual and intimacy disorders, emotional addiction, abusive relationships, and so on. (42)

Rather than diagnosing deviance, this dissertation departs from their approach by shifting attention from behaviors themselves to precise narrative and emotional consequences triggered by trauma and reclamation of agency through silence and voice with acknowledgment in cultural contexts. The research attempts to distinguish the individualistic culture and its procedure of affecting the traumatized in the way of expression or suppression.

Likewise, *13 Reasons Why* is also referred to as an adolescent suicide as an outcome of low self-esteem, but that is a mere representation. The broader context of systemic emotional neglect and cultural silence has failed to be represented in major scholarly works. Roshanara M.S. and Ramya S assert, "Suicide cannot be the

solution for problems in life, and this act of killing oneself should be prevented. The basic suicide prevention methods are self-regulation, least expectation, being courageous, self-exploration and self-acceptance" (74). Though their statement tends to refer to acknowledging suffering, they have not precisely directed how trauma can be acknowledged. They have stated in their findings that, they have "made an attempt to prove that being voiceless, would make people leave their unwanted footprints in other people's life" (75). This can oversimplify the dynamics of trauma by giving emphasis on the consequences of the victim's silence rather than what caused them to be silent. The voiceless are not a deliberate harm but a forced condition shaped by the failure of institutions and cultural expectations. This dissertation focuses on the silence and voice to be understood as a culturally conditioned reaction to trauma trauma, which calls for attention and space.

In *A Silent Voice*, adolescent trauma trauma is mainly focused on the perpetrator's guilt as a former bully. Bullying is definitely the major cause to be highlighted as Shoya also participates in the collective bullying of his victim, Shoko Nishimiya. Agnieszka Kiejziewicz, in the research article, *Bullying, death, and traumatic identity, the taboo of school violence in New Japanese Cinema*, identifies that “Bullying and school refusal are among the leading problems of Japanese teenagers and collective bullying involves psychical and psychological abuse by a group of students against one student" (77). Kiejziewicz effectively spotlights these behaviors as prevalent social issues. The dissertation, however, extends more of this understanding by exploring how collective silence around trauma trauma is narratively represented and culturally reinforced. Rather than viewing school refusal or bullying only as a response, the research argues that it functions as a symbolic withdrawal from environments that fail to acknowledge suffering, highlighting how

adolescents resort to silence when their pain is ignored. Kiejziewicz emphasizes the fact that “even the brashest and the most irreverent bully can lose his position and take the place of his victim" (86), and the director's attempts to “show that if the characters change, they can regain happiness and bad memories can be forgotten by making friends and apologizing" (86). These posit towards the adolescent trauma trauma and the search for redemption as in the dissertation. However, the researcher has only focused on these subtly, prioritizing more on the bullying culture of the collectivist culture.

The process of forgiveness depicted in adolescent trauma narratives requires it to be understood as a culturally mediated act of healing rather than just simple moral imperatives. Simon Laven implies "the value of being open to the world and others around you. So, if there is anything that I think one should take from this movie, it is how important it is not only to forgive others but also to forgive oneself" (21). Though he has focused on the transformative healing process, he has not mentioned the silence imposed by the cultural attitudes of society. Moreover, this dissertation brings up forgiveness not only as a sole individual choice but as a response to moral acknowledgment by peers and institutions. The research shifts from forgiveness being not only an internal resolution but also how these acts become meaningful when accompanied by cultural validation and narratives that give voice to suffering.

Trauma theory emerged in the late twentieth century as an important interdisciplinary field in regard to psychological, cultural, and narrative representation of traumatic experience as a clinical work, mainly by Sigmund Freud. The theory developed more formally after World War I and II, especially on long-term psychological effects such as "shell- shock" or PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress

Disorder). The significant turn occurred when scholars began to explore trauma not only as a clinical diagnosis but also as a cultural and narrative crisis.

The works of Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, and especially Cathy Caruth merged trauma theory with humanities. In Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma Narrative and History* (1996), she draws the concepts of Freud, Derrida, and literary texts and redefined her own theory that trauma is an experience that is not fully grasped as it occurs but returns belatedly often in a sudden form. She claims, "To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (4). This rethinking can opt for the exploration of subsequent academic work in trauma theory, including literature, culture, and psychology.

Adolescence is a stage of development marked by profound shifts in social, emotional, and psychological aspects of life. At this point, traumatic events can be severe. The traumatized adolescent's experience and expression can be significantly influenced by the culture they are a part of. With voice and silence serving as a coping mechanism, the study aims to investigate how culturally particular ideas of shame and accountability impact adolescents' reactions to traumatization in *13 Reasons Why* and *A Silent Voice*.

The responses to traumatic experiences are deeply embedded in the cultural systems they inhabit, which shape their emotional coping strategies. Often, in Western individualistic societies, where personal success is prioritized, adolescents may face challenges to overcome trauma individually. This results in therapeutic models, including self-reflection and emotional disclosure. Adolescents in collective culture often use shared duties and relational networks to understand the trauma within the framework of collective harmony.

Cre-experienced shaped contemporary understandings of psychological trauma trauma through a literary and psychoanalytic perspective. In her work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, she argues that trauma is not experienced fully at the moment but re-experienced belatedly through sudden events and disruption. The involuntary act of return of trauma trauma can cause the victim to struggle between silence and articulation. The theory presents the unspeakable nature of trauma, trauma, and the narrative confronts the limits and necessity of expression through language at the same time. Her insights are relevant to the study of adolescent trauma, where the silence deepens the psychological pain,n, and the voice acts both as a burden and a form of liberation. In her writing, she states:

> I would propose that it is here, in the equally widespread and bewildering encounter with trauma-both in its occurrence and in the attempt to understand that we can begin to recognize the possibility of a history that is no longer straightforwardly referential (that is, no longer based on simple models of experience and reference). Through the notion of trauma, I will argue, we can understand that a rethinking of reference is not aimed at eliminating history but at resituating it in our understanding, that is, of precisely permitting history to arise where immediate understanding may not. (182)

Caruth opens up a valuable theoretical pathway for analyzing the response to trauma trauma. The pathway can resituate the understanding of trauma trauma in a culturally sensitive reading. It urges us to reconsider trauma trauma, not merely as a historical event, but as an experience that resists linear narration and simple closure. In Western culture, where individuals might voice out their trauma in therapeutic sessions, the East adapts to silence not only as an absence but as a culturally meaningful expression of trauma.

Cathy Caruth's concept of trauma as an unclaimed experience and delayed response is mostly applied to Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003). The protagonist Amir's delayed response to traumatic events is illustrated through Caruth's idea: "Cathy Caruth describes trauma as an intense, often delayed, and uncontrollable experience" (Hao 1). Alan Ali Saeed and Shaima Muhammad Ahmad are found to have used her theory for the same movie, *The Kite Runner,* to explain traditional and psychological trauma theories to explain the unspeakable and incomprehensible notion of trauma (618-619). Mostly, Caruth's theory is applied to the disoriented notion of trauma, not to the comparison between silence and voice in a cultural framework.

Ron Eyerman, a prominent figure in cultural trauma theory, claims in his *Social Theory and trauma* that cultural trauma is "an emotionally charged meaning struggle over the foundations of collective identity in which perpetrators and victims are named and the past as collective memory is re- narrated as it is worked through" (48). This definition makes one understand how adolescent trauma is not just personal but rooted within broader cultural and social frameworks. In this dissertation, silence and voice navigate the emotional burden of trauma and its social consequences. Cultural attitudes towards shame, responsibility, and emotional expression shape how these young individuals process their trauma trauma. Eyerman's emphasis on naming and re-narration aligns with how trauma is processed in adolescence, not just as an individual pain but as a part of a collective negotiation over identity, morality, and memory. The silence and voice become both a symptom of trauma and a form of cultural engagement, revealing the interpretation of suffering and response to moral implications.

Adolescent trauma trauma often emerges not only from the experience of harm itself but from silence, misrecognition, or moral abandonment. Trauma is not only an internalized pain but something culturally shaped, expressed, and suppressed through social interactions and expectations. The silence and voice in such cases become more than a personal choice. It is a conditioned response to social judgment and cultural norms. In relation to this, Ron Eyerman, Jeffrey C. Alexander, and Elizabeth Butler Breese, in their *Narrating Trauma on the Impact of Collective Suffering*, introduce trauma trauma as "reflections neither of individual suffering nor actual events, but symbolic renderings that reconstruct and imagine them in a relatively independent way" (27). This perspective supports the present study, which explores how adolescents' silences and voices are shaped by their social environments and cultural norms and how trauma is constructed through social processes that assign meaning, blame, and value.

The relationship between the individual and collective puts insights into understanding how trauma functions in adolescence in the process of cultural framework. This dimension shows that the relation "is not only a matter of ways of living together, it is intimately linked with societal norms" (Hofstede 210). Geert Hofstede's foundational theory represents how the Western individualistic society internalizes trauma and emphasizes vocal expression, while Eastern collectivism embeds familial structure, prioritizing harmony and endurance. As Hofstede asserts, "They are tied to value systems shared by the majority; issues of collectivism versus individualism carry strong moral overtones" (210). This shows how cultural ideologies impact the ways trauma trauma is both lived and narrated. They shape not only how trauma is experienced by adolescents but also how it is expressed, silenced, or transformed through the narratives within social and institutional environments.

The cultural dimension theory provided by Hofstede and the concept of collectivism is applied to yet another novel by Khaled Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), by the scholar Ivana Pondelikova. She focuses on power distance and collectivism in Muslim countries through this theory. Her research, however, does not fill the gap between the adolescent experience and the dichotomy of silence and voice.

The broader sense of sociocultural aspects of an individualistic society can often be associated with greater autonomy. It is associated with personal growth and subjective wellbeing, as "many Americans see the individualism in their culture as a major reason for the greatness of the United States" (Hofstede 210). However, it can also bring about traumatic experiences among adolescents where the emphasis on self-sufficiency and emotional independence may exacerbate feelings of alienation and isolation during psychological distress. Ashley Humphrey and Ana Maria Bliuc, in *Western Individualism and Psychological Wellbeing of Young People: A Systematic Review of Their Associations*, explain:

> Despite positive associations between individualistic cultures and wellbeing, when contrasted with collective cultures, research on individualism and well being conducted at personal level of analyses provides a contrasting set of findings. Studies that have focused on how orientation towards individualism relate to wellbeing at the personal level (rather than across cultures) show individualistic values to be associated with higher levels of isolation, suicidal tendencies and poorer psychological health. (2)

This suggests that the burden of recovery on the individual is rather heavy. So, understanding the trauma experienced and narrated by adolescents requires attention to the cultural and social frameworks that influence their emotional development, interpersonal expectations, and modes of expression.

The culturally contingent nature of emotional experience suggests how trauma trauma is interpreted, expressed, or silenced as an inseparable part of socio-culture. For adolescents who are in the developmental process, this is more likely to be pronounced, and "among psychologists, several cognitively oriented theorists of emotion have suggested that emotion is importantly implicated and embedded in an actual social situation" (Kitayama 235). It provides a vital theoretical bridge between cultural psychology and trauma studies. This perspective emphasizes that emotions are closely connected to the roots of the culture of an individual. Emotional responses to trauma are shaped by communal expectations, interdependent roles, and prioritization of group harmony in collectivism, whereas adolescents are compelled to articulate their trauma themselves or are socially alienated in the individualistic culture. Therefore, this reality adheres to adolescent trauma, trauma where voice and silence are not merely personal choices but culturally prescribed responses.

The distinction between independent and interdependent self-construal is evident in Wayne Wang's movie *The Joy Luck Club* (1993). The movie displays the tensions around Chinese-American families where the daughter's desire for autonomy clashes with the mother's collectivist values. Kimberly S. Gangwish has centralized focus that "in order to operate in an individualistic culture, a person must organize individual behavior in such a way that it is primarily focused on individual thoughts and feelings rather than on those of others" (14), drawn from the theory provided by Markus and Kitayama. This is similar to the research on Western individualism and Eastern collectivism, which provides insights into the cultural differences but focuses the adolescent character more towards the American influence.

The adolescent stage anticipates both admiration and criticism, often compelling heightened emotions and overestimation of the degree to which others

observe and judge in society. This can affect the self-consciousness within adolescents, especially in traumatic experiences where shame, fear, and guilt are mostly involved. David Elkind, in *Egocentrism in Adolescence*, claims, “One consequence of adolescent egocentrism is that, in actual or impending social situations, the young person anticipates the reaction of other people to himself. These anticipations, however, are based on the premise that others are as admiring or as critical of him as he is of himself. In a sense, then the adolescent is continually constructing, or reacting to, *an imaginary audience*" (1030). This posits that adolescents are more self-conscious about their surroundings and the culture they live and rely on. They overestimate the attention towards them to a degree to a phenomenon which Elkind himself terms 'imaginary audience .'Though cultural contexts influence how emotions are expressed, *13 Reasons Why* and *A Silent Voice* show that adolescent trauma often manifests in similar ways across cultures, particularly through silence, isolation, and the struggle to be heard within social environments. The study intersects with the cultural expectations and development psychology among the trauma experience, silence, and voice of the adolescents.

The concept of an imaginary audience by David Elkind is used in the movie *Eighth Grade* (2018) by Bo Burnham. The concept is incorporated in the article “Five Lessons for Adults from the Movie *Eighth Grade*” by scholars Megan Wood and Amy L. Eva. The protagonist's anxiety and self-consciousness exemplify adolescent egocentrism. The article highlights that "teens typically become more self-focused at this developmental stage, picturing an 'imaginary audience'- always watching and always judging them" (2). The research is based on adolescent egocentrism, yet not focused on the concept of cross-cultural study. It is rather focused on the American teenage student.

Contrary to individualistic culture, an important dimension to look into collectivist cultural frameworks is the tendency to discourage personal disclosure in favor of preserving social harmony and communal image. Cindy C. Sangalang and Gilbert C. Gee draw attention to collectivist culture, which can be both a boon and a curse for adolescents. They state:

> Asian cultural values related to collectivism can limit the healthful benefits of social support. In contrast to Western individualism, a collective orientation may hinder disclosure of personal problems for fear of burdening others, disrupting group harmony or losing face. Indeed, some studies have found that compared with white Americans, Asian Americans appear less likely to seek social support in response to stress. (50)

This cultural norm can restrain adolescents from speaking up and divert them towards silence and emotional suppression. While collectivist values provide strong social support networks, they simultaneously risk marginalizing psychological needs that are seen to disrupt group equilibrium. This fear can be a barrier to seeking help. In *A Silent Voice*, the movie reflects how collective harmony can suppress individual emotional needs. However, the movie ultimately challenges this dynamic by promoting empathy, accountability, and emotional reconnection. The cultural suppression stands in contrast to a more individualistic culture that encourages open expression and disregards communal support. The roles between the silence and voice interplay in ways the culture shapes the experience.

By analyzing how teenage voices are muted in both individualistic and collectivist societies, this study highlights the common repression tendencies despite cultural differences. Most scholarly works have been focused on the Western Individual contexts on therapeutic recovery and personal voice and Eastern

collectivism on communal harmony and silently endured traumatization. Though other research solely depends on cultural aspects of mental health, they are not integrated with narrative analysis, adolescent development, and the silence-voice dynamics. Caruth's work has widely been used to discuss belatedness, incomprehensibility, and narrative resistance and remained largely confined to Western texts and contexts, which leaves a gap in the insights of her work into memory, silence, and narrative rupture in the cross-cultural paradigms. The research tends to extend her theoretical framework of comparative cultural analysis.

This study opens up a range of potential future inquiries. It opts for interdisciplinary research combining trauma studies, cross-cultural psychology, and developmental studies, which can further elucidate how adolescents process their experiences within cultural contexts. There is ample room for media and literary analysis as it delves into the audio-visual representation of trauma expression in global narratives. It generates future research references to examine graphic novels, storytelling platforms, and movie adaptations in the youth diaspora. Most researchers delve into the cross-cultural context only in immigrants' culture shock themes, while this research even tries to fulfill the gap by the comparative analysis of East and West in their untainted form, letting in the opportunity to testify the trauma theory, narrative, and psychology in the global context. The research combines trauma with cross-cultural psychology in adolescent development with metaphorical devices of silence versus voice, an intersection that remains underexplored in existing academic literature. It also strives on the media influence, a vital part of today's youth, to portray insights into the ethical implications of bullying and trauma trauma.

Adolescent trauma trauma cannot be understood solely through personal experience. While the pain may feel deeply individual, the ways in which young

people come to make sense of their suffering are heavily shaped by cultural narratives, institutional responses, and social attitudes that surround them. The idea is echoed in the assertion made by Jeffrey C. Alexander, Ron Eyerman, and Elizabeth Butler Breese, "Individuals do not respond to traumas but to trauma constructions. How they come to reflect upon them is certainly a matter of individual conscience, but it is also a massively collective thing. Individuals experience the pain and suffering of defeat, and the hopes for future emancipation, in terms of collective stories that engulf and instruct them, sometimes in positive, sometimes in frightening ways" (109). In *13 Reasons Why*, Hannah's trauma becomes unbearable precisely because it is minimized, denied, or normalized by those around her. The tapes she recorded are not just confessions but the narration of trauma trauma. Likewise, in *A Silent Voice*, Shoya's journey from perpetrator to outcast shows how his community chooses to assign blame and isolate him. Both narratives demonstrate the trauma trauma of adolescents, highlighting how culture can shape the emotions and ethics of trauma trauma.

The studies in the novel *13 Reasons Why* examine the portrayal of teen suicide and institutional failure, often critiquing emotional realism or media ethics. Meanwhile, the movie *A Silent Voice* remains relatively limited and has mostly centered on its aesthetics and themes of bullying and guilt with less emphasis on trauma theory or cultural trauma frameworks. While comparative studies often fall into the binaries of Western and Eastern narratives of trauma, there remains a gap in exploring how silence and voice function as shared yet culturally mediated strategies in the adolescent experience of trauma. This research examines silence and voice as culturally embedded responses to adolescent trauma, moving beyond East-West

binaries to explore shared emotional and narrative patterns across distinct cultural contexts.

Methodology and Research Approach

This dissertation adopts a qualitative research design with interpretive analysis of audio, visual, and textual forms in both *A Silent Voice* and *13 Reasons Why*. This research is inclined to the study of narrative, symbolic meaning, and cultural context, allowing in-depth textual and thematic analysis that goes beyond the surface-level content. Rather than quantifying responses or outcomes, this study seeks to understand how trauma trauma is constructed, mediated, and communicated through visual imagery, dialogue, narrative structure, and character development. The media plays a central role in the analysis as films, novels, and series expose powerful displays of cultural discourse in contemporary society.

This dissertation focuses on analyzing narratives of traumatization across cultures through literary and theoretical viewpoints in Jay Asher's novel *13 Reasons Why* and Naoko Yamada's animated movie *A Silent Voice*. This study emphasizes close text analysis, thematic interpretation, and cultural comparison rather than quantitative methods such as surveys and statistics. The qualitative method is used to explore how trauma is experienced, represented, and processed by adolescents in different sociocultural contexts. The design follows the methods from primary and secondary texts applied to analyze the traumatic experiences of adolescents.

The primary methodology includes comparative literary analysis focusing on silence versus the voice in cross-cultural contexts among adolescents. The primary texts involve Jay Asher's novel *13 Reasons Why* (2007) and Naoko Yamada's animated movie *A Silent Voice*. Both serve as a vital source to explore the traumatic experiences of adolescence and also as a contrasting case situated within Western

individualistic culture and Eastern collectivistic culture, respectively. The novel and the movie are purposefully selected as they focus on adolescent protagonists undergoing psychological trauma and their differing cultural perspectives on silence, voice, and guilt. *13 Reasons Why* is rooted in an American high school context, emphasizing confession and individual accountability and *A Silent Voice* draws cultural codes of harmony and emotional suppression from Japanese context. The analysis is interpretive, relying on narrative structures, character psychology, symbolic motifs, and cultural contexts.

The research centralizes the application of Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, particularly her idea of belatedness, unclaimed experience, and the impossibility of full representation. Caruth's framework is integrated with key insights from other scholars like the cultural psychology of Hofstede and Eyerman, Markus and Kitayama's independent versus interdependent self, and developmental psychology from David Elkind's adolescent egocentrism. This integration is done to formulate a multi-layered interpretive approach. Integrating such insights can significantly strengthen the study's validity, depth, and applicability. It transforms- dimensional research into a dynamic one, which can better reflect real-world intricacies.

Culture is a critical framework through which trauma trauma must be understood, especially in adolescence. It is a period of identity formation and emotional vulnerability. Trauma experiences do not occur in a vacuum, as they are filtered through cultural norms that shape the suffering. Hofstede argues that society not only means living together but is intimately linked with societal norms. The Western individualistic culture contrasts with Eastern collectivism as self-disclosure is valorized in the prior while harmony is prioritized in the latter. Markus and

Kitayama also emphasize the independent self, defined by internal attributes, and the interdependent self, embedded in relationships.

The research incorporates the framework of the developmental psychology of adolescents as it marks a transitional phase in which individuals are highly susceptible to cultural pressures. David Elkind points out as adolescent egocentrism that, young individuals often perceive themselves as the center of others' attention, creating an imaginary audience that intensifies feelings of shame or the need for validation. These psychological traits of the adolescents comprehend how trauma trauma is processed, silenced, or voiced. This allows the research not only to identify trauma trauma but also to interpret it through the phase of adolescent development. The study focuses on enriching cultural and psychological dimensions, without which the result might draw a risk of misinterpretation of the interaction between trauma and identity formation.

The dissertation is based primarily on Jay Asher's novel *13 Reasons Why* (2007) and Naoko Yamada's animated movie *A Silent Voice* (2016), both centering on adolescent protagonists experiencing psychological trauma within contrasting cultural environments. The characters navigate intense psychological trauma, the prior based on Western individualism of American high school and the latter on Eastern collectivism about Japanese high school life. The comparative analysis of these primary sources draws attention to how trauma is silenced or voiced depending on cultural norms and how adolescence as a developmental phase intersects with these cultural imperatives.

The core of this study lies in the trauma theory of Cathy Caruth and her foundational work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. She emphasizes that trauma trauma is not fully grasped in the moment of its occurrence but returns belatedly, disrupting comprehension. This is important to understand the

trauma trauma experienced by both the adolescent characters in *13 Reasons Why* and *A Silent Voice*. Caruth's concept of unclaimed experience is relevant to the narratives where trauma is not fully comprehensive, silence becomes a form of expression, and voice becomes the medium of reckoning. While Caruth does not explicitly theorize in terms of cultural difference, her call to rethink reference not as elimination of history but to resituate understanding allows this research to extend her framework to cross-cultural explorations.

A Silent Voice represents the silence not only self-imposed but culturally sanctioned. While the voice emerges as a weapon against negligence, Shoya's silence becomes a gesture of penitence. It shows that silence and voice are not merely opposites but culturally mediated responses to trauma trauma. The dual motif of silence and voice serves as a critical analytical input in this dissertation, functioning not only as narrative devices but as expressions of trauma, trauma, identity, and cultural belonging.

The study is grounded in close textual analysis and film analysis to explore the cultural shaping of adolescents through literary and cinematic narratives to the selected primary sources, *13 Reasons Why* and *A Silent Voice*. Close reading is employed to examine the narrative structure, character psychology, motifs of silence and voice, and symbolic language in the novel with attention to the protagonist's emotional isolation, confession, and blame. The film analysis is used to interpret visual storytelling techniques with body language, non-verbal cues, symbols, and markers in the movie to convey psychological trauma within the Japanese cultural framework. These methods enable the interpretation of trauma trauma as a culturally situated phenomenon.

The study commits to its non-invasive research ensured through publicly available texts and movies. The research holds the value of potential social contribution, particularly in fostering the understanding of adolescent trauma trauma across cross-cultural contexts. It deepens academic knowledge and raises awareness about the psychological realities faced by adolescents in relation to emotional suffering and its acknowledgment. Additionally, the study exercises cultural sensitivity by acknowledging distinct social norms and expressions present both in Western and Eastern cultures. Ethical, literary, and film analysis can function in public discourse by encouraging educators, caregivers, and policymakers to pay close attention to how trauma is communicated or silenced among young individuals. The use of theoretical frameworks from trauma studies and cultural psychology is conducted with scholarly precision, giving due credit to all sources and maintaining academic standards.

While the qualitative research design is centered on close textual and film analysis, offering deep interpretive insights, the study is limited in scope to two primary sources, Jay Asher's *13 Reasons Why* and Naoko Yamada's *A Silent Voice*. Though rich in thematic relevance, it cannot represent the full diversity of adolescent experience or trauma narratives within Western and Eastern cultures. The subjectivity of qualitative research may introduce biases of the researcher as the analysis is filtered through theoretical frameworks and interpretation. While the study strives for balance and sensitivity, cultural representations in literature and film may not capture the real-life complexities of adolescent trauma trauma. The research has limited quantitative elements, relying on interviews and data collection. These limitations, however, point to directions for future interdisciplinary and quantitative research.

In conclusion, the research design adopted in this dissertation is structured to provide a cross-culture comparative and ethically responsible exploration of adolescent trauma through narrative fiction and film by applying close textual and cinematic analysis to *13 Reasons Why* and *A Silent Voice*, the study brings light to how trauma, silence, and voice are differently navigated within Western individualistic and Eastern collectivistic culture. The design, with the theoretical frameworks of Cathy Caruth and supportive insights of scholars like Hofstede, Markus, and Kitayama, enables a deep engagement with the psychological and cultural dimensions of adolescent suffering. Although the qualitative nature and limited scope of study present certain constraints, the research opens a meaningful path for future interdisciplinary inquiry at the intersection of literary studies, psychology, and cultural theory. The design, hereby, supports the central aim to interrogate the silent suffering of adolescents across cultures and advocate for an empathetic understanding of trauma in diverse social contexts.

The research holds importance in bridging the cultural, psychological, and narrative gaps on adolescent trauma and bullying in global media influence. The cultural ideologies shape the narratives and moral accountability in *A Silent Voice* and *13 Reasons Why*. Both the movie and novel provide critical insights into how trauma is experienced, portrayed, and received within the cultural context in regard to the era where mental health issues among adolescents are highly visible yet stigmatized. Furthermore, this research is relevant in the current global conversation around youth, where suicide, mental health, and emotional well-being are gaining urgency.

Chapter II: The Unspoken Voices of Adolescent Trauma across Cultures

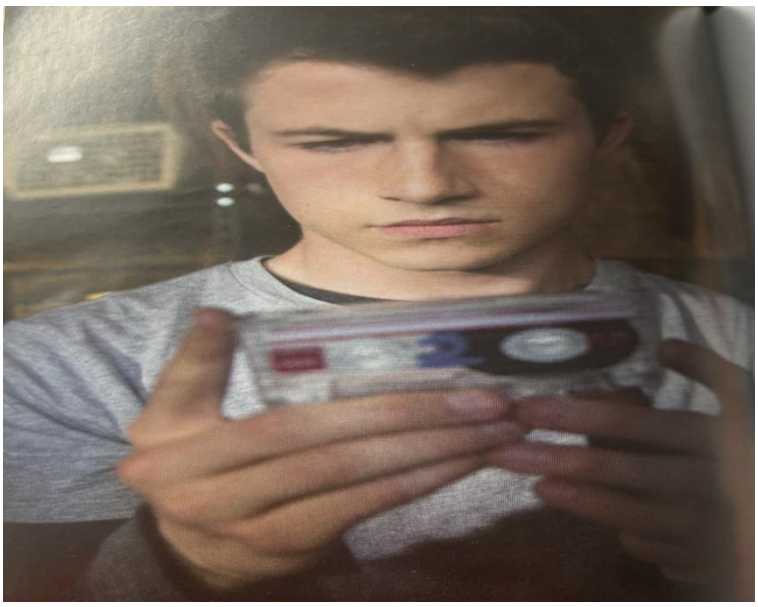
This chapter introduces *13 Reasons Why* by Jay Asher and *A Silent Voice,* directed by Naoko Yamada, to analyze the cultural attitudes on how adolescent trauma is constructed, represented, and silenced. It focuses on narrative structure, character development, and symbolic devices such as silence, voice, and institutional response. The chapter aims to uncover silence, which functions both as a symptom of suffering and as a culturally conditioned response to shame, guilt, or marginalization. Drawing on the trauma theory, particularly the frameworks of Cathy Caruth, Ron Eyerman, and Jeffrey C. Alexander, the chapter examines how both texts use narrative strategies to foreground the psychological weight of unacknowledged pain and the struggle for recognition in environments that are often emotional or morally disengaged.

Anatomy of Bullying: Perpetrators, Victims and Bystanders

13 Reasons Why is an adolescent novel by Jay Asher, which is a story about Hannah Baker, an American teenager, and her traumatic experiences. Throughout the novel, her recorded tapes press issues of bullying, mental health, and institutional failure. *A Silent Voice,* directed by Naoko Yamada, is a Japanese animated movie portraying Shoya's journey of repercussions of his acts from bullying to guilt, shame, and redemption. It also highlights Shoko's trauma and struggles for self-worth. Set within a collectivist cultural context, the movie illustrates how trauma is experienced and communicated when direct expression is socially or emotionally constrained. These cross-cultural perspectives provide a compelling platform for examining how voice and silence function as tools of resistance, accountability, and interpretation in the adolescent experience.

Victimhood of Hannah and Chain of Blames in *13 Reasons Why*

Hannah Baker's victimhood emerges as a paradoxical interplay between her accusations and actual powerlessness. As she appears to exercise her choice in narrating her story and decisions leading up to her suicide, the structural and psychological forces render her essentially powerless. Her suffering is not just a result of the singular event but accumulates through a series of violations that go unacknowledged or misinterpreted by others. Beneath Hannah's composed exterior is her inner turmoil, which is split between appearance and reality. This conflict



illustrates how trauma disrupts the self, caught between the desire to speak and the persistent silence that trauma imposes.

Fig.1.*Clay Jensen with Hannah's Tape, in Netflix series Adaptation of the novel played by Dylan Minnette*. *13 Reasons Why*, Penguin Books, 2009.

The escalation of harm inflicted upon Hannah by a range of perpetrators reveals disturbing violence beginning with seemingly minor acts such as gossip and rumor spreading in addition to physical and psychological violations. What initially appears as adolescent indiscretion progressively evolves into more direct and destructive forms of aggression. The rumors, "but eventually, as they always will, the rumors

reached. And everyone knows you cannot disprove rumor" (30). This exposes the blurred boundaries between direct and indirect forms of victimization. It shows the complicity of a broader social environment that enables harm through silence, misrecognition, and passive observation.

The role of bystanders in Hannah's narrative exemplifies the concept of passive perpetrators whose inaction becomes the spread of trauma. The trauma is proliferated through a series of events that brought the tragic end of Hannah Baker. Hannah articulates the profound impact of bystanders' inaction on her experiences. She notes a last record before her suicide in these words: "A lot of you cared, just not enough. And that …that is what I needed to find out" (280). This sentiment expresses the failure to act and empathize with the victims. Clay Jensen, the narrator to the readers, reflects his role as a bystander, although Hannah states that he is not among those she blames for her decision. In one of such moments, he reflects, "I deserve to be on this list. Because if I hadn't been so afraid of everyone else, I might have told Hannah that someone cared" (181). Cathy Caruth posits that trauma is not merely a pathological response but "always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (4). The line suggests the ethical imperative of listening and responding to the testimonies of trauma survivors. The act of negligence contributes to the chain reaction in which it becomes indistinguishable from direct violence.

In *13 Reasons Why*, Jay Asher illustrates a distressing chain reaction of blame where each individual's actions and inactions lead to Hannah Baker's tragic end. Hannah describes her chain of blame as a rumor that can have a "snowball effect" (31), indicating something minor or seemingly insignificant, like a snowball, can roll up to be larger and more powerful. During her ultimate state of despair, she gives one

last try, seeking hope from her school counselor, Mr. Porter, to save her from committing suicide. Mr. Porter, too, talks about the particular issue of how Hannah got to visit him, and when she cannot arrange the fragments of her trauma, he points out that "it is the snowball effect" (273). The metaphor underscores how minor betrayals link up to creating an overwhelming burden. The narrative illustrates Hannah's internalized blame and struggles with the silence and action of those around her, as "the conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma" (Herman 1). The perspective highlights how self-blame and societal denial can impede healing. Her tapes include the list of thirteen different people with the reasons why she reached the point of suicide, the final one being Mr. Porter himself, who is a guide and counselor of the school, reflecting the institutional negligence.

Fig.2.*Mr. Porter, in Netflix series Adaptation of the novel played by Derek Luke*. *13 Reasons Why*, by Jay Asher, Penguin Books, 2009.

The failure of those in positions of authority is illustrated in the novel. This is most evident in Hannah's final attempt to seek help from her school counselor, Mr. Porter. Although he shows concern towards her visit to the office, his ultimate solution to her fragmented story is to let it pass as he states to her, "…I'm not trying to be blunt here, Hannah, but you can move on" (278). Hannah's last cry for help is

dismissed, and when she walks out of his office, he calls after her but does not attempt to follow and stop her. "He's not coming. He's letting me go" (279), noted by Hannah in her tapes, displays the ignorance and negligence of authorities who could have helped the traumatized. She states in her final moments of recording the tapes, "I think I've made myself very clear, but no one's stepping forward to stop me" (280). This moment shows not just personal failure but a systemic breakdown of care. This refers to the failure to respond to "wrongdoings perpetrated by an institution, including failure to prevent or respond supportively to wrongdoings by individuals committed within the context of the institution" (Smith & Freyd). Therefore, trauma is not only rooted in individual violation but also in systemic failure to protect and respond to the trauma of victims.

Shoya Ishida's Role as a Bully and Outcast in *A Silent Voice*

Early in the movie, Shoya Ishida and his friends are shown bullying a new transfer student, Shoko Nishimiya, who is deaf (0:14:00-0:14:30). Her hearing aid is snatched off by Shoya, and her ear starts bleeding (0:14:26-0:14:30) for which everyone starts blaming Shoya though they had also participated in being amused while she got bullied. However, Shoko decides to apologize to Shoya because she thinks it is due to her that he is getting the blame, and when she tries being friends with him, writing a "Sorry" (0:14:54-0:14:57) note, he gets more offended. She is transferred to another school, and he soon finds everyone blaming him for the bully (0:17:05-0:17:26). These actions lead to his isolation, and he finds himself detested by his friends. This shift exposes his guilt and shame. Takie Sugiyama Lebra talks about shame and guilt in her work "Shame and Guilt: A Psychocultural View of the Japanese Self." Lebra states, "Shame is pervasive partly because Japan, unlike culturally and ethnically diverse societies such as the United States, has its cultural

norms well-defined so that their violations are readily recognized, and partly because the Japanese individual is more surrounded by significant audiences to whom his action is exposed" (193). This insight becomes especially significant while analyzing *A Silent Voice* as the protagonist Shoya Ishida's transformation into silence and self-isolation is deepened by shame. The shame becomes a silencing force in how trauma is faced and expressed in adolescent narratives within Eastern cultural contexts. Shoya's silence and Shoko's endurance both illustrate the collectivist culture of unspoken yet harmonized social cohesion.

Shoya Ishida's journey in *A Silent Voice* is occupied mostly by guilt and self-loathing that emerge after his isolation after his bullying towards a deaf student. This guilt, unlike the immediate moral awareness of wrongdoing, becomes a deep emotional wound that silences his voice. Distinct from shame, Lebra makes aware that guilt is something different and "is locked together with introspectiveness or self-reflection" (Lebra 201). Shoya's self-isolation and contemplation of suicide while viewing the river from a tall bridge and imagining himself falling (0:01:45-0:01:47) exemplify his guilt. It is not only the shame that he received, but his unresolved internal conflict, what Cathy Caruth would call an "unclaimed experience" of trauma as the confrontation of the event is not fully known or "processed at the time of its occurrence" (4). In this sense, adolescent trauma illuminates the internalized moral emotions and unprocessed memories often manifested through silence rather than speech.

Fig.3.*Shoya Bullying Shoko*. Pinterest, uploaded by c, https://pin.it/2sMzsOnjS. Accessed 16 June 2025.

A Silent Voice represents a redemptive quest by the protagonist whose guilt and withdrawal do not paralyze him indefinitely, but it is a journey toward self-betterment and amends. He changes himself as he withdraws from the noise of the society. He is seen closing his ears to the loud noise he hears passing the hallway in his school (0:30:25-0:30:27). He even tries to make amends with his victim's sister by helping her out when she feels down, but the latter is said to have doubts about him saying, "Are you doing this to feel better about yourself? Do you think doing these suddenly makes you a hero or something? I still can't stand you" (0:50:19-0:50:34). His search for Shoko Nishimiya to apologize her (0:35:29-0:35:45), all relate to his self- reflection. As Lebra suggests, "Japanese are socialized to be self-reflective and *hanseikai*, classroom session for self-reflection is part of the school curriculum" (201); Shoya's efforts to reconnect and rebuild broken relationships embody this cultural process of redemption through silent actions. These efforts fit in the theory of recognition of trauma and acknowledgment.

The movie centralizes social rejection and isolation as the experiences of adolescent trauma. Upon being identified as a bully, his own friends and classmates

start to avoid him. His own best friend Kazuki Shimada disregards him when he offers a new song album to listen saying, "Since you like them, I don't want it" (0:31:31-0:31:35). He is found walking in isolation and the visual representation and symbolic imagery of 'X' mark suddenly appears over all the faces he passes in school (0:30:09-0:30:27). This portrays a cinematic symbol of his perceived disconnection from others. Though at first Shoya is seen to be having fun with bullying and others following him, he is later condemned to feel shame and guilt through his self-reflection, and trying to make amends seemed rather difficult as the collectivist culture disregard his characteristics like how "an emotional expression may be more often regarded as a public instrumental action that may or may not be related directly to the inner feelings" (Markus and Kitayama 236). In this alignment, his trauma is not assimilated fully at a time, as Caruth mentions, and becomes a delayed echo of his unacknowledged guilt. His isolation suggests not merely social but a fractured relationship with self and others in a culture that prioritizes harmony over confrontation.

The dynamics of perpetrator and victim underlie the parallel and binary features in *A Silent Voice*. Initially, Shoya enacts violence through mockery and exclusion, targeting Shoko's deafness in an attempt to gain social dominance. However, the tables turn to accuse Shoya as a scapegoat for bullying, entering a prolonged isolation that mirrors the endured isolation of Shoko. Both characters are marked by silence as Shoko has a physical inability to speak and blames Shoya's psychological trauma and self-imposed guilt and shame. Cathy Caruth suggests the record of the past that precisely registers the force of an experience not fully owned (151). This notion is evident as the mirrored silence becomes the unspeakable residue

of the unprocessed pain. The blurred line between the victim and perpetrator often binds them in a shared and silent suffering.

Entanglement between the Perpetrator and the Victim in *13 Reasons Why* and *A Silent Voice*

Trauma is deeply shaped by the social and institutional forces that determine how suffering is acknowledged, silenced, or interpreted. The notion detailed by Jeffrey C. Alexander, Ron Eyerman, and Elizabeth Breese conveys that trauma constructions "are affected by the kinds of social groups that promote them, by the distribution of resources to broadcast them, and by the institutional structure of the social arenas in which their construction takes place" (110). This assertion is particularly reflected in the novel *13 Reasons Why* and the movie *A Silent Voice,* where trauma is shaped by the school environment that neglects emotional support, the peers who perpetuate silence, and the limited institutional mechanisms for addressing psychological distress. Hannah's cassette tapes serve as a mediated testimony enabled by the absence of outlets for emotional expression, while Shoya's isolation becomes a socially endorsed response that shifts the trauma narrative toward his guilt and redemption.

The novel and the movie illustrate how harm is not only inflicted but deepened within guilt, shame, silence, and voice, making the adolescents wounded in their own way. Hannah Baker and Shoya Ishida, though occupying seemingly opposite roles, both endure social isolation and the effects of unacknowledged pain. The latency is not only portrayed in the victims and perpetrators but also among bystanders like Clay Jensen and Mr. Porter in *13 Reasons Why* and characters like Miyoko Sahara, who cares for Shoko Nishimiya and Shoya Ishida only later. The

analysis of these adolescent narratives urges the bridging between silence and voice and blame and empathy.

Silence versus Voice in Adolescent Narratives of Trauma

The tension between silence and voice in adolescent narratives of trauma serves as a psychological and social dimension of suffering. Silence often reflects fear, shame, or internalization of cultural and institutional pressures that discourage open expression, while voice signifies the attempt to assert identity, seek recognition, or confront injustice. In *13 Reasons Why* and *A Silent Voice*, silence becomes a central mode of coping, resistance, or exclusion, and voice emerges as both a risky and redemptive act. The interplay of silence and voice reveals trauma as a culturally and socially mediated condition carrying profound consequences for the adolescent self.

Hannah Baker's Posthumous Tapes

Hannah Baker's tapes in *13 Reasons Why* become an embodiment of a paradox representing a voice that speaks only in death and breaking the silence she has long suffered in her life. Hannah experienced bullying, betrayal, sexual assault, and ignorance, making her increasingly voiceless and forcing her to commit suicide. However, through her recorded cassette tapes, she reclaims the power of narratives, transforming her silence into a vocal testimony. Her Cassette 1: Side A announces, "Hello, boys and girls. Hannah Baker here. Live and in stereo. No return engagements. No encore. And this time, absolutely no requests. I hope you're ready because I'm about to tell you the story of my life. More specifically, why my life ended" (Asher 7). The deliberation in her voice bridges the silence imposed upon her. This can also fulfill the delayed response, as previously noted in Caruth's theory. The silence imposed due to societal neglect and institutional failure echoes back as a recorded and haunted memory.

Fig.4.*Image of Hannah Baker, in Netflix series Adaptation of the novel played by Katherine Langford*. *13 Reasons Why*, by Jay Asher, Penguin Books, 2009.

The tapes become a weapon for silence and also a narrative device. The tapes are not just recordings but structured accusations, accountability, and unhealed pain. The opening of her tapes reveals, "If you're listening to these tapes, you're one of the reasons why" (7), making the recipients compelled to listen to her, creating a chain of accusations against the thirteen individuals. Hannah's delayed narrative delivers to be a speaking wound, as Caruth suggests (4). Although stifled at some points, Hannah's voice serves as a challenge and the anticipation of how the recipients react upon her death. This is ironic to say, as the aftermath of death does not give one a chance to see how others react, but she still hopes her voice will make her convicts feel the similar pain she endured. She lets out the rule as "only two. Rule number one: You listen. Number two: You pass it on. Hopefully, neither one will be easy for you" (8). The hope she puts on is what David Elkind, in his *Egocentrism in Adolescence*, states:

> One of the most common admiring audience constructions in the adolescent is the anticipation of how others will react to his own demise. A certain bittersweet pleasure is derived from anticipating the belated recognition by others of his positive qualities. As often happens with such universal fantasies,

> the imaginary anticipation of one's own demise has been realized in fiction. (1030-1031)

This egocentrism is intensified in Hannah's decision to narrate her trauma posthumously, suggesting a desire to control and foresee how her death will be interpreted and remembered. Her anticipation of reaction extends to her suicide, which becomes a personal act and a socially charged performance. Her narrative device serves as an appeal and tragic intersection between adolescent psychology and unresolved trauma.

The tapes in this unsettled trauma raise ethical questions about the limits of voice. Hannah's tapes can be analyzed as a desperate attempt to process and communicate the unclaimed suffering, as Caruth previously explained. Belatedly vocal in her accusations, the tapes also represent the silence of the bystanders and authorities in addressing the trauma inflicted upon the victim. She claims in her tapes that one cannot be selective about which part of life a bully should mess with. In one of her tapes, she states, "You don't know what goes on in anyone's life but your own. And when you mess with one part of a person's life, you're not messing with just that part. Unfortunately, you can't be that precise and selective. When you mess with one part of a person's life, you're messing with their entire life. Everything . . . affects everything" (201-202). Her recordings demand accountability and also trap the listeners in a cycle of guilt, blurring the line between justice and revenge. The recipients are forced to sit with their pain but reduce their identity as victims. The attitude towards bullying upon reading *13 Reasons Why* is also examined by James S. Chisholm and Brandie Trent in "'Everything… Affects Everything': Promoting Critical Perspectives toward Bullying with *Thirteen Reasons Why*." They urge the concerned parties to "reflect on their own roles in protecting the feelings of others and

preventing bullying in their own lives" (78). The partial responses to how bullying can characterize a passive victim and others who opt for standing up against it commit to the listener's variant thoughts on the ethical implications of Hannah's tapes. In giving her a voice, the narrative risks giving her limited space for the complexity of her life outside trauma.

The limits linger around the culture and societal background she shares with her bullies, friends, and authorities. Though society voices Hannah's unwanted shaming and rumors, the particular society is silenced when she requires help. These can be observed through the ignorance of bystanders and institutional authorities who could have voiced their say against the bullying inflicted upon Hannah. In her tapes, she states, "I wanted them to know me. Not the stuff they thought they knew about me. No, the real me. I wanted them to get past the rumors" (Asher 135). This highlights the desperation of how strongly Hannah wanted to be acknowledged and known to people about her real self and not the rumored one. Hannah's attempt to talk with Mr. Porter, the counselor, results in unsatisfied dismissal, and she walks out of his office but anticipates him to stop her or at least follow her. In her last tape, she walks and stops to check if he cares, recording altogether saying, "I'm walking down the hall. His door is closed behind me. It's staying closed. He's not coming. He's letting me go" (279). This displays the failure of the institution and the silenced trauma exploiting the victim. One of the scholars reviewing Judith Herman's work of *Trauma and Recovery* (1992) writes in her own review of *Coping with Catastrophe* that "Herman believes that it is absolutely essential for caregivers to have strong social support systems themselves" (Lewin 17). The study should focus on creating a "safe classroom environment in which positive peer interactions foster both community and powerful learning opportunities" (Chisholm and Trent 80). The

refusal of institutions to respond adequately combines the trauma to reinforce a cultural script in which adolescent suffering is often invalidated or overlooked.

Hannah's tapes serve as a rebellion against the silence imposed upon her by the Western individualistic culture she belonged to. The society she lived in encourages self-reliance rather than collective empathy. Her pleas for her pain were repeatedly minimized in the values of self-sufficiency. She made copies of the tapes and threatened her listeners, saying those copies "will be released in a very public manner if this package doesn't make it through all of you" (10). She had her death planned and bestowed to a trusted friend (whom we later come to know as Tony), as she remarks, "This was not a spur-of-the-moment decision. Do not take me for granted . . . again. You are being watched" (10). The warning she gives in her statement, like planning her decisions and not letting her take them for granted, shows signs of the individualistic culture she adheres to. Humphrey and Bliuc claim that "there is an evolving clarity of understanding on the harmful effects particular traits associated with individualistic social values can have on young people's psychological health" (8). This is particularly the result of extreme self-sufficiency in the individualistic culture.

The Unspoken Pain Behind Shoko's Muteness and Shoya's Isolation

Shoko's muteness and her notebook become a fragile bridge for communication, which Shoya throws into the water. Her muteness is also a metaphor for the marginalization she endures as she is the vulnerable one in a collectivist culture where group harmony is prioritized rather than individual suffering. Her repeated gestures of "I am sorry" written in her notebook (0:14:50-0:14:54) represent self-blame as a face-saving technique and aim toward social cohesion. Following her bully, Shoya is in self-loath and guilty for making Shoko endure all the pain he caused

and is convicted to the blame of being cruel. He is not physically restrained but psychologically silenced, avoiding contact and crossing out the faces of those around him. Caruth's suggestion that trauma returns to haunt later is symbolically understood in this context (4). The movie presents the collectivism that manifests through silence in expressing and understanding the shared trauma.

The adolescent narrative in *A Silent Voice* is conveyed mostly in silence, where even the voice fails to capture and represent the degree of psychological pain. Silence may be misinterpreted as an absence, but it is a powerful tool in the movie to express social withdrawal, emotional pain, and non-verbal cues that even words cannot contain. Though not fully assimilated, Herman suggests that a framework that "relates the patient's problem with identity and relationships to trauma history provides a useful basis for formation of therapeutic alliance" (157-158). Though Caruth's understanding depends on the acknowledgment only, Herman's statement aligns with hers in remembering the repressed trauma, which also suggests acknowledgment.

The concept of silence in *A Silent Voice* is the struggle often as a repeated failure to establish a genuine connection. His desire to make amends does not reach out in a meaningful way at first as he searches for Shoko in high school. She runs away upon seeing him (0:24:00-0:24:07), and his attempts to communicate with her in sign language (0:24:40-0:24:49) convey the viewers of their unspoken pain. In a scene, Shoko tries to confess love, saying "suki" (love) is misheard as "tsuki" (moon) by Shoya, showing how trauma can distort the vulnerable efforts to connect. Caruth claims that "the painful repetition of the flashback can only be understood as the inability to avoid an unpleasurable event" (24). The requirement of connection is needed in an interdependent culture like Japan as "it is the individual's responsibility

to say what's on one mind if one expects to be attended to or understood" (Markus and Kitayama 229). The attempts of Shoko and Shoya to reconnect, however, show efforts for redemption in tension with cultural expectations and risk of further traumatic experience.

Fig.5.*Shoya's Isolation*. Pinterest, uploaded by CowboyKT, https://pi.it/58LomqHMV. Accessed 16 June 2025.

Listening functions as a power to transform and restore fractured relationships. Shoya Ishida's journey from being a perpetrator to being remorseful shows his redemptive nature. For Shoko, the act of listening and communication is rather a struggle that the acknowledgment has long been denied to her. When all the blame of the past starts arising due to the past friends she met at high school, Shoya is frustrated, saying, "Just stop. It's my fault, okay? It's all my fault" (1:22:37-1:22:44). Shoko misunderstood it as another pain to Shoya because of her. The viewers come to the scene of Shoko's suicide attempt (1:38:38-1:38-57), which is yet another self-blame she gives herself for everyone blaming Shoya. She is saved by Shoya at the right moment, but he falls into the river. His thoughts into the drowning water are remarked by, "It's cold, it's warm" (1:40:37-1:40:40), a reaction to the coldness of the trauma and warmth of his blood. This tragic event befalls as listening was not part of acknowledgment, but "fear

of burdening others" (Sangalang and Gee 50) takes the upper hand. The readiness to open up, listen, and be present can have redemptive improvement like an 'X' mark falling off in some cases (0:37:03-0:37:06). The listening within silence and voice, hence, proves to bridge silence and voice and transform trauma as shared understanding.

The movie, though with a hopeful ending, still lingers on the silence. Shoko's muteness is not fixed as she is physically incapable, nor does Shoya fully escape his social anxiety. The repetitive portrayal of his panic attacks (1:20:04-1:20:16, 1:59:40-1:59:45) and his detest towards himself at times with the expression "Yeah! I hate me too" (1:20:43-1:20:45) show that the trauma is repetitive. Caruth's point on this certain experience is "not forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known, but in an inherent latency within the experience itself" (187). Their journey reminds one that silence can be a wound but also a testament to resilience. Thus, silence becomes both a culturally coded and a psychological metaphor, a way into coping mechanisms for unresolved trauma.

Reviewing Silence and Voice in *13 Reasons Why* and *A Silent Voice*

The motifs of silence and voice are intricately linked to *13 Reasons Why* and *A Silent Voice* in adolescent trauma shaped by the culture represented by Western Individualism and Eastern Collectivism. The tapes of Hannah Baker reveal the voice to claim agency and the silence of others, such as her peers, teachers, and institutions. On the other hand, Shoya's trauma reveals the silent suffering and the voice to move towards the redemptive path. Though divergent in culture, both the novel and the movie attempt to vocalize the emotional suffering faced by adolescents in their own ways.

The divergence in the narratives reflects broader cultural contexts, as seen in Hannah's story when she is marginalized with silence during her lifetime, and the silence again betrays her nearing the event of her death when she is not spoken to or cared for. Western individualistic society isolates her to be enduring, whereas the Eastern collectivist emphasizes social cohesion and suppresses the victims to not burden others. However, both the stories reveal the failure to listen, especially from friends and peers who are closest in relation to adolescents. The link in the narrative is shown for the redemptive attempts by Hannah with her power of tapes and Shoya reaching out to his victim. Humphrey and Bliuc, in their study, argue:

> The literature exploring individual and well-being at a personal level (rather than across cultures) suggests that the broad advantages of individualism that exist at the societal level are less persuasive when applied individually. Findings indicate that whilst individualistic cultures may possess some advantages when compared to collectivistic cultures, this effect disappears or outworks as a poor association between individualism and wellbeing when investigated at the individual level. (8)

Humphrey and Bliuc tilts more towards collectivism, especially in maintaining strong social relationships. On the contrary, Sangalang and Gee claim that "the collective orientation that characterizes many Asian cultures can also trigger social strain rooted in obligation, expectations, and norms of reciprocity (50). The narratives demand adolescent trauma to be navigated differently in cross-cultural contexts, not just one, and share the demand, which is to be heard. Voice is also a moral device challenging social norms that help spread the themes of silence. Both the novel and the movie enrich the understanding of trauma, not as a solitary event but a culturally shaped experience where the gaps between silence and voice should be bridged.

The silence is represented not as an absence but as a culturally informed response to adolescent trauma. Ron Eyerman emphasizes in his theory that cultural traumas are "processes of meaning making and attribution, a contentious contest in which various individuals and groups struggle to define a situation and to manage and control it" (43). This suggests that trauma becomes cultural or adopts cultural attributes when individuals or groups struggle to define the significance of a wound and to shape how such a wound is remembered. The silence functions as a resistance, shame, or erasure. He encompasses trauma to be "an emotional experience and an interpretive reaction" (43). Hannah Baker's feelings of betrayal, shame, and hopelessness and Shoya's internalized pain and alienation exemplify how trauma first manifests as a deeply personal experience. Then, it enters the realm of interpretive reaction as the experience unfolds into the attempt to assign responsibility, blame, and force of recognition to others and self. This can demonstrate that adolescent trauma is not only an emotional rupture but a cultural phenomenon constructed through responses, silences, and narratives shaped by their respective social environments.

Impacts of Cultural Attitudes on Adolescent Trauma

Cultural norms and values influence not only the perception of trauma but also the modes of emotional expression, coping, and help-seeking behavior. In societies that emphasize individualism, trauma may be framed through personal responsibility and self-disclosure, whereas collectivist culture may prioritize social harmony and discourage expressions that disrupt group cohesion. In *13 Reasons Why* and *A Silent Voice*, such cultural attitudes respond to the adolescent characters' trauma through isolated acts of narration or the quiet endurance of suffering. The research highlights how cultural expectations shape the construction and response of trauma.

American Individualism and Culture Blame in *13 Reasons Why*

In *13 Reasons Why*, Hannah Baker's life reveals the dangerous illusion of self-reliance promoted by Western individualism. Hannah is subtly conditioned to subdue her pain and avoid seeking help most of the time. She talks about the unfortunate suffering that she had to deal with alone. On Cassette 4, Side B, she states, "If you hear a song that makes you cry and you don't want to cry anymore, you don't listen to that song anymore. But you can't get away from yourself. You can't decide not to see yourself anymore. You can't decide to turn off the noise in your head" (Asher 178). She talks about the inescapability of the trauma, illustrating the challenge of confronting one's own pain. Her accusatory voice, after her suicide, becomes a challenge to the silence of the society. Lewin, in her review of Judith Herman, talks about trauma as "an affliction of powerless, the victim is rendered helpless by overwhelming force" (16). This shows how the autonomous culture based on self-reliance and self-expression tends to destroy Hannah's personal life.

The novel brings the cassette tapes not only as a narrative device but as an indictment of the shallow remorse of perpetrators and bystanders. Many of the recipients, such as Clay, Jessica, Courtney as well as Mr. Porter, respond to Hannah's sorrowful revelations with superficial responses. Clay, as the main narrator to the readers in the novel, reveals he deserved to be on the list of Hannah as he claims that ". . . if I hadn't been so afraid of everyone else, I might have told Hannah that someone cared. And Hannah might still be alive" (181). This shows how he neglected Hannah due to the cause of an individualistic society. Though he cared, that was from afar, and he prioritized himself more than an outcast who was suffering alone. Humphrey and Bliuc argue that "whilst individualistic societies allow for many positives, there are also a number of challenges these environments can present to one's wellbeing if they orientate themselves in a highly individualistic way" (8). The

individualistic concept of self only caused the trauma to be suppressed and created greater harm for Hannah. Her pleas to certain people who she thought were friends were overlooked, and she could not even get proper help from her counselor. The only atonement she could possibly hope for is her tapes demanding accountability, confronting each recipient as the consequence of their silence.

The novel critiques the American cultural tendency to closure as a transactional end point. Hannah's funeral is held, and that prioritizes the comfort of the living over the dead. The individualistic culture dismantles the fact that trauma should conclude in cathartic resolution at some point. Hannah's tapes deny absolution to her recipients, but the novel ends in annoyance towards the convicts rather than their transformation. Even the most sympathetic listener, Clay Jensen, admits to the consequences of her tapes as simply to be listened to and not done anything about it. He admits saying, "And now anytime someone says I'm sorry, I'm going to think of her. But some of us won't be willing to say those words back. Some of us will be too angry at Hannah for killing herself and blaming everyone else" (280). The novel criticizes the American psyche obsessed with quick fixes where apologies are meant to be transactional and the grief to be short-lived. As reflected in *13 Reasons Why*, such resolutions can lead to trauma to resist closure. It lingers, unsettles, and exposes the inadequacy of transactional apologies and institutional differences, revealing how such a culture struggles to hold space for prolonged emotional pain. One such interpretation of the individualistic culture by Markus and Kitayama in their article displays that "most of the emotions examined, with the exception of shame and possibly guilt, are what we have called ego-focused emotions. Thus, people with independent selves will attend more to these feelings and act on the basis of them because these feelings are regarded as diagnostic of the independent self" (237). The

novel finishes with a lingering trauma challenging the closure concept of individualistic culture and forces the readers to sit with discomfort.

The silence of secondary characters mentioned before, such as Jessica Davis and Courtney Crimson, illustrates passive support and more self-preservation embedded within the Western individualistic culture. Both characters choose to protect themselves even knowing the deteriorating emotional state of Hannah. She blames Jessica for believing the rumors about her and not believing her. She challenges Jessica in this way: "It's a knife in my back because you would rather believe some made-up rumor than what you knew to be true" (68). She also tells Courtney about the harassment she got, but she just got used and dragged by her to drive her to places. In a cassette to Courtney, she remembers asking her, "Why did you invite me here? Please don't tell me I was just a chauffeur. I mean, I thought we were becoming friends" (116). These were just some of the situations faced by Hannah during her low times. She did not receive support from her friends, whom she thought she would. This is evident in Lewin's observation as she remarks, "The trauma experience destroys victims' previous faith in their worlds. They have learned to mistrust everyone and both their social attachments and fundamental identities" (16). Positioning the bystander effect with the cultural paradigm of Western individualistic culture, the novel criticizes a society that privileges personal freedom and preservation rather than collective accountability.

The tapes represent systemic failures within the school, peer groups, and counseling services that add to her distress, illustrating how the absence of emotional support in her social environment contributes to the deepening of her trauma. This unresolved trauma can intensify, particularly when communal mechanisms of care are lacking. The recipients of the tapes are not merely character flaws but representations

of systemic neglect. In one of her tapes, she actually points out the time she began thinking of suicide. She reflects, "Maybe I was just looking for attention. Maybe I just wanted to hear people discuss me and my problems. Or maybe I wanted someone to point a finger at me and say, Hannah. Are you thinking of killing yourself? Please don't do that, Hannah. Please. But deep down, the truth was that the only person saying that was me. Deep down, those were my words" (173). Her statement, therefore, not only blames the people involved but also a culture that stigmatizes emotional vulnerability and equates strength with silence and self-expression. In fact, Hannah's tapes demand a shift from personal to collective accountability, mirroring Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, which views trauma not as an isolated experience but as one that calls into question the structures through which we narrate suffering (4). In the interview with the author of *13 Reasons Why*, provided at the end of the novel, Jay Asher is asked about a certain message of the book. He replies:

> Basically, even though Hannah admits that the decision to take her life was entirely her own, it's also important to be aware of how we treat others. Even though someone appears to shrug off a sideways comment or not be affected by a rumor, it's impossible to know everything else going on in that person's life and how we might be adding to his/ her pain. People do have an impact on the lives of others; that's undeniable. (297)

The experiences faced by Hannah resemble the individualistic culture, and her narratives reframe suicide as a cultural and institutional failure.

Japanese Collectivism and a Path to Repentance

In the Japanese animated movie *A Silent Voice,* directed by Naoko Yamada, Shoya Ishida's life as a perpetrator shows an individual moral failure, yet he is soon victimized as a reflection of the intricate group dynamics of Japanese collectivist

culture. Shoya Ishida's initial bullying of a deaf girl, Shoko Nishimiya, is normalized in a classroom environment where conformity is more valued over empathy. But later, he is scapegoated for being a bully and isolated once the teacher intervenes. When asked to Naoka Ueno and Kazuki Shimada, his close classmates, they both frame him as a bully. Naoka says, "Well, it's kind of true. He just teases her a little like he makes fun of her" (Yamada 0:17:07-0:17:13). He gives a surprised reaction to this statement as his own friend turns against him and a friend who was equally responsible in making fun of Shoko. He stutters while replying back, unable to vent anger to his peers accusing him. This shows the collectivity of the community, where he has to suppress his anger. The respondent is seen to avoid anger though he tries to justify himself, as Markus and Kitayama noted about Japanese society that "not only expression but also the experience of such an ego-- focused emotion as anger is effectively averted within an interdependent structure of relation" (237). The movie critiques the darker side of collectivism, silent by-standing and face-saving imposing isolation on an individual. Even standing out as a deaf person like Shoko also adds to exclusion.

In the movie, the moment Shoya is scapegoated, the bullying is remarked as how Japanese collectivist culture often enforces accountability not through individual justice but through public shame and group rejection. Alexander defines cultural trauma as occurring “when members of a collective feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (1). This aligns with the collective culture that has been subjected to a moral rupture, prompting collective responses such as public shame and social exclusion to symbolically restore group identity and cohesion. Shoya argues in his

stammers, "That's not fair. You are making fun of her to Kazuki, and it's not just the boys, the girls were doing it too. I swear it's true, especially Naoka and Miki" (0:17:25-0:17:35), but the public agrees on victimizing him along with Kazuki who remarks, "I keep telling him to knock it off but Shoya won't listen to anyone" (0:17:15-0:17:21). He is singled out which leads to becoming the object of same cruelty he once directed towards Shoko. Shoya becomes a vessel through which the community restores its moral balance, suffering not just for his actions but for all the wrongdoers in the group. Takie Sugiyama explains:

> This kind of intense shame, afflicting the total self, more painful than guilt, is by no means alien to the Japanese. It is indeed shared by a Japanese individual who is exposed to significant spectators when he seriously fails in living up to an expected level of ability, knowledge, performance, rectitude, propriety, or any other value. Inherent in this shame is the exposure of a distinct norm violation. (194)

Indeed, the group shared the bullying activity, but the blame falls squarely onto Shoya. The movie reveals how Japanese collectivism can reinforce surface harmony while silencing accountability, placing unbearable psychological weight on the publicly shamed individual.

The shame is followed by guilt to the point of cutting himself off from his peers and towards self-isolation to the response shaped by Japanese collectivist values. The recurring literal symbols of the "X" mark are seen on people's faces, intending the viewers to understand that he is in self-isolation and cannot face anyone. This isolation becomes a form of repentance and Japanese "haji" which means the "exposure of sensitivity of outer self" (Lebra 194). Another indigenous emotion refers

to "oime", which involves the “feeling of being psychologically indebted to somebody else” (Markus and Kitayama 238). They state:

> *Oime* was located at the very negative end of pleasantness dimension, perceived even more negatively than such universal negative emotions as anger and sadness. The extreme unpleasantness of *oime* suggests the aversive nature of unmet obligations and the press of the need to fulfill one’s obligations to others and to return favors. It also underscores the significance of balanced and harmonious relationships in the emotional life of those with interdependent selves”. (238)

Indeed, guilt becomes an extreme component of trauma, and Shoya's reluctance to speak, downward gaze, and avoidance of contact mirror a culturally accepted pathway of remorse. When he begins to reintegrate, he engages in actions like trying to reconnect with Shoko and learn sign language, which is more shown in efforts than a verbal apology. As the theory suggests, he is obliged to fulfill and correct his past mistakes. The Japanese collectivist culture is shaped by trauma and isolation as a means of painful but necessary steps toward purification.

Fig.6.*X Marks shown on Shoya's Classmates*. Pinterest, uploaded by Katharina Sahr, https://pin.it/1cOXOEX6N. Accessed 16 June 2025.

Shoya's path to reconciliation is a struggle as it is overshadowed by anxiety and persistent fear of disrupting the group harmony rooted in Japanese collectivism. His struggle is shown through the above-mentioned crossed-out faces and social anxieties most of the time. A scene where the sound of muted fireworks (1:37:54-1:37:59, 1:38:44-1:38:53) also visualizes the dissonance use of silence and physical distancing. This not only represents his struggle but Shoko's inner guilt of disability towards the now effort making Shoya highlights the internal conflict which is seen just before her suicidal attempt (1:38:14-1:38:44). After the scene of the suicidal attempt and Shoya saving her and getting drowned himself, comes the phases of flashbacks and dreams that disturb both of them and nudge them towards reconciliation. The dream of Shoko hurting Shoya more because of her foolish act of suicide attempt (1:47:59-1:48:47), despite Shoya's repetitive attempt to reconnect with her and just because she thought she was a burden to him, and flashbacks of Shoya's attempt to commit suicide due to guilt in his dreams (1:49:37-1:49:40) trigger them both to understand the inescapable wound, yet, to acknowledge creating further pain. The Japanese collective thought for social harmony and not creating further trouble is seen here. They meet at a bridge after their dream, Shoko from her home and Shoya conscious after hospitalization, and try communicating with each other once again. Shoya says in sign language, "I was dreaming and in this dream, I was just ready to give up on everything" (1:53:21-1:53:26). They are seen apologizing to each other and try to heal through reconciliation. Cathy Caruth, in her work, *Violence and Time: Traumatic Survivals*, claims, "Unlike the symptoms of a normal neurosis, whose painful manifestations can be understood ultimately in terms of the attempted avoidance of unpleasurable conflict, the painful repetition of the flashback can only be understood as the absolute inability to avoid an unpleasurable event that has not been given psychic meaning in

any way" (24). The two characters in the movie reconcile through the incapability of avoiding the pain and painful events but acknowledging them.

Fig.7.*Shoko's Suicidal Attempt and Shoya Coming to save her*. Pinterest, uploaded by my name is secret, https://pin.it/56b6iuu1O. Accessed 16 June 2025.

Fig.7.*Reconciliation Between Shoko and Shoya*. Pinterest, uploaded by Anime Fan, https://pin.it/6yVuvzc8Z. Accessed 16 June 2025.

A Silent Voice offers a depiction of a redemptive pathway not solely from individual remorse but through a process of personal accountability and collective

participation. There is a scene of his first friend after a prolonged time of self-isolation, Tomohiro Nagatsuka. A boy is bullying Tomohiro and threatens to take his bicycle. Intervening the situation, Shoya offers his bicycle to the bully, which results in his loss. Still, Tomohiro ultimately finds the stolen bicycle and returns it to him. At this point, the visualized "X" mark falls off from Tomohiro, a sign referring to his acceptance of a new friend (0:37:03-0:37:06). The redemption pathway unfolds as he re-engages with others, not as a demand for forgiveness but a willingness to listen, be vulnerable and take responsibility for past harm. His reconnection with friends and collective harmony is like an awakening; however, he questions himself at times, "Am I allowed to have this much fun?" (1:12:37-1:12:39), juxtaposing himself with the question of whether he is capable enough to enjoy the laughter and fun. Cathy Caruth further remarks that "it is only in recognizing traumatic experience as a paradoxical relation between destructiveness and survival that we can also recognize the legacy of incomprehensibility at the heart of catastrophic experience" (24). Therefore, the problem of trauma is not in recovery, but it repeats at times; however, the survivors are to accept it. Shoya's question to himself and the sudden reappearance of "X" marks on people show that trauma is not fully erased. However, his acceptance of communal relations and acknowledgment drives him towards a redemptive pathway.

Western Individualism versus Eastern Collectivism

In Western individualistic culture, the self is constructed as autonomous and independent. Adolescents, in this account, are encouraged to define their identity through personal choices, self-expression, and individuality. Hannah Baker's tapes in *13 Reasons Why* serve as a reclamation of voice and demand for acknowledgment

from a culture that emphasizes self-advocacy. It reflects on the culture where healing is linked to verbalization and quick closure.

In contrast, Eastern collectivistic culture is fundamentally interdependent, characterized by the roles of group harmony. Adolescents in such contexts often suppress individual emotions to maintain cohesion. Here, silence is not necessarily repression but a culturally coded response to shame and guilt. Shoya Ishida's silence and self-imposed isolation in *A Silent Voice* are shaped by collective norms, and his reintegration is through mutual understanding and nonverbal acts of care. Hannah is concerned that her parents became distant with their problems and says, "There was suddenly a lot for them to think about. Much pressure to make ends meet. I mean they talk to me, but not like before" (Asher 169), show her suppressed silence and a sense of disregard from her family. On the other hand, Shoya's attempts to reconnect with Shoko and reconcile make him realize and say, "I guess I'm being a bit selfish" (Yamada 0:51:08-0:51:11) referring to his consistent effort to make amends may have bothered her and her family reflecting concern for others in a collectivistic culture. Humphrey and Bliuc have this observation about individualism and collectivism: "Individualism focuses on valuing personal independence and autonomy, with all measures including at least one item focused on 'valuing personal independence.' While the collectivist items all included a focus on shared group goals and preferences, and at least one item focused on the sense of duty to group as well as relatedness to others" (5). The novel and movie, thus, represent the culturally coded roots of individualism in *13 Reasons Why* and Eastern Collectivism in *A Silent Voice*. The former is embedded in autonomy and self, and the latter in harmony and group. The trauma represented by her is the silent suppression of Hannah, while Shoya reflects the self-imposed isolation for reconciliation.

One of the key distinctions between Western individualism and Eastern collectivism lies in the concepts of shame, guilt, and remorse. In Western frameworks, shame and guilt are internal and action-based, demanding personal responsibility. In contrast, in collectivist settings, they are relational and serve as regulatory mechanisms to preserve social order. Hannah's conviction of guilt to others and the recipients' tendency to move on quickly with forgiveness or ignorance, as mentioned previously, depict the individualistic culture. On the other hand, Shoya's self-isolation and effort to make amends depict the collectivistic culture of communal harmony. He does not eagerly seek forgiveness but instead tries to reconcile through positive efforts. He is seen apologizing only later in the movie, despite his continuous effort to reconcile. He says to Shoko, "I'm really sorry. I never apologized for all the stuff I did to you when we were kids" (1:52:01-1:52:08). This later scene is captured as his verbal apology though he had already shown his regret through repetitive actions to reconnect and reconcile with Shoko. Hence, the culture varies in its response to traumatic experiences of shame, guilt, and remorse in Western individualistic culture, as exemplified by Hannah's story ending without repentance, and in Eastern collectivistic culture, as exemplified by Shoya's meaningful apology through actions.

The divergence is also evident through the social support mechanisms of Western individualistic culture and Eastern collectivistic culture. While Western culture emphasizes individual therapy sessions, confession, and closure, as seen in Hannah Baker's traumatic journey in *13 Reasons Why*, Eastern culture values endurance and collective reconciliation, as illustrated in Shoya Ishida's traumatic journey in *A Silent Voice*. Hannah's school has a counselor for therapy; she is also found confessing through her tapes, and the individualistic culture of moving on from the experience bears her death. The Western culture imposes highly individualistic

values that require amendments. While trauma in collectivist contexts may appear more subtle and make amends through gesture, presence, and shared silence, there is a need to rectify scapegoating, which may lead to suicidal thoughts. Markus and Kitayama remarks:

> When the cultural imperative is to seek connectedness, social integration, and interpersonal harmony, most of these motives should be typically experienced by the individual as positive and desirable. In contrast, when the cultural task centers on maintaining independence and separateness, holding any of these motives too strongly often indicates a weak or troubled personality. (240)

Both the Western individualistic culture and the Eastern collectivistic culture need to revise the attributes and policies about these traumatic experiences faced by adolescents. Through a close analysis of these texts, one can discern the importance of social support and addressing the echoes of unspoken voices.

Acknowledging Trauma

Cultural frameworks do shape how trauma is perceived, expressed, and interpreted, but the fundamental requirement for all kinds of trauma is the acknowledgment that transcends all cultural boundaries. Caruth suggests that trauma is the story of a wound that cries out, addressing us in an attempt to convey a reality or truth that is not otherwise available (4). This leads to the need for acknowledgment that even if culturally mediated, trauma is still featured universally as a wound that cries out regardless of where it happens. Whether communicated through voice and signals in Western individualistic culture or through silence and gestures in Eastern collectivistic culture, trauma demands recognition from others and within the self, unlike acknowledgment and support, which are notably absent in Hannah Baker's traumatic journey in *13 Reasons Why*, Shoya's journey in A Silent Voice develops this

acknowledgment belatedly, with some actual support from his peers and family members. The consequences make a turn in Shoya's life from suicidal ideation to reconciliation. In contrast, the contentment in Hannah Baker's life only remains as an indictment to her recipients after her suicide, which may or may not have an impact on them. Meanwhile, Shoya asserts, "Even though certain things can make life difficult sometimes, it doesn't mean they are worth dying over" (1:53:36-1:53:46). This clearly shows that trauma can be repressed. It may occur repeatedly in sudden instances, but to acknowledge it is the greatest worth one can possess. This sums up Caruth's central idea that the notion of trauma is that "a rethinking of reference is not aimed at eliminating history but resituating it in our understanding, that is, of precisely permitting history to arise where immediate understanding may not" (182). She also focuses on the repetition through flashbacks that "the return of traumatic experience in a dream is not the signal of direct experience but, precisely, of the attempt to overcome the fact that it was not direct, to attempt to master what was never fully grasped in the first place" (25). So, survival remains in acknowledging the trauma, which may disrupt at times but awakens the instinct within us.

Adolescent trauma surfaces as time has passed, and the delay is evident in young individuals still forming their sense of identity and emotions. Ron Eyerman's observation that trauma tends to be "what has been denied or repressed, a memory best forgotten, but which somehow cannot be erased" (45) aligns closely with Cathy Caruth's concept of trauma as an unassimilated experience that returns belatedly in fragments and symptoms. The novel *13 Reasons Why* and the movie *A Silent Voice* reflect the unresolved nature of trauma in a delayed response, as Hannah Baker's posthumous tapes erupt after being silenced for a long time. At the same time, Shoya's isolation illustrates how his past violence, even after being socially repressed,

continues to define his present identity. Ron Eyerman's supportive theory to this claims that "whether or not one calls this temporal dimension latency or necessary distance is a matter of the framework of interpretation one applies, whichever one might choose, time and distance as well as a proper form of representation appears to be necessary when dealing with experiences which strongly shock one's accustomed being in the world" (49). This aligns with Cathy Caruth's theory, which demands that trauma should have a proper narrative form to be acknowledged. Hannah's death in *13 Reasons Why* portrays the lack of acknowledgment and voicing of pain that is often absent in life. Shoya's confrontation with guilt and moral awakening in *A Silent Voice* reveals how proper time and acknowledgment are essential for his emotional reckoning. Both narratives reveal that the representation of trauma requires not only emotional readiness but also cultural spaces in which trauma can be meaningfully expressed.

The novel *13 Reasons Why* and the movie *A Silent Voice* can entice public debates over mental health, suicide contagion, and personal accountability. The tapes Hannah recorded prompt a dual reaction, as they are seen as necessary confrontations or criticized for oversimplifying the issues and placing blame on others. In the study surveys of Chisholm and Trent, the students' reactions upon reading the novel exhibited differences. They observe, "Many students continued to characterize people who are bullied by others as passive individuals who lack agency needed to stop bullying. However, half of the students positioned people who are bullied by others as change agents" (78). The audience may empathize with Hannah or be implicated in the moral issues of blame. On the other hand, *A Silent Voice* can evoke a more subdued response as characterized by Eastern collectivistic values. The journey of traumatic experiences may depict restraints or reflection upon the social consequences

of bullying. Markus and Kitayama note that "this translates into a constant concern for belongingness, reliance, dependency, empathy, occupying one's proper place, and reciprocity" (228). In any case, the response to this analysis must focus on the social system and policymakers to lessen the traumatic events in adolescents. Sangalang and Gee are concerned over the issue, saying, "Mental health interventions aimed at enhancing social support among individuals with depression and anxiety may be more effective by understanding the quality of a client's social relationships" (57). The analyses in the dissertation invite broader public discourse on how adolescent suffering is represented and received within different sociocultural and institutional frameworks.

The study, through its cross-cultural analysis, adopts trauma theory further to recognize the impact of cultural awareness on adolescents worldwide. Ron Eyerman argues that "cultural traumas are made, not born" (43). He adds that "cultural trauma is a contentious discursive process framed by a dichotomy between perpetrator and victim which is spurred by a powerful, unforgettable occurrence" (43-44). The present study suggests that adolescent trauma should not only be confined within one particular culture but across the globe to understand the deeper traumatic experiences faced by all adolescents. The research theorizes in terms of Caruth's expression of considering "possibilities of cultural and political analysis, that the impact of this, not fully conscious address, may not only a valid but indeed a necessary point of departure" (192). This also serves as a basis for future studies across literary and non-literary disciplines, providing a point of departure for research analysis.

Through the textual analysis of *13 Reasons Why* and *A Silent Voice*, this research has demonstrated that silence and voice function as a powerful indicator of how adolescent trauma is culturally shaped, internalized, and expressed. In *13*

Reasons Why, Hannah Baker's use of cassette tapes serves as a posthumous form of testimony, demanding acknowledgment from those who ignored or dismissed her distress while she was alive. Her voice preserved in recordings shows how unacknowledged pain festers into irreversible consequences. Shoya's self-imposed seclusion in *A Silent Voice* serves as an example of the role that guilt plays and the resistance of the community to trauma processing. These specifics demonstrate that adolescent trauma is a culturally mediated condition influenced by institutional institutions, societal norms, and narrative expression styles in addition to being a personal psychological break. The results indicate that although cultural settings vary, both texts emphasize the significance of addressing suffering while sharing a common unwillingness to listen to teenage sorrow. Trauma is not only an emotional breakdown; it is also a culturally rooted fight for acceptance, while silence results from a lack of acknowledgment.

Chapter III: Rethinking Adolescent Trauma through Silence, Culture, and Voice

This dissertation examines how adolescent trauma is shaped and represented by Western individualism and Eastern collectivism through an analysis of the American novel *13 Reasons Why* by Jay Asher and the Japanese animated film *A Silent Voice,* directed by Naoko Yamada. The research problem focuses on understanding how trauma expression, based on silence and voice, is analyzed through expression, guilt, and acknowledgment in adolescent narratives. Despite different cultural contexts, the adolescent characters in *13 Reasons Why* and *A Silent Voice* undergo similar sufferings of trauma, such as emotional isolation, silence, and struggle for acknowledgment. Regarding this research problem, the study claims that cultural frameworks significantly mediate not only how adolescents experience trauma but also how they express or suppress it within the binaries of speech and silence, guilt and shame, and isolation versus community. While cultural contexts shape the modes through which adolescent trauma is expressed and suppressed, the underlying psychological consequences of silencing, like emotional isolation, lack of acknowledgment, and delayed response, manifest similarly across both individualistic and collectivist societies.

The study draws on Cathy Caruth's idea of trauma as a belated experience and the necessity of acknowledgment. The cultural dimensions were further explored using the work of Geert Hofstede, Jeffrey C. Alexander, and Ron Eyerman. The theoretical insights analyze both texts in broader cultural contexts and norms that influence experiences and discourses of trauma. Both *13 Reasons Why* and *A Silent Voice* portray adolescent trauma based on silence and voice. However, the cultural framing of this silence diverges significantly. *13 Reasons Why*, rooted in Western individualistic culture, portrays silence as emotional neglect, institutional failure, and

prioritization of personal autonomy over communal care. The protagonist's choice to speak posthumously through tapes highlights her desire for acknowledgment and criticism of the superficiality of guilt. Meanwhile, *A Silent Voice*, based on Japanese collectivist values, portrays silence as a representation of shame, self-erasure, and eventual repentance.

The present comparative study reveals that Shoya from *A Silent Voice* and Hannah from *13 Reasons Why* experience isolation, guilt, and failed attempts at connection. However, Shoya's character leads to redemption through collective healing and non-verbal reconnection, while Hannah's narrative emphasizes unacknowledged trauma and the inadequacy of institutional and interpersonal responses. One finding is that while Western frameworks tend to individualize trauma and recovery, Eastern narratives often distribute responsibility across a social network.

Additionally, this study also argues that bullying, guilt and bystander apathy function differently in the two cultural settings. In the West, the emphasis on personal freedom can result in institutional detachment and passive spectatorship. On the other hand, in the East, social harmony and group conformity can lead to social exclusion and collective punishment. Hence, silence in both contexts becomes a critical site of trauma representation. The study reveals that silence is not void but a coded language that communicates emotional pain, social critique, and suppressed histories. Therefore, the dissertation affirms that cultural attitudes play a vital role in shaping how adolescent trauma is expressed, suppressed, or silenced.

Furthermore, silence remains a dominant motif in both texts. The voice, on the other hand, emerges as an equally critical counterforce that resists eliminating trauma itself but seeks acknowledgment. In *13 Reasons Why*, Hannah Baker's recorded tapes

represent her voice. Although it is no longer present in life, it reclaims space in a world that refused to hear her when she was alive. Not only do tapes narrate trauma, but they also demand accountability. The voice becomes an act of turning private suffering into public indictment. The disjointed structure of the narrative forces the listener and reader to engage with the inconvenient reality that adolescents often must create their platforms to be heard, particularly in systems that value closure over inconvenient truths. Likewise, *A Silent Voice* presents a more subtle yet equally powerful portrayal of voice within a collectivist cultural framework. Shoko, a deaf girl, literally struggles to communicate in a society that treats her as the other. Her voice is often represented in her sign language, notebooks, or silence. On the other hand, Shoya chooses the path of repentance. The voice here is not simply about speaking aloud. It mentions being understood, acknowledged, and valued within the community.

In conclusion, this dissertation explores the need for a culturally sensitive approach to trauma narratives in globalized media, where adolescent experiences are increasingly mediated through movies, literature, and online discourses. Healing, too, must be considered a cultural influence, a psychological development, and a form of narrative agency. This dissertation contributes to trauma studies by bridging psychological theories with cultural analysis and narrative forms. The findings of this study extend trauma theory by incorporating cultural psychology and adolescent developmental theory, portraying trauma to be communicated. Furthermore, it offers a critical reflection on how adolescents navigate trauma through voice and silence. It represents how these navigations are deeply rooted in cultural identities and social expectations. In doing so, it opens pathways for future academic inquiry and invites more diverse frameworks for understanding adolescent suffering across borders.

Future research can expand by exploring cross-cultural adolescent trauma in cinemas and literature.

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