UNTHINKABLE, INDESCRIBABLE, UNKNOWABLE: THINKING WITH HANNAH ARENDT ABOUT SCHOOL SHOOTINGS THROUGH CONCEPTS OF UNACKNOWLEDGED SHAME, VIOLENCE AND FORGIVENESS

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ABSTRACT

The figure of the rampage school shooter continues to present a challenge to educational thought and research. This dissertation examines discursive representations of unacknowledged shame, violence and forgiveness in young adult fiction written about rampage school shootings. I frame my thinking of concepts and analysis through Hannah Arendt's discussion of shame, violence, and forgiveness. To explore these concepts, I will engage with literary pedagogy, to examine the potential for fostering dialogue with students to think about the combined role of the emotional and social realms of the school shooter and finally how young adult fiction about rampage school shooting can be used to initiate classroom discussions.

Key Words: Arendt, Shame, Violence, Forgiveness, Literary Pedagogy

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Chapter One
Introduction

The conviction that everything that happens on earth must be comprehensible to man can lead to interpreting history by common places. Comprehension does not mean denying the outrageous, deducing the unprecedented from precedents, or explaining phenomena by such analogies and generalities that the impact of reality and the shock of experience are no longer felt. It means, rather, examining and bearing consciously the burden which our century has placed on us-neither denying its existence not submitting meekly to its weight. Comprehension, in short, means the unpremeditated, attentive facing up to, and resisting of, reality-whatever it may be. (Arendt, 1968, p. viii)

My Past Leads Me to My Present

In 1958, in a small community on the outskirts of Montreal, a two-year old child stands in the hallway of the family flat. Holding a dead duck in one hand, and a shotgun in the other, the child is waiting patiently, for her father, an avid hunter, to take a picture. The gun outweighs the child by at least ten pounds. On the wall directly opposite the child is a gun rack housing five additional shotguns. The guns are not loaded. The ammunition sits in plain sight on the bottom shelf of the rack. The gun rack is not locked.

(Photo Library: Charles Desmond Snow)

I am this child raised amidst hunters and shotguns. From early childhood I have been exposed to guns, their power and ability to take a life (animal and human). My four brothers were all taught how to handle and fire a gun at a young age. Each owned their own guns by age twelve. Every time they went hunting, they would return with their kill, a duck, a rabbit, or a

deer. This was my normal family life and continued to be "my" normal until my father passed away in 2017. This culture of guns and hunting was part of our culture, our community and my father's circle of friends. Guns and ammunition were always in plain sight in our home and the homes of our family friends. The culture of guns was integral to community life – no one thought it was unusual to see someone cleaning a gun at the kitchen table while having a cup of tea and chatting with friends or walking down the street with a gun tucked under their arm.

(Photo Library: Robert Snow)

Until age fourteen, I was still living in the city of Verdun a community that bordered on what Kathy Dobson, journalist, and scholar (2016) describes as "Canada's toughest neighbourhood," Point St. Charles. I would argue that Verdun was on par when it came to "tough" places to live. Tough does not refer to the wide-spread poverty, the overcrowded living spaces, the lack of food or the hand me down clothes. Rather "tough" is an explicit reference to everyday violence that permeated the community. Violence was how disputes were settled - with a show of fists rather than words. During my first fourteen years of life I witnessed and experienced many of the scenes Dobson (2016) describes in her book *With a Closed Fist: Growing Up in Canada's Toughest Neighbourhood*. Therefore, it is of no surprise that my interest in school violence dates to my childhood and the incidents of violence that I witnessed from an early age. Violence that was commonplace and normalized by its frequency and linked to an inherited belief that corporal punishment and discipline are part of growing up and embedded in community as well as school culture.

I completed the first eight years of my schooling in Verdun at Bannantyne Elementary School.

(Picture courtesy of McCord Museum)

While there, I witnessed acts of violence against students, which were routine behaviour at this time, and in this place and culture. If similar acts of violence were to take place now, they would be seen as abusive and/or illegal. Sharing some of my “personal experiences” while thinking with Hannah Arendt, I seek to qualify the role that time, place and culture play in our childhood experiences and how we come to view the world (Arendt, 1978; Archer, 1988). Arendt’s reflections are predicated on her life in Europe and The United States, her study of and with philosophers such as St. Augustine, Martin Heidegger, and Karl Jaspers. In addition, her German-Jewish cultural heritage and experiences during the Nazi regime are reflected in her writing and give meaning to the notion that how we think with our past experiences shape our lived experiences. For Arendt (1978) all thinking moves from experience. The present is a battleground where the past and the future collide if only for an instant, a place to think, between the “no longer” and “not yet” before pushing forward to the future (pp. 202 - 213). This thinking in the present on the battleground – allows us to “neither deny … our existence or submit … meekly to its weight. Comprehension, in short, means the unpremeditated, attentive facing up to, and resisting of, reality-whatever it may be” (Arendt, 1968, p. viii). We cannot deny our memories but also do not need to back away from what we have experienced. Our experiences

shape who we are and is the materiality of our thought. How we approach the future is done in the present on the battleground of thinking.

Thus, in this dissertation I draw on my personal experiences and Arendt's reflections as a catalyst to my thinking. I start with a memory from 1963 which still haunts my thoughts to this day. I was in a mixed gender grade two class, during a time when corporal punishment was legal and accepted in schools and modesty was of importance in our cultural upbringing. There from my seat, only four rows from the front of the room, I witnessed the physical punishment and beatings of classmates at school. I specifically recall one incident of a child being spanked for speaking in class when not called upon to do so. The teacher called her to the front of the room, bent her over her knee, lifted her tunic exposing her underwear and spanked her with a ruler, this incident is fresh in my memory as if it had happened yesterday, I recall her name, her face, her horror.

In the 1960s corporal punishment was intended to not only discipline the perpetrator and to serve as a warning to others, but also intended to shame the student. I felt my classmate's shame, not for the punishment but for how it was delivered. I vowed to myself not to get caught talking in class. Corporal punishment is commonly viewed as physical punishment and administered with a leather strap, or wooden board, or wooden yard stick. Physical corporal punishment was not banned in Canada until 2004 and is still used as a form of discipline in some parts of the world.[1] To me this violence was not simply physical but mental and emotional intended to have a lasting impact on all students, a shaming affect. I will come back to this mental and emotional (shaming) form of punishment still experienced today in school settings, but first to complete this picture, I need to share what I witnessed, on several occasions during my eight years at Bannantyne Elementary School (1961-1970). To get from the grade two

classroom I assisted in, to my own grade seven classroom, I had to pass by the principal's office. It was my practice to slip by without being noticed - this practice of becoming invisible was something I learned as early as grade one and was to avoid being mistaken for a misbehaver. Often, I witnessed someone with their hand extended awaiting the leather strap - I did not want that to be me. Children who were administered the strap did not talk about the pain or the shame. They did not go home and tell their parents because parents would punish them a second time, first for misbehaving and second for the shame they had brought to their family. Thus this "shame was repressed rather than confronted," which is what Thomas Scheff and Suzanne Retzinger (2001), refer to as "unacknowledged shame" (p. xi). As young people we were taught to hide our shame not to share it openly, we were taught to repress it and not recall it even to ourselves. Shame is something to be ashamed of.

Although physical corporal punishment has been illegal in classrooms and school hallways in Canada since 2004, the shaming of students in school is still a routine occurrence. Peter Stearns and Clio Stearns (2017) state, "shame's disciplinary role … increased for several decades, in part as an alternative to corporal punishment" and "milder forms of shaming persist to this day, as shame continues to be a rather contested emotion in the school setting" (p. 58). Over the past thirteen years, I have witnessed these milder forms of shaming in the university classrooms as professors single out those talking during a lecture or for using their electronic devices for reasons other than recording lecture notes or when calling out a student when they get up to leave in the middle of a lecture (personal observations). Shaming has a lasting affect not only on the perpetrator but also on those who witness the shaming practice (Scheff and Retzinger, 2001). An example of this lasting effect is twofold: the student who was called out for leaving during lecture, never returned to the lecture hall and a couple of other students told me

that if they had to leave early, they would just skip the lecture to not be the centre of the joke for their peers and the course director.

In 1970, I was thirteen years old and in my final year at Bannantyne Elementary School. Tensions between the English and French speaking communities in Quebec were percolating. The separatist movement and Front de Liberation du Quebec were on the rise. My school was an English-speaking school in a mixed English/French speaking community, it was located a city block from a French-speaking School. Early in March, the children my age and younger from the French-speaking school decided to protest the English-speaking school. They marched on the school chanting and throwing rocks. My father heard about this demonstration on the radio. He took a gun from the rack in the living room and headed out the door with the intention of protecting his children. Luckily, we lived in a second floor flat and before he made it to the bottom of the stairs he thought - what am I doing? Later that day my father recounted to my mother what had happened. My parents decided that it was best to move the family from the community before things escalated further. I still imagine what my life might have been had my father went to school with a gun. If he had carried out his impulse, I might today be the child of a school shooter.

These recollections from my childhood are at the forefront in my thoughts and research in this dissertation. My childhood autobiography is the prime motivation of my work. To bring this project to fruition, I find myself needing to use an object(s) of analysis that have meaning to me and a common understanding for others. Thus, I am drawn to stories and specifically, novels, for this project. For me pedagogical literacy has a strong place in our learning cycle. As a child we are taught many life lessons from the stories and fables that we are read by our parents and teachers. We learn to look beyond the ugly toad and ugly duckling to see beauty,[2] we examine

kindly gestures of the wolf to see whether they are in disguise to carry out an evil plot to eat us[3] and we learn ways to build a stronger house and/or escape the evils that often come to us on our journey.[4]

As I read scenes of school shootings in young adult literature with Arendt's reflections on shame, violence, and forgiveness my aim will be to generate knowledge of how these representations can create avenues of pedagogical dialogue for teachers to reflect and bring into the discussion with students the problem of school violence. Literacy educator, Christine Edwards-Groves, (2018) explains pedagogical dialogue as the "understanding [of] how talk functions and influences learning in a highly nuanced way [and] is a functional matter for understanding professional practice, and indeed teacher efficacy" (p. 1). Thus, these avenues of pedagogical dialogue assist in "shaping the realities and identities of the students" (p. 4). They also support teachers and students to engage in difficult topics and open pedagogical conversations that they might not otherwise feel comfortable to share.

Inquiry Parameters

Historically, this inquiry begins with the rampage shooting at Columbine High School in Columbine, Colorado in 1999 (Columbine Massacre). Since the Columbine Massacre, school shootings "seem to act according to a cultural script that features the use of the spectacle of violence as transmitted via mass media" (Muschert, 2013, p. 265). This highly publicized shooting is pivotal to my inquiry because it has made "a significant mark on social discourses about youth social problems and youth alienation in contemporary society" (Muschert, 2013, p. 265). Rampage school shootings fuel a media-saturated fascination with violence and horror that takes on a life of its own in the form of a spectacle. Muschert (2013) explains,

> in cases of exceedingly rare catastrophes which capture the collective sociological imagination (often in anxious and/or existential ways), the public relies strongly on the media to understand the meanings, details, and effects of such tragedies. School shootings are among the superlative examples of mediatized violence, in which the discourse about the phenomena is dominated by the mass media process…particularly concerning the intersections between "real world" events and the media representations of such events. (p. 267)

The Columbine shooters, not only "generated a full-blown post-modern spectacle of alien youth" they created a "whole series of entertaining, enticing, dramatic narratives and images" that turned them into the celebrities they hoped to become and "America's suburban youth into an exotic new species to be observed, feared, hated and controlled" (Frymer, 2009, p. 1389). The use of weapons, explosives and random victim violence present at Columbine are said to be mimicked in subsequent rampage shootings not only in the USA but around the world (Canada, Germany, Brazil)[5] making Columbine the model of what to do and what not to do. Along with providing a cautionary tale for rampage shooting, the unthinkable events at Columbine High School continue to seize the imaginations of the general observer and young copy-cat shooters. These stereotypical representations of the school shooter are distorted and depict an individual (often male) as crazed and/or a loner, "seeking to exact revenge and/or to convey a message" through the "use of extreme violence in a school setting" (Muschert, 2013, p. 265). Educational scholar, Peter Sitzer (2013) reflects on the notion of the copy-cat, in his review of "The Empirical Study of Adolescents: Appropriation of perpetrators self-presentations" conducted by Bockler and Seeger (2010), which indicates that school shooters do not see themselves as copy-cats but instead as people with similar views, thoughts and feelings who are looking for ways to

opt out of difficult and abusive situations and although they adopt some of the more obvious traits "posing with a gun in hand – on the internet (Eric Harris)" they are not imitating (p. 295) other school shooters, they are acting on their own beliefs. However, this does not make the notion of a copy-cat a media myth. In Sitzer (2013), academics, Harding, Fox, and Mehta (2009) and Newman et al (2004) state, "media-communicated cultural scripts can not only supply the design for a school shooting, but also suggest to potential perpetrators that a rampage offers a potential solution to their problems … and the changes in scripts of school shootings can be interpreted as media modeling and dissemination" (p. 295). Therefore, whether the school shooter is copying those before them or striking out on their own, the knowledge generated by these mass media reports of the Columbine Massacre have an impact on the shooters decision to act. These media tropes also have influenced both the fictional and non-fictional representations of school shooters.

Media images of the school shooters at Columbine High School and the events of April 20, 1999, have sparked the real and literary imaginations of the public and authors. Although there is not a specific fictional piece that is written about Columbine, many elements of that real-life incident appear in novels about school shootings. In reading more than twenty-five novels and numerous non-fiction accounts of rampage school shootings,[6] I note that although the story is told differently the key elements and the picture painted by the media of the Columbine Massacre shine through in the fictional account, demonstrating that the media plays a significant role in how rampage school shootings are represented, portrayed, and fictionalized.

My use of the term "rampage killings" is taken from Muschert (2013), who describes "rampage shooting" as a sub-category of mass murder, it is used to qualify the various situations depicting "the (attempted) killing of multiple persons least partly in public space by a single

physically present perpetrator using (potentially) deadly weapons in a single event without any cooling off period" (Bondu et al, 2008, p. 12 in Muschert, 2013, p. 4). However, for the purpose of this project I will combine the above definition with the more nuanced definition of "rampage school shootings" provided by educational scholars, Nils Bockler et al (2013) in *School Shootings: International Research, Case Studies and Concepts for Prevention* to qualify the real and fictional representations of school shootings and school shooters:

> [rampage school shootings are] mostly committed by adolescents and occur at school or in a school-related place such as the schoolyard or a school bus stop. The location is specifically chosen, often for its symbolic meaning to a perpetrator who wishes to take revenge on the community, or to experience or demonstrate power…the perpetrators are a current or former student of the attacked institution. (p. 5)

Collective consciousness considers school shooting to be rare occurrences (Muschert 2013), however, school shootings in North America and their severity have in fact increased since the 1990s with more than 93 school shootings and incidences such as the Newtown (12/2012), La Loche (01/2016), Parkland (02/2018) and Houston (05/2018). (Bockler, Seeger, Sitzer, and Heitmeyer, 2013) giving us (the community) sufficient reasons to think about discourses of school safety, security, and prevention. Discourses that give the community (students, parents, teachers, administrators, and public) the belief that school shootings are rare and not happening in our community, eliminate difficult and serious conversations that we should be having on school shootings and their traumatic and lasting effect on young people. What is needed, I argue, is not a language that defends against the horror of violence but a language that speaks to and with this violence to think of its underlying social, political dynamics, procedures, and effects on the lives of young people. British academics, Brad Evans, and Sean Michael Wilson (2016) state

"creating alternative futures requires serious and sustained investment in arresting the cycle of violence, imagining better futures and styles for living amongst the world of peoples" (p. 11). Arendt (1998) further suggests that these conversations can be initiated through,

> transformations [that] occur in storytelling and generally in artistic transposition of individual experiences. But we do not need the form of the artist to witness this transfiguration. Each time we talk about things that can be experienced in privacy or intimacy, we bring them out into a sphere where they will assume a kind of reality which, their intensity notwithstanding, they never could have had before. The presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of reality of the world and ourselves. (p. 50)

In thinking with the philosophical and political ideas of Arendt, I conceptualize how utilizing creative text, such as novels may provide teachers a space to think critically with students as reading "collides with the real world" (Mulhall, 2009, p. 44) of experiences, I ask does literature have the potential to intervene in and even "arrest the cycles of violence" (Evans & Wilson, 2016, p. 59) repeating in schools? And in what ways can these conversations on school violence allow for young people to continue the conversations in the home? Jacqueline Rose (2021) in her recent publication *On Violence and On Violence Against Women* supports the notion that we need to make time for thought and conversations "which must include equivocations of our inner lives,[7] [otherwise] we will do nothing to end violence in the world, while we will surely be doing violence to ourselves" (p. 33). I propose that through literary pedagogy and the sharing of fictional literature in secondary and post-secondary classrooms which focuses on issues/concepts of social concern[8] a platform for thought and conversations can be created that extends beyond the classroom to encompass the home and community. Thus, establishing a "transferential

exchange between object and learner, [in which] knowledge is made, broken down and remade" (Mishra Tarc, 2011, p. 366) to develop as Evans and Wilson (2016) suggest "alternative futures [that] take education seriously, and harness the power of imagination and equip global youths with the confidence that our world can be transformed for the better" (p. 59). For Arendt (1998) this notion of literary pedagogy through shared reading in public is a space where reality can be realized, and the world is viewed through various perspectives. Deep reading of the text can allow for rich discussions of social and human relations that are often too painful to discuss if they are too close to one's own experiences.

The young adult reader can be transported into the story depicting a social situation or a traumatic event that they may not thankfully experience otherwise. They can feel kinship with the characters and think with them, dialogue with them and create meaning and understanding that will help a young person to recognize they are not alone in what they are feeling and/or thinking. Young readers can identify with, resist, and play with the similarities and differences of the fictional representation that aligns with their own personal situation. Reading, as a special kind of thinking, can support one to wonder (alone and with others) about how real-life situations align with what they have read. Through wondering they can navigate ways to adopt ideas that mitigate their own reality. When transported to the public space of the classroom - situations, events, and/or incidences that happen within the novel can be discussed without revealing anything about themselves.

By mobilizing the concepts of unacknowledged shame, violence, and forgiveness (reconciliation to move forward) in the following sections, I open a space in my written analysis to engage with these concepts. Thus, I will wonder as I read the novels with guided thinking to

strengthen and bridge difficult, messy discussions of trauma that encompass social issues such as school shootings.

YA fiction about school shootings inform and bear witness to violent acts in fictional scenes that still touch on emotional truths. Building on this notion that YA novels depicting school shooters are intended to inform and bear witness, this dissertation asks: How might teachers present fiction depicting the violent and hard knowledge of school shooting to generate thinking about it on the part of students and parents? Without shifting the sole burden of solutions of school violence to our youth, I none-the-less feel that student engagement in these issues is critical to opening a space to talk about the less desirable and hurtful aspects of young people's school experiences.

There are no simple answers to explain why school shootings happen and little way to comprehend the complex motives and factors leading to school shooting. The intermingling of motives and factors such as bullying, persecution, revenge, rejection, cultural ideology, and political beliefs make the individual experience a complex puzzle that cannot be easily profiled (Bockler et al, 2013; Muschert & Ragnedda, 2010). If there are diverse approaches (sociological, psychological, social- psychological, political, philosophical) to understanding the phenomena of school shooting, no single approach can account for the more inexpressible aspects of its violence. As such, each of these disciplines examine these phenomena in a different way. For example, sociological research (Klein, 2003; Newman et al, 2004; Collins, 2008; Altheide, 2009; Linder, 2014) studies social behaviour - specifically social interaction - by examining the school shooter from the perspective of society's expectations of the individual in social interactions. Psychological research (Pepler, Craig & Connolly, 2006) tends to analyze the individual's behaviour and the mind and thus provides a lens through which to examine the school shooter

based on their cognition. Social psychology (Goffman, 1963; Cooley, 1902; Sandstrom et al, 2014, Scheff & Ritzinger (2001) focuses on "how people's thoughts, feelings and behaviours are influenced by the actual, imagined and implied presence of others" (Allport, 1985, p. 5). In other words, social context impacts how any one individual perceives, behaves, and engages others in the world.

Glenn Muschert cautions that accepting *one* approach to studying school shootings "can lead to a counterproductive narrowing of perspective: School shooting incidents need to be understood as resulting from a constellation of contributing causes, none of which is sufficient in itself to explain a shooting" (as cited in Bockler, Seeger, Sitzer & Heitmeyer, 2013, p. 1). Therefore, as I approach this topic of the school shooter, I will not be looking for answers to questions that have already been explored by the many disciplines of study, such as gun control, violent video games, and (social) media influence. Instead, my approach will be to first, think with the political theorist, Arendt, about school shootings through the tropes of the emotions, unacknowledged shame, and forgiveness and through her theories of violence. I theoretically frame violence as springing forth from unacknowledged grief, shame, and anger. I position these three notions, unacknowledged shame, forgiveness, and violence as concepts throughout my work. By thinking with the theories of Arendt and these concepts I seek to develop a pedagogical foundation to engage in dialogue about school shootings as represented in young adult literature. Eviatar Zerubaval (2021) suggests that having specific concepts and theories to focus on while you complete your research provides, "a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances" (p. 3) and allows for the researcher to focus their reading to capture instances of these concepts and theories that may have otherwise been overlooked.

While school shootings indeed threaten the values and interests of society, panic may also

shroud and further suppress understandings of what violence represents, as well as hard questions about the work of repair and relationality after such violence. By panic, I am referring to the reaction that is experienced by society (in this instance, Western World) in response to activities[9] that create "widespread public fear that evildoers [are] trying to harm and/or tear apart the very fabric of our society" (Burns & Crawford, 1999, p. 148). Representations that describe killers as "misfits who kill for kicks," or as "murderers that kill for revenge," or as "murderers next door" incite fear and panic (Cohen, 1972, p. xiv) amongst young people and the adult community causing those directly and indirectly involved to look for ways to calm the fears of those around them. Student safety thus becomes paramount over other mandates such as the curriculum,[10] the hidden curriculum[11] and in some cases, has teachers and administrative staff managing policing policies rather than academic policies (Klein, 2012; Ringrose, 2013; Lawrence & Birkland, 2009).

The popular reaction to school shootings – blaming them on "misfits" of "evildoers" or responding via the securitization of the school environment – can be a way of avoiding the difficulties of *thinking* about school shootings and the fear, bewilderment, and horror that they engender. Michel Kimmel and Matthew Mahler (2003) report that "school violence is an issue that weighs heavily on our nation's consciousness" (p. 1439). As they find, "3 in 10 [students] say violence has increased in their schools in the past year and nearly two-fifths have worried that a classmate was potentially violent" (p. 1440). How can an increase in violence, an increase in school shootings, and the resulting increase in fear, horror, insecurity, and trauma make the classroom or the school a place that is safe? I seek to respond to this question by engaging depictions of school shooting violence in young adult fiction to consider how engaging with such literature may open space for addressing fear, horror, insecurity, and trauma in the classroom. In

the wake of the Columbine shooting, there has emerged a plethora of "school shooters stories" in digital and social media, media, fiction, and non-fiction literary texts. Alongside these representations, a genre of youth novels depicting fictional accounts of school shooters was created. In the next section I discuss the emergence of the genre of this literature and my approach to reading through Arendt's constructs of shame, violence, and forgiveness.

Fiction and School Shootings: The violent birth of a genre

To clarify, young adult literature (novel) is inherently amorphous, for its constituent terms, "young adult" and "literature" are dynamic, changing with culture and society. The young adult novel is a narrative of book length which usually has some degree of realism, action, and a main character. Young adult literature is pedagogical in nature as it is both a "window and a mirror" for the reader. Michael Cart (2018) explains,

> the mirror lets readers see themselves, which is a godsend because young adults, being inherently solipsistic, often think they are the only one of their kind; this is especially true of those who are treated as outsiders by their peers. It can, accordingly, be vastly reassuring to see that there are others like oneself. The window aspect allows readers to see into the lives, minds, and hearts of others, a process that can (speaking of pedagogic) teach empathy, one of the most important lessons of literature. (p. 1)

Not all literature is categorized in the same way, a novel is one specific genre of literature. By genre, I am referring to a category of literature that is similar in style, content and subject matter and intended for a specific audience, in this case young adults, twelve to twenty-four. The intriguing thing about young adult literature is its audience is not restricted to young adults (12-24). The audience also includes adults (25+). Caroline Kitchener (2017) cites English professor

Virginia Zimmerman when identifying why young adult literature appeals to such a wide group of individuals. Kitchener (2017) finds that because young adult novels are often considered coming of age novels “adults recognize…something we have been through and as adults, we know that we continue to change, continue to come of age.” She further finds adults can “sink into [a] reality to encounter feelings, challenges, and relationships they recognize from their own lives” (p. 1).

Within the genre of young adult literate is a sub-genre which targets topics that are traumatic and can be uncomfortable for some readers as well as their parents. These topics can include bullying, sexual violence, race and gender discrimination, child soldiers and school violence, such as school shootings. The growing emergence of this genre reflects the pressing need on the part of young people and adults to find ways to connect with others and find effective language with which to engage in unthinkable realities and increasingly common forms of mass-casualty violence. The unthinkable and unspeakable aspects of mass violence generate articulations of intolerable feelings that are painful for some and distasteful for others.

I use the terms unspeakable and unthinkable to refer to the experiences of young people confronting violence rather than the discourse reporters and other media use to report it. When referring to the unspeakable and unthinkable I am thinking with Roger I. Simon (2008), who notes that there is a “curious knot that binds novelists and terrorists”[12] whereas “it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of the culture, now bomb makers and gunmen have taken that territory. They make raids on the human consciousness” (p. 352). The unthinkable becomes ever present in our minds invading our thoughts and compelling us to remember, “taking possession of our lives and our futures” (p. 354). Thus, to chase these unthinkable and unspeakable experiences from our minds Simon (2008) suggests that we need “counter narratives…to

overshadow all other speeches [those of the gunman] to reply to the power and beat back our fears" (p. 355). Simon argues these narratives can take many forms and they are a way to "de-privatize dread, preserve a social contract with each other and establish a basis for living on and confronting future violations and violence" (p. 355).

By engaging the theories of Arendt on unacknowledged shame, violence, and forgiveness to call forth the unspeakable and unthinkable, my project explores literary depictions of rampage shootings through the interior view of young adult school shooters with a view to generating pedagogical thinking about violence. Thus, a seminal question for this work is: In what ways do young adult novels with fictional representations of school shootings provide a space for pedagogical reflection that acknowledges shame and yet establishes a basis for victims of school shootings to move forward and confront unthinkable social violence both inside and outside the classroom?

To provide insight into this question and other questions within this work I will engage with the school shooting stories depicted in the fictional young adult novels, *Nineteen Minutes* by Jodi Picoult, *Luckiest Girl Alive* by Jessica Knoll and *Hate List* by Jennifer Brown. I will employ Arendtian theory, and the specific concepts mentioned earlier (unacknowledged shame, violence, and forgiveness) to complete my analysis. It is worth noting that the concepts selected are interchangeable and could have been applied to the analysis of each of these fictional accounts of a school shooting. However, I will focus on one novel to think with each of the concepts. I have chosen to primarily focus on the three female characters that are implicated in the school shooting but are not the school shooter. First, the fictional character, Josie Cormier, is from the novel *Nineteen Minut*es. Josie is a friend of the shooter and plays a pivotal role in the revenge plot of the novel. Josie's interpretation of how others see her allows us (the reader) to

imagine how unacknowledged shame may affect inner life and how that unacknowledged shame can erupt into violence. Next, for *Luckiest Girl Alive* I will think with the concept of violence and the fictional character Ani Fanelli. Ani experiences violence in several ways which happen prior to the shooting, during the shooting and following the shooting. Ani has a personal relationship with the shooter and is one of the catalysts for the shooting. The representations of violence in this fictional account will be my focus and include scenes of gang-rape, verbal abuse, shaming, punishing, physical violence and the actual shooting all which are graphically described. Finally, I will turn to the *Hate List* and focus on the fictional character Valerie Leftman. I acknowledge that Valerie's journey of self-discovery and redemption is what attracted me to this fictional account of the school shooting and why I choose it specifically to explore the concept of forgiveness. Valerie leads us to think about the journey of creating a possibility of acceptance and moving on after a tragic event. My focus on these characters rather than the fictional shooter is to distance my analysis from the spectacle of the act of the school shooting. I thus concur with Arendt who proposes – to be able to think one must find some distance from one's object of study.

Shame: The creation of emotional turbulence

> *Violence occurs when the path toward negotiations is blocked by inadequate bonds and hidden crosscurrents of emotion – that is by…alienation and shame.* (Scheff & Retzinger, 2001, p. xix)

Shame for Arendt is a more nuanced theoretical concept. Through my engagement with *The Human Condition,*[13] *Origins of Totalitarianism,*[14] *Rahel Varnhagen, the life of a Jewish Women,*[15] and "Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility"[16] I build a theoretical foundation to think about Shame. In addition, I utilize the work of scholars, Scheff, 2003; Scheff &

Retzinger, 2001; Lewis, 1995; Lynd, 1958 to develop the concept of shame and a way of thinking about the shame in school shooting incidences.

The academic literature claims catalysts for school shootings are complex and varied. Among these are bullying, drugs, mental illness (Shuffleton, 2015a), social isolation, exposure to violence on TV, in movies and in video games (Hong et al. 2011), access to guns (Shuffleton, 2015a; Shapirio, 2015), racism, jilted love, sexual harassment, retribution, gang connections, masculinity and gender differences (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003). This long list indicates that the trigger for one shooter may not be the same for another shooter. As such researchers find it difficult to create a common profile of a school shooter.

Kimmel and Mahler state that school shooters feel that their masculinity was threatened however, this research is not conclusive, as an average of more than fifty percent of school shooters kill themselves during the shooting and do not leave evidence as to why they went on a rampage to kill people at their school, others are not willing to talk about what motivated them. Thus, I contend without evidence of their motives it is hard to know what they were thinking and why they decided on this type of violence (Preti, 2008). The other factor that is central to the discussion of the school shooters and to the shooter’s construction is in terms of whiteness as more than sixty-six percent of school shooters are young white males making the intersectionality of race and masculinity an interesting avenue of research for the future (Newman, 2004; Hong et al, 2011; Klein, 2014; Watts Spooner, 2016). Although I recognize the complexity of this issue and believe race and masculinity play a part in the construction of the rampage school shooter, this project will not explore race or masculinity as social categories but instead focus on the qualities of masculinity (which might include racial tropes and delusions) as expressed in shameful personal, social, and political feelings and acts against others.

Scheff and Ritzinger (2001) state “shame leads to anger which leads to aggression…shame is both a major cause of violence and the emotion most implicated in preventing violence” (p. x). Shame is not a voluntary emotion, rather it creeps up on the individual and can “affect” the individual long after the sting of the strap or embarrassment of being singled out has dissipated. Schultz (2013) defines, affect as “a physiological event occurring involuntarily in the body as a response to stimulus” (p. 2). From this vantage point, affect is not a conscious emotion – such as sadness, or anger, or excitement. It is an unintended response to an interaction with people and objects that comes to us without warning, and often without wanting. It “comes to us uninvited and may be present whether we know it or not. Affect is automatic” (p. 2). One does not call upon affect, it is there. It is a physiological response that transforms feeling into thoughts and judgement. At the root of all affects, and important to my work, is shame. Shultz argues that “shame is one of the primary affects” (p. 2). Shame is a deep and spontaneous feeling that threatens our sense of being in the world. When it cannot be avoided, the individual tries to hide it. However, avoidance cannot do away with affect, meaning that reactions to shame can manifest in various ways including withdrawal from the group, violence to self (suicide) and/or others (murder) (Schultz, 2013, p. 3). Key to understanding shame and its ability to manifest into violence is the distinction between shame and unacknowledged shame. Shame (acknowledged) can be constructive as it can strengthen bonds between individuals. If the individual “acknowledges the shame and respects the other’s reasons for expressing the disapproval, and the other reciprocates this respect” a stronger bond can be created. However, when “shame is evoked by disapproval and repressed rather than confronted...people get angry” (Schultz, 2013, p. 3). Unacknowledged shame on the other hand can unravel into “a vicious circle, damaging the social bond. Unconfronted shame, disrespect and

anger can ultimately get out of hand, unraveling in violence" (Scheff & Retzinger, 1991, p. xi). This notion of unacknowledged shame is key to this dissertation as reports of school shooters in real life incidents, such as the Columbine Massacre and representations of school shooters in young adult fiction both indicate that the shooter(s) were bullied, stigmatized, and cut off from others creating low self-esteem and aggression and most likely shame. Here I turn to the real-life example of Luke Woodham.

In the interviews following the shooting and in his own written manifestos, Luke conveyed his belief that by using violence he could stop being a tormented victim and prove he was strong and "manly" capable of making others quiver in his presence. "One second I was some kind of heartbroken idiot" he declared, "and the next second I had the power over many things." He explained that he had been told too often that he was weak and ineffectual – not masculine, but "gay." He wrote, in an apparent effort to sound like Nietzsche: "I am not spoiled or lazy, for murder is not weak and slow-witted. Murder is gutsy and daring" (p. 58)

Thomas J. Scheff and Suzanne M. Ritzinger (2001) note that, "shame leads to anger which leads to aggression…shame is both a major cause of violence and the emotion most implicated in preventing violence" (p. x). Woodham stated to the police, "murder is not weak" implying that he was not weak but instead demonstrated strength by his actions and yet his actions were disordered and confused. His girlfriend had just broken up with him and at the same time he was being tormented and questioned by his peers about his masculinity. The embarrassment of losing a girlfriend and the pressure of conforming to the demands of masculinity translate into feelings of shame - an ashamedness that creates an "emotional turbulence," that pulls and pushes the individual to a breaking point. This "emotional turbulence"

has the potential to erupt into violence against oneself or others. This metaphoric concept is drawn from the notion of turbulence "a state of confusion and/or disorder"[17] and emotional "the connection with and the showing of feelings."[18] Emotional turbulence in this context is a metaphor for the turbulent feeling of being pulled from one direction and pushed from another direction to a state of confusion that manifests into a display of feelings that are disordered and contrary to socially accepted behaviour. Professor of Social Work, Johnathan Fast (2013) states, "if no one will listen to us, or if we must keep shame a secret, then it cannot be discharged. The discomfort and alienation become unbearable. Our anger over such circumstances is discharged destructively, through substance abuse, cutting, or suicide when turned inward; through vengeance against the shamer when turned outward" (p. 247). Woodhams self-narrative reveals this conflict, which manifests into the "gutsy and daring" act of murder.

School Violence and Power

> *The practice of violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is a more violent world. (Arendt, 1969, p. 5)*

Since violence is at the root of school shootings it seems appropriate to think with Arendt's (1969) ideas on violence. Arendt looks at "the distinction between violent and non-violent action" (p. 1). She warns that we must look beyond violent action which is "bent upon the destruction of the old" for a space where non-violent action can exist to "establish something new" (p. 1). Adding to the understanding of complex notion of violence, is that violent action comes down to needs, Arendt states, "all violence harbours within itself and element of arbitrariness [and yet,] plays an enormous role in human affairs" (p. 1). Violent actions are often perpetrated to satisfy the necessities of life, this was true in the French Revolution when the poor staged the revolution against the rich to satisfy the necessities for food. The revolutionaries were "bent on the destruction of the old" to satisfy their personal bodily need for food. This violent

action against the power of the institution of wealth was with the intention that "establishing something new" would allow everyone to share in the wealth rather than just the few.

While the catalyst for the French Revolution may not be directly relevant to the violence of a school shooting, we can use it to think with the reasons that violence happens and the impact of violence in school shooting situations. The violence of school shooting may not appear to be satisfying necessity for the masses; however, it is "an action" by the shooter that could be interpreted as satisfying the necessity for self-preservation by the shooter. By lashing out against the institution of schooling the shooter is responding to being shamed, bullied, ostracized, or intimidated. All these actions could be internalized by the shooter as a threat to their safety. It is also "an action" (the shooting) that does have an "enormous role in human affairs" as it impacts the private realm, leaving some dead, others experiencing ongoing trauma and the general society bewildered and seeking to understand the cause of this ultimate school violence.

Citing C. Wright Mills, Arendt (1970) states, "all politics is a struggle for power, the ultimate kind of power is violence," (p. 35) Arendt's more nuanced understanding of power, authority and violence is explored in her work *On Violence* (1970) where she claims that power and violence are often combined but conceptually distinct. For Arendt power is a political phenomenon, one that requires support and legitimacy of a group of people that come together. Without the group there is no power. Arendt (1970) explains:

> Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to the group and remains in existence only as long as the group keeps together. When we say of somebody that he is "in power" we refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to

> act in their name. The moment the group, from which the power originated to begin with…vanishes "his power" also vanishes. (p. 44)

Arendt's explanation of power requires a group to keep the power in place. It is a form of empowerment that is garnered through the support of many. Arendt (1970) asserts, "Violence can always destroy power: out of the barrel of a gun grows the most effective command, resulting in the most instant and perfect obedience. What never grows out of it is power" (Arendt, 1970, p. 53). Violence is absolute and power does not exist where violence is present, in the Arendtian sense. "Power springs up whenever people get together and act in concert, but it derives its legitimacy from the initial getting together rather than from any action that then may follow…violence comes to play where power is being lost" (pp. 52–53).

Research indicates that unacceptable permeated violence was present at Columbine High School prior the Columbine massacre in 1999. This violence was part of the school culture, accepted as part of school life. It was present in the classroom and halls as teachers chose to ignore student against student violent acts, such as pushing, tripping, name calling, pantsing, and fighting. Sue Klebold (2016) (mother of Dylan Klebold) writes in her book *A Mother's Reckoning: Living in the Aftermath of Tragedy*, "much has been written about the school culture at Columbine High School" and that "for many people, Columbine High School was a hostile and frightening place even if you were one of the more popular kids" (p. 187). In his book *Comprehending Columbine* Ralph Larkin claims that Regina Huerter, director of Juvenile Diversion for the Denver district attorney office indicated that "teachers turned a blind eye to the harassment and even violence in the hallways [of Columbine High School], either because they did not take it seriously – "kids will be kids" - or because they sided with the popular athletes doing the bullying" (pp. 187-188). These kinds of responses from teachers and administrators

who are in positions of authority by virtue of their role and the institutional rules allow force to be distributed unevenly amongst students. Unchecked force often enables students to wage violence against each other in unthinkable ways.

Thinking with Arendt about power and violence supports another analysis of the story of Woodham. Woodham stated, “One second I was some kind of heartbroken idiot and the next second I had the power over many things.” Luke’s split expression of feeling powerless and powerful give insight into how he felt regaining power was critical to his standing as a person in school. Feelings of powerlessness, as Arendt suggests, leads some to resort to violence. And yet the feeling of power is destroyed by violence such that the moment the boy deploys it he is rendered again without belonging and support.

Forgiveness in the Wake of School Shootings

> *Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to one single deed from which we could never recover; we would remain victims of its consequences forever, not unlike the sorcerer’s apprentice who lacked the magic formula to break the magic spell. (Arendt, 1958, p. 237)*

The final construct I turn to think about school shootings is forgiveness. School shootings create a myriad of unanswerable questions, leading to assumptions and speculations that leave students, families, teachers, and social trust in ruin. Arendt (1958) states that “men are unable to forgive what they cannot punish and that they are unable to punish what has turned out to be unforgiveable” (p. 241). In this statement Arendt suggests that some acts are neither forgivable nor punishable. Some acts are beyond forgiveness and there is no retributive punishment that would fit the action. This begs the questions: when an action is seen as monstrous, unthinkable, and indescribable should forgiveness even be considered? Can one even consider the possibility of forgiveness when it comes to school shootings? But it does seem the situation of the school

shooter, for whatever reason – perhaps because each of us has had a violent revengeful feeling in schools – give one pause "to think" about forgiveness.

If as stated above – there are some actions that are unforgiveable and/or unpunishable – I must think about forgiveness beyond the actual shooter. In other words, does forgiveness have to be restricted to the shooter to be forgiveness? Is a form of social forgiveness needed for the social trust to be restored? When the shooter takes the life of a random individual as well as their own a void is created, leaving no one to forgive or be forgiven. Why is it so important to consider forgiveness after the incidence of a school shooting? Arendt (1958) states the most common way to react to a transgression is to seek vengeance, the notion of forgiveness is unexpected and is not in character with the original action. "Forgiving, in other words, is the only reaction that does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven" (p. 241). Challenging this notion, pushing it to the boundaries is the school shooting incident, the initial reaction by the public to a school shooting is to seek revenge - to make someone, anyone pay for the transgression. When the shooter is not available the revenge moves to those closest to the shooter, family, and friends. In all incidences of a school shooting there are survivors that although they did not hold the gun are held accountable for the action of the shooter by the school community and/or blame themselves for the actions of the shooter.

Sue Klebold (2016), mother of Dylan Klebold, one of the Columbine school shooters, when asked the question "Can you forgive Dylan for what he did?" answered "forgive Dylan? My work is to forgive myself" (p. 249). How many survivors of school shootings feel that there is a need to forgive themselves? How many parents, teachers, administrators, and friends blame

themselves for not doing something to prevent the shooting even when they had no idea it was going to take place? How many children who were missed by flying bullets wonder if they were the target or why they were not the target or why their friend, classmate or teacher died or was injured or died during the shooting?

For Arendt forgiveness is an action, an action that is "intimately intertwined and not entirely up to the individual" (Pettigrove, 2006, p. 483). The decision to forgive cannot be forced; it needs to be arrived at by the forgiver through thinking. Even the strongest argument cannot create the will to forgive. Often the forgiver needs time and space to think and make the decision to forgive. "As a result, one's ability to begin something new, especially in the aftermath of wrongdoing, is limited by the readiness of those whom one has to [interact with] to see it as new" (p. 483). While this creates a dilemma "a predicament of irreversibility" for all involved in the shooting also creates space for "a remedy to the predicament". According to Arendt, "[t]he remedy, like the predicament, depends on the presence and actions of others. Others can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. They can forgive" (1998, p. 484). This in no way means that the action of the shooting is erased, "the transgression cannot be removed from the realm of social facts" (p. 484). What is important to note in Arendt's work on forgiveness is that forgiveness can only be given if the deed was done unknowingly. Thus, those connected to the shooter, parents, friends, teachers, and schoolmates have "the [possibility of] redemption from the predicament of irreversibility - of being unable to undo what one has done though one did not, and could not, have known what he was doing" (Arendt, 1998, p. 237). Pettigrove (2006) explains this notion of the unknown as closer to unintentional, thus those closely related to the action may have not intentionally acted in a way that affected the perpetrators actions.

I argue, the reason that discussions of forgiveness are necessary in the classroom and specifically, when this incident may not have directly affected those present, is that schools are the place in which this horrific incident unfolds and where the community is in ruin because of the deadly violence. Schools need to become the site of social forgiveness and as such are a place where discussions of mass school shootings and violence need to be heard. Literature is a catalyst for such discussions of forgiveness that can transcend the boundaries of the personal and open social and public space for discussions of forgiveness that consider the stories and histories of those who have experienced social injustices and trauma of various types, such as bullying, homophobia, and racial discrimination.

Is there forgiveness for the shooter, Luke Woodham? Arendt (1998) asserts, in the above quote, that we cannot move on unless we are released from the wrong we have done, which implies that Luke would need to be forgiven by those he wronged. This may not be possible as one cannot forgive themselves and those who can are not available to do so.

Engaging in reading and discussion of Unthinkable, Indescribable, Unknowable Trauma

> *Since people find it difficult, and rightly so, to live with something that takes their breath away and renders them speechless, they have all too frequently yielded to the obvious temptation to translate their speechlessness into whatever expressions for emotions were close at hand, all of them inadequate.* (Arendt, 2003, p. 56)

In the shared public space of reading where reality is realized, we can view the world through various perspectives. By sharing what we read in open conversation we allow voices to be heard, rather than yield to the "temptation to translate [the other's] speechlessness" into the words we want to hear. Through the eyes of the other we can gain new understanding and create new meaning for what we have read. Deep reading of the text can allow for rich discussions of social and human relations that are often too painful to discuss if they are too close to one's own experiences (Arendt, 1998). Turning to the literary, I seek to open the path to thinking about what

reading YA fiction might do for our collective search to find an affective language with which to engage in unthinkable realities and increasingly common forms of mass-casualty violence.

I recognize that I am proposing young people (12-24) do this reading in the classroom, a space that I am challenging as a safe space due to the threat of, and the actuality of, violence and school shootings, however, who better than those who are affected most by the incidences of school shooting to engage in the rich discussions of social and human relations that can be teased out of these readings. School shootings are not isolated incidences that happen in a bubble, they are surrounded by the cloud of human interaction and incidences of shame and violence. These topics can be plucked from the text to open discussions that are painful because "of [an] ongoing project of understanding oneself and one's relations to others within a complex set of relations" (Sumara, 1996, p. 1). This relationship to the text is built as the story unfolds. Entering a work of literary fiction is different than reading factual texts, Sumara (1996) states, "fictional and real texts of life are united and the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction become blurred" (p. 3). These "integrated experiences of reading and life" allow an opening for discussion to occur (p. 4). Discussions that are fictional yet real. What I mean by this is that many of the narratives in YA literature are based on "real life" occurrences and have been experienced in one form or another by the reader. Acts of bullying and violence may not include school shooting but have relevance in the discussions that can occur from the close reading of the text. This raises the following questions for me. Does reading traumatic literature about school shooting shift the burden of collective and adult responsibility of school shootings to the classroom? Should we be protecting our children from this type of trauma or preparing them for the messy world they are part of?

Arendt (2003) warns against using children in a "political battle in the schoolyard" in her paper "Reflections on Little Rock." However, I challenge the notion that young people are to be protected from the messy world, as they are already part of that world. When a school shooting happens every student and every adult no matter where they are in the world becomes a little more aware that violence can happen "anywhere, anytime, in any school." This awareness is referenced whenever teachers and administrators review lock down procedures and/or active shooter guidelines. I recall a time, about twenty years ago, 2001 when my children, aged seven and five, came home from school, and reported: "today we hid under our desks with the lights out and the doors locked. We were not allowed to make a sound. The teacher told us we were practicing, there was no danger we were safe, but we needed to practice in case a bad man came to our school." As I listened to their story, a wave of fear came over me. As I calmed myself, I had visions of fire drills in the 60s, and 70s when I was in school, we were afraid of fire. I asked myself, how had this practice of fire drills escalated to lock-down drills in which we are now afraid of people like we were afraid of fire? A short time after the initiation of lock-down drills, the doors to the school were locked after all the children were brought inside, to gain access you had to ring the bell, and someone would verify that you were allowed to enter before coming to the front door of the school to let you in. Another precaution put in place by Peel School Board to keep the bad out and the good in. However, the bad may already be inside. I will come back to the idea of lock-down drills and heightened security measures in chapter two however what I find interesting as I think back, within a year or two there were no stories about lock-down drills from my children, they still happened, the lock down drills that is, it was that they became "the normal" in the classroom and no longer were a cool story to tell when you got home. The other

thing that is notable, years later when my two children entered high school, they did not even bother to mention that there was an on-duty police officer at their school, every day.

As I think with Arendt on these issues, we are often shocked by what happens around us, we jump into action and create solutions that address our personal fears without considering the fears or impact on our children. Through this acting in a readily predictable way, I argue we have already shifted trauma and the burden of safety to the classroom and our young people. We assume that we know their unexpressed fears and feelings. I suggest that we need to explore ways to tap into our young people's unexpressed fears and feeling and ease the trauma and burden of safety. I suggest that one way of doing this work of repair is through YA fiction. YA fiction is intended for young adults (12-24) and as mentioned earlier is often read by adults. Although some of the language used to describe the incidences in YA novels is graphic there are filters that remove horror from its description of violence. It is important to note that in many cases, young people have been exposed to this type of violence in their schools, when watching TV and movies or while playing a variety of video games. The fact is that our children may be exposed to violence regularly and may not have the words to express what they are experiencing. Violence may be part of their everyday experience and they may not see their actions or the actions of others as anything but normal.

Coming back to Arendt (2006b) I take a moment to consider the conclusion of "The Crisis in Education,"

> The problem is simply to educate in such a way that a setting-right remains possible, even though it can, of course never be assured. Our hope always hangs on the new which every generation brings; but precisely because we can base our hope only on this, we destroy everything if we so try to control the new that we, the old,

> can dictate how it will look. Exactly for the sake of what is new and revolutionary in every child, education must be conservative; it must preserve this newness and introduce it as a new thing into an old world, which, however revolutionary its actions may be, is always, from the standpoint of the next generation, superannuated and close to destruction. (p. 189)

After the shooting at Stoneham Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, students came together in the fourth largest protest in American history, "March for Our Lives." This action by a group of young people indicates that reading and discussion of traumatic literature in the classroom is pushing the issue to a space that may be uncomfortable for some but accessible for all. Our children face new challenges, challenges that as children we did not face.[19] Arendt suggests, education must introduce "a new thing in an old world" and I am not suggesting that literature is new or has not been used in the classroom in the past as a pedagogical tool, of course, it has. We have been reading Shakespeare in English classrooms for a very long time. What I am suggesting is using literature in a *different way*, to open discussion of social issues and to flush out concepts of study.

The Road from Reality to Fiction and Back Again

Each of the chapters in my dissertation will build my argument that young adult literature can be utilized to build an intentional and adult-mediated space for further thinking and forging pedagogical opportunities to dialogue and conceptually engage with traumatic incidences and the discussion of concepts. Symbolizing possible ways of living on after violence both inside and outside the classroom is pedagogically generative. The pedagogical dialogues that can come from reading literature against and with the constructs developed by Arendt can support young people to move their emotional responses towards thinking.

In chapter 2, I will set the stage for my analysis through a discussion of literature, theory, and social life. In addition, I will explore the theory around the relationship between fictional and realistic representations to indicate that the shooters imagined in the novels are fiction and as such not real while speaking to real life. I will begin here to think with the three concepts that I have chosen to use in my close reading of the YA novels, respectively *Nineteen Minutes*, *Luckiest Girl Alive* and *Hate List*. In addition, I focus on academic literature that discusses the catalysts for school shootings to further provide conceptual grounding for my work.

In chapter 3, Drawing on the work of Arendt to guide me I call on social, academic, and philosophical approaches to drive my understanding and lay the foundation for my analysis of the three concepts, unacknowledged shame, violence, and forgiveness.

In chapter 4, I begin metaphorically to think about the layers we must peel away so we can wonder and think with literature. In turn I examine *Nineteen Minutes* for representations of unacknowledged shame, *Luckiest Girl Alive* for representations of violence and *Hate List* for representation of forgiveness.

In chapter 5, the concluding chapter, I suggest a forum of engagement for teachers to reflect and bring into the discussion with students the problem of school violence. I draw on my personal experience of using young adult literature in the university classroom and present an argument for the use of young adult literature as an avenue to open discussions into this difficult topic.

I open this work by reviewing the academic writings from various directions to create a foundation for this work, starting with how philosophy and literature come together in the generation of pedagogical dialogue.

Chapter Two
Thinking with the Academic Literature

In this chapter, the work of Hannah Arendt anchors my thinking as I explore ideas related to realistic representations in young adult literature depicting rampage school shootings. I consider how this literature can serve as a pedagogical tool to introduce topics in the classroom that can be triggering to some, traumatic yet reaffirming to others. As characters, locations and incidences in novels are imagined and thus fictional, I will first look at real life accounts of school shootings[20] and academic analysis[21] that focuses on school shooting incidences. I do this to illustrate that reality exists in fiction and to provide a foundation for the need to look for new ways to open discussions of traumatic social issues. Finally, I explore the concepts of unacknowledged shame, violence, and forgiveness. This exploration will help me to set up the conceptual framework that I will draw on to think about the possibilities of reconciliation in the aftermath of such a catastrophic life changing event.

"What is Real?": Building a foundation for thinking about reality and fiction

> *The distinction between a real and a fictional story is precisely that the latter was "made up" and the former not made up at all. The real story in which we are engaged as along as we live has no visible or invisible marker because it is not made up.* (Arendt, 1998, p. 186)

Although real is real and fiction is fiction reality enters into stories about fictionalized worlds,[22] far away galaxies,[23] and/or anthropomorphized characters.[24] These ideas are fed by the imagination, "yet recognizable" and familiar to the reader. For Arendt, the "imagination" "[is to] represent what is absent [to have] an image of something [and] somehow reproduce [it]" (2018, p. 388). In other words, to imagine is not directly tied to an actual object but actual objects can trigger the imagination "it can make present whatever it chooses" connecting the "no longer" and the "not yet" (Arendt, 2018, p. 388). This brings me to the distinction between fiction and

realistic fiction. In realistic fiction certain things do not happen. “People do not go backwards in time, pots do not talk, elves do not do chores while shoemakers sleep, and holy men do not walk unaided over the surface of lakes or oceans” (Diamond, 1995, p. 40). The words written by the author are translatable via signs and symbols that reference the worlds of readers from different backgrounds and cultures. Thus, the author in realistic fiction adopts conventions to make common meaning and understanding that point back to reality. Literary conventions are features that allow the reader to identify distinct genres of literature. The similarities in style, devices, and tropes signal how the story will develop.[25] The novel provides a vehicle of expression for a writer’s experiences and emotions that convey real yet imagined stories. Sociologists, Peter Baehr and Philip Walsh (2017) note in their collection of essays on Hannah Arendt’s work,[26] “storytelling, Arendt argued, is the most human way of understanding the past because, through a narrative, individuals are portrayed as genuine actors rather than as vectors of abstract forces and structures… Arendt admired the skill of the novelist to illuminate events through the characters they depict” (p. 20). Often the characters and stories created by the author are closely based on real life characters and incidences creating representations of reality that are palatable and digestible for the reader.

Each of the three novels that I have selected to explore in my work is generated by realistic events or as philosopher, Martha Nussbaum puts it by “a standard of correctness set by the author’s sense of life, as it finds its way into the work” (p. 9). Whether through lived experiences or researched events the authors employ real-life occurrences and people to shape their stories and mold their characters. Although it is true that characters in novels are modeled after real life representations of what we know[27] the characters, scenes and events depicted in novels are not people, places, or incidences that the author personally knows or has encountered

but instead are created in the image of the authors experiences to remind us of real-life actors and actions.

In an interview at the Toronto Reference Library, November 5, 2018, Jodi Picoult author of *Nineteen Minutes* put it this way, "I fictionalize stories based on truth and do extensive research that looks at an issue from many perspectives, before I write a book."[28] Similarly, in the authors notes at the end of her novel, Jessica Knoll (2015) states, that "her real-life experience with gang-rape informed the novel *Luckiest Girl Alive"* (p. 343). In response to questions, Jennifer Brown (2009) author of the *Hate List* answered that she "hopes *Hate List* sparks a little thinking here and there" in reference to the various real-life resources from which she drew to provide a creative fiction about bullying and its sometimes-catastrophic effects.

With young adult novels there is the opportunity for the reader to identify and recognize something that they have in common with the characters (Frye, 1963). Mishra Tarc (2015) states,

> literature can teach us of the unconscious yet deeply felt inner communications that takes place in communicative encounter. Literature acknowledges interiority as it supports us to gain insight into the mysteries of the inner world. Literature attunes us to the emotional situation of language and moves us to thinking. (p. 15)

The advantage for the reader in that the encounter with a novel is just that, "an encounter." The reader may not have experienced the real incident but encounters it in the event of reading. She/he does not have to suffer from its real effects and instead considers it apart from her/his own life experience. If uncomfortable she/he has the option of closing the book, retreating to a deliberative space separating from the reality of violent incidents such as bullying, rape and/or school shootings. This distance helps to minimalize the retraumatizing those who have experience acts of violence, such as bullying, rape and/or gun violence. By a deliberative space I

am referring to a space where they can think, discuss, and come to terms with what they are reading. Mishra Tarc (2015) tells us, “Support[ing] scholars and teachers of literacy to engage in psychoanalytic constructs through the depictions of fictional lives and events” allows for discussion of topics that may be uncomfortable for some and unbearable for others because of their past experiences (p. 15). A safe deliberative space to read literature allows us to look at real life from a remote space to view what we do not like about our real world.[29] Stephen Mulhall (2009) states “anything more than a convention-bound representation of reality of one kind or another [that] might test the faith of both novelist and reader in the very possibility of an authentic representation of individual human experience” (p. 146). When we read, we are making the novel a representation of the “real” yet “not real”. The novel provides an altered accounting of real events from which reader can distance themselves if they would prefer not to be involved. It can also be a fictional accounting of real events that a reader needs more time to think about and take in at their own pace.

The idea of what is real in realism is always in question, philosophically, or as Mulhall (2009) states, “realism is both a recognized category and a contested one” (p. 146). While philosophy aims to represent realism and claims the “truth of things” it is constantly being challenged. Thus, it is important to note that philosophy is about the unsettling and questioning of whatever we might assume is “real” or settled. Not necessarily by a higher reality, but by the power of following through with our thinking and rethinking what we assume. This process of determining what is “real” is never ending and always under scrutiny in philosophical circles.

In realistic stories, the plot develops as the story progresses and characters respond to events as they happen. Thus a “realistic novel [presents] individual characters built out of detailed observations rather than character types whose qualities are determined in advance by

labels…ensuring that plot developments are congruent with the way things (physical, social, and cultural) actually work" (Mulhall, 2009, p. 147). Therefore, the quality of the symbols and signs that are present in literature depict and transform the physical, social, and cultural aspects of human life and absorb them into the imaginative body of the story (Frye, 1963). The story of a school shooting may shock its reader as it holds more than a graphic description of the shooting while also burying in its layer issues of unacknowledged shame, violence, and forgiveness. Unpacking of issues needs to be mitigated to expose stereotyping and the perpetuation of the myths that can result from media sensationalism. The academic discussion of how these novels can be used pedagogically can help us to think about reading stories that shock the reader and yet at the same time can sensitize the reader to the world of others around them and their histories.

Jacqueline Glasgow (2001) argues that teacher's need to utilize the classroom to de-structure these stories as "young adult literature, provides the context for students to become conscious of their operating world view and to examine critically alternative ways of understanding the world and social relations" (p. 54). By employing a pedagogical approach of shared reading, the educator can use literature as a corridor for the reader to develop critical thinking skills and empathy for alternative histories and experiences, one in which "the transferential exchange between object and learner, [allows for] knowledge [to be] made, broken down and remade" (Mishra Tarc, 2013, p. 366). Thus, the use of fictional literature on school shootings in the classroom can provide a platform to make (and remake) meaning from unthinkable events.

Through an intimate reading of a text the reader is afforded the space to interpret the words based on their own lived experience. The *transformation* occurs when the reader brings their understanding of the text into a space where it can be shared and discussed with others that

have similar or alternate views and experiences to share. Dennis J. Sumara (1996) states that "the classroom is the site of complex, interwoven relationships and shared reading of literary text can have profound effect on both the teacher and student and introduce new interpretations of lived realities" (p. 6). These relationships can produce a venue for the reader to consider new ways of understanding the text and "allows for the possibility for interpreting the usually invisible and unarticulated relations among things" (p. 10). Deep reading of the text can allow for rich discussions of social and human relations that are often too painful to discuss if they are too close to one's own personal experiences.

In her study of literacy pedagogy, Judith Robertson (1997) probes the possibility of students embarking on personal journeys of self-knowledge through a difficult piece of literature. Robertson states that "the idea is to help students begin to identify the varying conditions present in paradigms of destruction, and to produce vigilance in learners about the ongoing implications and effects of catastrophic suffering in the world today" (p. 462). Robertson (1997) further argues that "by providing the conditions for insight … about how to use stories to teach about the worlds of hurt, [will lead to] a greater likelihood of effecting positive change in the literary learning experiences of [students]" (p. 460). The pedagogical and ethical use of young adult literature in the classroom is the result of the conditions created by the teacher, who supports and encourages students to be receptive and open to the text and the many interpretations they can make from it.

To think about pedagogical and ethical use of literature, I draw on Arendt (2003), who writes about "morals" and "ethics," following philosophers especially, Nietzsche and Kant, to assert that "there is a distinction between right and wrong, and that it is an absolute distinction" (p. 75). Building on this assertion philosophers claim that "every sane human being can make

this distinction" (p. 75). This distinction is not taught in formal lessons but instead the individual interprets and internalizes the world they live in to understand what is right and what is wrong. Although this may vary slightly depending on culture, religion, and upbringing for the most part fundamental ideas of right and wrong are consistent with all human beings, for example, killing is wrong (p. 90). The question of ethical use of the literature in the pedagogical encounter is why Mishra Tarc (2015) suggests "that teachers prepare for their literacy pedagogy through sustained and trained readings of literature [that] grapples with human existence" (p. 15). Similarly, RM Kennedy (2011), poses a paradox implied in the effort to bring literature into the pedagogical response to thinking about traumatic incidence. While introducing difficult experiences of violence, there is a risk of repeating their scripts. In the wake of violence, he therefore asks, "how do we create this fragile pedagogical space where the truth or unjust histories can be taught, *but not in such a way that it forecloses our capacity to become new people* in relation to this history, or to imagine the world together differently?" (p. 387, emphasis added). Kennedy builds on the work of Arendt and examines a cosmopolitan curriculum that allows the classroom to be a place to start anew, a place where we can talk and share ideas openly. Without this openness and the willingness to consider histories other than one's own a project that uses literature to teach about social and human relations may be a site of repletion. The question, therefore, is how to read in ways that transform ideas that can be made and ever re-made?

Thinking with the causalities of school shootings as identified in academic analysis

> *The thinking activity – according to Plato, the soundless dialogue we carry on with ourselves – serves only to open the eyes of the mind.* (Arendt, 1978, p. 6)

There is not *one* stereotypical type of school shooting incident, there is not *one* driving force behind *all* school shootings, school shootings are not the result of *specific* conditions. The common denominators in the school shooting incidences are that they are perpetuated in and

around the institution of schooling, the authority, the culture, the building, and the grounds. Let us keep that at the forefront of our thinking while we review the academic literature that has been produced about school shootings.

With the escalation of school shootings in the past twenty-five years[30] a new focus has been placed on understanding, recognizing, and mitigating school shooting incidences. With this focus has come a range of theories that explore school shootings from various perspectives such as social and mass media, (video) gaming, normalized violence (in movies, on television, and in music lyrics),[31] bullying, homophobia, and gun laws.[32] Bockler et al (2013) asserts that when creating knowledge about school shootings it is imperative that researchers broaden their scope to include the intersections of various causes through collaborative work and discussions to create room for new ideas and ways of thinking about school shootings. While I agree with Bockler et al (2013) and see value in each of these approaches to studying the underlying causes of school shootings, I argue that we need to push these "causal" discussions even further to include school culture and the "hopeless young pariah."[33]

Mass Media and Mediatization

Jane O'Dea (2015) affirms, that mass media is not the sole reason for rampage school shooting when she states, "it is difficult to establish direct causes for complex human behaviour" and "however convenient and comforting it would be to isolate and blame a single catalyst, such as mass media, the issue of violence appears sufficiently complicated and complex to make it virtually impossible to do so" (p. 406). While cultural scripts perpetuated in media normalize violence in social spaces such as schools and have been cited as the reason for increased violence, there is no conclusive evidence that there is a direct relationship between media, television programing, video games and violence or school shootings. Because each of us has a

complex inner world, and because humans are interpretive subjects, violence is never a direct reflection of "the social world." Drawing on the work of Marshall McLuhan – media guru, O'Dea (2015) argues, that it is not the media itself that incites violence it is the "sociocultural conditions that [it] engenders…we need to acknowledge the messy complicated environment we now inhabit, the forcefulness of the opposing social values imbued in consumer culture and their potential to undermine reflection, careful deliberation, and, as a result, efficacious moral development" (pp. 407 - 420). The ethics of knowing right from wrong and being able to be in a self-reflexive conversation with oneself, Arendt (2003) claims, is essential for being able to judge for oneself what is the right thing to do. Thus, young people can develop their critical thinking skills by engaging with what they see and hear in the media and by asking questions and thinking about the responses in connection with their own personal values and beliefs. O'Dea (2015) suggests "students need to be afforded multiple opportunities to consider, discuss, and contemplate the moral, social, personal and emotional consequences of actions, [and] the importance of moral principles related to inclusion and their connection to a just society" (p. 420). While O'Dea proposes that mass media is a catalyst for the school shooting, Maschert explores mass media from the perspective of mediatization of school shootings.

Muschert (2013) states, although mass media has been touted as the catalyst for rampage school shootings there is little direct evidence to support this theory. Violence, Muschert (2013) writes, is represented in a "highly mediatized phenomena, in that both the events themselves and the public perception of them are intimately tied to media logic" (p. 266). David Altheide (2013) further explains that "media logic" is "a form of communication, and the process through which media transmits and communicates information" (p. 225). In Western society, most people have access to mass media (news outlets, social media, television, and newspapers). The

representations that news-providers choose to share are often selective and sensationalized. News junkies see and hear what journalists want them to see and hear, they do not have direct experience with the subject of the news story, such as school shooters or the victims of these incidences. Thus Muschert (2013) states, "the ubiquity of the school shooter trope obliquely implies the mediatized nature of contemporary society and its problems" (p. 266). Rampage school shooters are constructed by the story tellers, in this case the journalists, based on their "moral judgements, professional conventions, and [the] social problem frames applied to the process of production" (p. 270). Thus, we must consider not only the story of the school shooter but also the source of the story, who is telling it and for what purpose.

The names Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, the shooters at Columbine High School are likely familiar to most people in North America and possibly around the world. In 1999, their actions created a spectacle and set an unthinkable precedent for school shootings globally. Thinking on spectacle, Muschert (2013) explains that the dramatic quality of the narrative of a school shooting incident that is presented in the media tags shooters as "natural born killers or super-predators" while the victims "moral sensibility" is highlighted. This much media attention made the Columbine shooting a blueprint for not only real incidences but also fictional accounts of school shootings. Tom Campbell (2018) in his memoir, *Comics and Columbine: An Outcast Look at Comics, Bigotry and School Shootings* asserts, "there had been earlier American school shootings, but none of these triggered the intense preoccupation of Columbine" (p. 197).

Jackson Katz (2014) furthers the discussion of the media to include the impact of hegemonic masculinity in rampage shootings. Katz (2014) states, "the mainstream debate about media effects and relationship between media and violence is embarrassingly superficial and simplistic" (p. 5). In his view, such analysis tends to overlook the role of media in perpetuating

hardened stereotypes that uphold structural inequalities fueling social violence. Katz introduces the notion of gender as mattering to media representation and violence. Specifically, he argues that "our ideas about masculinity and what it means to be a man – is socially constructed and learned, and since media reinforces these ideas and norms more powerfully than any other cultural force, it's imperative to look at how cultural norms about manhood are constructed in media culture" (p. 5). It is not the movies, music lyrics or video games themselves that cause violence but their reinforcement of cultural norms. Following Katz, we need to identify, analyze, and change the cultural scripts, change the discourse that make an act of violence normal based on stereotypical ideas of what it means to be a boy, what Professor of Psychotherapy, Ken Corbett (2009, 2015) calls, "boys-will-be-boys psychology" (p. 191-192; p. 149).

Katz (2014) also focuses on the romanticization and valorization of violence in the media, television programing, action movies, and popular video games. By romanticization, he is referring to the notion that death in the movies and on television piques excitement and draws an audience. Super-hero movies are highly attended, and the crowd waits for the battle scene teetering on the edge of their seats to claim victory for good over evil. The script dictates who is good and who is bad often blurring the lines between the two when a vigilante takes matters into his/her own hands. In video games death does not have real consequences, one only needs to restore their character and they are ready to play again. But while media is arguably a factor in creating cultures of violence, the actual act of violence cannot be tied back to a specific news story, movie, or television program. Newman et al (2004) posits, which games, movies, television shows and/or super-hero can we specifically blame? (p. 70 -72). While Critical theorist, Douglas Kellner (2013) agrees that one specific game, movie, television program or super-hero cannot be blamed he asserts that he wants to avoid both extremes:

> neither demonizing media and youth culture nor asserting that it is mere entertainment without serious social influence. There is no question…that the media nurture[s] fantasies and influence[s] behaviour, sometimes sick and vile, and to survive in our culture requires that we are able to critically analyze and dissect media culture and not let it gain power over us. (p. 509)

There are no simple answers to reshaping media influence however, Kellner (2013) supports O'Dea's claim that reconstruction of education may be a step towards a "new sensibility" and curriculum that "cultivates equality, peace, harmony and community" (p. 509). I suggest (although outside of the scope of this project) that there needs to be a focus on the connections between mediatization, romanticization and valorization of violence – to think – what impact does mass media have on the possible ways of living on after violence?

The nuanced aspects of bullying

The academic literature on school shootings constructs the heterosexual violent male figure as a bully. (O'Dea, 2015; Muschert, 2013; Katz, 2014). Thus, it is pertinent that we explore the role of the bully in school violence. Dan Olweus is among a group of scholars[34] that claim bullying is one of the main causes for escalated violence in schools and ultimately school shootings. Olweus (1993) provides a nuanced definition of bullying

> as a subset of *aggressive behaviour* characterized by *repetition* and an *imbalance of power*…a student is being bullied or victimized when he/she is exposed *repeatedly* and over time subjected to negative actions on the part of one or more other students with the intention of hurt. (p. 9, emphasis added)

Created for the victim is a space of "shame that walks hand in hand with a life of isolation"[35] that is no fault of their own but instead is a result of being the victim of the bully's aggressive

behaviour. However, current scholarship suggests that this definition does not capture the complexity of the evolving nature of bullying dynamics.[36] Thus, to avoid homogenizing the term, more nuanced conceptualizations have been proposed, ones which recognizes bullying's extremely multifaceted and complex structure and includes not only behaviours but also structural inequities, biases, and stereotypes around race, class, gender, and sexual orientation (Buchanan & Winzer, 2001). Examples of the complex structure of bullying are explored by various academics and will be surveyed below.

Jessica Ringrose's (2006) research focuses on "relational aggression". "Relational aggression" is mainly perpetuated by young girls who use "relationships to hurt and psychologically injure those they are close to" (p. 410). Talbot, Hill and Hellmore (as cited in Ringrose, 2013) state that "relational aggression" although repetitive is mainly perpetuated by girls towards other girls (p. 29). This type of bullying is often done covertly, and the victim may not be aware of the perpetuator of the bullying. Often girls will engage in social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tik Tok) to perpetuate these relational aggressions and thus the intersection with social media research is essential in thinking about relational aggression. Girls are often shamed for their appearance, clothes, and behaviour (too sexual) by anonymous aggressors to diminish their self-confidence which serves to isolate them from others because they do not know who they can trust.

Boys on the other hand are often shamed for not being masculine or masculine "enough". Kimmel and Mahler (2003) argue, homophobic bullying is different from ordinary bullying as it is merciless, routine and specifically targets the individual's masculinity. This type of bullying takes place between boys who use representations of masculinity, such as being good at sports, able to control emotions, and willing to defend themselves with their fists, to determine if other

boys are worthy, manly, and live up to the masculine values that society has identified as important to being seen and respected as a real man. This type of bullying and shaming is based on ideas of what it means to be a man in Western society in which heterosexuality is the norm that is valued and privileged over other gender and sexuality identities. Thus, parents with convictions that homosexuality is not acceptable socialize their children from a very young age to be accepting only of those who perform the gender and/or sexuality they were assigned at birth and to ostracize those who select to perform other than what is considered normal. Kellner (2013) states,

> these ideals are reproduced in corporate, political, military, sports, and gun culture as well as Hollywood films, video games, men's magazines, and other forms of media culture, and in sites like the frat house, locker room, boardroom, male dominated workplaces, bars, and hangouts where men aggregate. (p. 498)

Consequently, the questioning of one's masculinity can play out in different ways. Individuals that have been socialized to believe that heteronormative behaviour is the only acceptable way shame, tease, threaten, beat up and ostracize boys who present other than masculine. On the other-hand boys that are bullied because they do not present as masculine "enough" or that believe the school allowed and "perhaps even conspired to pigeonhole as a member of a this "inferior" and "shameful" minority" (Campbell, 2018, pp. 222 – 223) may resort to violence to prove they are masculine "enough."

While motives for violence are varied and only a small minority of boys who do not live up to societies expectations of masculinity are pushed to the point of violence, Kellner (2013) argues, "there is a common crisis in masculinities in which young men use guns and violence to create ultra-masculine identities in producing a media spectacle that generates fame and celebrity

for the shooters" (p. 497). Kellner (2013) labels this connection between masculinity and being a tough guy as a "crisis in masculinities" and draws on Katz (2006) definition of "tough guise" as:

> a mask or façade of violent assertiveness, covering over vulnerabilities. The crisis erupts in outbreaks of violence and societal murder, as men [boys] act out rage, which can take extremely violent forms such as political assassinations, serial and mass murders, and school and workplace shootings. (p. 497)

This need to "do masculinity" is not only linked to how violence is represented in mass media, such as movies, television, and video games but also to how young men are socialized to see violence to solve problems. Criminologist, James Messerschmidt's (1993) states, "men learn violent behaviour as a means of "doing masculinity" and [also] to assert dominance over women and other men, these behaviour[s] socially reproduce the structures of capitalism and patriarchy" (p. 498). Further, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) describe hegemonic masculinity as an effect of history and the social world that continues to "allow men's dominance over women" (p. 832). It is distinguished from mere behaviours and rather references the systems and pervasive practices that legitimize identity in relation to the abuse of power. In their words, hegemonic masculinity, "embodies the currently most honored way of being a man, it requires all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and ideologically legitimate[s] the global subordination of women to men. (p. 832)

The notion of hegemony comes from Antonio Gramsci's (1971) work which examines power and the manufacturing of consent through two overlapping spheres, the "political society" (which rules through force) and the "civil society" (which rules through consent). Masculinity itself underpins the concept of hegemony in which power operates through an apparatus class and/or pecking order. According to Spivak (1988), white male power produced the hegemonies

of masculinity that govern all others. Hegemonic ideas are shaped in political society and reproduced through the institutions of civil society to “manufacture consent”[37] and legitimacy. Thus, hegemony is a type of agreement in “civil society” that manifests as an invisible power, that influences beliefs and values and becomes the common understanding of the way in which one should behave to be part of a group (Heywood, 1994, p. 100-101). Coupled with hegemony, masculinity as explained by Corbett (2009), naturalizes the binary between masculinity and femininity such that what is masculine is what is not feminine. Hegemonic masculinity also incorporates race, religion, and ethnicity into its ranking order. To be a white, straight male is to also be at the top of the order. Corbett (2009) further argues that “hegemonic masculinity is distinctly heteronormative, leading to a violent collapse of gender, race, and sexuality” (p. 6). The embodiment of heterosexuality from the perspective of hegemony is white masculinity which is the opposite of femininity and blackness.

Kimmel and Mahler (2003) cite the pressures of hegemonic masculinity as a significant aspect of the school shooter’s construction of self and that masculinity is a major influence in the rage that the school shooter experiences. How masculinity is performed is related to hegemonic beliefs and values, impacting the shooter’s action. Statistics indicate that “most of the boys who opened fire were mercilessly and routinely teased and bullied and that their violence was retaliatory against threats to [their] manhood” (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003, p. 1439). Most, if not all, school-shooters are also white. In the context of these claims, I note a paradox that symbolizes a curious collision course of power. This is a paradox wherein the shooter, who reportedly feels threatened and bullied, is most often white and middle-class and therefore carries a great deal of social privilege. I argue that this social privilege reveals an understudied question of shame as a key dynamic in the emotional atmosphere influencing gun violence in schools.

Shame, I suggest, refers to – emerges from – and plays a significant role in the construction of the school shooter. I will explore this connection between masculinity and shame later in this chapter. First, I would like to think about how education can intervene to create new knowledge about gender and sexuality for boys who are constantly fed rhetoric from a young age regarding expectations to perform masculinity. Second, I grapple with whether a culture can be created in a school to combat ideas of hostility that stem from the non-normative gender and sexual behaviours of those who identify as LGBTQ?[38]

Carsten Rohlfs and Marius Harring (2013) state, "the school because of its strong impact as a social environment, becomes a focal point for students lives and a powerful agent of socialization. This makes schools a significant object of study not only as a crime scene but also as a facilitating or deterrent factor" (p. 478). We see evidence of the school being a focal point for students in *The Beyond Bullying* multimedia, storytelling project conducted in three US high schools by Gilbert et al (2018), as one way to consider the possibilities of schools being a site of new knowledge about gender and sexuality for both boys and girls. Koscie et al (2013) as cited in Gilbert et al (2018) state,

> even as we insist that all people are entitled to fulfilling, safe, and meaningful lives, intimate possibilities are differently apportioned in a society characterized by entrenched social inequalities … and in formal policies and everyday instruction, US high schools are home to a studied indifference and, at times, hostility to LGBTQ sexuality and gender. (pp. 165-166)

Yet through *The Beyond Bullying Project* intimate possibilities were unearthed as students and staff told personal stories illustrating "the importance of stories and storytelling to understanding, exploring, and inhabiting sexual and gendered lives" (p. 180). Further, this research points to the

importance of stories and histories as vehicles for thinking and learning in the transformation of the school into a place where young people can develop empathy for alternative histories and experiences; a place in which knowledge can be made, broken down and remade (Mishra Tarc, 2013).

Shifting school discipline

Furthering this discussion Carney and Merrell (2001) and Randall Collins (2008) suggests that the changing shape and shifting significance of school discipline in the schooling system magnifies the complexity of school violence. What was once an accepted practice to teach children right from wrong – framed as simply part of growing up – is now paradoxically perceived as unacceptable in Western culture. Forms of physical punishment such as "official practices of ceremonial corporal punishment: [where] a student may be boxed in the ear by the headmaster [or] flogged with a cane, in a public demonstration before the entire school" (Collins, 2008, pp. 167-168) have been challenged and questioned. To this point, Adams (2000) underscores the relationship to discipline to school violence when arguing,

> historically the problem of discipline has been to bring the impulses and conduct of the individual into harmony with the ideas and standards of the master, a leader, or a teacher. Therefore, school violence and discipline are mutually constitutive of the problem and need to be considered in relationship to each other. (pp. 142-144)

The values and beliefs reflected in school and community culture play an instrumental role in how school violence is understood and enacted; even so, in some instances, the use of aggression in education continues to be accepted as normal everyday practice and "good preparation for later life" (Collins, 2008, p. 159).

Wang, Berry and Swearer (2013) highlight the importance of school climate and draw on

social disorganization theory[39] and social control theory[40] to explain how a strong supportive climate engages student, teachers, parents, and school administrators in programs that promote behaviours such as caring and empathy. They assert that creating a positive school climate will result in a reduction of bullying while Collins, Newman, Katz, Kellner, and O'Dea advocate for changes to the curriculum to include a pedagogy that allows for critical thinking, supportive dialogue, and interactive critical learning situations.[41]

The catalysts for school shootings are varied and nuanced, scholars who have studied the phenomena of school shootings agree there is no one cause for a shooter to enter a school and randomly kill classmates, teachers, and administrators. This remains an enigma in academic research and with those who are involved in the incident. I suggest that to deny the use of literary pedagogy as a tool to open conversations in the classroom about current social issues that affect the school community would be a missed opportunity. Developing skills that allow students to wonder with others is a skill that not only assists in creating meaning and understanding but also allows them to see the world through the eyes of the other. As Arendt (2006b) so aptly stated, "our hope always hangs on the new which every generation brings; but precisely because we can base our hope only on this, we destroy everything if we so try to control the new that we, the old, can dictate how it will look" (p. 189). We must look for ways to create "the new" not by erasing the past but by empowering our youth to think and act "a new" and to challenge the status quo. We must prepare them for the future by giving them the tools they need to act in the public space.

While the objective of this chapter was to provide an overview of the academic literature that has been presented on school shootings the next chapter is specifically focused on grounding my approach to this work. As I will be using a theory and concept driven approach to work

through my analysis, the next chapter will think along side this theory and methods driven approach and engage with the notion literary pedagogy that I argue can be used in the classroom.

Chapter Three
Wondering with Theory and Concepts

> *All speculation about deeper causes returns from shock of reality to what seems plausible and can be explained in terms of what reasonable men think possible. Those who challenge these plausibilities, the bearers of bad tidings, who insist on "telling it as it is," have never been welcomed and often not been tolerated at all. If it is in the nature of appearances to hide "deeper" causes, it is in the nature of speculation about such hidden causes to hide and to make us forget the stark, naked brutality of facts, of things as they are.* (Arendt, 2003, p. 261)

This quote from Arendt's (2003) essay "Home to Roost" refers to the political situation in the United States prior to 1975 gives me a place to start my thinking about societal responses to school shootings. In the wake of such shootings there is a tendency to search for a "plausible reason that reasonable men think possible," for violent traumatic incidences such as school shootings. Although I do not intend to determine the specific causes of school shootings or to "speculate about hidden causes to make us forget the stark brutality of facts" it is helpful to engage in thinking about how speculation of hidden causes is not addressing the need to explore the effect of school shootings.

I entered this project with a clear goal of examining literature as a pedagogical tool using Arendtian theory to guide me and specific concepts to push the analysis. At first, the concepts related to school shootings such as masculinity, deviance, shame, violence, race, gender, and forgiveness were all swimming in my mind. My reading of academic and fictional literature allowed the most salient concepts to "become increasingly sharper and thus more explicitly articulable" (Zerubavel, 2021, pp. 4-5). The three concepts that emerged were unacknowledged shame, violence, and forgiveness. Zerubavel (2021) validates a theory and concept driven approach when he states,

> concepts, of course, constitute the metaphorical lenses through which concept-driven researchers access the empirical world, their role being defined primarily in

> terms of attentional sensitization. Essentially sensitizing researchers' attention, they thus help give them a general sense of what they might find relevant to attend to by effectively suggesting to them "where" to look, like the mental templates that help birders … notice a particular kind of bird … In the words of one [birder] "it's not an eyesight; it's a mindset." … a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances, suggest directions along which to look. (p. 3)

Thus, I bring the theories of Arendt and the concepts, unacknowledged shame, violence, and forgiveness to my reading and analysis of YA novels, *Nineteen Minutes, Luckiest Girl Alive and Hate List* and think with Mishra Tarc (2015) as I consider the relationship between reader, author, and the pedagogy of the text. Mishra Tarc (2015) asserts,

> when reading we can temporarily ruin and renew a sense of ourselves in thoughts of each other. Author and reader are affected by an intense correspondence in the mind where to strangers, without speaking to each other, intimately communicate, teach, and learn and make meaning. The exchange of meaning generated by the novel can produce a profound form of literary pedagogy. (p. 39)

Following this idea, I suggest that thinking and literary encounters are reflexively mediated, what we read is determined by our experience, and our experience shapes how what is read is understood, which in turn further shapes our experience. While reading one becomes engaged in a pedagogical dialogue with the text creating a connection and meaning that can change the way we encounter the world. This encounter with reading and wondering about what we have read in solitude and/or in the company of others, cannot change our identity but it can have an impact on our experience and how we interact in the world.

Conceptually, there is a distinction between experience and identity. Experience, "is internal. It is one's personal interpretation of the events and situations one is going through. It is not always, perhaps only rarely, in balance with one's identity, not least because [identity] is not exclusively under one's own authority, [instead] is imposed upon [us] from outside and by other people" (Parvikko, 1996, p. 429). Identity is already conceptualized and has social markers such as race, gender, sex, class, ethnicity, culture, heritage, and nationality which cannot be simply left behind, "although new experiences may invite one to do so" (p. 429). Thus, our identity cannot be denied, and it can never be erased. The interpenetration of "what" we are (white, female, heterosexual, Canadian[42]) and "who" we are (singular and unique) shaped by our personal interpretation of the events and situations creates the individual that we present as in social situations.

Thinking about Thinking

> *All thought arises out of experience, but no experience yields any meaning or even coherence without undergoing the operation of imagining and thinking.* (Arendt, 1978, p. 87)

I choose to immerse myself in this work of wondering and thinking in conjunction with my lived experience and subsequent research on the topic of school violence, specifically school bullying[43] and school shootings.[44] Through intentional "intimate reading," of the three selected novels I rethink my first impressions, refine my ideas, revise my understanding to abandon some of my basic intellectual reflexes (Baehr & Walsh, 2017, p. 1) to wonder and think about the concepts: unacknowledged shame, violence, and forgiveness. I begin by looking to the work of Arendt on wondering and thinking as a starting point for creating meaning around the notion of what it means to wonder and to think.

For Arendt (1978) there is a distinction between wondering, thinking and doubt. She writes "the wonder that is the starting point of thinking is neither puzzlement nor surprise nor perplexity; it is an *admiring* wonder" One cannot "summon up wonder by themselves; wonder is a *pathos*; something to be suffered not acted" (italics original, p. 143). This act of wondering is relational as it pushes us into a space with others, a space where we feel the need to talk about what we are wondering about. As Mario Di Paolantonio (2018) further clarifies:

> wondering thus does not (merely) open up the perplexity and puzzlement of an object so that it simply confirms our cleverness and gives us the answer we, in some way, already expected. Nor would wondering make us aloof or disregarding of the world in front of us. Rather, it lights up a world through the *admiration* and *care* that we are able to broach, and through the questions that we share with each other when we wonder about those ungraspable things that give pause between us. (p. 220)

The potential of admiring wonder is unlimited. It allows for the hope of questions which can be thought about and talked about in open conversation with others. Arendt asks if through wondering together can we make the invisibility of thought clearer and dispel the uncertainty of what our eyes see, and our ears hear. Di Paolantonio (2018) explains, "admiring wonder attunes us to a compulsion to *affirm* our minds' commitment to the world: a commitment … towards others who, in coming together through words, can come to sense and give sense … to that about which one might be wondering" (p. 222). Following this notion of coming together Di Paolantonio (2016) suggests, that there is a beautiful risk we take in coming together to "influence each other with words". However, the risk is worth the opportunity that we gain to place ourselves in a space to exchange ideas, develop understanding and "expand our sense of

belonging to world of significance" (p. 149). To engage in literary pedagogy that "counts on the imaginative potential of words to produce an embodied event of meaningful exchange" (Mishra Tarc, 2015, p. 39) is a risk; however, I suggest a risk worth exploring.

While wondering is something that is done in a conjunction with others, for Arendt, thinking is something one does alone, in solitude. Thinking is a self-reflexive dialogical process one conducts with oneself. Arendt insists that one must withdraw from the rest of world to think. Although separated from others, we are never lonely when we think, we are in company with ourselves. Loneliness is different from being alone to think. One can feel alone in a crowded room yet not be lonely when thinking with oneself. Being alone to think is different because thinking is an embodied experience, and we keep company with ourselves and dialogue with ourselves when we think. Our thinking is not limited it can encompass "the no longer" (past, memories) and "the not yet" (future, imagination). This self-reflexive dialogical process is not about thinking about things that are happening in the moment, it is about stepping back from your belief and value systems to think about your experiences in relation to others. It is about suspending yourself from your present conditions to think and explore your experiences and your relationship to the world, to become more conscious, open-minded, and self-critical. Thus, thinking supports one to develop capacities to relive, re-evaluate, remake and to judge experience and phenomenon in the solitude of our own company because this solitude allows the individual to be totally alone and honest with their thoughts; the only judgment that comes from this process of thinking is the judgement one bestows on themselves. As thinking is the discussion you have with yourself it is invisible to others. No one knows what you are thinking, your thoughts whether kind or murderous are your own. As Saccass (2017) further explains, "to be clear, Arendt understands thinking in a rather specific sense. For her, thinking is not mere

problem solving or calculation or the pursuit of truth. It is rather the pursuit of meaning and the work of clearing ground for the possibility of judgement" (p. 1). Thinking is an ability or capability of the mind. In other words, it is a mental faculty not visible to others and only revealed through language and metaphor. Yet, as Arendt reminds us (1998), thinking "is at the same time the most private and the least communicable" (pp. 50 – 51). What we think is shaped by our own subjective experiences. Language and metaphor are needed to bring thinking into action in the public space. However, language and metaphor may not be sufficient to "transform [thought] into a shape that is fit for public appearance" (p. 51). Yet thinking with language is necessary in our quest to live in the world.

There is a third distinction that Arendt makes when elucidating about wonder and thinking: "doubt," specifically "Cartesian doubt." Arendt (1998) explains,

> Cartesian doubt did not simply doubt that human understanding may not be open to every truth or that human vision may not be able to see anything, but that intelligibility to human understanding does not at all constitute demonstration of truth, just as visibility did not at all constitute proof of reality. (p. 275)

Everything should be doubted and thought about – seeing it, reading about it, sometimes touching it does not make it real. Alternatively, just because we cannot see something, does not make it not real. We must think and create meaning from everything around us and use doubt as tool to think, question and wonder. Although this questioning can cause despair when we realize truths, it can also have the opposite effect when we create meaning. So why is wondering, thinking, and doubt important for me and to this project? First, by thinking with the YA fiction I can remove myself from "the real," the horror of real-life school shootings and explore the ideas embedded in the text; as Zerubavel states, I can sensitize my attention to root out examples of the

theories and concepts that I have chosen to explore and bring them into the discussion. Second, I can use these examples to wonder in my writing, to present for discussion within my writing the examples that I have uncovered and demonstrate the notion that YA fiction can be used as a pedagogical tool to open discussions in the classroom. Finally, I can think with the text to expose what is not easily seen and often questioned. To better understand that school shootings are complex events that have many moving components and intersections, in other words, that such shootings are not simple and that they leave the community in ruin, affecting not only the shooter and victims but all those involved. Thus, thinking with theories and concepts allows for "attentional sensitization," so that my focus is clear in the execution of this work.

Thinking alongside concepts

The idea for this project emerged from my interest in school violence and thinking with Arendt's ideas on unacknowledged shame, violence, and forgiveness. Although Arendt is a political theorist and does not directly address school violence, she encourages wondering and thinking about violence in works such as *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1976) and *On Violence* (1970). Thus, I have taken her ideas and orientation to thinking hard thoughts as fuel for this project, for thinking about, passion and emotion, power and violence, and forgiveness and reconciliation. These connections intrigue me and push my understanding to a new place, one where I ask myself questions like: How does passion and emotion emote shame? If the act of thinking is done in solitude and is a private conversation one has with oneself, how can the individual outside of that private conversation know if they are acting without thinking? What are some of the ways that educators can promote thinking before acting? If unacknowledged shame can spiral into rage, in what ways can educators teach self-reflexive thinking to help young people become more conscious, open-minded, and self-critical? What is needed for young

people experiencing violence to have their voices heard? What are some ways in which a community can repair and move forward in the aftermath of a school shooting?

Passion, Emotion, Shame: all part of what makes us human

> *The passions, moreover, though their seat is invisible, have an expressiveness of their own: we blush with shame or embarrassment, we grow pale with fear or anger, we can shine with happiness or look dejected, and we need a considerable training in self-control in order to prevent the passions from showing.* (Arendt, 1978, p. 72)

Arendt does not devote much of her writing to theorizing about emotions and how they play a role in the world, however, she does give me a jumping off point for my thinking about emotions, specifically unacknowledged shame. For Arendt emotions – such as shame and embarrassment, fear and anger, happiness, and dejection - are invisible and stand apart from involuntary outward signs such as blushing, paleness, and looks of dejection. Emotions are invisible, yet, powerful feelings, intense barely controllable or tolerable. Their "invisibility resembles that of our inner bodily organs of whose functioning or non-functioning we are also aware [of] without being able to control" (Arendt, 1978, p. 72). Emotions happen without us thinking or willing them to happen like our internal organs, however, unlike our internal organs Arendt argues with training in self-control we can learn to manage our emotions and their engendered physical evidence. This idea of learning self-control and managing the engendered appearance of our emotions is considered in Arlie Hochschild's (1979) work on emotional labour. Hochschild notes that "emotional work can be done by the self upon the self, by the self upon other, and by others upon oneself" (p. 562) "as we try to actively manage what we feel in accordance with ... conventions of feeling (i.e., what one is supposed to feel) in our social exchange between individuals" (pp. 571 -572). Hochschild's notion of emotional work expands the idea of control, as individuals and to varying degrees we are expected to control our emotions

in certain situations. Hochschild (1983) explains that in certain jobs we are required to express and suppress certain emotions. For example, as a flight attendant one is required to smile, be overly nice and accommodating, whereas on the other hand a debt collector is required to be forceful and demanding. This ability to control emotions is learned and practiced for execution of various roles. Thinking with Arendt (1958 and 1968) I submit that managing our emotions is not always done in a conscious manner, accessing, and acknowledging some emotions are painful. At times the shame is too painful to acknowledge, unintentionally we bury it, we do not think about it when by ourselves and we do not talk about it with others.

Therefore, I push beyond the idea of self-control and acknowledged shame to account for what can be termed "unacknowledged shame," referring to that which we hide from others and ourselves. By mobilizing my thinking about how the social bond and social relationships are affected by unacknowledged shame that gives rise to rage and violence, I begin to think about the representations of unacknowledged shame in the novels selected for this work.

Shame is examined from many perspectives and although at times my approach will fringe on psychological categories, my interest is focused on how shame affects the social bond and social relationships, therefore, I rely on Thomas J. Scheff (2000/2003) to guide my thinking along this path as he draws on sociological and psychoanalytic approaches to think about shame. Scheff presents the theory that "shame arises because the self is social" and that we see ourselves not only through our own eyes but through the eyes of others (p. 242). Scheff (2003) explains,

> A self-idea of this sort seems to have three principles elements: the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his[her] judgement of that appearance, and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification [shame]. (p. 242)

Thus, self-idea can be understood as – looking at oneself through the eyes of another to constantly evaluate and judge ourselves. We are testing ourselves when engaging in social interactions and constantly asking ourselves are we good enough? What happens when we don't like the answer that we arrive at? I suggest that we feel embarrassment and shame. Thus, starting with some elemental features of shame we can begin to build an understanding of what is meant by shame and more specifically unacknowledged shame.

Shame is an emotion that is so intense that it presents in various ways and acts as an inner turbulence that can upend us as individuals. Shame is personal, individual and can come upon us without warning, becoming destructive to the individual and those around them when suppressed. (Scheff & Retzinger, 2001). Shame is often conflated with the concept of guilt. However, guilt is different. Guilt is shared with others, often to absolve the doer from its power. Where shame is hidden, to share shame is to expose oneself, to lay oneself bare to the other. Scheff's (2000) study of shame draws on Helen Lynd's (1958) work, *Shame and Identity* to flush out the nuances between guilt and shame,

> Guilt is about what one did, shame is about the self, what one *is*. Guilt also involves feeling that the ego is strong and intact: one is powerful enough to injure another, and one is also powerful enough to make amends. By contrast, shame feels like weakness and dissolution of the self, even for the wish that the self would disappear. Guilt is a highly individualist emotion, reaffirming the centrality of the isolated person; shame is a social emotion, reaffirming the emotional interdependency of persons. (p. 92)

The response to guilt is to ask for forgiveness, to face the victim and ask them to forgive you for your wrongdoing to accept the consequences of that wrongdoing and to make amends. Shame is

different, it is deep, hidden, and painful, it is buried because the individual does not want it to rise to the surface to be exposed, it is raw and not shared to be forgiven by others.

I come back to Arendt (1958) who argues in the *Human Condition* that we are made up of our experiences which shape our thinking and our thinking shapes how we experience our interactions with others. The conditions of existence that we are exposed to, our formed beliefs and values help us understand the world around us and how to navigate our social environment.

The social environment is a space of encounters and as shame is an inner experience it often comes when no one is around. It can be triggered by an object, event, or memory. These notions of shame are individual and personal but silenced they fester and grow. In the poem below by Vern Rutsala (cited in Shultz, 2013), Rutsala denotes that shame comes to each person in a different way, and that it is buried for only the individual to experience, not to be shared with others.

SHAME
This is the shame of the woman whose hand hides
her smile because her teeth are so bad, not the grand
self-hate that leads some to razors or pills
or swan dives off beautiful bridges however
tragic that is. This is the shame of seeing yourself,
of being ashamed of where you live and what
your father's paycheck lets you eat and wear.
This is the shame of the fat and the bald,
the unbearable blush of acne, the shame of having
no lunch money and pretending you're not hungry.
This is the shame of concealed sickness--diseases
too expensive to afford that offer only their cold
one-way ticket out. This is the shame of being ashamed,
the self-disgust of the cheap wine drunk, the lassitude
that makes junk accumulate, the shame that tells
you there is another way to live but you are
too dumb to find it. This is the real shame, the damned
shame, the crying shame, the shame that's criminal,
the shame of knowing words like "glory" are not
in your vocabulary though they litter the Bibles
you're still paying for. This is the shame of not

knowing how to read and pretending you do.
This is the shame that makes you afraid to leave your house,
the shame of food stamps at the supermarket when
the clerk shows impatience as you fumble with the change.
This is the shame of dirty underwear, the shame
of pretending your father works in an office
as God intended all men to do. This is the shame
of asking friends to let you off in front of the one
nice house in the neighborhood and waiting
in the shadows until they drive away before walking
to the gloom of your house. This is the shame
at the end of the mania for owning things, the shame
of no heat in winter, the shame of eating cat food,
the unholy shame of dreaming of a new house and car
and the shame of knowing how cheap such dreams are.
(p. 96)

Shame, as Rustula poetically shares, is individual, private, and different for everyone. Rustula points out in her poem, shame is specific to the individual, our values, and beliefs shape how we react to social interactions and for some of us certain interactions will trigger a feeling of being ashamed. Some of us may read this poem and not identify with a single line or word. While others may remember a time when one of these events affected us and we felt ashamed of our situation, our lived experience, or our living conditions. Sometimes we are shamed by something that is not visible to others, but we know it exists, like the state of our underwear or a concealed sickness. Others have no way of knowing what we are feeling unless we share it with them, and we are too ashamed to do that. We are all different not everyone would experience these events in the same way, and if we hide shame, bury it, shame becomes unacknowledged and painful.

Drawing on the work, *Emotions and Violence: Shame and Rage in Destructive Conflicts by* Thomas J Scheff and Suzanne M. Retzinger (2001), I endeavor to advance my thinking about unacknowledged shame, rage, and violence in social relationships. Scheff and Retzinger from a sociological perspective propose that,

> a particular sequence of emotions underlies all destructive aggression: shame is first evoked, which leads to rage and then violence. But shame leads to violence under only one condition – that it is hidden to the point that it is not acknowledged or resolved. … [S]hame occurs much more frequently in human affairs than has been recognized, but it becomes destructive only when its presence is completely suppressed. (p. 3)

Scheff and Zetzinger, refer to shame that even the individual does not recognize as shame. I admit that I did not recognize or acknowledge the shame I was feeling about being Diabetic. Only in reflection of the events can I now see what I was doing to hide my condition. I take medication and must watch my diet. This can be difficult when you are trying to hide your condition from family and friends. Sometimes I was not strict with myself and would not take my medication at the designated time or I would eat food that was not recommended so I did not have to explain. I realize my actions had the potential to be self-destructive, however, I did not think about my choices that way, I only cared about hiding my secret.

Clearly, I need to establish a distinction between shame and unacknowledged shame before I move forward to think about the school shooter. To make this distinction I first draw on the work of Jonathan Fast (2013), who solidifies the idea that, "shame is a "self-reflective" feeling, meaning that it is the result of contemplating how one believes that others perceive them." Fast uses the metaphor of a "shame tank" to think about how shame is a tank (burden) carried on our back. If we manage our shame the tank will not get too heavy or hard to carry. On the other hand, if it becomes unmanageable the tank can become "clumsy, inconsiderate, selfish or aggressive" to the point that we may "overstep the norms of the laws, of the community" (p. 247). If we do not realize that the tank is overflowing and do not release some of the shame (by

sharing with family or friends the shameful incident) the tank will become too much of a burden, it might even explode. Thus, if we hide our shame and do not acknowledge it the consequences are that it can turn into rage or violence (p. 247). Shame that is acknowledged and talked about with others can be mitigated, whereas shame that is unacknowledged festers and grows into anger towards oneself and others. By burying shame deep within ourselves we may not even be aware that it exists. Helen Lewis (as cited in Scheff and Retzinger, 2001) notes that,

> when shame is acknowledged rather than denied, it is a brief duration – usually lasting less than a minute – and serves as a signal, allowing for repair of damaged bonds … Denial occurs when one is ashamed of being ashamed. Under these conditions, shame becomes recursive and self-perpetuating. Unacknowledged shame builds a wall between persons and between groups. A chain reaction occurs, shame building on shame. Loops of this kind are both internal and social, occurring both within and between parties. (pp. 29-30)

Shame can be constructive as it can strengthen bonds between individuals. If the individual "acknowledges the shame and respects the other's reasons for expressing the disapproval, and the other reciprocates this respect" a stronger bond can be created. However, when "shame is evoked by disapproval and repressed rather than confronted...people get angry" (Schultz, 2013, p. 3). Therefore, unacknowledged shame can result in damage to the social bond leaving the ashamed person in a state of "emotional turbulence."

"Emotional turbulence" is important to consider because adolescence is a time filled with the chaos that feelings bring. The turbulence is not mere conflict: it is a storm of emotions that pull and push at the individual taking them to a breaking point. "Emotional turbulence" has the potential to erupt into violence against oneself or others. This metaphoric concept is drawn from

the notion of turbulence “a state of confusion and/or disorder” (Cambridge Dictionary) and an understanding of the emotional as “the connection with and the showing of feelings” (Cambridge Dictionary). “Emotional turbulence” in this context is a metaphor for the turbulent feeling of being pulled from one direction and pushed from another direction to a state of confusion that manifests into a display of feelings that are disordered and contrary to socially accepted behaviour. Johnathan Fast (2013) states,

> if no one will listen to us, or if we must keep shame a secret, then it cannot be discharged. The discomfort and alienation become unbearable. Our anger over such circumstances is discharged destructively, through substance abuse, cutting, or suicide when turned inward; through vengeance against the shamer when turned outward. (p. 247)

Scheff and Retzinger (1991) find, “unconfronted shame,” can debilitate the individual and “evolve into disrespect” by others and disrespect of oneself which can itself generate into “anger and can ultimately get out of hand, unraveling in violence” (p. xi). I suggest this notion of unacknowledged shame plays a role in the stories of the school shooters whether real or fictional. As we are thrown into a world with others and have a need to interact with others, how others perceive us becomes part of how we see ourselves.[45] We need to understand how our actions are perceived by others and how our actions impact our relationship with others. My analysis of the novels “reads for shame” to generate thinking around how depictions of shame may be pedagogically useful to teachers when engaging young people in the classroom.

Thus, when thinking about unacknowledged shame we must separate it from its counterparts, shame, and guilt. Although they all influence the individual, guilt and

shame can both be managed by interacting with “the other”. By bringing the incident into the space of appearance the guilty can apologize and the shamed can confront the shamer strengthening their relationship. Unacknowledged shame alternatively is hidden, and the shamed person is not aware it is present or does not want to recognize its presence. Here I turn to think with Shultz and Retzinger (2001) and their claim that unconfronted shame, can have a lasting effect on the individual, that cannot only debilitate but spiral out of control to generate anger and violence.

Violence: **Shattering the illusion of safe space: From enormous to normalized**

Although there are laws and rules in place to prevent behaviour that is violent, all violence is not eliminated by restrictions imposed by laws created by man. Arendt (1998) asserts as an individual we must “think what we are doing”, because it is when we do not think that the outcomes of our actions can be life changing for ourselves and others (p. 5). Arendt (1998) asks,

> could the activity of thinking as such, the habit of examining whatever happens to come to pass or to attract attention, regardless of results and specific content, could this activity be among the conditions that make men abstain from evil-doing, or even actually “condition” them against it? (p. 5)

The underlying meaning is that if you think about what you are doing are you more likely to make an ethical choice, one that takes into consideration the outcome of your action and its impact on others. Jacqueline Rose (2021) states,

> It is a truism to say that everyone knows violence when they see it, but if one thing has become clear over the past decade it is that the most prevalent, insidious forms of violence are those that cannot be seen. (p. 1)

These forms of violence are just as harmful and dangerous as physical violence that is enacted by the wrongdoer, experienced by the victim, and witnessed by the bystander. Rose (2021) asks, “who decides what is called out as violence? Who determines the forms of violence we are allowed, and permit ourselves, to see” (p. 6)? I would argue violence is much more nuanced and present in our everyday lives than we would like to believe.

I draw on Randall Collins (2008) and his study of *Violence* (in his book by the same name) to continue thinking about violence. Collins’ description of violence, in the introduction to his book, aims to demonstrate that violence is nuanced and not in one single act but many acts. He states,

> [violence] is short and episodic as a slap in the face; or massive and organized as a war. It can be passionate and angry as a quarrel, or callous and impersonal as the bureaucratic administration of gas chambers. I can be furtive and hidden as a rape-murder, or public as a ritual execution. It is programmed entertainment in the form of sporting contests, the plot tension of a drama, the action of action-adventure, the staple shocker of the news edition. It is heroic, disgusting, and exciting, the most condemned and glorified of human acts. (p. 1)

As I read this list, I realize we could witness all these various acts of violence in a couple of hours by watching television, reading the newspaper, or browsing the internet, all things young people do daily. What Collins captures for me in a couple of lines is how violence is everywhere and in many of our daily interactions whether we are directly involved, a bystander or a passive viewer. Thinking more deeply about violence I begin to wonder about the insidious nature of violence and its gradual and cumulative effect in juxtaposition to the single violent physical act. This insidious type of violence is intriguing for me because we sometimes cannot see the affect

that it has on the individual, yet it is there and much like shame it is only exposed when the individual decides to share the incident of violence with others. The woman that is raped while drinking at a party, will likely hide the rape because of the shame she feels. First for being at the party, second for drinking and third for being exposed, violated, and raped. We witness this in one of the novels for this study. Ani in *Luckiest Girl Alive*, does not share that she is raped while at a party, she was drinking and only recalls parts of what happened that night. What she does know; is she woke up in bed with one of the boys and she is not fully dressed but does not remember how she got there or how she got underdressed. She remembers another boy on top of her and not being able to push him away. Most of what she does remember is foggy and unclear. She is embarrassed and wants to forget that it happened. She does not tell her family or friends and does not report the rape to the authorities because she is not sure what happened, she was too drunk to remember. The shame is too much for her to process so she buries the incident deep within herself, if she doesn't discuss it, if she doesn't think about it, maybe it didn't really happen. But it did and the pain (not physical but emotional) eats at her. Not being able to bring herself to discuss the incident with others, she shields herself from facing up to the reality that she was raped not once but repeatedly. This story from the novel is a representation of both violence and unacknowledged shame. Rape is violent, because one individual(s) is using force and strength on another individual. Shame that is unacknowledged eats at you, it evolves. Ani doesn't shoot her attackers, instead we witness what shame does to the individual when it is not acknowledged, and it is just as violent. I will return to Ani's story and the other examples of violence that it offers in chapter four.

Physical and non-physical violence are distinctly different. The acts of pushing, slapping, punching, beating, and shooting are physical and visible. The wounds that the victims will suffer

will be visible and, in some cases, even fatal. The insidious, non-physical, and invisible violence will leave scars that cannot be seen yet are present all the same.[46] What really strikes me is that violence is difficult to describe, if violence can be found in so many situations, and can be understood in various ways, how can a simple definition be arrived at?

In *On Violence*, Arendt (1970) stated, “violence has always played an enormous role in human affairs, and we do not question what we take for granted” (p. 8). I interpret Arendt’s use of “enormous role in human affairs” to be the surreptitious nature of violence and how it is difficult to distinguish it from everyday activities or imagine our world without it. I argue that violence is part of our everyday lives and a normalized behaviour in our community. We hesitate to bring it into conversation because to do so admits that it is prominent in our lives and impossible to eliminate. Violence in movies and video games (with real or aminated characters) is seen as entertainment and not a depiction of real life, yet in truth, it is only a representation of what is present in our own communities. Without straying too far from the main theme of this project I ask that you think about your last outing, whether in a car, on public transit or maybe out for a walk. Did you get beeped at by an impatient driver and maybe even witnessed an aggressive hand gesture, pushed by a fellow transit rider because you did not enter the subway car quickly enough or almost run over by a driver of a car that was in a hurry to turn the corner. Each of these things happen numerous times every day, and we give them little to no consideration. We accept them because they are familiar to us. Some of you may even be saying to yourself – “that is not violence”. I content that it is violence in its minor form. It is an act of unsolicited aggression.

Coming back to Collins (2008) to think further about violence in the context of this project and the various ways it appears in social situations, I will draw on his work on bullying

and present an example of how physical violence and non-physical violence can be present in the same social setting. Collins (2008) asserts that boys and girls often use the same “degrading nicknames, humiliating stories” however, girls are less likely to be involved in face-to-face confrontations. Whereas boys will confront their victim with their remarks, bullying girls are more likely to maliciously gossip or spread rumors without confrontation (p. 159). Although the intent is the same the way that boys bully and girls bully is different, one is visible for all to see and the other is covert, and often not witnessed by others. This covert violence can take the form of exclusion, silent treatment, looks and gestures and do as much damage to some one’s self esteem as a public slap in the face.

Arendt (1970) asserts there is an interconnectedness of violence and power, however, they “are distinct phenomena, [although they] usually appear together” (p. 52). Power in the Arendtian sense needs the support of the group, “power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to the group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps it together” (p. 44). Violence comes at the end of power. Arendt argues “violence appears where power is in jeopardy” (p. 56). By understanding that for Arendt power is a political phenomenon and it needs the support of the group to make it possible would illustrate how the school shooter can never experience power in an Arendtian sense. The “effective command” of the gun and its silencing bullet, result in the disruption of power and authority (Arendt, 1970). Thus, for Arendt, using a gun to gain power is impossible. Not only does the violence negate power it also loses the support of the group. Who will the school shooter have power over if there is no one to stand with him?

If we follow Arendt’s thinking on the distinction between power and violence, there is no power where violence exists, we must think about the collective and individual concepts of

power, force, strength, and violence which "have distinct meanings that are not simply different things but different kinds of things" (Walsh, 2021, p. 4). "Strength" for example is individual and does not have the support of the group. Therefore, the bully or the rapist, have physical/mental control over their victim(s), but do they have power? Would these predators have the support of the person or group? From an Arendtian perspective to have power you need to have the support of the group and it is unlikely that these predators would get any support for their actions. The predator has strength over the victim, because they are likely, stronger, bigger, and/or holding a weapon. Collins (2008) retells the story of a rapist. The rapist in his own words describes how he overtakes his victim, pushing her to the floor, punching her and taking what he wants, dominating his victim by using physical force (p. 179). This is not power; it is brute strength and force. Arendt (1970) states "violence appears where power is in jeopardy but left to its own course it ends in power's disappearance" (p. 56). For Arendt power and violence cannot exist at the same time, one destroys the other. Rose (2021) states,

> If violence is so rousing, it would seem to be in direct proportion to its ability to suspend anything vaguely resembling thought, to release the rush of blood that gives you no time to pause. No introspection, even though – or because – violence plunges so deeply in who we are (the claim that violence is declining in our times, which is presumably intended to make us feel better about ourselves, drastically misses the point, sidestepping the key moment of recognition that violence requires permanent vigilance in so far as it is a potential for everyone). … As if it is only in a state of blindness that violence can bear to conduct itself. (pp. 23-24)

Violence leaves its scars on those that it touches, whether it is visible or silent in its action it is ever present in our daily lives. The survivors of violence do not remember the things that

happened during the violent episode because, “it is very quick, and afterwards, you don’t always remember things…You remember what happened afterwards, the injuries or whatever, but the violence itself is often just a blur” (p. 24). In real-life narratives[47] that I have read about school shootings this is often the case, the details of the shooting are not as clear as the events following the shooting.

Violent Youth

Young people are inundated with numerous challenges while moving from childhood to adulthood, they are constantly being pulled and pushed in various directions by peers, teachers, parents, and the media. Sociologist, Kathryn E. Linder (2014) reports as a society we send strong “messages about the kind of young people we want as our future citizens: white, heterosexual, hegemonically masculine and feminine, and submissive to authority” (p. xxii). These messages created by societal norms are accompanied by violent images in video games, movies and social media which send strong subliminal messages that violence is acceptable. Kimmel and Mahler (2011) argue: “the belief that violence is manly is not a trait carried on any chromosome, not soldered into the wiring of the right or left hemisphere, not juiced by testosterone…boys learn it…from their fathers, nearly half of whom own a gun…, from the media that glorifies it, from sports heroes who commit felonies and get big contracts, from a culture saturated in images of heroic and redemptive violence” (p. 55). Violence is learned, accepted, and tolerated if you are a boy or a man. We witness this in sports such as hockey and football where boys and men are expected to check, charge, tackle and fight their way to victory.

In schools, violence is not always physical in nature and often takes the form of isolating, avoiding, and ostracizing behaviour. Status groups are common and while young people want and need to be accepted by their peers it is not easy to gain access to a popular or athletic group.

Members of these groups consider themselves elite and have strict criteria for entry. Being on the outside of the group is difficult but even worse is the possibility of not maintaining one's status in the group (Klein, 2012; Newman et al., 2004). Further, James Coleman's (1959) study on public education finds,

> students didn't care much about scholastic things; that, in all schools' students cared more for "good looks" and "being an athlete" than they did for "good grades" and "being smart". It is clear that the interests of teenagers are not focused on studies, and that scholastic achievement is at most of minor importance, whereas status and prestige are of high importance. (p. 342)

Falling from the grace of the group or not being part of the group can be enough reason to be the victim of violence, as the group thrives on "othering" those that have not achieved admittance or have not lived up to the expectations of the group. Those who are no longer members of the elite group or have never been members feel isolated. Campbell (2108) asserts, "shame walks hand in hand with a life of isolation" (p. 163) and if violence is continuous, repetitive, and vicious enough the victim may lash out and match violence with violence.

Collins argues "the retaliations we know about, such as spectacular mass school killings are not … frequent and only a small number of those who have experienced repeated violence will go to the extreme of taking a gun to school, to exact revenge" (p. 163). I suggest that school shootings may be rare in relation to other acts of violence both in school and the wider community however, the actual event and media spectacle of the school shooting is only the beginning of the story. The effect of the school shooting remains in the minds of those directly and indirectly involved. Whereas school shootings have an immediate and devastating impact on the victim (those injured or killed), there is also a long-lasting impact on the immediate family,

relatives, community, and society in general. Brooks Brown (2002), Sue Klebold (2016) and Kristen Krueger (2019) have written about the impact of the Columbine High School shooting and its long-lasting affects from very different perspectives. Brown as a close friend and suspected accomplice, Klebold as the mother of one of the shooters and Krueger as a student of Columbine who was present in the halls of the school when the shooting took place. Rhetorically, I pause to wonder if violence of this magnitude can ever truly be left behind and if those touched by the violence (whether directly or as an outsider) can move on? My strong feeling is that this type of violence lives on in one's memory.

Normalizing Violence

My review of various scholars' notions of violence has reinforced my understanding of how violence is experienced differently by everyone. We are all vulnerable to violence, but there is an economy that makes some more vulnerable and disposable than others. There is a violence in the very flattening out of the specificity of violence and its unequal distribution (across, race, sexuality, class, ability, etc.). Anyone and everyone can experience violence, no one is immune to its effects.

The values and beliefs reflected in school and community culture play an instrumental role in how violence is understood and enacted; even so, in some instances, the use of aggression in education continues to be accepted as normal everyday practice and "good preparation for later life" (Collins, 2008, p. 159). The institutional setting of the school brings students together in one place for several hours a day, five days a week with little to no way of escaping tormentors (Baker, 1998: Collins, 2008; Gendron, Williams, & Guerra, 2011; Horton 2011, 2013). The victims of violence are trapped in an environment that gives the aggressor easy access. Students report that violence is a normal part of school life that often goes undetected or

is not reported because students fear retribution from the aggressor. Teachers are often unwilling to intervene or deal with aggressors reinforcing the belief that it is an accepted part of the school culture and not recognized as a violation (Meyer, 2008; Horton, 2011; Safran, 2008; Dunne et al, 2006) of school codes of conduct or school policy. Thus, the school environment provides a "stage" and opportunity for violence to occur (Collins, 2008). Individuals (students, teachers, and administrators) bring to that "stage" a "socially constructed identity" (Goffman, 1959; Meyer, 2008) shaped by beliefs, values and lived experiences creating layers of internal and external influences inherent from their social exposure (school, peer groups, family, community, media, and technology).

Sociologist, Jessie Klein (2012) dissects "the inextricable connections between school shooting outbursts, "the everyday" violence of bullying, and the destructive gender pressures and social demands created by the larger culture and endured by virtually all children in our schools" (p. 3). By examining the schools in North America from various perspectives Klein (2012) makes the claim that although there are different forms of violence in schools, "nearly all the school shooters were violently reacting to oppressive social hierarchies in their schools" (p. 3).

Social status provides the hierarchical structure and climate for violence. In some cases, violence can be enacted "as a way to win…respect and project strength in a peer culture… and a way of reclaiming manhood and masculinity" (Katz, 2014, p. 3). These activities for the aggressor seem to be a way to show their status, as stronger and more masculine but for the victim are destructive. This brings me to think about initiation practices that were popular in high school when I attended. These practices were not isolated, they were embedded in the school's culture.

I personally experienced hazing as a grade nine student in Oakville, Ontario in 1970 in a school sanctioned hazing ritual. As a newcomer, I was initiated to high school life along with my classmates and forced to wear a beanie. This symbol (the beanie) meant that we were fair game for students in grades ten through thirteen, as older students were charged to make our lives difficult as we carried their books, pushed quarters across the lunchroom with our nose or clucked like a chicken while bystanders (other students and in some cases teachers) stood by laughing. I personally avoided being in spaces that were heavily populated and isolated myself as much as possible to avoid being singled out. Although I was never required to do more than carry a few books it is not one of my favorite memories from high school and I chose not to participate in this ritual as I progressed through the upper grades.

Although in early 1990 initiation practices and hazing were eliminated in most school settings, investigative journalists, Chris Staiti and Barry Bortnick (2013) report that they still take place without the support or approval of school administrators, and "that school administrators are often aware of initiation practices and of student-on-student violence, yet they do little to prevent it [pleading] ignorance if brought to their attention" (p. 133). A recent team hazing in October 2018 at St. Michaels College School in Toronto, is an example of how administrators claimed they were not aware that boys on the football team hazed and sexually assaulted newer members of the team on several occasions as a form of initiation. This action of power (the initiation practice) and violence (student-on-student) provides an example of political power and violence that Arendt (1969) purports when she claims that "violence can always destroy power" (p. 15) and "what can never grow out of violence is power" (p. 15). As I unpack this scenario, I will illustrate how Arendt's theory of political power and violence can be utilized to think about the initiation practices of the football team at St. Michaels College School. I begin

with the political power that was present. For Arendt political power needs the support of the group in the space of appearance. The existing players had the power of being part of the team and they initiated and performed the hazing that had the support of the group. The group consists of other existing players, the coaching staff (although they claim to be unaware) and the administration (who also claim to be unaware) and for the most part (although we may not want to believe it) those who were victims of the hazing (as the hazing was part of gaining admission to the team). In the case of the coaching staff and administration their silence in this situation was a form of support. The power to act was imparted on the few and they used their power in a violent way. As the violence was instrumental in the initiation of the future players it destroyed any power that the existing player possessed before the violence. As once the violent hazing practice became known by those outside St. Michael's College School, the boys responsible for the hazing, coaching staff and administration lost their power because of the violence.

In thinking about school violence and creating meaning around various origins, I draw an example from Jodi Picoult's novel *Nineteen Minutes.* Peter, the shooter, survives the shooting, which allows us to witness through the narrative the abandonment that he experiences following the shooting. No one sees Peter having power over others, no one sees Peter as a hero for standing up for himself against the school bullies. Even Peter's father could not bring himself to visit Peter in jail after the shooting. Peter was truly alone, without the power to even make decisions for himself. By utilizing theory (power and violence) and concepts (violence, forgiveness) to think about and reconcile incidences of school violence in fictional accounts I seek to demonstrate how this bridge between fiction and reality can be crossed to facilitate discussion so those affected can move forward.

Forgiveness, forgetting, vengeance, punishment: Reconciliation, and the world anew.

> *Forgiving is the only strictly human action that releases us and others from the chain and pattern of consequences that all action engenders; as such, forgiving is an action that guarantees the continuity of the capacity for action, for beginning anew, in every single human being who, without forgiving and being forgiven, would resemble the man in the fairy tale who is granted one wish and then forever punished with that wish's fulfillment. (Arendt, 2005, p. 59)*

Is forgiveness possible? Author and Holocaust survivor, Simon Wiesenthal, (1998) asks two questions in his book *The Sunflower* that I have also asked myself while writing this dissertation. "Is it possible to forgive and not forget? [and] how can victims [and perpetrators] come to peace with their past, and hold on to their own humanity and morals in the process?" (p. xii). I acknowledge that a school shooting is not the same as the Holocaust or other genocide incidences, yet I would argue, there is an element of atrocity in killing of young people in a space that is considered by most to be safe.

When I was a child, my mother would say "forgive but never forget. Everyone *needs* to forgive but they should never forget. To forget means that you have not learned anything from what has happened." This lesson was carried with me as I accompanied my friend who followed the tenets of the Catholic religion to church every Wednesday afternoon for confessional. Confessional takes place inside the church in conjunction with the priest. The confessor, in this case, my friend, confessed to the priest her sins of the past week and asked God for forgiveness, the priest acted as God's proxy and forgave her sins. Based on the magnitude of her sin(s) the priest assigned several prayers to be said as penance. This process seemed rather easy and painless however, I often wonder if my friend was really being forgiven and if she would forget what she had done and repeat her actions the next week. How could she have so many sins if she was not doing the same bad things week after week? Only God, the priest and my friend knew what she had done, and she never told me what she had done, nor did she face the person that she

had wronged to asked for their forgiveness. This made me wonder if you could be forgiven that easily? What would stop her from doing wrong in the future? If it was as easy as a couple of prayers to obtain forgiveness. I remember distinctly the feeling of shame and guilt when I did something wrong as a child. These feelings ate at me, not letting my mind rest until I fessed up to the person that I had wronged. Did my friend not feel the same way? I must admit there were times when my eight-year-old self-wished that I was Catholic so I could pray my shame and guilt away.

What I did not realize in 1964 was forgiveness is not that easy and the enigma of forgiveness would always plague my thinking. To this day I still wonder how forgiveness really works. I am sure I have done things in my life that hurt the people around me, and I know that I have been hurt. In some cases, forgiveness was asked for and granted but did they forget, did I forget? Did we really forgive, or did we just choose to move forward? Can one really forgive, and can one really be forgiven? Arendt (2005) states, "that forgiveness is among the greatest of human virtues" (p. 58). Is this because it is so difficult to forgive or is it because as individuals, we are too ashamed by what we have done to either talk about it or ask for forgiveness. If it is the "greatest" of human virtues it must be very difficult to give and to receive. In the Christian tradition, it is often assumed that the power for ultimate forgiveness rest in God, so I wonder if we, as human beings can forgive.

I return to Wiesenthal's book *The Sunflower*, which focuses on the possibilities and limits of forgiveness. Wiesenthal gives the same scenario[48] to fifty-three distinguished men and women the likes of Primo Levi, The Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu and Herbert Marcuse asking what they would have done in the outlined situation. Would they forgive or would they deny forgiveness? The specific answers to this question are not important but what is important is that there was no

resounding answer to this question. Many of the respondents looked for ways to answer both yes and no to the question. For me this indicated that forgiveness is not that easy to conceptualize or practice. Which brings me to the question for this dissertation: can we forgive a school shooter?

Let me return for a moment to the idea of remembering. It seems that for my mother remembering was important. “We *need* to remember” she said. Which makes me wonder can forgiveness really be given or received if remembering is so important to Western culture? To ensure that we do not forget we build Memorials and museums (such as, the 911 Memorial Museum, Holocaust Memorial, Commemorative Plaque at l’Ecole Polytechnique de Montreal) to remind us of the past and the mistakes that we as humans have made. Visits to these memorials represent our respect for the dead and a remembrance of the evils that we inflict on each other. In remembering are we holding on to the past, the evil and the anger? Do we need these memorials to remember the lives lost? Are we afraid that by forgiving we may create a space to forget? Are we really forgiving or are we choosing to put what happened in its place and move forward?

Returning to Arendt, to think about what the benefits of forgiveness are to the forgiver and the perpetrator. Arendt states, we need to forgive to move on, to free ourselves from the bonds of not forgiving to start anew. However, she is not asserting that forgiveness is possible as it cannot undo what has been done, or if the forgiven perpetrator benefits from that forgiveness or if they can live with the shame and guilt of what they have done. Further, Arendt (2005) states,

> the great boldness and unique pride of this concept of forgiveness as a basic relationship between humans does not lie in the seemingly reversal of the calamity of guilt and error into the possible virtues of magnanimity or solidarity. It is rather that forgiving attempts the seemingly impossible, to undo what has been done, and

> that it succeeds in making a new beginning where beginnings seemed to have become no longer possible. (p. 57-58)

Putting this in the context of a school shooting, if the family of the victim (of a school shooting) decides to forgive the shooter will they ever forget the child or brother or sister they have lost and how that loss occurred? Will the children and teachers that were in the school on the day of the shooting ever be able to erase the visions of death from their minds? As my mother once said to forgive does not mean we forget. However, when a community is torn apart by the bullets of a gun there must be a space created to begin anew. The calamity of what has happened cannot define the future but how does that happen. How is “one’s ability to begin something new, especially in the aftermath of wrongdoing, … limited by the readiness of those with whom one has to do [it with]?” (Pettigrove, 2006, p. 483). How does magnanimity or solidarity happen if there is no space to create a new beginning?

The salient position taken by academics when thinking about forgiveness is that - the other is needed to forgive. Thinkers such as Arendt and Kristeva speak in their respective ways to this notion in their work. For these thinkers the connection between forgiveness, repentance and futurity is linked to the idea that to forgive one must face the victim and ask for forgiveness. Arendt (1958) asserts,

> both faculties, therefore, depend on plurality, on the presence and acting of others, for no one can forgive himself and no one can feel bound by a promise made only to himself; forgiving and promising enacted in solitude or isolation remain without reality and can signify no more than a role played before one’s self. (p. 237)

Thus, forgiving oneself is futile and silent. Forgiveness must be requested of and granted by the victim to open the possibility of a different way of being. A way of living on after the event. The

choice to forgive is not the perpetrators however, the initial action needed to initiate the process of forgiveness is theirs. The perpetrator must put aside their shame and guilt and ask for forgiveness. Ultimately the choice to forgive is the victims. To move forward both the victim and the perpetrator must participate. Thus, Arendt (1958) suggests forgiveness is "the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven" (p. 241). By acting anew Arendt is suggesting a space where both can perhaps learn to restore the world between them and live-in mutual respect, thus begin anew.

Kristeva (2002) agrees with Arendt that there can be no forgiveness without the perpetrator's acknowledgement of the crime, "criminals can be forgiven only after they have made reparations, expressed remorse, and indicated a desire to transform themselves and begin again" (p. 279). For Kristeva (2002), if there is no remorse, "then there is no forgiveness to offer" (p. 283). If one does not regret what they have done if they are not remorseful how can they ask for forgiveness. Maybe that was what was missing for me so many years ago in the dimly lit church as I sat waiting for my friend to complete her penance – one prayer, two prayers maybe three all done in a row without much remorse, thought or conviction. To me it seemed like an easy way out. I am not sure forgiveness or being forgiven should be that easy, it should be hard, it should be ethical. Also, it is important to consider why and what my friend was asking forgiveness for – although she never shared the private moments she spent in the confessional, I am sure that she was not asking to be forgiven for participating in a war action, or physically injuring another person or for killing someone. Her crimes were likely minor in nature, like speaking back to her mother, telling her sister that she hated her or maybe stealing a lipstick from

the 5 &10 cent store.[49] All things I had witnessed her doing. Can these types of infractions gain forgiveness easily so one can move forward?

However, to think about forgiveness in this project we must think about what for many is unforgivable. The offences referred to as "radical evil" which are not common and leave almost everyone less willing to think of the possibility of forgiveness. Offences such as mass shootings, targeted bombings and rampage school shootings fall into this category. Offences "that we can neither punish nor forgive … that … transcend the realm of human affairs and potentialities of human power, both of which they radically destroy wherever they make their appearance" (Arendt, 1998, p. 241).

In many but not all cases of rampage school shootings the perpetrator takes not only the lives of his/her victims but also their own life. This is also the case in the novels that I have chosen for this project. The death of the shooter in these novels does not mean the story has ended, in fact, I argue the story is just beginning. The story of repair, renewal, and reconciliation. I will reflect on this idea of reconciliation in the next chapter through my close reading of *Hate List* by Jennifer Brown.

Literary Pedagogy the Path to Shame, Violence, and Forgiveness

> *Action and speech create a space between the participants which can find it proper location almost any time and anywhere. It is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the word, namely the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly.* (Arendt, 1998, pp. 198 - 199)

Arendt asserts that the space of appearance is where man/women come together in speech and action and whenever people gather, there is a possibility to be present. This is the space of the public where discussion can take place. Where individuals are free of their necessities (of acting to care and provide for themselves) of the private realm and can engage in conversation

with others about the world. In this space there is possibility. This is space “to think together” where there are no goals to create, solve, plan, or regulate. Where men and/or women can come together, be together and wonder together. I argue that this space of appearance can be created in the classroom, a potential space for dialogue and discussion of a common topic, in which our coming together can open space for literary pedagogy in the form of empathy and understanding.

Following the work of Mishra Tarc (2015), I am not suggesting a new way to think about social trauma, however, I am suggesting that literature in the form of young adult novels can be a tool for literary pedagogy that “provides teachers and scholars a means to think about [social trauma] as inherent to the philosophical and cultural construction of humanizing narratives of existence and to the possibility of renewing those existential narratives” (p. 5). Using novels students can gain a vocabulary that has meaning for the group that share the space of appearance and allow one’s private reading to enter open discussion. The practice of “decoding and deciphering” can aid teachers and scholars in facilitating these open discussions of topics that are otherwise difficult to discuss or complex in nature such as shame, violence, and forgiveness.

Dennis J. Sumara (2005) reminds us that “all experiences are unique” and the lived experience of the reader can play a significant role in how the book is read and understood, As the reading experience is different for each reader – content, context and where one reads matters (p. 5). The difficulties occur when private reading becomes public as “readers can usually integrate [personal] experiences when reading is done in private, [however], they have more difficulty when these experiences present themselves in the public space of the classroom” (p. 5). Sumara argues, “reading, curriculum and the lives of those who experience them are inextricable from one another [and their] existence continues to evolve as [one] moves through the experience of living” (p. 5). I propose there is a space created for lessons that are excavated from

the ruins of personal and social trauma and that they can be employed to think about unacknowledged shame, violence, and forgiveness. That a pedagogy of a different type, specifically literary pedagogy, can be explored to open dialogue and thinking about difficult social situations.

Metaphorically

I allow myself to think of with the metaphor of an "onion" when exploring young adult novels that tackle traumatic social issues. The novel which has layers upon layers hidden from our view yet present and ready to be peeled back. Layers that make the story more accessible to a vast group of readers. Layers that allow the reader to identify with parts of the story if not the whole story. Layers that bury the character of the school shooter and those around him/her deep in the pages protecting them from the outside world.[50]

Dennis Sumara (1996) argues, the interaction with the book can be very personal and at the same time very public. [51] Sumara also points us to Margaret Hunsberger who suggests that "the experience of re-reading is always a new experience and, because of this, the emotions that are generated by this experience can never be predicted" whether you read privately or in public (p. 2). Reading fiction can produce real and present moment emotions, making the "present whatever it chooses" by connecting the "no longer" to the experience (Arendt, 2018, p. 388). The novels I analyze in this work are as the category of novel suggests – fictional – they are "made up." I return to a thought from Arendt (1998) earlier quoted in this work,

> the fictional story reveals a maker just as every work of art clearly indicates that it was made by somebody; this does not belong to the story itself but only to the mode in which it came into existence. The distinction between a real and a fictional story is precisely that the latter was "made up" and the former not at all. (p. 186)

Each of the three novels analyzed in chapter four reflects the authors lived experience, their personal experience "does not belong to the story itself," however, it does influence how the story is told and how "it came into existence" (p. 186).

While the overarching plot of these three novels is the school shootings, the theme is violence, how it is enacted in various forms, how it affects individuals in different ways (e. g. unacknowledged shame) and how it manifests, tragically leaving the victim to find a way to move forward. Each of the stories is distinctively different, cultivated by the authors connection to the theme, their personal research of real-life school shootings and their creative ability to tell made up stories (fiction). Through extensive research of the plot (school shootings) and character development these authors create fictional stories and characters that are representations of real-life school shooting events and those involved. Sumara (1996) articulates, "it seems that the line between fact and fiction cannot be neatly drawn. Without references to the real world, a literary fiction would be totally meaningless, and a daily life without imaging would be at best dull – likely intolerable" (p. 18). Thus, this ability to take facts and imagine them into fiction becomes paramount in the development of the story and the characters as well as how it is read and interpreted. The interwoven lived experience of the author and the context of the story opens a space for the reader to create a connection and through reflection we as readers can link our experiences to the experiences of others (Sumara, 1996).

Why the Authors of Young Adult Fiction Write What They Write

Jodi Picoult (2007) states, that as a mother of three she saw "her own children struggling to fit in" and thought "everyone wonders if they're good enough, smart enough, pretty enough, no matter how old they are" these thoughts drew her to the topic of school bullying and school shootings. Picoult was able to review police evidence from the Columbine shooting, with the aid

of her research assistant. This allowed Picoult to gain a basic understanding of the shooter's mindset. While writing the book, her real life and her fictional story telling collided as Picoult sat at her computer "writing a scene in *Nineteen Minutes* and on the TV next to [her] a reporter said exactly what [she] was typing into her fiction" Picoult later described this moment as surreal. The writer revealed her fiction, and the reporter revealed the real-life story. Intertwined in every fiction is a little reality.

Jessica Knoll reveals pieces of her own history in *Luckiest Girl Alive* a story of violence that transcends the school shooting incident. This narrative not only belongs to the creative work but also to the mode in which it came into existence. As Arendt aptly puts it "the distinction between a real and a fictional story is precisely that the latter was "made up" and the former not at all" (p. 186). In this case Knoll's novel is a bit of both truth and fiction, as it was conceived from her real-life experience with gang rape, and it is also made up as she embeds that experience in the fictional story.

Although Jennifer Brown (2009) had always had questions about school shootings, she did not set out to write a book about a school shooting. For her *Hate List* was about an "emotional journey." As a mother she is very frightened by school shootings but was motivated to write this book because of her personal experience with bullying in middle and high school. The one thing that resonated with me when reading about how Brown came up with this story was, she believed that school shootings were not simply evil and that their triggers were not simply mental health issues, bullying, gun availability or media influences but instead complex multi-dimensional events. As part of her preparation to write *Hate List,* Brown decided that her character Valerie would represent all sorts of different "truths" out there.[52] After writing an extensive character sketch of Valerie she enlisted the help of her husband, a clinical

psychologist, to “do therapy” on her character, through exhaustive conversations about Valerie, Brown was able to get a real understanding of what Valerie would have gone through emotionally after the shooting. In this scenario, Brown did not belong to the story only to the mode in which the fictional story came into existence.

For me the thing that is strikingly similar in these novels is the focus by the author on a character that is not “the shooter.” This entrance into the story through a character that is not responsible for the actual shooting is more palatable and digestible. Thus, considerable care and effort goes into the development of the characters including the shooter, close connections, parents, teachers, and victims to ensure they are represented in a way that does not reflect the author’s biases. When Brown was asked about character development, she stated that she “really struggled with softening up [her characters] making them less ugly, because … when someone is in a horrified, grieving place, they may not be likable.”[53] Thus, the construction of all characters is carefully thought through and developed to allow the reader space to come to grips with the events that led up to and follow the fictional shooting. If “the shooter” or supporting characters have no redeeming qualities, the reader may find it hard to find a space for empathy and/or be able to situate themselves in the text. Sumara (1996) suggests,

> That the culturally agreed-upon forms of literary fiction give readers permission to situate themselves amid such texts in a way which invokes and conditions an imaginative response to the text. It is through these imaginative experiences that the reader is able to move beyond her or his daily lived experience into another lived experience as conditioned by the literary fiction. (p. 85)

My focus in this dissertation is to push the reading of the text to the next level, to wonder and think with theories and concepts of unacknowledged shame, violence, and forgiveness in

fictional literature about traumatic social issues such as school shootings, to move beyond the real and give readers the opportunity to wonder with others about these conditions of reality in an imagined space. I do not propose that we condone, justify, or analyze the reasons behind school shootings or for that matter "school shooters" actions. Instead, I endeavor to wonder, as Mishra Tarc (2015), proposes, with how "we can find traces of the inner life[54] of literacy in the aesthetic form, content, and reception of some literary works." I concur with Mishra Tarc that "as with the material relation, literature holds the inner lives of both the writer and reader in an unspoken demand to communicate" (p. 39). While Samara (1996) proposes that "these imaginative spaces help the reader to understand that lived truth is slippery and contingent, for by imagining a situational possibility during the act of reading, there simultaneously occurs a questioning of what exists" (p. 85). Thus, through guided reading in the classroom books can poke at this connection and draw out the salient topics for discussion

In this respect, Picoult leads us from the onset of the story to think about how *nineteen minutes* changed the lives of the students, staff, friends, and family in the fictional community of Sterling High, I argue what really changed their lives is the time before. Such "minutes" can be appreciated by what Arendt refers to as the "no longer". In both the real and fictional world, the present cannot be what it is without having lived through the "no longer". Time is important to every narrative as it is what holds the story together. The "no longer" cannot be return to, it cannot be altered, it is written, the story is told by the author and read by us as something that already happened. What we do with what we read is the "not yet" it is the future. This may seem a bit disjointed as I am meshing fiction with reality but if we do a close reading of the novel, we can unpack theory and concepts as pedagogical tools to understand how what we have read applies to our personal story. Mishra Tarc (2015) brings us to think, the

> author and reader are affected by an intense correspondence in [the] mind where two strangers, without speaking to each other, intimately communicate, teach, learn, and make meaning. The exchange of meaning generated by the novel can produce a profound form of literary pedagogy. (p. 33)

Thus, in the next chapter through a close reading of the three novels mentioned above, I bring to the foreground some examples of how we might use theory to unearth the concepts of unacknowledged shame, violence, and forgiveness, to enhance a pedagogical discussion.

Chapter Four
Analysis of the Young Adult Novels

In this chapter, I directly apply theory and concepts driven approach to my analysis of three novels: *Nineteen Minutes* by Jodi Picoult; *Luckiest Girl Alive* by Jessica Knoll and *Hate Lis*t by Jennifer Brown. Although, these three stories (in the novels) unfold in very different ways I can cull representations of theory and the concepts, specifically, unacknowledged shame, violence, and forgiveness to wonder and think alongside as I develop the practice of "intimate reading" affords the reader (me in this case) a personal and private space to grapple with the hard content of some novels. Following Mishra Trac (2011), I argue that bringing one's responses, feelings and lived experiences to a close reading of the fictional literature can transform one's understanding of social and real life. Intimate reading occurs when the reader brings their understanding to the text and is reflexive in their interruption of what they are reading. Thinking alongside theory can support students to move these readings into a space where it can be shared and discussed with others that have similar or alternate views and experiences to share. As the novels are my objects of analysis, I begin each section in this chapter with a brief synopsis of the novel and to avoid repetition, I focus 1) on the concept of unacknowledged shame to analyze *Nineteen Minutes 2)* on the concept of violence to analyze *Luckiest Girl Alive* and 3) on the concept of forgiveness to analyze *Hate List.*

Unacknowledged Shame in *Nineteen Minutes* by Jodi Picoult

> *By the time you read this, I hope to be dead.*
> *You can't undo something that's happened; you can't take back a word that is already said out loud. You'll think about me and wish that you have been able to talk me out of this. You'll try to figure out what would have been the one right thing to say, to do. I guess I should tell you, don't blame yourself; this isn't your fault, but that would be a lie. We both know that I didn't get here by myself.*
> *You'll cry, at my funeral. You'll say it didn't have to be this way. You will act like everyone expects you to. But will you miss me?*
> *More importantly will I miss you?*

Does either one of us really want to hear the answer to that question?
(Picoult, 2007, p. 3)

After my first encounter with this note, I assumed that it was written by “the shooter.” A suicide note, but I wonder now as I reflect on my close reading of the text - who wrote it and to whom?

“NO ONE” “ANYONE” “EVERYONE”

This compelling and emotionally charged young adult novel, *Nineteen Minutes*, tells the story of two teenagers Peter and Josie and the role they play in the school shooting at Sterling High School. Peter Houghton, for many years has been the brunt of the joke, harassed and physically abused by his classmates. Peter’s parents’ continually compare him to his older brother who is smart, athletic, and popular making shame a constant in his life. Peter’s best friend as a child was Josie Cormier, however, they have drifted apart as Josie has fallen prey to adolescent peer pressure and being part of the popular group. Peter and Josie’s lives are parallel in many ways and they have more in common than the friendship they once shared.

Unspoken, Unacknowledged Shame

Unspoken, unacknowledged shame appears in every individual differently, the mask one wears to cover deep seeded emotions is individual. Sociologist Erving Goffman (1959) states that we are obsessed with how others see us. We are constantly questioning our self-image. We fear that we are not good enough, not attractive enough, not smart enough, not talented enough, in general we are just not enough. This recurring theme of not being good enough is present in the three novels selected for this work. Josie (*Nineteen Minutes)*, Ani (*Luckiest Girl Alive) and* Valerie (*Hate List)* question their self-image, the person they present to others, their ability to be successful. Each character respectively asks, “am I good enough?” “Am I good enough, for my mother, for my teachers, for my friends, for myself?” I will focus on the characters Josie and

Peter (shooter) in *Nineteen Minutes* to flush out how one can be obsessed with their self-image to the extent that they lose themselves in the process.

Nineteen Minutes was my first encounter with a YA novel that graphically depicted a school shooting. The opening lines hooked me and the story telling held my attention. The story conveys how a young teenaged boy who had been embarrassed, harassed, bullied, beaten and had his sexuality challenged, got up one morning, made his bed, went to school, and shot his classmates, predators, and teachers, went to jail, and died by suicide. The story was intriguing to read and yet, hard to digest. I am not suggesting that I understood Peter, the shooter's motives, however, as I read this book for the first time, I empathized with what Peter went through before he made the decision to take a gun to school.

When I turned the last page of *Nineteen Minutes*, I reflected on what I had read. This was not just a story about a school shooting, this was a story that had many complex scenarios that needed to be analyzed. Besides the main plot of the shooting, there were sub-plots that were more important and powerful. Although Peter was the shooter and a truly troubled character, Josie was also a character of interest to me in this novel. Her story did not hinge on the spectacle of violence like Peter's but was just as violent. Josie is as complex a character as Peter, she is the character that we can peel back the layers of to make meaning and create understanding of the concept of unacknowledged shame. By the time that Peter hits high school he has accepted that he is not popular and that everyone including his family have used him as an example of who you do not want to be. While Josie for her part is still struggling. Struggling to figure out who she is, who she wants to be, how to be accepted for herself. Throughout my analysis below I will draw on examples of Peter's character. I am mindful that Picoult, has created a school shooter that represents all the stereotypes that we witness when reading media coverage of school

shootings (loner, bullied, questioning sexuality, video gamer, access to guns). The portrayal of Peter affords us to think through how the notion of unacknowledged shame escalates to rage and then violence. At the same time, I will reflect on Josie's journey with unacknowledged shame drawing on the notions of the "looking glass self," "saving face," "self-image," and "emotional turbulence."

The characters in a novel, just like many of us are complex, they are not one dimensional. Rather, the characters are much like we are, onions that are layered and complex. Each layer tightly fitting into and around the layer beneath it. Our inner being only exposed when cut open. We hide within our protective skin only letting others see what we want them to see, only sharing what we want to share. I keep in mind that even when we share Mishra Tarc (2015) suggests "words continually fail us [as] it is extremely difficult, to convey in words the felt motivations of human thought and action" (p. 75). Thus, words are often not adequate to convey what we are thinking or feeling, leaving the listener or reader to interpret them based on their own experience and vocabulary.

Reflecting on the words Picoult uses to bring her characters to life in the novel *Nineteen Minutes* binds us to the narrative and allows us (the reader) to think about our own experiences in comparison to those of the story. In fictional narratives events are reflections of real life and therefore limited by language. It is easy to describe trees, tables, and books because they are objects that the storyteller and the reader have in common.[55] Emotions and other intangibles that we cannot physically see are on the other hand harder to illustrate in words that have common meaning to everyone. Therefore, some things are not easily described, words do not adequately describe intense feelings, such as pain, joy, or shame. Arendt (1998) in *The Human Condition* speaks to the experience of pain as an example of language not being adequate. She writes,

> [i]ndeed, the most intense feeling we know of, intense to the point of blotting out all other experiences, namely, the experience of great bodily pain, is at the same time the most private and least communicable of all. Not only is it perhaps the only experience which we are unable to transform into a shape fit for public appearance, it actually deprives us of our feeling for reality to such an extent that we can forget it more quickly and easily than anything else. (pp. 50 – 51)

Our vocabulary may not have the words or common experiences that allow us to express intense feelings of pain to others. For example, if I have never felt pain, or if my tolerance for pain is different than yours, or my vocabulary does not have the words that can explain pain in language that is digestible by you then I may not be able to describe what I am experiencing, and I may not understand what is being described to me. Further Lynd (1999) suggests,

> The characteristics that have been suggested as central in experiences of shame – the sudden exposure of unanticipated incongruity, the seemingly trivial incident that arouses overwhelming and almost unbearably painful emotion, the threat to the core of identity, the loss of trust in expectations of oneself, of other persons, of one's society, and a reluctantly recognized questioning of meaning in the world – all these things combine to make experiences of shame almost impossible to communicate. (p. 60)

I think of shame as one of the emotions that is difficult to put into words or speak about. Shame is private and individual, it is not often shared with or easily described to others, words used to express shame are vague and nuanced. If an individual shares their shame with others, it can generate painful emotions, thus individuals often hide their shame deep within their consciousness or use words that imply shame but do not claim it. There is always an element of

trying to save face[56] in the act of hiding shame. The private silent nature of shame makes it much easier to bury, hide or disguise our shame. Scheff and Retzinger (1991) explain,

> There are hundreds of words and phrases that seem to be substitutes or euphemisms for the words shame and embarrassment. For example, we may say, "It was an awkward moment for me." Such a statement usually refers to a feeling of embarrassment. It contains two movements that disguise emotion – denial of inner feeling and projecting it onto the outer world: I was not embarrassed – it was a moment that was awkward (Scheff, 1984). In modern societies our very language conspires to hide shame from display and from our consciousness. (p. 6)

This conspiracy to cover up our shame is not consciously undertaken it is done automatically to protect ourselves from others and sometimes from ourselves. As shame is something that we internalize it is rarely admitted to the other person. Often it is hard to find the words that describe how we feel. We can reflect on this exchange between Peter (the shooter) and Josie in *Nineteen Minutes*. Picoult demonstrates that it is hard to put into words what one feels, Josie cannot share what is complicated, how she feels or why it is so important to act the way people expect her to or why it is important to be popular…but it is.

> Peter: "Do you hate me?"
>
> Josie: "No"
>
> Peter: "Then why, do you act like you do?'
>
> Josie: "I have to act the way people expect me to act. It's part of the whole … thing. If I don't … It's complicated. You wouldn't understand." (p. 312)

The words to describe how she feels and why she acts the way she does elude her. She may be, "unable to transform [her feelings] into a shape fit for public appearance"[57] her vocabulary may

not be adequate to generate the intended meaning or the person she is trying to communicate with may not have had the same experiences to create understanding.[58] While Josie may want to share with Peter, she also wants to manage the impression that Peter will have of her once she has shared. Managing what others think of her is very important for Josie. How and why, Josie acts the way she does, is what Goffman refers to as impression management.

Picoult (2007) uses metaphors to describe the shame her characters experience, for example "Josie thought of her life as a room with no doors and no windows … it was a room from which there really wasn't an escape. Either Josie was someone she didn't want to be, or she was someone no one wanted" (p. 8). I take this metaphor to mean that Josie feels trapped inside a person that she is not comfortable with, but she thinks others want her to be. She is ashamed of who she has become. Discussing her feelings and exposing her dilemma about her identity seems to be something that she is unable to do, she does not understand what she is feeling or how to describe her feelings. It all seems just too personal to share.

Drawing on Cooley's (1902) theory of "the looking- glass self", we can think about how shame is monitored by the social self. The social self is the person seen in the space of appearance, this person imagines how we are seen by the other, what the other thinks of them makes a difference in how they feel about themselves. They feel shame or pride in themselves depending on how they perceive what others think about them. Picoult describes Josie as hiding behind a persona of the person that she thinks others want her to be. She is afraid that if she shows her true self no one will like what they see. She is ashamed of the person she is and wants to be someone others will like. Picoult does not describe what Josie is feeling with the word "shame", however, as readers we can "make meaning from our engagement with the text" (Sumara, 1996, p. 18). Our experiences and the experiences of others (shared in discussion) can

help us navigate the text, to pull from the story of the fictional character what is real to us. This along with theories such as Cooley's looking-glass self and Arendt's notion of language (as discussed above) can help us navigate our connection to the text without revealing our true self if we choose to remain anonymous in group discussions.

Throughout the novel we witness various representations of unacknowledged shame and shaming acts towards both key characters Josie and Peter, the shooter. Josie provides various examples of unacknowledged shame for the reader to engage with to create an understanding of how unacknowledged shame can evolve to anger and then violence. Through her aborted attempts of suicide, violence against herself and when she shoots her abusive boyfriend, violence against others. Picoult, also reveals to us Peter's evolution of shame, from a young boy to a school shooter. Peter's unacknowledged shame escalates from embarrassment, to anger, to rage. Peter shamed by his parents, his brother, and his peers, has no outlet to discuss what he is feeling, no one that he can trust to share his shame with. Readers may not have experienced every aspect of these two characters journey, however, there may be parts that resonate with them.

Sumara (1996) suggests that "telling stories, listening to them, and reading them (to oneself or others) opens a window to other worlds, other persons, and other experiences" (p. 85). I suggest this window if thrown open can also lead to conversations amongst readers that will create awareness of what unacknowledged shame can look like in its raw messiness. Through reading and discussion of fictional text these conversations can take place without risk of exposing what one tends to hide deep within their own layers.

To think further about the obsession with how others see us I return to Picoult's character Josie. As already discussed, Josie's public-self is not her true self, it is a representation

of who she thinks others want her to be. For Arendt (1998) there is a distinction between *what* and *who* the individual is. *What* can be described in words and is often confused with *who* someone is. For example, someone may ask who is that? If they are referring to me the response would be "Wendy." However, that does not tell you much about me at all. The natural progression of the conversation depends on the setting. So, let's place me at school. The conversation may go like this. Wendy is a PhD student in education and a teaching assistant in Sociology. That is not *who* I am but what I am, a student and teaching assistant. The language used to describe me, needs to be mobile, it needs to mean something to both people in the conversation. Arendt argues that *what* enters the conversation, "the moment we want to say *who* someone is; our very vocabulary leads us astray into saying *what* he [she] is; we get entangled in a description of qualities he [she] necessarily shares with others like him [her]; we begin to describe a type or a "character" (p. 181). In other words, who we are requires the other, no one gets to tell their own story. We appear on the public stage and disclose ourselves to others through our speech. There must be an audience to say who we are. In this case, the question of *who* Josie is, becomes *what* Josie is, and *the what*, is *who* Josie is, they cannot be extracted from each other. Yet, for Arendt they are distinctly different, Josie is the popular girl, the star hockey players girlfriend, the daughter of a Judge, a good student – in this matter the *who* is lost. There are limits to our vocabulary when we describe *who* someone is. How do we describe the *who*? As I wonder about my own *who* I start to think about the *what* to describe myself. Coming back to Arendt, "all definitions and interpretations of what man is, of qualities, therefore, which he could possible share with other living beings...could be found in what kind of who he is" (p. 181). What kind of a person or should we be thinking what kind of a representation of the who are we seeing when we see Josie?

Thinking through this scene, which is set prior to the shooting, Peter approaches Josie in the school cafeteria. She is sitting with her popular friends, Peter is not considered popular in fact he is the brunt of jokes, name calling, abuse and bullying. Although Josie and Peter were friends when they were children, high school is different. In high school it was important to be one of the popular kids as invisible is not an option. You are either in or out and that can happen in various ways. Josie's choice to be popular makes her obsessed with how others see her, she is, constantly working at being popular (impression management) to the point of allowing her boyfriend control over her actions. The interaction between Josie and Peter allows us to think about how Josie represents her *who* and the interconnection with Goffman's notion that we are obsessed with how others see us, and we try to "save face" when we feel we will be exposed as someone we do not want to be seen as. Scheff and Retzinger (2001) state, "protecting face is a universal feature of all known societies. [Goffman defined face] "in terms of avoiding embarrassment or humiliation" (p. 27). This act of protecting or saving face may result in someone going along with the popular position rather than acting in a way that is true to how the individual feels. For example, laughing at someone when they are made fun of rather than siding with them. In this example from the text, we witness Josie actions towards Peter when she is with her boyfriend and her friends.

> Peter Houghton was standing next to their table, holding a brown bag in one hand and an open milk carton in the other. "Hi Josie," he said, as if she might be listening, as if she weren't dying a thousand kinds of death in that one second. "I thought you might like to join me for lunch."
>
> The word *mortified* sounded like you'd gone to granite, like you couldn't move to save your soul. Josie imagined how years from now, students would point to the

> frozen gargoyle that used to be her, still rooted in the plastic cafeteria chair, and say, *Oh right, I heard about what happened to her.* (p. 320, original emphasis)

Josie's behaviour when she is with her friends is very different from how she interacts with Peter when they are alone, and no one is around to witness the interaction. Goffman and Cooley theories of self-image and the reflexive self-conscious of the looking-glass-self alongside Arendt's thinking of the *what* and *who* of a person come into play here. It is important to our imagined self not only how we are perceived and described by others, but also the lasting impression that we make on others. Josie is imagining how she is being seen by her peers and how she will continue to be seen in the future, because how she is perceived by others, will shape who she imagines herself to be. Josie is mortified (ashamed) when Peter says her name, she sees herself as something ugly, a granite gargoyle[59] frozen for eternity, perched in a plastic cafeteria chair for current and future generations of students to stare at and comment on. Managing our self-image is part of managing our shame. Scheff and Retzinger (1991) reference Cooley, and the notion that pride and mortification (shame) are not merely mechanical reflections of ourselves, "but an imputed sentiment, the imagined effect of this reflection upon the another's mind" (p. 8). Josie was mortified (ashamed) that Peter approached her in front of the popular group. Josie imagines what the group is thinking of her as Peter says her name. The reference to the gargoyle is not simply the petrified state that gargoyle's finds themselves in but also their unsightly appearance. Why a gargoyle? Why choose something that will remain forever frozen, ugly, and perched on the plastic cafeteria chair for others to stare at for eternity?

Scheff and Retzinger (1991) think with Goffman about "impression management" in other words how we feel the need to control the impression we make on others. They state,

"Goffman's actors are obsessed with their image in the eyes of others, with the impression they are making. His actors seem to constantly fear being seen negatively in the eyes of the other" (p. 9). Josie in this scene and throughout the narrative is trying to manage what others think of her. Popularity is one part, but only a small part of her overall objective which is that people do not see "the real" Josie, because she is afraid and ashamed, afraid, they will not like what they see, and ashamed of the "the real" Josie. The "what" of Josie (popular, pretty and the hockey stars girlfriend), is more important than the "who," as Josie would prefer that no one ever knows "what kind of a who"[60] Josie is.

We can also reflect on Goffman's notion of "impression management" when Picoult writes about the average adolescent and how they all try in various ways to put their best self forward for others and may not realize how this self is not their true self. Picoult (2007) states,

> *Look at the average high school student, and you'll see someone who's putting in time twenty-four hours a day, for the entire length of the school year.*
> *So how do you crack that inner sanctum? Well, here's the catch: it's not up to you. What's important is what everyone else thinks of how you dress, what you eat for lunch, what shows you TiVo, what music is on your iPod.* (p. 241, original emphasis)

As teenagers and even as adults we are always trying to manage the impression that we have on others. The words that are used to describe us and how we want to be seen often dictates how we act. To be part of the group we may participate in activities that we do not really want to, we may behave in ways that we do not feel comfortable with and even feel shame for our part in an activity or behaviour, but we do this because we can hide our true self from others. If we act outside of the group standard or norm, then we risk the chance of being exposed and openly

shamed. For example, had Josie decided to have lunch with Peter, she would have not been maintaining the image of popular girl that she worked so hard to portray.

For me there is a difference between the shame one imposes on themselves, and the shaming imposed on us by others. When no one else knows that I am feeling ashamed, I can bury it deep within myself and not share it. Josie for the most part imposes shame on herself, if there are occasions that she is publicly shamed it is at the hands of her boyfriend Matt. Matt tends to impose shame when he is either trying to control others or is practicing his own impression management. Josie does her best to avoid public humiliation at the hands of her boyfriend who seems to not really care who he crushes in his path to "saving face". Josie shows up at Matt's hockey game and he is very unhappy that she is there.

> A shadow passes over his face as his team started catcalls.
>
> *Matt, you need help putting on your jock?*
>
> *Hey, quick get the guy a bigger stick…*
>
> "Yeah" Matt shot back as he walked across the rubber mats towards Josie. "You just wish you had someone who could suck the chrome off a hood ornament"
>
> Josie felt her cheeks flame as the entire locker room burst into laughter at her expense, and the rude comments shifted focus from Matt to her. (p. 330, original emphasis)

When one is publicly shamed or others witness their shame, it can be humiliating. This type of shame can be experienced over and over each time that it is referenced and whenever the people who witnessed it snicker or whisper. Whether shame is experienced in a private or public setting it is still violence against the other and can still incite violence. For shame to **not** become violent it needs to be acknowledged and reconciled. Scheff and Retzinger (1991), "shame provokes

violence, when it is (a) unacknowledged, and (b) communicated disrespectfully. [However] shame prevents violence when it is acknowledged and communicated respectfully" (p. xii). If we talk about what shamed us with the person that shamed us, we can reconcile how the action affected us. However, if we bury our shame and make excuses, it becomes unacknowledged and can escalate to rage and violence.

Returning to Picoult's novel *Nineteen Minutes* we can reflect on the many times, in Peter's life when he was called gay. Although Peter did not see himself as having a sexual preference for boys over girls, he began to question his sexuality and masculinity. Peter was confused and questioning. How do you know if you are gay? What are the signs? Kimmel and Mahler (2003) state, "when one is questioning their sexuality, they can often feel shame" (p. 1447). Shame is often felt in boys because they do not live up to the standards set by others as to what is masculine, things such as strength, athletic ability, and attraction to the opposite sex.

Peter thought, "I am not strong like other boys, not good at sports like the jocks and do not know how you tell if I am attracted to boys or girls" (p. 157). He did not seem to be especially attracted to either sex. What did this mean? Since Peter, did not know what being heterosexual or homosexual felt like, he hid his shame and was uncomfortable around everyone. His relationship with his parents was one in which he never felt good enough, as he was always compared to his brother who was presented as being good at everything, sports, school, and social relationships (girls). Peter's mother often said, "why are you not more like your brother?" (p. 70). This made Peter fear a conversation with his parents that would only serve as more ammunition for them to fain their disappointment. Peter, therefore, internalized his feelings of shame, shame that he was not good enough, amplifying his confusion about his sexuality.

Wearing a “mask of shame,” Peter showed up at his high school’s Gay and Lesbian Alliance meeting. He did not know if he belonged at the meeting and did not speak while he was there, first because he did not know the right questions to ask and second because it was not about how others felt about him being there. Really, he had only gone into the meeting that day to see if he felt like he belonged. Peter wondered “were the names he was being called because others saw something that he could not see himself? Could you tell if someone was homosexual by just looking at them?” (p. 191). Peter’s experiment did not work, he was just as confused when he left the meeting, and he never returned. If he was not gay, he did not want to be seen there and if he was gay, he did not want anyone to find out. Peter was in search of an identity that he was not sure he wanted but at the same time needed to understand. Still trying to figure it out, Peter went to Front Runner, a gay bar, “to see if he [could] fit in with this society, instead of his own” (p. 251). However, all he felt was curiosity, and confusion. Each act of questioning his sexuality, served to cause him to be more confused and more ashamed as to why he could not figure out how he felt about his sexuality. Peter felt ashamed not that he may be gay but instead that he was so confused about his sexuality.

Shaming by others causes one to have self-doubt and lose their self-esteem. The combination of self-doubt and low self-esteem can turn into shame that can escalate to rage and then violence. Kimmel and Mahler (2003) argue that individuals that are subjected to intense bullying and ostracization can experience self-doubt, low self-esteem, and intense shame. Shame that creates an “emotional turbulence,” this emotional turbulence pulls and pushes the individual to a breaking point that can erupt in violence (p. 1439). I share two examples from the text for us to think with. The first is a conversation that Peter has with his lawyer after the shooting,

> my brother, the captain of the baseball team; my brother who placed first in a French competition; my brother who was friends with the principal; my brother, my fabulous brother, use to drop me off a half mile from the gates of the high school so that he didn't have to be seen driving all the way with me and made fun of me and called me a fag … You don't exactly get any perks for hanging around with me … Joey wouldn't stick up for you when bullied? (lawyer) Are you kidding? Joey was the one to start it. … He used to tell people at school I was adopted. That my mother was a crack whore and that's why my brain was all fucked up. Sometimes right in front of me. (p. 185)

This rejection, ostracization and bullying by his brother reflects of how his family generally treated him as not being good enough. Picoult, shares Peter's mother's thoughts after the shooting, "Lacy remembered holding Joey's grades up against Peter's; telling Peter that maybe he should try out for soccer, because Joey had enjoyed it so much. Acceptance started at home, but so did tolerance. By the time Peter had been excluded at school…he was used to feeling like an outcast in his own family" (p. 286). I am not proposing that this is a justification for Peter's actions rather what we see here is a justification for his shame. Lynd (1999) states the public shaming of another "could not in itself have brought about shame unless one had already felt within oneself, not only dislike, but shame for [their personal] traits" (p. 29). Peter's feeling like an outcast at home and his questioning of his sexuality caused him shame, shame brought on by his feeling of never being good enough of not fitting in, so when others taunted him and bullied him outside the home, his shame intensified. Exposure of his weaknesses to others was less painful than his exposure to himself of his own weaknesses (Lynd, 1999).

The second example from the text exemplifying the devastating consequences of being shamed by another occurs following Peter's encounter with Josie in the cafeteria when he asks her to have lunch. Josie's boyfriend Matt, surprises Peter from behind, he hooks

> his thumbs into the loops of Peter's pants and yanked them down to his ankles. Peter's skin is moon-white under the harsh fluorescent lamps of the cafeteria, his penis a tiny spiral shell on a sparse nest of pubic hair. [Peter] immediately covered his genitals with his lunch bag, and as he did, he dropped his milk carton. It spilled on the floor between his feet. "Hey look at that" … "Premature ejaculation" (p. 321).

Peter is humiliated as everyone in the cafeteria laughs including Josie. However, he does not share his shame with anyone, he does not discuss it with anyone, he holds it inside. Without a word or act of retaliation Peter flees the cafeteria and makes his way to the washroom to hide in a stall away from the prying, mocking eyes of those who witnessed his shaming. We can look to Lynd (1999) to develop our understanding further,

> closely associated with anger and bitterness, emotions that according to our code should be repressed, and may be turned against the self. Not knowing what should be done with shame one's first impulse is to conceal it, and this may produce further shame. … More than other emotions, shame involves a quality of the unexpected; if in any way we feel it coming we are powerless to avert it. (p. 31)

Shame sneaks up on us and takes us by surprise, we often are not aware of its impact on us as we immediately try to hide it from those around us. We witness this in Peter's reaction to the "pantsing." Shultz (2013) argues shame is a deep and spontaneous feeling that threatens our sense of being in the world. When it cannot be avoided, the individual tries to hide it. However,

avoidance cannot do away with affect. Returning to Schultz and Ritzinger (2001) affect stays with us it is involuntary an unintended response to a stimulus. The effect of unacknowledged shame is not a single, solitary common response, it can manifest in various ways including withdrawal from the group and violence to self (suicide) and others (murder) or in some cases a combination of both.

In the novel, both Josie and Peter consider suicide.

Josie: (*a narrative by the author*)

> It had taken Josie nearly six months to inconspicuously gather only fifteen pills, but she figured she would wash them down with a fifth of vodka, it would do the trick. It wasn't like she had a strategy, really, to kill herself next Tuesday, or when the snow melted, or anything concrete like that. It was more like a backup plan. When the truth came out, and no one wanted to be around her anymore, it stood to reason Josie wouldn't want to be around herself either. (p. 10)

Peter: (*conversation with his lawyer*)

> Peter flinched. "Fine. You want to know if I was going to use the guns? Yeah, I was. I planned it. I ran through the whole thing in my head. I worked out all the details, to the last second. I was going to kill the person I hated the most. But then I didn't get to do it."
>
> "Those ten people -"
>
> "Just got in the way," Peter said.
>
> "Then who were you trying to kill?" [his lawyer asked]
>
> On the opposite side of the room, the air conditioner suddenly choked to life. Peter turned away. "Me" he said. (p. 194)

While Josie and Peter shared some of the same reason for feeling shame, both were ashamed of how they appeared to others and felt they were just not good enough and they also both had individual reasons for their shame. Josie's individual struggle with shame was centred on the person she pretended to be, she feared being exposed for who she really was, an unpopular, geeky and good student. Peter was ashamed of constantly being picked on, which exposed his weaknesses, as his sexuality was put into question. Their shame was both shared and individual resulting in a combination of self-harm (suicide) and violent (murderous) tendencies. Both Josie and Peter contemplated suicide. Both Josie and Peter committed murder, which is described by the media as monstrous and evil[61], leaving me to wonder who are Josie and Peter? Evil monsters? Or people that committed evil monstrous acts?

Violence in *Luckiest Girl Alive* by Jessica Knoll

> *Dean's fingers were stumbling over the button of my khakis. It was too soon to stop. Dean wouldn't believe me if I put an end to it now. As calmly as I could, I broke the kiss.*
> *"Let's go inside" I tried to make it sound breathy, seductive, but we both knew there was nowhere to make good on my promise inside the house. Too late, I realized my play was dangerously transparent, that I had fatally miscalculated Dean. He seized the button on my pants with such gusto my pelvis thrust forward, and my feet flew off the ground. I stumbled backward, landing on my wrist as a ruthless angle, and I let out an injured-puppy yelp that reverberated through the yard. "Shut up!" Dean hissed. He dropped to his knees and slapped me*. (Knoll, 2015, p. 133)

Of the three novels analyzed in this project, I selected *Luckiest Girl Alive* to bring to the forefront how violence can unsettle us yet allow us to think with others about its effects on a fictional or real school community. This young adult novel tells the story of a teenage girl that endures violence and humiliation in high school. After high-school Ani works to reinvent herself to leave what happened in high school behind and move on. She changes her name has a glamorous job, expensive wardrobe, and a handsome rich boyfriend. However, her past keeps

creeping into her present and affecting her future. Ani finds it impossible to forget what she experienced while at Bradley a prestigious private high school where she was gang raped and instrumental in the school shooting and ultimately the death of the shooter. Without reconciling her past, specifically the violence she experienced, witnessed, and was part of – she cannot move forward. This story focuses on Ani's journey.

The sub plot of this novel is the story of the school shooting. The two shooters Ben and Arthur have similar yet very different reasons for their part in the shooting. Ben had been forced to leave Bradley because he was continuously humiliated and harassed by his classmates. Arthur was not part of the popular group and had experienced similar humiliating treatment, in addition he saw how the popular group treated Ani and wanted to protect her, she was his friend when no one else would have anything to do with him. Ben and Arthur wanted to make things right, to settle the score, to get revenge.

Extending the Notion of Violence

This novel has a graphic depiction of a school shooting and other scenes of violence, (one of which is noted above in the quote). The violence of rape is real. The emotional effects of rape are deep. The shame and unacknowledged shame are debilitating. Although rape and its emotional effects are not within the scope of this project, the violence that is involved in the act must be acknowledged. Therefore, I will draw on the scene above and others that refer to the (gang) rape that took place in this book and subsequent events that followed.

For me the title of the novel is intriguing, *Luckiest Girl Alive,* as it can be interpreted in multiple ways. Is the primary character Ani the luckiest girl? Has Ani had a string of good fortune or is she just lucky to be "alive?" The description of the book does not prepare you for what you are going to read as you peel back the pages and experience the juice of the story. I

expected a graphically described school shooting scene however, I was taken back by the violence that unfolded in addition to the shooting.

We step into the story years after the shooting. Although Ani has her dream job and is engaged to marry a successful man, she is still struggling to come to terms with what happened to her during high school. She has adopted the persona of a successful businesswoman, happy with her life but under the layers that she has built for her public appearance there is someone that is still trying to cover up her past, to not expose that true Ani. Ani is afraid that her co-workers and new friends many not like the person she was in high school.

I return to the work of Mulhall (2009) as I think with the violence in this text. He draws our attention to the work of J. M. Coetzee,[62] and the difficulty of reality in literature when he notes that through the characters in the novel the author speaks of things that are otherwise difficult to talk about. Horrors of rape, violence, and school shootings are "morally maddening" (p. 212) and we as readers are challenged to decide to read or not to read "as acts of reading are no more immune to moral critique" than everyday events we witness in person or in the news (p. 212). Our moral compass sometimes is challenged while reading however, Knoll eases us through the scenes that are hard to read at the start of the book with violence that is covert and not fully described leading us toward the graphic scene of the shooting where, as they say, "the gloves are off" and we witness the gruesome details step by step in its harsh but real description.

Talking about violence is difficult. Although it is present in our everyday, it is hard to think about, define, describe, or share with others. Rose (2021) argues, "fictional writing plays a central role" in making conversations about violence more accessible. For Rose, "it is one of the chief means though which the experience of violence can be told in ways that defy both the discourse of politics and the defenses of thought" (p. 31). Reading fiction about violent

incidences allows us to reflect from a distance on how violence appears in our everyday, even as we choose to defend against acknowledging its presence. Mishra Tarc (2015) states,

> Reading is not only a function of the conscious and comprehending mind. Reading mostly plunges us into the unconscious where reside our difficulties with comprehension, and particularly with those representations that call into question passionate attachments to our self and others. (p. 77)

As previously mentioned, reading is a personal solitary action. One that allows the reader to be alone with their thoughts, being one with the text. Continuing with Mishra Tarc (2015),

> Sometimes readings bring rapture, and we are transformed by the other's sublime capacity to move. Other times, reading arrives in the form of deep existential trouble in our self and with others that we might rather forget. Operating through transference, when reading, our thoughts are never our own. (p. 79)

Transference, Mishra Trac tells us, is triggered by the individual's intense feelings, and induced by an event or person. Thus, "an experience of reading can leave us shaking from the outside in" (p. 81). Reading novels that contain personal violence such as the ones selected for this project risk the reader feeling raw from the experience. Exposed somehow. That said, by wondering with those reading the same novels the raw reality can be questioned and discussed. Although the reader can be affected by the words and events that trigger emotional responses that are beyond one's control there is possibility in wondering and thinking together (Di Paolantonio, 2019). Returning to Arendt (1978), "the wonder that is the starting point of thinking is neither puzzlement nor surprise nor perplexity; it is an *admiring* wonder." Arendt continues, one cannot, "summon up wonder by themselves; wonder is a *pathos*; something to be suffered not acted" (p. 143, emphasis original). To open one's inner thoughts to others can be difficult, but in drawing

on examples from the novel as an object between us we are afforded a chance to come together to talk about traumatic events and the struggles of the characters. This wondering together can bring forth an interpretive engagement with the fiction and indirectly our own struggles.

Fiction is made up and therefore is loosely based on lived experiences. For example, Ani in *Luckiest Girl Alive* survived the gang rape as did the author, Knoll. That is not to say that the way the gang rape was depicted in the novel was the way that it happened in real life, instead I am saying that the real-life experience provided knowledge that helps shape the story. For Knoll, the writing was a way of dealing with the ghosts in her past. By sharing her story through fiction, she was able to recognize and deal with her own reality. The act of sharing this is brave but also allows others to think with their own experience as they read about her experience.

Although there may not have been a school shooting in Knoll's true-life story, the knowledge of real-life school shootings as reported in the media can be drawn upon to provide a foundation for writing about them in fiction. Fiction allows us to view these types of violence that take place daily in the social world from a position removed from the act. Rose (2021) asserts, "we are all subjects of violence not least because we are embedded in a violent social world" (p. 33). Drawing on Arendt, Rose states,

> At the beginning of *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt writes: "What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing" (p. 5).[63] If there is one thing of which writing about violence has convinced me, it is that if we do not make time for thought, which must include the equivocations of our inner lives, we will do nothing to end violence in the world, while we will surely be doing violence to ourselves. (p. 33)

When a scene like the one above happens in fiction, we can take the time needed to think about it and try to make sense of what has happened and why it happened. "To make meaning of traumatic history," Mishra Tarc (2015) asserts "we must first mourn the unthinkable event" (p. 111). This violent scene from *Luckiest Girl Alive, is* one of many violent scenes in the novel and although not every violent scene is graphically described the reader can imagine from what is written what transpired. Sumara (1996) proposes "that imaginative spaces help the reader to understand that lived truth is slippery and contingent" (p. 85). Not everything that happens in the fiction happens in real life and not every detail of the violent transaction is recorded in fiction, part of it is made up but there is enough real to make the story worth reflecting on and discussing.

In what follows I think with the notion of mourning that is developed in Mishra Trac's work (2015). Mishra Tarc states,

> Reading as a work of mourning also supports an opening for the reader. Tapping into our sympathetic, shaken insides, the novel supports the reader's interpretive capacity to foster a new regard for the others traumatic history, which denigrates and diminishes the whole of humanity. (p. 111)

When we read of violence against the other, such as rape or school shootings we can think in the privacy of our own thoughts, we can mourn the loss of someone's innocence and be angry with the wrong doer. We can also question the actions of the victim without fear of being accused of being insensitive to their fate. These thoughts are our own and the reflexive questions we ask the text allows us to think in solitude with ourselves. Discussions of the text can take place once we have (in solitude) thought through the trauma and violence.

Below I bring two scenes in the book, to think about two different forms of violence, verbal and physical. The verbal violence in this first scene could happen to anyone. Often verbal violence is not seen as violence, because the scars are invisible, and it is hard to capture the act to research the effects. Collins (2008) states, "there are categories of violence that have spawned research specialties such as homicide, war, child abuse, police violence however, situational violence provides a different dynamic when thinking about violence" (p. 1). Situational violence is more difficult to research because it happens spontaneously and is not recorded in the moment. Thus, situational violence is recorded after the incident and from memory which allows for misrepresentation or parts of the incident to be left out. An example of situational violence from the text would be the verbal confrontation between Ani and Arthur at Arthur's home, after Arthur has been expelled for defending Ani (quoted below). As this confrontation was not witnessed by anyone other than the two people involved there was no formal written record of the incident. Recalling a conversation after the event by either of the people involved could produce flaws in accuracy. First, because the person recording the event may have been too emotionally involved to capture the details. Second, because the person recording the event may try to save face by recording the details in their own favour. The benefit of using a fictional text to think about verbal violence is the confrontation is recorded by a third party.

Ani: Is it really final?

Arthur: It's really final.

Ani: It's fucking Dean who should be expelled.

Arthur: There's a reason the cafeteria is named after his family.

Ani: Maybe he would be expelled if I had some balls.

Arthur: But you didn't.

> Ani: You're mad at me for that?
>
> Arthur: You should be mad at you! – Actually, you thought you could redeem yourself. – It's just, don't you see. Don't you get it? You were injured out of the gate. – And your just such a stupid cunt that you couldn't see it.
>
> Ani – (narrative) I would have taken Dean's hand a million times across my face over this. At least what he wanted, what he was angry he couldn't have, was the most basic primal thing in the world, which was in no way a reflection on me as a human being. The realization that Arthur saw me as something completely different than how I thought he saw me was devastating. We weren't friends, peers, united in our distain for the Hairy Legs and HO's, above it all. I was a reject that Arthur had kindly taken in. Not the other way around. I hit back the only way I knew.
>
> Ani – Yeah well, at least Dean wanted me. I had a chance. Unlike you. Fucking walking around with a three-year-old boner for him. (pp. 184 - 185)

The scene continues with harsh words and accusations, most of which were said in anger. This exact scenario may not have transpired in the readers world, but something similar probably has. Words said in anger that cannot ever be taken back, true, or not true, meant, or not meant, they are out there hanging between the two people. These words can be recalled at any time to inflict pain. While forgiveness could be asked for and granted, would it erase the pain that has already been inflicted or the memory of what has been said? Would it destroy the violence of the words? This brings me to think about the activity of thinking. How would 'a heat of the moment' conversation be different if we stopped to think what we are going to say?

The second scene that I want to think about is the graphic description of the shooting. Here physical violence is present and laid out for the reader to witness over thirteen pages of the

text. Graphic and descriptive language is used to send a visual to the reader, one that they will find difficult to read. I will recap a few of the descriptive sentences to give you a sense of the scene.

> EX 1: The sound the gun made was nothing compared to the sound of Ansilee's body hitting the floor. … The hardwood floor was covered with a large Oriental carpet, but by the sickening crack Ansilee's head made when it connected with the ground it was not nearly thick and lush as it appeared. (p. 203)
>
> EX 2: The chairs had caught Peyton, and they held his body upright, arms flung wide scarecrow like. There was nothing left of his face below the nose. A great gust of stream billowed all around him, like laughter on a freezing cold night. (p. 204)
>
> EX 3: Arthur was blocking our exit, standing in the rubble of the building and bodies, his face pebbled with water and holding his father's hunting rifle across his body like a bar a tightrope walker uses to keep his balance. Dean was slumped against an overturned cash register, his right arm, the arm that had been closest to the blast, marbled with white muscle and blood that had come from a place so deep it could have been tar. (p. 210)
>
> EX 4: [Arthur offered the gun to Ani to shoot Dean] "Don't you want to be the one to do it?" "Don't you want to just blow this cocksucker's cock off?" I made the mistake of taking the bait, of reaching out and trying to take the gun. "Nah-uh." Arthur pulled back "Changed my mind."

> Then he pivoted, surprisingly graceful, and shot Dean between the legs. Dean made an inhuman noise as blood and water shot straight up in front of his face like a fountain at Epcot Center. (p. 211)

The scene continues with Ani recounting having stabbed Arthur three times before he falls to the floor. We don't have to be in the room, we don't have to experience this for ourselves, the violence of the incident recounted for us in text is enough to open a discussion of violence with others that have read the same fictional novel.

Forgiveness in *Hate List* by Jennifer Brown

> *What if I didn't want to move on yet?*
> *Why couldn't she see that accepting the schools "thanks," in that light, was painful to me? Like gratitude would be the only possible emotion I could feel now. Gratitude that I lived. Gratitude that I'd been forgiven.* (Brown, p. 10)

By the time I encountered *Hate List* by Jennifer Brown, I had read several YA novels and non-fiction accounts of school shootings.[64] For me, *Hate List* approached the theme of school shootings in YA novels from a different angle. The novel reflects on the "no longer" and the "not yet" when it recounts the shooting at Gavin High School. While the novel contains the elements that other YA school shooting novels contain such as the story behind the shooting, the events leading up to the shooting and narratives about the people caught in the line of fire, *Hate List* is different. Valerie Leftman the main character must come to terms with the part she played in the shooting and the reality that the person that she loved shot their classmates ("the no longer"). Although she did not fire the gun or know that Nick was going to shoot their classmates, she did help Nick create the "hate list." The "hate list" is a list of people that had made both her and Nick's lives miserable. Valerie is "guilty" of consequences she never intended or even imagined.[65] Unlike Josie and Ani, Valerie did not want to be part of the popular group, she hated

them. At first Valerie is not a likable character, we must grow with her, get to know her and then we must make room for her.

Forgiveness Or Redemption

The central plot of this novel is redemption for the main character Valerie, the school, the community and to a lesser extent for the shooter. By focusing on what happens after the shooting we (the reader) see one possibility for reconciliation and moving forward after a school shooting ("the not yet").

The Oxford dictionary defines forgiveness as "the action or process of forgiving or being forgiven." A tautological definition of a concept that really does not provide any clarity as to what forgiveness is, how it operates, who controls it, or if it is real. How can we explain forgiveness, so someone knows how to forgive? How do we know if someone has forgiven? What does forgiveness look like? Feel like? If forgiveness is the exchange of words, spoken between two people, how do we know that they are genuine? In what ways does the wrongdoer accept forgiveness? How do they know they have truly been forgiven?

Early in my research I read the nonfiction *Forgiven* by Terri Roberts the mother of the Amish School Shooter. I could not help but think as I read the book, is it possible to forgive a school shooter? Although Roberts claimed that the Amish community forgave her son for the school shooting that took the lives of thirteen girls, I wondered whether this community exemplifies an isolated and rare exception of forgiveness for the school shooter? Or was the Forgiveness Roberts described different, based on the religious beliefs of the Amish people and not easily accessible by those outside the Amish community.

In addition to Terri Roberts book, I also read real-life stories of Sue Klebold,[66] Brooks Brown,[67] and Rachel Scott[68](Columbine), and King[69] (E. O. Green Junior High), these books all

addressed forgiveness and the possibility to think differently about forgiveness. Metaphorically, to pull back the layers and think about forgiveness in a different way. For me this has been a journey, one layer at a time. A journey where I question my beliefs, values and understanding of what forgiveness is, what it can be, and if it is "a real" possibility. What I struggled with is how can we think of forgiveness in a way that does not absolve the shooter from the responsibility of what they have done but instead reconciles what happened so a space can be found to move forward.

Returning to this project, it is important for me to think with my objects of analysis, the stories that I am examining are not real-life school shootings rather fictional representations of school shooting in young adult novels. In the telling of fiction one can model the story to the outcome that is wished for the characters, although none of the novels that I read had a fairy tale ending that had everyone live happily ever after, they did have an ending that left the reader hopeful. Thus – how is forgiveness represented in the novels I read for this project? Was there forgiveness only when religion presented itself in the narrative? How was forgiveness arrived at, or granted, or was it explicitly granted?

For some, this notion of forgiveness is embedded in religious tradition, this is the case for Rachel Scott and Terri Roberts, whose stories are based on forgiveness that is tied to religion and the teachings of the Bible. For others forgiveness is not possible if the act is considered evil or generates personal harm to another individual. Arendt (1960) wrote in a letter to Auden that some things are not forgivable, that it would be better to have not been born than to commit an act against another that did personal harm (page 1).[70] She claims that we should not forgive without being asked to forgive that to do so is to violate the integrity of the wrongdoer. If we forgive without being asked to forgive, we are "impertinent or at least conceited – as though one

said: Much as you tried, you could not wrong me; charity has made me invulnerable" (1960, Letter from Arendt to Auden, p. 1). Although I take Arendt's point, there are conditions in which the wrongdoer cannot ask for forgiveness, for example if the wrongdoer (in this case the shooter) or the person who is injured die during the incident there is no one to ask and no one to forgive. Also, in these incidences there are survivors, people who are injured but not killed or people who witness the incident but are not physically harmed or family members who were not present but still effected. Where does this leave these survivors (with no one to ask them for forgiveness and no one to forgive)? How does the survivor move on from the incident?

Returning to Arendt we can wonder with her about reconciliation in opposition to revenge or forgiveness. Roger Berkowitz (2011) tells us that Arendt "argues forgiveness is not humanly possible. Forgiveness elevates the forgiver above the forgiven and destroys the equality between them so completely that "after such an act no further relationship ought to be possible" (Denktagebuch, 3). According to Arendt, only God, "can ease [the] burden [of the wrong doer]" (p. 3). Forgiveness therefore implies that the wrongdoer is released of the burden of responsibility for their wrongdoing. Although it would be ideal for forgiveness to magically release the wrong doer from the burden they bear, it may not be possible. The wrongdoer must live with what they have done and therefore may never be freed from thinking about what they have done.

Alternatively, the forgiver could reconcile themselves to the notion that they too could have done what the wrongdoer did. When the act of revenge takes the shape of the wrong that was done, the forgiver will need forgiveness creating a vicious violent circle that cannot be escaped. Continuing to think with Arendt, we take the step towards reconciliation. Berkowitz (2011) tells us for Arendt reconciliation,

> leaves the wrongdoer with the burden on his shoulders (unlike forgiveness that promises to release the wrongdoer) but also demands that the reconciling party takes that burden on himself. To reconcile with a wrongdoer is to accept that one is also part of a world in which wrongs are fated to happen. Arendt's embrace of reconciliation with the wrongs of the world is not absolute. Not every wrong and not every wrongdoer can be reconciled. And some wrongs, while not irreconcilable, are bad enough that they don't merit reconciliation. (pp. 7 - 8)

This notion of reconciliation leaves us with the same dilemma that forgiveness offers, there are actions that are "unforgivable" and therefore, there are some things that are irreconcilable, to address the "unforgivable" Arendt proposes, "we have the choice of either reconciliation – affirming one's acceptance of the existence of the world that includes such a wrong – or at least passing by – silently allowing the wrong to exist" (Berkowitz, 2011, p. 8).

So, if not all things are reconcilable, how do we move forward? Arendt proposes that we can move forward from the irreconcilable through understanding,

> we come to terms with and reconcile ourselves to reality, that is, try to be at home in the world … the reconciling man resolves himself (sich entschliesst) to be responsible – with (mit–verantwortlich zu sein), but in no circumstances guilty – with (mit-schldig) the wrongdoer and his wrong. (Denktagebuch, 7) What reconciliation allows therefore, is the development of a common world that is not based on original sin. (Berkowitz, 2011, p. 9)

For Arendt this common world is based on political judgement and not Christian beliefs because "Christian punishment reverts back to revenge, the forced humiliation of the criminal as penance for his prideful assertion of the right to do a wrong" (Berkowitz, 2011, p. 9). This is where

judging comes in for Arendt, as “against both forgiveness and revenge, reconciliation is the most political of man’s facilities, because it demands judgement” (Berkowitz, 2011, p. 9). This judgement must be made based on the criteria established by man. Thus, judgement based on the criteria (the law) “established by man” must be free from cries for revenge or forgiveness.

A close reading of *Hate List* by Jennifer Brown enables me to see how notions of reconciliation can be imagined. Through fiction we can allow our mind to accept what is happening without question, without intervention from outside influences that stand in the way of our considering the possibilities. Of the three novels selected for this work *Hate List* focuses on the notion of reconciliation most closely, while also highlighting representations of unacknowledged shame and violence. Although at times forgiveness is used to describe what is transpiring, I would argue that it is not forgiveness but a portrayal of reconciliation. Thinking with Arendt, to forgive is to release the wrong doer and free them from the wrong they have done. Whereas reconciliation does not release the wrong doer but instead allows the one who chooses to reconcile to come to terms with the wrongdoing and move forward.

The shooter Nick does not survive the shooting, he cannot ask anyone for forgiveness, he cannot be freed from what he has done. Those killed during the shooting cannot grant forgiveness and technically there is no one to forgive. Instead, what we do have is Valerie, Nick’s girlfriend, and the co-creator of the “hate list.” A list that was initially created to vent about the people that had treated Nick and Valerie badly, bullying them, embarrassing them, beating up on them and generally making their lives miserable. Nick hits his breaking point and decides to escalate the purpose of the list. He does not share this decision with Valerie. Instead, he brings a gun to school and opens fire on the people on the list. Valerie is taken by surprise and tries to stop Nick in the process she is shot in the leg. A wound that will forever remind her of

her involvement. Although Valerie was not directly involved in the shooting, many people in the school and community blame her for what has happened. Valerie's journey through the reconciliation process is layered and tough. First, she must recognize her own involvement in the incident. Valerie acknowledges her involvement in the incident and is ashamed that she did not see the signs that Nick was planning to use the "hate list" to target students in the shooting. Things that maybe she should have noticed about Nick had been clouded by her love for him. Valerie realizes that Nick is responsible for what happened, and nothing can change that, murder under any circumstance is not acceptable. With the help of a therapist, she takes steps to reconcile her involvement in the incident. Once Valerie has accepted that she unknowingly played a part in the shooting she moved towards community reconciliation. Valerie's first step is to see things as they really are, what is in front of her instead of what she imagines others are thinking. She does this through reflexive drawing, she draws pictures of what she is seeing, really seeing and then reflects on what she has drawn. This technique allows her to think through what she is doing, has done, might do. To imagine/project herself into the scenario and to reflect on different perspectives of the situation that she is witnessing before acting on what is happening around her. For Arendt this would invoke the metaphor "going visiting" which is linked to imagination and the ability to put things at there proper distance while bridging the abysses with the other (Biesta, 2016, p. 186). This notion is distinct from empathy which is being able to understand and share the feelings of the another. It is instead, Biesta (2016) states "to think one's own thoughts but in a story very different from one's own, thereby permitting yourself the disorientation that is necessary to understanding just how the world looks different to someone else" (p. 186).

Next, Valerie visits the reporter who continuously sensationalizes the shooting. Although it has been months since the shooting everything related to the shooting is published in a way that brings up memories, memories that are harmful and do not allow those who need to move on, to do so. The most recent headline read: “SHOOTING VICTIM ATTEMPTS SUICIDE: PRINCIPAL REAFFIRMS HEALING EFFORTS OF GARVIN HIGH STILL FIRM.” Valerie approaches the reporter at her office,

> Angela Dash: What do you want?
>
> Valerie: I want you to stop writing this stuff [as she throws the latest newspaper on the desk]. Please. The stuff you write is not true. It’s not like what you’re saying in your articles. You’re making everyone think we have moved on and it’s one big love fest in that school, but it’s not. You made Ginny Baker look like some suicidal freak who can’t get over what happened when everyone else has. And it’s a lie. You didn’t even speak to Ginny.
>
> Angela Dash: (leaned forward on her elbows) Spinning lies, huh? And where are you getting your information?
>
> Valerie: From living it. I am in school every day. I’m there to see what people are still doing to each other. I’m there to see Ginny Baker is not the only girl still suffering. You’ve not been there. Not one day. Stop writing about us. About Garvin. Leave us alone. (pp. 377 – 378)

Although Valerie is not sure that this visit to Angela Dash would make a difference, it was a step in the direction of reconciliation for herself and hopefully for others.

Next, Valerie takes responsibility for her part in the creation of the “hate list.” She takes it upon herself to visit each of the families that have been directly affected by the shooting and

apologizes. She was not looking for forgiveness but instead has found herself working towards reconciliation, a place to start anew.

Finally, Valerie helps the student council with a memorial to the victims of the shooting. Brown describes the scene at graduation as one where the community came together to memorialize those who were victims of the shooting. At graduation the student council president said,

> I don't know if it's possible to take away hate from people like us, who've seen firsthand what hate can do. We're all hurting. We're all going to be hurting for a long time. And we, probably more than anyone else out there, will be searching for a new reality every day. A better one. We do know that it's possible to change reality. It's hard, and most people won't bother to try, but it's possible. You can change a reality of hate by opening up to a friend. By saving an enemy. But in order to change reality you have to be willing to listen and to learn. And to hear. To actually hear. (pp. 399 - 400)

Valerie followed with:

> Many of the people who died, did so because the shooter…my boyfriend, Nick Levil, [Nick] and I thought they were bad people. We only saw what we wanted to see and we. Um. We didn't, [that is] Nick and I didn't know the reality of who these people were. (p. 400)

This was followed by an acknowledgement of each of the victims as a personal item was placed in a time-capsule that was to be buried below a bench containing all the names of the victims of the shooting. If we continue to think with Arendt through the above scenario we can move to reflect on the predicament of action. Arendt in the *Human Condition* states that an action sets in

motion "an irreversibility and unpredictability of the process started by acting" which results in everything that follows to a certain extent, a product of that action (p. 236). This domino effect lays an enormous burden on those creating the first action. The creation of the "hate list" by Valerie and Nick is the action that sets an irreversible series of events in motion in the novel. Without it maybe the shooting would not have happened. The event not only effected the school and its students, but the entire community and the creator of the list is "guilty" of consequences she never intended or even imagined. Valerie and Nick are the creators of that list and therefore become ever bound to its consequences. Nick is dead, but Valerie is alive and is "guilty" although she never intended for the shooting to happen. I return to Arendt (1998) who states, The possible redemption for the predicament of irreversibility – of being unable to undo what one has done though one did not, and could not, have known what he was doing – is the faculty of forgiveness. (p. 237). Thus, forgiving Valerie for the creation of the "hate list" an act that was the catalyst of the school shooting, but it had not been created with that intention is for Arendt a possibility. In this instance, I understand what Arendt is referring to, when she states, there are some unintended consequences that are tied to an original act. Valerie did create the "hate list", but she did not shoot anyone. This original act of creating the list is forgivable and can be dismissed as hurtful and unkind, releasing Valeria to start anew.

Concluding thoughts about the characters Josie, Ani and Valerie

The shooters in each of the novels, Peter in *Nineteen Minutes*, Ben and Arthur in *Luckiest Girl Alive*, and Nick in *Hate List* were secondary in the story to their counter parts, Josie, Ani, and Valerie. Whereas male representations of school shooters dominated scenarios of the actual school shooting scenes within each novel the female characters are portrayed as central to how the story unfolds. The not so good female illustrates that violence is non-gendered. Each of the

female characters are depicted by the author as involved in the school shooting and living with the outcome of what transpired before, during and after the shooting. At times within the story these female characters are not likeable, they all displayed characteristics that presented as shallow, self-involved, and narcissistic. Josie was so worried about not being popular that she stayed in an abusive relationship and allowed Peter to take full responsibility for the shooting. Ani was more interested in being an important someone that she was willing to do almost anything while in school and afterwards. Valerie created the “hate list” which was the catalyst for the shooting If not for the reconciliation component of these stories, these characters would remain forever fated to be unredeemable. The reconciliation comes for Josie when she admits that she shot her abuser. Ani’s story comes full circle when she confronts her attacker and connects the (gang) rape she experienced to the shooting. Finally, Valerie takes steps towards redemption and reconciliation by apologizing, and memorializing. By reconciliation I am referring to accepting what cannot be changed and moving forward as opposed to forgiving which for me means to absolve the wrong doer of the responsibility of what they have done and the affects that it has had on others. With reconciliation one takes responsibility for what they have done and recognizes that they have a role in restoring the relationship with the other. Arendt (1994) ironically states,

> forgiveness [is] (certainly one of the greatest human capacities and perhaps the boldest of human action insofar as it tries the seemingly impossible, to undo what has been done, and succeeds in making a new beginning where everything seemed to have come to an end) is a single action and culminates in a single act. (p. 308)

Arendt’s ironic tone and the bracketed words make me pause to think about forgiveness and its impossibility. The single action of saying the words “I forgive you” cannot change what has been

done, they cannot erase the pain, the hurt or the death of a loved one. These words cannot make everything anew. I return to the letter that Arendt wrote to Auden in 1960 when she stated, "that some things are not forgivable, that it would be better to have not been born than to commit an act against another that did personal harm". I agree some things are unforgivable, but these things still happen, and we must reconcile ourselves to the world we live to allow the space to move forward. Arendt (1994) puts it this way, "to understand [the unforgivable] is not to condone anything, but to reconcile ourselves to a world in which such things [like mass murder] are possible" (p. 308). One needs to reconcile themselves with what cannot be changed and move forward. By this I do not mean forgive or forget but instead understand that we are part of a messy world, and we need to find ways to move forward after a tragedy, such as a school shooting.

Limitations and Considerations

While the three novels selected for this study provide a representation of a rampage school shooting there are limitations to this project that can provide further opportunities for research. I selected three novels that resonated with me, this selection of the novels could be extended to look at other YA novels that have a school shooting as their theme. My reason for selecting three novels was twofold. First, I wanted the three novels selected to represent a rampage school shooting, like the real-life shooting at Columbine High School which was the stepping off point for my academic research. Secord, I wanted to be able to manage the amount of data that I would be working with and the number of concepts that I would focus on during my analysis. That said, other data (YA novels) and other concepts could be selected and explored. Also, I limited this work to my own research and reflections on the novels, theory, and

concepts. Moving forward it could be beneficial to conduct participant studies as an extension of this work.

During my research for this dissertation, I noted that there is a gap in the academic research around race in relation to school shootings. What is missing in the relevant literature is an interrogation of whiteness. As most shooters are white males, the literature only mentions race in reference to white male violence but does not go further. What is central to the discussion and construction of the school shooter is whiteness as more than 66% of school shooters are young white males. At this time, for me to have gone further would be outside the scope of the project, of which the focus was unacknowledged shame, violence, and forgiveness. So, this project does not take up the broader literature's omission of an interrogation whiteness; however, I would be interested in exploring it in the future.

Finally, although my work does not focus on the possible triggers that this type of literature can invoke, I understand importance of thinking about how literature of this nature may affect the victim of violence and more specifically gun violence. This would be a topic that is of interest in my future research around literary pedagogy.

Chapter Five
The Journey, The Learning and My Concluding Thoughts

> *In nineteen minutes, you can mow the front lawn, colour your hair, watch a third of a hockey game. In nineteen minutes, you can bake scones or get a tooth filled by a dentist…in nineteen minutes you can read a story to a child…you can walk a mile. In nineteen minutes, you can stop the world, or you can jump off it. In nineteen minutes, you can get revenge.* (Picoult, 2007, p. 5)

These opening lines of Jodi Picoult's novel *Nineteen Minutes* resonate with me because my lived experience has allowed me to witness these and many other nineteen-minute segments in my lifetime. In nineteen minutes historic, catastrophic, and traumatic events can and have happened. The Valdivia Earthquake in Chile in 1960 lasted less than nineteen minutes. J. F. Kennedy was assassinated in less than nineteen minutes. The Twin Towers in New York City came crashing to the ground in less than nineteen minutes. The course of the world can change with a conversation, an interaction, or an encounter. An individual's decisions, choices, and/or destiny can be altered in less than nineteen minutes. Although Picoult's novel *Nineteen Minutes* is a work of fiction the point that Picoult makes in these opening lines transcends fiction and invades reality. Point in case, the fictional shooting in Picoult the novel and the real life shooting at Columbine High School transpired in less than nineteen minutes. Thus, I contend fiction mimics, reflects, represents, and draws on real life for its ideas. Arendt tells us in the *Human Condition* that "everything appears in public" and storytelling "deprivatizes, and deindividualizes" events making them fit for "public appearance." For Arendt storytelling is a way of ensuring that stories are shared so others can see what we see, hear what we hear (p. 50).

Throughout this dissertation I have demonstrated how we can broaden the use of literary pedagogy to think alongside theory and concepts to extract meaning and at the same time consider traumatic social situations[71] facing us in our everyday lives. I chose the theories of Hannah Arendt as the foundation for my dissertation and interwoven social theory to

complement my thinking with concepts of unacknowledged shame, violence, and forgiveness because for me these ideas speak to our reality and provoked me to think in a different way about the novels. Changing my entry point into the novels from casual reader to an analyst focused on theory and concepts challenged me to deep dive into the text and root out representations of unacknowledged shame, violence, and forgiveness that I may have missed in my initial reading. This new approach to the novel was unsettling at first but as Hazel Rochman in Glasgow (2001) tells us a "good book unsettles us, makes us ask questions about what we thought was certain; they don't just reaffirm everything we know" (p. 55). Thus, I push beyond the idea of the "good book making us ask questions" to suggest that we enter the book with a direction in mind that is framed by thinking alongside theory and concepts while reading. We can develop and ask questions of the reader before they engage with the text that are formulated to assist the reader in flushing out examples of the predetermined theories and the concepts. These findings can then be discussed to create meaning. For example, by using Arendtian theories and concepts of unacknowledged shame, violence and forgiveness, questions such as 1. Using the concepts explored in this course provide examples of how unacknowledged shame is represented in *Hate List*? 2. Thinking with various theories of violence, explain how is violence portrayed in *Nineteen Minutes*? 3. Using Arendtian theories of forgiveness give examples of how does the story demonstrate the possibility of forgiveness and/or reconciliation?

To challenge myself and test this idea of using fictional literature in a real-life scenario, I suggested to Professor Deborah Davidson in the Sociology Department at York University that we incorporate young adult fiction into a first year Sociology course. Fictional readings supported the text and the themes of the course, which were race,[72] gender,[73] and sexual violence[74] through a social inequality lens. We did not use any of the young adult fiction that I

used for this project, but instead chose young adult fiction that directly addressed the themes and concepts of the introductory Sociology course. For me this was empirical research without specific participants, questionnaires, or interviews, the results were for my observation and allowed me to experience how using novels that spoke to difficult social issues would be received, read, and cited as part of course work. I will not share my observations in detail, because the observations were informal and outside of the scope of this project. However, using novels in conversation with course concepts provided a space for the students to think about racism, racial profiling, gender difference, sexual identity, rape, and silencing. Professor Davidson pushed the use of young adult fictional literature to the next level by challenging the students to frame their written work with examples from the novels and to think critically about what they had read. This informal research allowed me to observe the results of using fictional literature to explore sociological concepts, and although there is room to adjust the approach to this pedagogical method, it produced results that reinforced my hypothesis that young adult fiction can be used to create space for open discussion of difficult social issues.

School violence is a social issue and an enigma, not only for me but for academic scholars of various disciplines. Gun violence challenges the illusion that schools are safe and leaves in its wake disillusionment, fear, and trauma. The shooters, victims, bystanders, silent observers, parents, friends, teachers, school administration, and school community are forever changed by the experience of a school shooting. Although school shootings have been highlighted in the research of various disciplines of academia such as education, sociology, psychology, philosophy, and criminology there is no consensus on the cause or prevention of these incidences, school shootings remain an enigma.[75]

My project is not conceived with the notions that I can solve this enigma or propose a prevention plan for future school shooting incidences. Instead, the intent of my project is to explore the beautiful messiness of wondering with theory and the concepts while reading young adult fiction that features traumatic school shooting incidences and to bring young adult fiction into a space for further thinking, reflection, and dialogue through a fictional inquiry of emotions and the combined role of social and emotional responses that are difficult to comprehend for many of us. Each form of storytelling, whether real or fictional has elements of realism and lived experience woven into its core. Storytelling allows us to bring into the space of appearance stories to share and experience together. By bringing stories into the public space (space of appearance) they can be heard, shared widely and openly discussed by everyone.[76]

Conversations about fictional stories can open a pedagogical space for wondering with others and sorting through the messiness of real-life experiences. While the connection to the story may be private, and private reading may seem like something that is done alone, Sumara posits that private reading can be transported to the space of appearance where open discussions with others can take place.[77] Sharing openly and wondering together leaves space to ‘privilege our curiosity and attend to the world without risk or a predetermined outcome.[78] Creating meaning within our lived reality and social world helps us navigate anew while drawing on the old.

During the research and writing period of my dissertation, I looked for ways to explore how shared reading could facilitate discussion, understanding and engagement. I drew on the work of, Dennis Sumara,[79] Stephan Mulhall,[80] and Aparna Mishra Tarc,[81] as well as others[82] to guide my way. Each of these scholars brings to my understanding something unique. The inclusion of the work of Mulhall brought to the forefront realism in fiction, allowing me to think

more clearly about how fiction mimics the real and authors draw on their lived experience to share their story or the stories of others. Mishra Tarc and Sumara reinforced my belief that literary pedagogy can open space for discussion of emotions and the combined role of social and emotional responses that are difficult to comprehend and openly discuss. Young Adult fiction as a literary pedagogical tool can provide an easy entrance. Jacqueline N. Glasgow (2001) supports this notion and proports young adult literature can provide context for young people to critically think about their "understanding of the world and social relations" (p. 55).

That said, rather than assuming that certain concepts would be present in both the academic and fictional literature I read academic articles and young adult fiction[83] that focused on school shootings as well as non-fiction that told the stories of school shootings and represented extensive research of specific school shootings.[84] From this reading I harvested theories and concepts that much like an onion were buried deep below the surface. As each concept rose to the surface, I acknowledged its existence and peeled back the layers to expose the hidden core. Concepts such as masculinity, shame, deviance, evil, violence race, gender and forgiveness surfaced allowing me to assess and explore their viability for this project. In some cases, I incorporated them into the conversation and in other cases I addressed them and moved on. Overall, I arrived at three concepts that I felt strongly should be the basis for my analysis in this work, unacknowledged shame, violence, and forgiveness. However, pulling the onion from the ground is not the end of the journey, you must pull back the layers. Thus, I moved through the practice of defining the concepts to give meaning for this work. As I did this exercise, I realized thinking is based on language and images making it messy. As language plays a major role in how we define things so that others can extract meaning, our language needs to create common meaning. Each concept proved to have many layers making it nuanced and complex, in

some instances metaphors were employed to help define emotional pain, shame, violence, and forgiveness. This meant for me that distinct uses of the concepts was needed, and examples of meaning needed to be cited. Overall, I discovered along with the metaphors there was as Arendt (1994) states a need for imagination.

> Imagination alone enables us to see things in their proper perspective, to be strong enough to put that which is too close as a certain distance so that we can see and understand it without bias and prejudice, to be generous enough to bridge the abysses of remoteness until we can see and understand everything that is too far away from us as though it were our own affair. This distancing of some things and bridging of abysses to others is part of the dialogue of understanding. (p. 323)

Thus, this beautiful messiness of language, metaphor and imagination led me to reach beyond my original expectations for this project and develop a hybrid approach to literary pedagogy. In addition, language, metaphor, and imagination has pushed me to take a risk when thinking with Arendt and mobilizing her work to think with the concepts of unacknowledged shame, violence, and forgiveness.

Although Arendt did not write specifically about school shootings, her work provokes my thinking throughout this work in many ways. While reading "The Crisis in Education" I was pushed to think anew about education and the possibility of what education can bring to the next generation. How "the no longer" (past), its atrocities and blessings are part of our understanding of what is to come and needs to be in conversation with "the not yet" (future). Without some understanding of "the no longer" the future can repeat similar mistakes and not capitalize on the progress that has been made in many areas, such as race, gender, sexuality, class, and mental health. Although we may not have these things completely sorted out education can open a space

to think and to build anew. Thus, with every new human being and new action there is the possibility to imagine something new. Arendt posits the world existed before us and will continue after us,[85] however, while we are here, we can choose to make a difference by employing an educational pedagogy that allows us to reflect on "the no longer" to create anew the world.

While thinking about shame and unacknowledged shame, I transcended the shame of the school shooter, to think about the shame of those who participated in acts of violence against others, the bystanders that watched silently in fear and the victims who felt they had no choice but to comply. Although the shame of the shooter is salient in this discussion, those left behind after a school shooting incident (victims, bystanders, teachers, parents) are more likely to benefit from the discussion of how shame or unacknowledged shame affects those involved and the need for reconciliation of their ashamed self. Shame is an individual experience, and yet requires the presence of "the other" one cannot be shamed unless there is a possibility of being seen. What shames one person may not shame another person, each of us is unique. What we believe "the other" thinks of us comes from our lived experiences, beliefs and our self-imagined ideal of ourselves. Although, there are situations where the ashamed person may blush or avert their eyes, shame is mostly invisible to others as these outward signs are fleeting and may not be noticeable or recognizable to "the other". When we see ourselves through the eyes of "the other" and feel that we do not live up to their ideal of us, we experience shame. Thus, when we enter the world of appearance, we conduct ourselves in accordance with what "the other" expects of us, and how we live up to their expectations determines if we are successful in our own eyes. I take from my theoretical readings and research of shame that much of the work done by Lynd, Lewis, Scheff and Retzinger on shame is rooted in the thinking of sociologists, George Herbert

Mead, Erving Goffman, and George Horton Cooley. According to these scholars, impression management is important to us as individuals, how we imagine and interrupt what "the other" thinks of us, plays a role in how we experience shame. Shame is complex and characteristically painful. Although not openly revealed or discussed by the ashamed individual it is ever present in our daily social interactions and manifested in how we present ourselves to others.

Through a close reading of Arendt's various essays and books I discovered the concept of shame is salient in her work. Arendt references, shame of who we are, shame of capacity to do evil things and shame that silences us. These forms of shame are woven into her telling and the analysis of Rahel Varnhagen's story, and how being born Jewish was humiliating because of the history that surrounded the Jewish people.[86] This shame needed to be recognized and accepted by Varnhagen to exist in the world of appearance. For Arendt, shame can also be silencing when one realizes that they are capable of evil. This notion of "capacity to do evil" and silencing shame is explored in her book *Origins of Totalitarianism (1976)* and her paper "Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility" (1994). Arendt reflects on the German people who watched from the sidelines doing nothing as neighbours and friends were shipped to the extermination camps, and the Jewish people who did not resist the Nazi regime and assisted the organization of the transportation of Jewish people to concentration camps.[87]

Taking these theories and the concept of shame with me as I enter the space of reading, I see evidence of shame in all three of the novels used in this work. I previously shared examples of shame that Josie in *Nineteen Minutes* experienced and how that shame silenced her, for months after the shooting she told everyone that she did not remember what happened that day, and she never shared the shame or humiliation of how she thought others saw her. Ani and Valerie also experienced shame. Ani was ashamed of who she was, who she had become and

spent most of her story trying to be someone that she was not, even to the point of changing her name, while Valerie was ashamed of the role, she played in creating the "hate list." Shame can be silencing.

The concept of violence is a thread that is woven through Arendt's work. *On Violence (1970)*, *The Origins of Totalitarianism (1976)* and *Between the Past and the Future* (2006b), to name a few helped me develop my thinking and wondering about violence. The ideas that Arendt shared in these publications pushed me to think about violence as something that ends power, rather than as power. Understanding that Arendt is referring to political power is important, yet I think that power's relationship to violence is important to consider, when we think about the school shooter who wants power and tries to gain it by using violence. I argue that we can coopt Arendt's position on power and violence to think about the school shooter. The school shooter wants power over those who they feel have done them wrong but is that power in the Arendtian sense. No! Power Arendt asserts has the support of others whereas violence destroys that support. I can belabour this point; however, it has already been discussed in the earlier chapters.

Pushing on with Arendt's notion of violence ever present in my thinking. I review the work of Randall Collins, Jacqueline Rose (who mentions Arendt frequently in her work on violence), Brad Evans and Sean M. Wilson to confirm that violence is nuanced and complex. The one thing that is clear and evident is that there are many ways to think about violence and as Rose (2021) so aptly put it "violence is not a subject about which one can believe, other than in a state of delusion, that everything has been said and done" (p. 359). Each of these academics had a perspective on violence that was worth considering and thinking about while I engaged with the novels. As all the above academics point out violence has become normalized in Western society, and it fills our world with events of oppression, alienation, and harassment. Violence is

opportunistic and can strike whenever and wherever it likes. By reading about violence in young adult fiction, Franzak and Noll (2006) posit, “we can enrich and deepen” (p. 863) the readers understanding of the nuances of violence.

The obvious violence of a school shooting is forefront in each of the novels that I reference in this work. The descriptive passages in each of the novels leaves no doubt that violence is at the heart of these stories. However, what is less obvious is the violence that occurred behind the shooting. These events are not as graphically described and are the violence’s that children face daily in schools in North America, on television, while gaming and on social media. These representations of violence are what need to be brought into the space of discussion. These messy, ugly, and unwanted acts of violence that individuals face in classrooms at all levels of education. Literary pedagogy can open the space for the wonderful messiness of wondering together about how violence is embedded in our lives.

My upbringing would lead me to believe that forgiveness is possible. That if we admit what we have done was wrong and ask for forgiveness that we will be forgiven. My understanding of the judicial system is that for one to receive a lesser sentence, or parole they must admit the wrong they have done and ask for forgiveness.

Philosophically, we can question forgiveness, because the nature of philosophy is to question, to cast doubt, to think alternatively. I challenge the notion of forgiveness, not just philosophically but in general terms. We can think about what forgiveness means, but can we unequivocally say forgiveness is possible. It would be ideal if the wrong doer could ask for forgiveness and have it granted, however, I am not convinced that forgiveness is possible in many situations. Arendt (1998) tells us “Men are unable to forgive what they cannot punish and that they are unable to punish what has turned out to be unforgivable” (p. 241). For me, this was

an awakening, an epiphany. A moment when I stopped to think, really think, is forgiveness possible. This project is and was never to suggest that "the school shooter" could or should be forgiven or for that matter, that everything can be forgiven. There are certain wrong doings, crimes, and atrocities that cannot and should not be forgiven. For example, we cannot consider the deaths of more than six million Jewish people during the Holocaust forgivable, we cannot consider the deaths of more than eighteen hundred aboriginal children in residential schools forgivable, any more than we can consider the death of a grandfather and his grandchild by a drunk driver forgivable.

For me, this project allowed me to think about forgiveness and explore ideas of forgiveness in relation to school shootings, it let me entertain other possibilities when it came to forgiveness. I wanted through this project to make people think about the impossibility of forgiveness in certain situations and at the same time consider how does one move on after a tragic event. When I was eight years old my brother died in a boating accident with three of his friends. There were stories that circulated after. The stories included: one of the boys was drunk and had capsized the boat, that the driver of the boat had been reckless, and that the motor on the boat had been faulty. Everyone was angry and looking for someone or something to blame. What was needed was reconciliation. Time to think and time to give meaning to what had happened. That is what I am suggesting, is that we consider how reconciliation could work in the event of a school shooting, how reconciliation can give victims of the school shooting hope and space to move forward.

In the three novels used in this project there are different forms of reconciliation. In *Nineteen Minutes*, Peter the shooter takes his own life to reconcile with himself and his shame for what he has done to himself, his family, and his community. While Josie comes forward to

take responsibility for the shooting of her boyfriend, to reconcile the shame she is feeling for what she has done. In *Luckiest Girl Alive*, Ani confronts her attacker and gets him to admit what he did so she can reconcile and move forward and build anew. Finally, in *Hate List*, Valerie takes part in organizing, remembering, and initiating a healing process for the community.

When I started this project, I thought when I am done, I will have the answers to my questions. What I did not realize was that along the way I would have new questions, ideas and understanding that would change what I thought I knew. Just recently, I attended a webinar, where Jacquelin Rose was the speaker. Two things that resonated with me from her talk: “I know that I do not know, means you know” and “The unthinkable has to be thought about.”

Two resonating thoughts! The first “I know that I do not know, means you know.” Many times, during this project I thought I know that I do not know, and I need to find out. So, in a way I did know. I knew that I really did not know and that I needed to read more, research more and ask myself more questions. This was a learning journey, a journey to understanding myself and why I was so interested in violence in schools. As a parent, as an individual, as a student, as a teaching assistant, I knew that violence in the school setting was an enigma for me. What I did not realize when I started this project was this enigma of school violence dated back to my childhood. I have always thought of school fondly, I liked the idea of learning, of exploring, of challenging myself but there was something about schooling that bothered me. I realize now it is the idea of school being a safe space and at the same time not being a safe space. That violence is not always visible but is sometimes hidden in a comment, a covert action, or the way one is treated in the classroom. I reflect on some of my classroom experiences as I write this and think how unintended shaming can hurt just as much as a slap in the face.

The second resonating thought: is directly related to my work "the unthinkable has to be thought about." That is what this project is all about, the unthinkable, indescribable, and unknowable. The very essence of this project is to think about what is unthinkable. We cannot invade the mind of "the other," there is no path to discover unacknowledged shame, or to determine what is violent to an individual, or what forgiveness looks like. Emotions are elusive and invisible to us and others, to bring them into conversation we need a pedagogical tool. Throughout this work I have posited that literary pedagogy is the access point. Through literature, specifically young adult fiction we can wonder and think about the unthinkable, and indescribable, utilizing theory and concepts we can bring the unknowable to the comfort of our private reading space or into a safe space that is open to wondering with others. I leave you with this final thought which reaffirms what I have been stating in this work.

> *A good book can break down barriers…make a difference in dispelling prejudice and building communities, not with role models and literal recipes, not with noble messages about human family, but with enthralling stories that make us imagine the lives of others. (Hazel Rochman cited in Glasgow, 2001, p. 54)*

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APPENDIX A: SCHOOL SHOOTING NOVELS – REFERENCED, REVIEWED, READ

AUTHOR	YEAR	TITLE	GENRE
Bockler, N., Seeger, T., Sitzer, P., Heitmeyer, W.	2013	School Shooting: International Research, Case Studies, and Concepts for Prevention	Non-Fiction
Brown, B & Merritt, R	2002	No Easy Answers	Non -Fiction
Brown, J.	2009	Hate List	Fiction
Brown, J.	2014	Say Something: A Hate List Novella	Fiction
Campbell, T.	2018	Comics and Columbine: An Outcast Looks at Comics and School Shootings	Memoir
Clark, M	2014	The Competition	Fiction
Corbett, K.	2016	A Murder Over a Girl: Justice, Gender, Junior High	Non-Fiction
Cullen, D.	2009	Columbine	Non-Fiction
Cullen, D.	2019	Parkland	Non-Fiction
Draper, S.M.	2009	Just Another Hero	Fiction
Frye, M.	2005	School Shooter: In his own words	Fiction
Garden, N.	2006	Endgame	Fiction
Hogg, Lauren Elizabeth	2019	Activist: A Story of the Marjory Stoneham Douglas Shooting	Non-Fiction
Hutchinson, S.D., Blake, K., Brezenoff, S.	2015	Violent Ends	Fiction
Klebold, Sue	2016	A Mother’s Reckoning: Living in the Aftermath of Tragedy	Non-Fiction
King, S. (Bachman, Richard)	1977	Rage	Fiction
Klein, J	2012	School Shootings and The Crisis of Bullying in America’s Schools	Non-Fiction
Knoll, J.	2015	Luckiest Girl Alive	Fiction
Krueger, K.	2019	Healing: The invisible Wounds of Trauma	Non-Fiction
Lerner, S.	2019	Parkland Speaks	Non-Fiction
Linder, K	2014	Rampage Violence Narratives	Non-Fiction
Lysiak, M	2013	Newtown: An American Tragedy	Non-Fiction
Myers, W. D.	2004	Shooter	Fiction
Newman, K.S., Fox, C., Harding, D.J., Mehta, J., Roth, W.	2004	Rampage: The Social Roots of School Shootings	Non-Fiction
Nijkamp, M.	2016	this is where it ends	Fiction
Panitch, A.	2015	Damage Done	Fiction
Picoult, J.	2007	Nineteen Minutes	Fiction
Pignat, C.	2016	This is Not a Drill: Shooter	Fiction
Prose, F.	2003	After	Fiction
Quick, M.	2015	Forgive Me Leonard Peacock	Fiction
Roberts, T.	2015	Forgiven: The Amish School Shooting. A Mother's Love, And a Story of Remarkable Grace	Non-Fiction
Shriver, L.	2003	We Need to Talk About Kevin	Fiction
Smith, N.	2016	Boo	Fiction
Strasser, T.	2000	Give a Boy a Gun	Fiction
Watson, C. G.	2007	Quad	Fiction

End Notes

[1] Corporal punishment is a deliberate use of physical punishment such as spanking, striking on the hand or face, and the use of a cane, wooden paddle, leather strap or wooden yard stick to punish someone. Corporal punishment in schools was band in all parts of Canada in 2004. By 2016 corporal punishment was band in 128 countries including all of Europe, most of South America and all of Southeast Asia. Some countries still allow corporal punishment in schools, including parts of the United States and Australia and some countries in Africa and Asia.
[2] *The Ugly Duckling; The Princess and the Frog*
[3] Little Red Riding Hood; The Gingerbread Man
[4] The Three Little Pigs; Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs; Hansel and Gretel.
[5] For a complete list see Table 1.2 in School Shootings: International Research, Case Studies and Concepts for Prevention (2013) by Bockler, Seeger, Sitzer, and Heitmeyer (p. 11)
[6] A list of non-fiction and fictional books on school shootings can be found in Appendix A.
[7] Having a rich inner life means being in touch with your true self and the vast terrain of your hopes and dreams, thoughts, emotions, instincts and intuition (Mishra Tarc, 2015) speaks of the inner life of literacy through literature. In her book *Literacy of the Other,* Mishra Tarc's use of "literature to gain some perspective on how language forms and informs thought" (p. 5). Mishra Tarc further explains " to forge a rethinking of literacy as a return to its humanizing imperative, I turn to modern humanistic literature. Providing a juncture between the physical and social worlds. Literature gives indirect access to unconscious processes structuring human relations (Love, 2007) […to] grapple with the more unthinkable aspect of human subject formation (p. 13). Novels offer scholars and teachers of literacy [and social issues] a glimpse of the inner lives of literacy by those who are most closely attuned to the inside working of language – exemplary writers of literature. It is not simply enough to inform teachers that literature is useful in their pedagogy of literacy. I suggest that teachers prepare for their literacy pedagogy through sustained ana trained reading of literature grappling with human existence.
[8] Social issues such as violence, shame, forgiveness, racial discrimination, gender and sexual equality, social class disparities
[9] Moral Crusades against alcohol under Prohibition, anti-pornography and censorship crusades, and drug panic.
[10] reading, writing and math
[11] assimilation of culture, management of gender expectations and socialization of youth to the norms and values of North American society while creating the future citizen and worker (Dewey, 1897; Arendt, 1954; Klein, 2012; Ringrose, 2013
[12] The school shooter is seen by some as terrorizing the school and the community. Hunter et al (2021) examine these phenomena in their article: "Are mass shooting acts of terror? Applying key criteria in definition of terrorism to mass shootings in the United States from 1982 to 2018"
[13] Arendt, H. (1998). (p. 73). *The Human Condition* references shame and Christian goodness.
[14] Arendt, H. (1976). (Part 2) *The Origin of Totalitarianism.* Arendt references the shame of the German people for the Holocaust and the shame of the Jewish people for the indignities they faced during totalitarian rule.
[15] Arendt, H. (1957). *Rahel Varnhagen, Life of a Jewish Woman*. Arendt references Rahel's coming to terms with her shame of being Jewish in a gentile society.
[16] Arendt, H. (1994). Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility. *Essays of Understanding*. Schocken Books.
[17] Definition from the Cambridge Dictionary
[18] Definition from the Cambridge Dictionary
[19] The introduction of the internet has provided a new way of communicating with each other. This remote form of communication creates a platform to reach more people instantly and, in some cases, to do so without identifying who we are.
[20] Columbine; Parkland; Newtown; LaRoche; Montreal
[21] See Blockler et al; Newman; Larkin; Langman; Fast; Muschert; Sitzer; Kellner
[22] Fictionalized worlds: Abier-Toril; Hogwarts; Middle-earth; Naria; Neverland; Oz; Wonderland
[23] Far away galaxies: Star Wars Galaxy; Starship Enterprise;
[24] Metaphorized characters: Charlotte's Web; Winnie the Pooh; Franklin the Turtle
[25] As literary theorist, Northrup Frye (1963) argues, "all writers [are] conventional, because all writers have the same problem of transferring their language from direct speech to the imagination…serious good writer[s] release [their] experiences or emotions from [themselves] and incorporate them into literature, where they belong" (p. 24).
[26] See Baehr, P., & Walsh, P. (Eds). (2017). *The Anthem Companion to Hannah Arendt.* Anthem Press.
[27] Frye (1963) states, the world of literature is a world where there is no reality except that of the human imagination. We see a great deal in it that reminds us vividly of the life we know. But in that very vividness there's something unreal … as realistic [as it is, it is] not reality but an illusion … [the] things that don't remind us directly of our own experience but are [things] which are bigger and more intense experiences than anything we can reach – except in our imagination, which is what we are reaching with. (pp. 57 - 58).
[28] Picoult, J. (Nov 5, 2018) I attended an author interview at the Toronto Reference Library, Toronto, Canada where Jodi spoke about how she prepares, researches and writes fictionalized accounts of difficult social issues.
[29] Northrup Frye (1963) articulates, literature leads us toward the regaining of identity, but it also separates this state from its opposite, the world we don't like and want to get away from. The tone literature takes towards the world is not a moralizing tone, but the tone we call ironic. The effect of irony is to enable us to see over the head of a situation – we have irony in a play, for

example, when we know more about what's going on than the characters do - and so to detach us, at least in imagination, from the world we'd prefer not to be involved with. (p. 31)
[30] See Newman, K. S. et al. (2013). Rampage: The Social Roots of School Shootings
[31] See Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Newman et al, 2004; Klein, 2012; Linder, 2014; Shuffleton, 2015; O'Dea, 2015; Gereluk et al, 2015…
[32] See Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Newman et al, 2004; Klein, 2012; Linder, 2014; Shuffleton, 2015; O'Dea, 2015; Gereluk et al, 2015…
[33] Campbell, T. (2018). (p. 214). *Comics and Columbine.* Campbell is referring to the stigmatized children, which remain on the outside of the socially accepted group, the children with learning disabilities, physical disabilities, and social disabilities that are always on the edge looking in. I draw on Arendt's definition of pariah to fuel my definition of the term 'pariah'. In the essay "The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition Arendt (1944) articulates that the pariah "is excluded from formal society with no desire to be embraced within it, turns naturally to that which entertains and delights the common people (p. 103). The pariah "is excluded from society and never quite at home in this world…you are dismissed by contemporary society as a nobody" (p. 114).
[34] See Ringrose, 2006; Collins, 2008; Finkelhorn, Turner and Hamby, Isaacs et al., 2012; Craig, 2013; 2011; Horton, 2011, 2013
[35] See Campbell, T. (2018). (p.163).
[36] See Ringrose, 2006; Collins, 2008; Finkelhorn, Turner and Hamby, Isaacs et al., 2012; Craig, 2013; 2011; Horton, 2011, 2013
[37] See Herman & Chomsky, (1988).
[38] Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning
[39] Social disorganization theory – young people exhibit delinquent behaviours (e.g. bullying) as a result of economic difficulties that limit the community's (e.g. parents', school's) ability to control or supervise behaviour (Wang, Berry& Swearer, 2013, p. 297).
[40] Social control theory - when a young person's bond to society is weak or broken they are more likely to engage in delinquent behaviour such as bullying (Wang, Berry& Swearer, 2013, p. 297).
[41] In the style of Arendt, Dewey, Freire, Glasgow, Marcuse, Sumara
[42] Arendt asserts in her biographical account of Rahel Varnhagen' life, Varnhagen tried to deny that she was a Jewess however "her dreams told her that her Jewishness was ineradicable" – one cannot escape from who one is (Young-Bruehl, 1982, p. 90). Building on Arendt assertion, I argue, thinking is messy and unique, it cannot be separated from the individual, similarly experience cannot be divorced from one's thinking.
[43] Theme of my Masters in Sociology
[44] Theme of my PHD in Education
[45] See Cooley (1902) The looking glass self.
[46] This type of violence is referred to as symbolic violence by Pierre Bourdieu and more recently is the theme of Jacqueline Rose's Book: On Violence, On Violence Against Women (2021)
[47] *A Murder Over A Girl* by Ken Corbett the story of the Lawrence King shooting; *Activist* by Lauren Elizabeth Hogg, story by survivor of Douglas Stoneham Shooting: *No Easy Answers* by Brooks Brown: survivor of Columbine.
[48] The scenario I refer to was presented in the book: *The Sunflower* written by Simon Wiesenthal – I will quote the synopsis from the jacket of the book to provide an understanding of the questioned asked. "While imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp, Simon Wiesenthal was taken one day from his work detail to the beside of a dying member of the SS. Haunted by the crimes in which he had participated, the soldier wanted to confess to – and obtain absolution from – a Jew. Faced with the choice between compassion and justice, silence and truth, Wiesenthal said nothing. But even years after the war had ended, he wondered: Had he done the right thing? What would you have done in his place? In this book, fifty-three distinguished men and women respond to Wiesenthal's question. The are theologians, political leaders, writers, jurists, psychiatrists, human rights activists, Holocaust survivors, and victims of attempted genocide in Bosnia, Cambodia, China and Tibet. Their responses, as varied as their experiences of the world, remind us that Wiesenthal's questions are not limited to events of the past".
[49] A store in the 1960s and 1970s the was similar to a Dollarama or Buck of Two in present 2021.
[50] Think about an "onion", let the image, mystery and metaphor stir your imagination. An "*onion" is* a vegetable grown from a bulb deep below the surface of the earth is my metaphor for thinking with the layers of the novel. An "*onion,"* varying in size, colour and shape pushes above the surface as it grows and although you can see its flower poking above the dark rich soil you cannot see the beauty of what is below the surface, nor can you see the many layers that are hidden beneath its opaque and flimsy skin, they are not visible even if you pluck it from the ground and hold it in your hand to inspect it. Its smooth exterior protects what is inside and does not prepare you for the interior. Peel it, cut into it. Run your finger over the layers. What is hidden in the layers and between the layers? Peel back one layer at a time and allow the juice to spring forth. Examine the core - a great place to hide. Let the juice burst forth but be careful the juice can make your eyes water. Taste a small piece and be surprised by the tangy, sweet, spicey taste that gives the onion its unique flavour. Smell it and have that smell stay with you on your hands and in the air. The onion is surprisingly diverse, use it as a condiment, or add it to your food, allow its hidden qualities to enhance your taste experience. An *"onion"* can provide a visual representation of the layers that the author creates in the story. I draw from Arendt's (1954) essay "What is Authority" to think with the image, mystery, and metaphor of *"the onion"* as she creates the contradistinction to both tyrannical and authoritarian regimes. Arendt states, the proper image of totalitarian rule and organization seems to me to be the structure of *"the onion"*, in whose centre, in a kind of empty space, the leader is located; whatever he does – where he integrates the body politic as in an authoritarian hierarchy or oppresses his subjects like a tyrant, he does it from within, and not from without or above. [The layers of *"the onion"* are all working together to create] a deceptive facade of normality to the outside world (Arendt, 2006b, p. 99) (emphasis added)

The leader is sheltered from the rest of the world, not exposed in any way, protected and separate. I borrow from Arendt's *"onion"* metaphor when analyzing the fictional stories of the school shooter. Not that Arendt's appropriation of *"the onion"* in her analysis of the (totalitarian) leader protected by the layers, while hiding in the core of "*the onion"* is directly applicable to my work but instead as an image, mystery, and metaphor. *"The onion"* can provide a visual representation of the layers that the author creates in the story. Layers that make the story more accessible to a vast group of readers. Layers that allow the reader to identify with parts of the story if not the whole story. Layers that bury the character of the school shooter and those around him/her deep in the pages protecting them from the outside world until to open the book. As the author unfolds the story, the reader is drawn into "*the onion"*. The story becomes the skin of the onion, the opaque layer that surround the inner layers where the characters rest, each with its own story to tell. The characters are rarely one dimensional and have their own part to play in shedding the layers to get to their core. Metaphorically, *"the onion"* is useful in thinking about the layers of the book.
The cover hides what lies beneath, crack the spine, pull apart the layers and let the juice pour out. As you start to read you can see and taste the juice. Beware! The layers of the book like the onion can sting, they may make more than your eyes water. The layers may expose your vulnerability and cause you to have a strong emotional reaction.

[51] Dennis Sumara shares the personal story of reading a passage from the novel *Bridge to Teribithia* to his class and his own unexpected emotional reaction to the text (p. 2 - 3) in *Private Reading in Public* (1996)

[52] Reference: Interviews with "https://coffeeforthebrain.com/author-interview-jennifer-brown-hate-list/ Oct 29,1009 & https://oldpeoplewritingforteens.wordpress.com/2009/12/10/interview-with-hate-list-author-jennifer-brown-and-book-giveaway/

[53] Reference: Interviews with "https://coffeeforthebrain.com/author-interview-jennifer-brown-hate-list/ Oct 29,1009 & https://oldpeoplewritingforteens.wordpress.com/2009/12/10/interview-with-hate-list-author-jennifer-brown-and-book-giveaway/

[54] Having a rich inner life means being in touch with your true self and the vast terrain of your hopes and dreams, thoughts, emotions, instincts and intuition (Mishra Tarc, 2015) speaks of the inner life of literacy through literature. In her book *Literacy of the Other,* Mishra Tarc's use of "literature to gain some perspective on how language forms and informs thought" (p. 5). Mishra Tarc further explains " to forge a rethinking of literacy as a return to its humanizing imperative, I turn to modern humanistic literature. Providing a juncture between the physical and social worlds. Literature gives indirect access to unconscious processes structuring human relations (Love, 2007) […to] grapple with the more unthinkable aspect of human subject formation (p. 13). Novels offer scholars and teachers of literacy [and social issues] a glimpse of the inner lives of literacy by those who are most closely attuned to the inside working of language – exemplary writers of literature. It is not simply enough to inform teachers that literature is useful in their pedagogy of literacy. I suggest that teachers prepare for their literacy pedagogy through sustained ana trained reading of literature grappling with human existence.

[55] See Arendt, 1998, (*The Human Condition*)

[56] The act of retaining respect and avoiding humiliation

[57] See Arendt (1998). (pp. 50-51) *The Human Condition*

[58] See Arendt (1998). (pp. 50 -51) *The Human Condition*

[59] Gargoyle – is a waterspout, usually carved from stone to resemble a monstrous creature with a frightening appearance

[60] See Arendt, (1998). (p. 181) *The Human Condition*

[61] School shooters are often described in the media as crazed and/or evil. See: Katz, J. (2011). An Interview with Jackson Katz.

[62] J. M. Coetzee is an author, he has written novels such as The Lives of Animals, Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons, Slow Man, As a Woman Grows Older

[63] See Arendt. (1998). (p. 5). *The Human Condition*

[64] See Appendix A

[65] See Arendt. (1998). (pp. 236 -243). *The Human Condition*

[66] Mother of Dylan Khebold – One of the two Columbine High School Shooters

[67] Friend of the Columbine High School Shooters

[68] Victim of the Columbine High School Shooters (written by her father)

[69] The story of Larry/Leticia King and Brandon McInerney (I will refer to them by their first name moving forward) provides a real-life example of how humiliation breeds shame and shame grows into rage and violence. Brandon shot and killed Larry/Leticia in a classroom in Oxnard, California on February 14, 2008, this is a fact, it was witnessed by classmates and teaching staff. We cannot ignore that Brandon is guilty of murder. This shooting was targeted, not random, it was not a rampage shooting, it was intentional murder. My values and beliefs do not accept that murder is a solution, and my research is focused on rampage shooting, so why am I sharing this narrative? I am sharing this story because is it part of my journey, it has resonated with me since I first came across it in 2012, while preparing a paper for a graduate class on Social and Moral Regulation. The story leaves me with many unanswered questions, questions that possibly do not have answers, questions that open a space for wondering and reflection. Thus, I have revisited this story many times and it is present in my mind as I wonder and write about school shootings. This is a narrative of unaccepted difference in a hostile community that struggled with LGBTI education rights at many levels (Jones, 2017) and two biological boys, Larry/Letitia, whose racial identity was Latino and did not conform to biological gender and of a boy[69], and Brandon, a white heterosexual "boy that grew up violently, a boy who was made violent"[69] (Corbett, 2016, p. 236). So many factors play a part in this narrative, however, my focus is on how unacknowledged shame played a significant role in the story, this does not mean that I have not thought about the hostile and unaccepting culture of this community or had thoughts of whose life is important (Butler, 2004). It is just these thoughts are outside the scope of this project. Putting aside the undisputed fact in evidence that Brandon shot Larry (Letitia) in the back of the head with his father's gun, let us reflect on the perceived cause of the shooting. Brandon objected to Lawrence /Leticia's, expression of gender and was influenced by his social relationships. His father was abusive and homophobic and nightly "questions about gender and sexuality came into

[his home when watching] television: [where] he joined his grandfather, father and brothers in hurling sexual and racial slurs at the minority characters" (p. 208). Also, evidence presented during Brandon's murder trial connect him with a group that self-identified as white supremacists[69]. These interactions helped Brendan forms his beliefs and values. When Lawrence/Leticia asked Brendan to be his Valentine, Brendan interpreted the action as an attack on his masculinity. Brendan was shamed by this public display of affection and imagined that others would view him as gay, and that they would judge him, a narrative that was not acceptable in Brandon's world. Corbett (2016)[69] states, "Any kid could be made anxious by clumsy flirtation, especially unwanted flirtation. Matters of sexual identity are fragile for adolescents. But Brandon was granted *the* valued heterosexual and imperiled identity; he was at risk" (p. 202). Especially, in a community that accepted "fear and hate" of the LGBTI community as normal. Corbett (2016) explains further, when Larry/Leticia, a gay boy, said to Brandon "What up baby?" by Brandon's logic, that made him a girl, [giving] Larry/Letitia the upper hand; proper dominance was turned around […] Brandon's immediate response was rage" (p. 209). Larry/Leticia's comment to Brandon, threatened the core of Brandon's self-understanding. He felt ashamed by the mere suggestion that he may be attracted to Larry/Leticia. He hid his shame and tried to get some of his classmates to help him bully Larry/Letitia but when they did not support him, his power was completely lost. Brandon felt victimized, disgusted and ashamed that Larry/Letitia had shown interest in him. Following Ken Corbett (2016), I suggest his shame went unacknowledged and the emotional turbulence he experienced turned into "intense anger, which eventually reached a point of rage" (p. 185). This rage blinded him to what was right, so he went home found his father's gun and brought to school to regain his masculine identity. Corbett states that Brandon never showed remorse for having killed Larry/Letitia, in fact he described him as stone cold. Would having a space to think through your actions and their consequences alter the outcome of Brandon's actions? How might sharing the feelings Brandon had when Larry/Laticia said "What's up baby? have helped in this situation?

[70] Arendt (1960) Letter from Hannah Arendt to Wystan Auden dated Febuary 14, 1960 retrieved from the archives. #004864 & #004865

[71] In this work I have specifically looked at school shootings, however, this could refer to any event that causes a disruption to a large group of individuals.

[72] Stone, Nic., 2017. *Dear Martin.* Ember

[73] Prince, Liz., 2014. *Tomboy: A Graphic Memoir*. Zest Books

[74] Halse Anderson, L. (2018). *Speak: A Graphic Novel*. MacMillan.

[75] See Bockler, Seeger, Sitzer, Heitmeyer. (2013). *School Shootings: International Research, Case Studies, and Concepts for Prevention.*

[76] See Arendt, H. (1998). (p. 50). *The Human Condition*

[77] See Sumara, D. (1996). *Reading in Public.*

[78] See Di Paolantonio, M. (2018). "Wonder, Guarding Against Thoughtlessness in Education"

[79] See Sumara, D. J. (1996). *Private Reading in Public: Schooling the Literary Imagination*.

[80] See Mulhall, S. (2009). *The Wounded Animal: J.M. Coetzee & the Difficulty of Reality in Literature and Philosophy.*

[81] See Mishra Tarc, A. (2015). *Literacy of the Other: Renarrating Humanity*.

[82] Arendt, (2007), Nussbaum (1990), Frye (1963)

[83] See Appendix A

[84] See Appendix A

[85] See Arendt, H. (1978). *Life of the Mind* and (2006). "The Crisis of Education" in *Between Past and Future*.

[86] See Arendt, H. (1976). (Part 2). *The Origin of Totalitarianism.*

[878787] See Arendt, H. (1977). Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil. (p. 115).