A CORPUS-ASSISTED THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF ANGIE THOMAS' *THE HATE U GIVE*

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A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERATURE, FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY, EDO STATE, IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF BACHELOR OF ART B. A. IN ENGLISH AND LITERATURE, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY

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CERTIFICATION

I certify that this project work entitle A Corpus-Assisted Thematic Analysis of Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give* was carried out by Chiemela Diana Abraham (Miss), in the Department of English and Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria, in partial fulfillment for the award B.A. Degree in English and Literature.

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Mrs. D. L. Efobi Date

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my late father, Mr. Abraham Godson Ebere, and my family and friends for their support (financially and emotionally) and their prayers throughout my academic journey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am profoundly grateful to Almighty God for granting me the strength, wisdom, and perseverance required to complete this project successfully.

I owe my heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor, Mrs. Dilichukwu Lilian Efobi, whose invaluable guidance, insightful criticisms, and unwavering support provided the foundation upon which this work was built. Your mentorship has not only enriched this project but has also inspired my academic and personal growth, thank you so much.

My deepest appreciation goes to my beloved parents, Mr. and Mrs. Abraham, whose prayers, sacrifices, and unconditional love have been the pillars of my success. I am equally thankful to my wonderful siblings, Chukwudi, Ikechukwu, and Vivian, for their constant encouragement and belief in me. Your support has been both uplifting and invaluable.

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a corpus-assisted thematic analysis of Angie Thomas' novel, The Hate U Give, investigating the linguistic and thematic construction of racism, systemic injustice, identity crisis, and poverty. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research integrates qualitative literary interpretation with Critical Race Theory (CRT) and quantitative data derived from Voyant Tools to explore the novel's vocabulary and statistical features. The analysis reveals that the theme of racism is dominant, with high-frequency terms like "Cops" collocating heavily with violent indicators such as "tear," "gas," and "death," while the concept of "justice" is linguistically bound almost exclusively to the victim, Khalil. Furthermore, the study examines the protagonist's fragmented identity, demonstrating how code-switching between African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and Standard English is used to navigate the segregated worlds of Garden Heights and Williamson Prep until trauma forces these personas to collapse. significantly, the research highlights the often-overlooked theme of poverty, using lexical indicators to frame it as a cyclical survival trap where characters are forced to choose between the "legitimate hustle" and the "street hustle" to meet basic needs like "lights and food". The study concludes that Thomas utilizes specific linguistic patterns to map social inequality, providing measurable evidence that systemic oppression and economic scarcity are foundational to the narrative structure.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of Study

This study carries out a corpus-assisted thematic study of racism and systemic injustice, identity crisis and poverty in Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give*, in order to provide insight on the lived realities and social anxiety of the Black individuals navigating contemporary American society.

1.2 Scope of Study

The study focuses on the text *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas and specifically analyses the themes of racism and systemic injustice, poverty and identity crisis. The text is selected because it is a contemporary literature that tackles the subject matter of racism. To analyze the text, thematic components are qualitatively explored but also, these thematic keywords are tracked using Voyant Tools as an assistive tool to show how vocabulary reflect these themes.

1.3 Methodology

The research employs a mixed methods approach as it combines quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative method involves the use of numerical data and statistical analysis in a research or to test hypotheses. It provides a framework for

obtaining objective data that can universally be measured and analyzed (Creswell 145). These data employed in this reader work are obtained through the assistance of a corpus analysis software known as the Voyant Tools, to explore the novel's vocabulary and identify statistically notable features. While qualitative method is a technique that uses analysis and data collection to interpret and understand recurring meanings and ideologies in the text (Creswell 173). Qualitative analysis is used to explain how the linguistic data generated by the corpus contributes to thematic issues like racism and systemic injustice, poverty and identity crisis within the text.

The whole text of Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give* serves as the primary source for this research work. The text was cleaned, formatted, and uploaded to Voyant Tools, an online text analysis software. This created a self-contained, searchable corpus, from which the quantitative data are formed. While the secondary source is of this research is derived from published academic sources like articles and books by scholars.

Quantitative method of research according to what it entails makes use of a text-analysis software known as Voyant Tools to generate frequency lists, collocations, context windows and even distribution graphs. Key racial and thematic terms such as black, white, color, cops, police, gun, justice etc, are extracted to see how often they appear. Collocations are retrieved to identify words that frequently occur around the key

terms. For example, the term white or black associated with words like woman, girl, boy, community and so on. Multi-word patterns are also used to examine and identify repeated phrases to contributes to the thematic emphasis within the text.

Qualitative method then interprets these data gotten through the quantitative analysis. This method involves carefully examining the excerpts, where the keywords and collocates appear and then interprets how they contributed to the novel's major themes. Through this process, data-driven themes emerges, including the representation of racial hierarchy, the cyclical nature of racialized poverty, linguistic constructions of identity and community-based speech as a form of resistance. Each one of the theme is supported by textual evidence which is reinforced by the corpus findings, making sure there's a strong link between the numerical patterns and their interpretive importance.

In summary, this methodology provides a systematic framework for examining the thematic analysis in *The Hate U Give* by combining quantitative corpus data and qualitative thematic analysis. To ensure validity and reliability, the study maintained transparency in the corpus procedures by applying consistent settings for generation of frequencies, collocations and keywords. The use of Voyant Tools enhances reliability because its frequency lists, collocations and context are reproducible and can be independently verified. The combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods

allows for a more thorough and comprehensive understanding of the thematic analysis using corpus data.

1.4 Theoretically Background

The theoretical framework employed in the analysis of the text is Critical Race Theory (CRT) which was developed by Derrick Bell and Kimberlé Crenshaw. Developed in the late 1070s and 1980s, CRT is an academic movement that examines how race and racism have Operated in legal and cultural institutions within society. It challenges traditional views of race by asserting that racism is not simply the result of individual bias but is deeply implanted in the system, institutions, cultural practices and day to day interactions. Critical Race Theory provides the ideal lens for identifying how the structures of power maintain racial inequality and how marginalized voices can fight these structures, it also interprets the relationship between race, law and power. CRT is grounded in several core tenets and each of them are advanced by key proponents. The number of these tenets vary in different contexts, but generally, there are six principles or tenets of CRT, in this study we will analyze just those six tenets of CRT.

The first tenet in CRT states that race is socially constructed and not biological natural. Genetic studies throughout the 20th century proved that race is not actually

biological. While certain traits like hair color or skin color is common among groups of people who share these traits, race itself is a social construct. Social construct being said to be defined by people and subject to change over time and it varies in regards to location. Some CRT theorists hold that race is an artificial associated created and maintained by dominant groups (particularly in the United States) to justify their oppression and exploitation of other groups on the basis of the latter's inferiority, immorality or the incapacity of self-rule.

The second tenet Critical Race Theory states that racism is normal and not an abnormality (in the US). This simply means that racism implied either on purpose or by accident, happens frequently in the US to the extent that it now makes racism a norm. Although extreme racist behavior and beliefs are not as common as they were before the mid-20th century, most people of color still continue to be regularly discriminated against or rather, treated unfairly in both public and private spaces, as indicated by various social indicators. Many instances of racist attitudes towards people of colour take the form of microagressions which are usually verbal or behavioral, subtle and either unintentional or unconscious that may convey a stereotype or a negative behavior towards a person of colour and this indicates indirect bias based on race.

The third tenet of this theory is interest convergence. This tenets states that the racial hierarchy of the marginalized or exploited group often improves when it serves the interests of the dominant white groups. The most provocative argument that supports this thesis was the suggestion by Derrick Bell, that the U.S Supreme Court's landmark decision in Brown versus Board of Education (1954), which overturned the segregation, supporting "separate but equal" doctrine established in Plessy versus Ferguson in 1896, occurred when it did because of two reasons, the first one being said to be the potential disruption among Black former soldiers who fought bravely for their country in World War II and the Korean War but were now expected to the oppression and exploitation of the whites. The second reason is world's image of United States as a intolerably racist society, threatened to diminish American influence over developing countries.

Differential racialization is the fourth tenet of Critical Race Theory. Members of the minority group or the marginalized group undergo differential radicalization or the attribution to of different sets of negative stereotypes, which depends on the interests of the whites. Such stereotypes are often illustrated in popular culture like in movies, literature and also in the media, influencing the content of history curricula in public schools. Differential racialization is said to be an idea that race is in fact sometimes that

changes depending on the situation and time depending on the needs of the dominant society such as the labour market.

Another closely related tenet to differential racialization is intersectionality which states the idea that every race have their own identity and history. Intersectionality is the framework to understanding tor recognizing the various forms of discrimination and privilege that often intersect, creating challenges for people with different identities. For instance, the privilege that a white woman gets in a white society is not the same as a woman of color in that same society.

Lastly, we will look at the sixth tenet of CRT, which is the voice of color or storytelling to emphasize that people of color are entailed to speak on behalf of the other members of their group(s) regarding the stored and lived experiences concerning the effects of racism. The "legal storytelling" movement encourages people of color (black or brown) to account for the experiences associated with racism and the legal system, by applying their own perspectives.

In summary, by using Critical Race Theory as the theoretical basis, the analysis of the study can surpass a surface-level thematic reading and go deep into a critical examination of power structures, privilege and systemic oppression as illustrated throughout the novel, *The Hate U Give*. By drawing on the contributions of its major

tenets and core principles, Critical Race Theory allows for a deeper understanding of the relationship between race, law and power within the novel. It further supports the interpretation and examination of the thematic patterns uncovered through the analysis of the corpus , making it a very suitable framework for this study.

1.5 Review of Related Scholarship

Critical scholarship on Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give* has largely converged on three interrelated concerns which are its representation of Black lives experience under systemic racism, its development of language and discourse to expose racial stereotyping, and its function as a pedagogical and activist text in contemporary culture. In this section, we are going to look at the critical and systematic evaluation of existing scholarships on Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give*. These works includes articles and books based on the thematic concepts like systemic racism, the issue of identity and poverty within the novel.

Shofia Nur Rachma Utami et al, in the article "Striving for Superiority Reflected in the Main Character of Angie Thomas's *The Hate U Give*: A Psychological Study," provides a thorough overview of the novel's protagonist, Starr Carter. The core argument of the article is that Starr Carter's journey in *The Hate U Give* can be understood as a manifestation of the Adlerian concept of the striving for superiority as a

response to an inferiority complex. The study posits that Starr experiences deep feelings of inferiority stemming from her socio-economic status, race, and personal trauma (Khalil's death and previous trauma). To compensate for these feelings, Starr develops two contrasting, fragmented personalities: the docile, non-threatening "Williamson Starr" for her predominantly white prep school and the authentic, guarded "Garden Heights Starr" for her neighborhood. Although by prioritizing the Adlerian framework, the article may potentially oversimplify or minimize the profound impact of systemic racism and collective trauma.

Sandra Tausel's work analyzes "*The Hate U Give*" (THUG) as a direct confrontation of contemporary systemic racism and the invisible structures of "Whiteness" that center the white experience. The article uses the novel, and Starr Carter's journey specifically, to reflect the "perpetual violence against Black individuals and communities in the US," linking the fictional narrative to real-world data and the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Tausel frames Starr's struggle to navigate the poor, predominantly Black neighborhood of Garden Heights and the affluent, predominantly white Williamson Prep using academic concepts; Double Consciousness (W.E.B. Du Bois) and Triple Consciousness (Nahum Welang), an expanded concept specifically used to capture the complexity of Black women's identities in contemporary American

culture. While "systemic racism" covers economic issues, the analysis heavily prioritizes the racial and identity crises over a deep dive into economic segregation, lack of social mobility, and poverty as specific, structural mechanisms driving the community's problems.

Sana' Mahmoud Jarrar's article, "*The Hate U Give*: As You are Black, You Have No Rights," serves as a "perfect showcase" of the hatred, oppression, and power dominance directed by White America toward its Black citizens. The article argues that the novel revolves around the theme of racism against people coming from a Black background in the USA, citing the country's history of slavery as the root cause. The article touches on Starr Carter's dilemma of feeling "torn into two personalities" due to belonging to an underprivileged Black community while attending a high-class White school, though this is primarily used to illustrate the pervasive nature of racism. Yet, Jarrar's article is short and tends toward broad generalizations rather than deep, distinct literary analysis (e.g., of narrative structure, symbolism, or rhetorical devices). It summarizes the novel's message rather than offering a complex critical theory application.

Adam Levin's article, "Finding the 'Herstorical' Narrative in Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give,*" positions the novel within a Black feminist and activist tradition. Kevin

argues that Starr Cater's narrative can be read as a "herstorical" account that foregrounds Black women's perspectives in the struggle against police brutality and systemic racism. By tracing Starr's transformation from traumatized witness to vocal activist, Levin shows how the novel reclaims history from below and centers on the everyday experiences of Black girls as a crucial site of resistance. This article highlights the novel's engagement with popular culture (such as Tupac's "THUG LIFE" aphorism) and suggests that Thomas uses young adult fiction as a vehicle for political consciousness-raising among a new generation of readers.

In "Quietly Loud: Unearthing Aversive Racism in Angie Thomas's *The Hate U Give*" co-authored by Radma Gul, Saima Ayaz, and Laila, the central focus is the application of the theory of Aversive Racism to the events and characters in *The Hate U Give*. This theory is often associated with psychologists like Samuel L. Gaertner and John F. Dovidio and it proposes that modern forms of racism often manifest not through overt hostility (like the King Lords) or traditional prejudice (like Officer one fifteen), but through subtle, unconscious biases held by individuals who otherwise believe themselves to be non-prejudiced. The title refers to how this aversive racism operates and it is often quiet or unspoken in its intent but has a loud and devastating impact on the victim. Although by focusing intensely on aversive racism, the article may give less

attention to the more direct, violent racism represented by Officer one fifteen and the systemic injustice of the grand jury, which is the novel's primary conflict driver (factor or condition for violence).

In essence, scholarship on *The Hate U Give* mainly focuses on systemic racism, identity struggles, and the novel's activist purpose. Utami, Wajiran, and Arain analyze Starr's split identity through Adlerian psychology, while Tausel examines systemic racism using Double and Triple Consciousness. Jarrar highlights racial oppression in broad terms, and Levin centres the everyday experiences of Black girls as a crucial site of resistance. Gul, Ayaz, and Laila explore subtle bias through the lens of aversive racism. While these studies offer valuable insights, many remain descriptive and overlook key structural issues, especially the theme of poverty and its connection to racism. This study will look deeper by integrating linguistic analysis with a focus on the often-neglected issue of poverty, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how the novel constructs and critiques systemic oppression.

1.6 Thesis Statement

In *The Hate U Give*, Angie Thomas explicates the themes of racism and systemic injustice, identity crisis and poverty, and these are reinforced by the application of

Voyant Tools on the text which shows a correlative representation of these themes through frequency list, collocation and distribution analysis.

CHAPTER TWO

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF RACISM

2.0 Introduction

The theme of racism in *The Hate U Give* is the central focus of the narrative, explored through the lens of systemic injustice, code-switching, and casual prejudice. The text establishes these themes immediately through the main character, Starr Carter, and the traumatic event that shapes the story which is the fatal police shooting of her friend, Khalil. This event is presented not as an isolated incident, but as a predictable consequence of systemic racial bias in law enforcement. Starr's father prepared her for such encounters by giving her "the talk" at age twelve; a set of strict rules for interacting with police, such as keeping hands visible and only speaking when spoken to. This necessary instruction for Black children underscores the life or death consequences of an unequal justice system. Khalil is shot and killed by a white police officer, One-Fifteen, during a routine traffic stop for a broken taillight. The officer escalates the situation when Khalil, a Black male, talks back and makes a sudden movement to open his car door, resulting in him being shot. Starr's father, Maverick, immediately calls out the racial nature of the event, dismissing his brother-in-law's attempt to depoliticize it: "A sixteen-year-old black boy is dead because a white cop

killed him. What else could it be?".

The novel highlights the constant identity struggle Starr faces as a Black teenager who lives in the poor, predominantly Black neighborhood of Garden Heights but attends a wealthy, predominantly white preliminary school, Williamson Prep. Starr feels there are "places where it's not enough to be me. Either version of me". In Garden Heights, she is criticized by her Black peers for acting "stuck-up" because she attends a "white-people school". At Williamson, she is "cool by default" because she is one of the only Black students, but notes the irony of this commodification: "It's dope to be black until it's hard to be black". Starr questions if dating her white boyfriend, Chris, is a form of betrayal to her community, especially after the shooting. Her friends in Garden Heights, like Kenya, also accuse her of dropping them for her "bougie-ass kids" from Williamson.

The theme of racism extends into Starr's personal relationships, particularly with her white friends, revealing how racial bias is used to dehumanize victims and how microaggressions strain interracial friendships. Starr's white friend, Hailey, immediately refers to the murdered Khalil as a "drug dealer" and "gangbanger". Hailey then suggests Starr should simply "get over it" because Khalil "was probably gonna end up dead anyway", demonstrating a profound lack of empathy and a belief in racist stereotypes

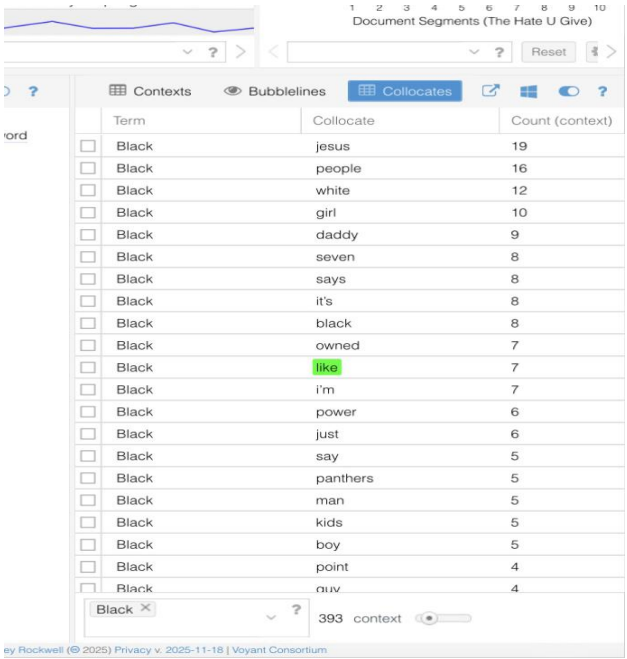
that justify police violence. Starr confronts Hailey for a "fried chicken joke," which Hailey dismisses as harmless "game talk". Starr affirms, "You can say something racist and not be a racist!" and that the comment "felt racist" because it was directed at the only Black person in the room. Hailey's decision to unfollow Starr's Tumblr over a picture of Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old Black boy brutally murdered for whistling at a white woman in 1955, is a clear refusal to acknowledge or engage with historical racial violence, prioritizing her own comfort over her friend's pain.

2.1 Lexical Indicators of Racism in the Corpus

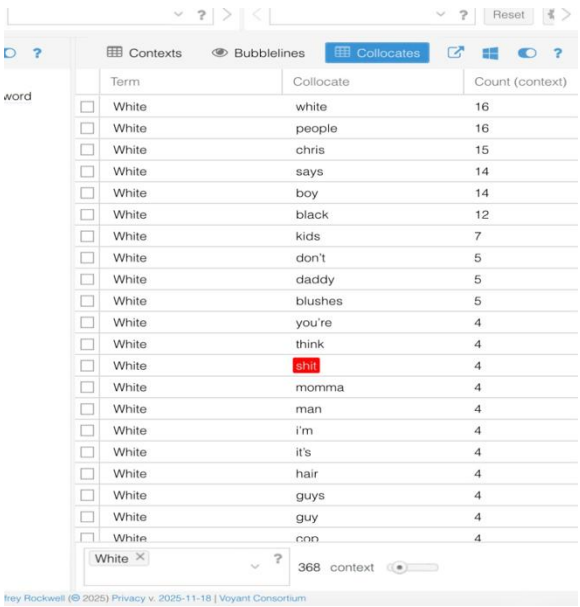
The high-frequency terms black, white, police, justice, and dead reveal the text's central preoccupation with racial identity and systemic racism, particularly in the context of police brutality and its aftermath. The raw frequency of Black (137) and White (113) as keywords underscores that the story is fundamentally a meditation on race and the conflict between two different worlds.

The term "Black" frequently appears in conjunction with terms that highlight social, familial, and identity-related contexts. The strongest collocates include terms related to people and family, such as people (16), girl (10), daddy (9), boy (5), and kids (5). It frequently collocates with white (12), and also with cop (4), suggesting a narrative that frequently addresses Black-White dynamics and encounters with law enforcement. The

word is also connected to concepts like power (6), owned (7), and panthers (5), suggesting themes of racial pride, ownership, or political/historical movements.



The term "white" is also highly associated with people and personal interactions, but also with general descriptive terms. Similar to "Black," it collocates with people (16), boy (14), and kids (7). Personal names like chris (15) are also a strong collocate. It collocates highly with black (12), showing that the White and Black racial categories are often discussed in relation to one another. It is also found near words like blushes (5), hair (4), and guilt (3). These data are illustrated below;



The term "Cops" appears in contexts that are much more focused on conflict, interaction, and consequences. It frequently collocates with the proper name khalil (4) and khalil's (3), strongly suggesting a narrative centered on an incident involving this individual and police. The most important collocates are highly charged, including throwing (4), tear (3), gas (3), and death (3), pointing to themes of violence, protests, or the direct use of force by law enforcement. It also collocates with daddy (5), i'm (4), and just (3), indicating a narrative where the main character or their family is directly involved in or commenting on police activity.

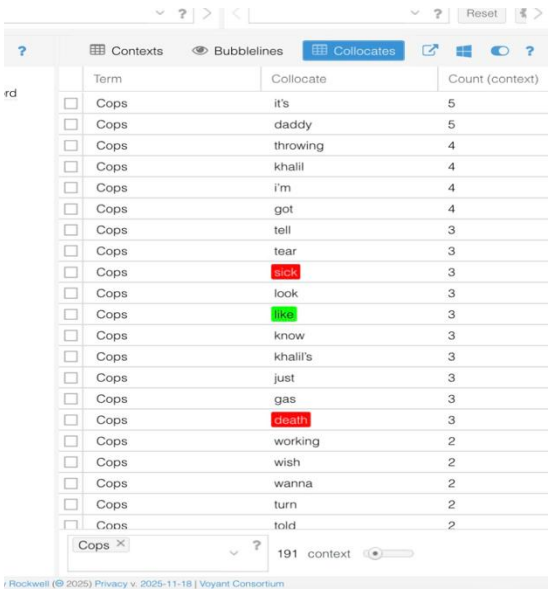
Over all, the high-frequency terms “Black”, “White”, and “Cops” are central to the text, collectively creating a narrative framework dominated by racial identity, socioeconomic contrast, and systemic oppression. The term “Black” (appeared 137

times) grounds the story in the experiences of the Black community, exploring identity and heritage while exposing the fatal vulnerability to violence. Conversely, white (appeared 113 times) defines the contrasting reality of privilege and wealth, highlighting the economic disparity and the complexity of inter-racial dynamics. The term Cops (appeared 60 times) represents the direct, violent intervention of the state, serving as the antagonist that triggers the central conflict and the community's call for an end to "police brutality".

2.2 Collocational Patterns of Racial Conflict

Based on the statistical collocate data from Voyant Tools, the terms related to law enforcement and accountability reveal a focused narrative of systemic violence, personal tragedy, and the fight for justice. The collocates of Cops (freq 60) directly establish the central conflict of the narrative; an event involving law enforcement that leads to violence, death, and social disruption. The co-occurring terms overwhelmingly point to a volatile and dangerous presence of the terms “throwing” (4), “tear” (3), “gas” (3), and “death” (3) which are clustered around Cops, indicating scenes of police force, civil unrest, and mortal consequences. The term is intimately linked to the family, specifically “daddy” (5), which suggests that law enforcement actions are a direct threat or point of concern for the protagonist’s father. The appearance of khalil (4)

immediately identifies the police as the agent in the narrative's central, tragic incident.



The collocates of justice (freq: 29) demonstrate that the entire thematic goal of accountability in the text is singularly focused on the shooting of Khalil and the community's response. “Justice” collocates most frequently with khalil (15), showing that the pursuit of justice is completely defined by his case. Terms like “just” (9) and “says” (5) indicate that the concept of justice is frequently expressed through dialogue and rhetoric, the act of speaking out and demanding fairness. The presence of “devante” (2) links the theme of justice to another character, suggesting that the concept extends beyond the central incident to others impacted by the system.

The analysis of Cops and justice confirms that law enforcement is depicted as the primary antagonistic force, initiating a cycle of violence that demands a public and

personal response. The narrative's entire framework of justice is dedicated to achieving accountability for the actions associated with the term Cops, centering the fight around the tragedy of Khalil.

The most significant collocations revealing overt racism are those used by external forces, such as the media or figures of authority, to justify violence and dismiss a victim's humanity. The term "thug" collocates strongly with words like "shot", demonstrating how language is used alongside imagery to construct a criminal identity for Khalil after his death. The media selects the most aggressive-looking photo, pairing it with the demeaning label to suggest his death was inevitable. Furthermore, a character like Uncle Carlos uses terms like "drug dealer" and "gangbanger" immediately before suggesting these characteristics "could explain Brian's decision if he felt threatened." This linguistic pattern of term plus justification highlights how overt slurs and criminalizing labels are used to mitigate police accountability and minimize the need for justice.

A separate set of collocations reveals how insults are used internally within the community to police social boundaries and identities. The term "bougie" is used as an insult, often collocating with "shit," "girls," or "kids" (e.g "bougie-ass kids"), to accuse the protagonist or her friends of being snobbish, acting superior, or abandoning their

roots. Similarly, the protagonist internally uses phrases like "angry Black girl" and "weak Black girl" which collocates "Black girl" with limiting emotional labels to describe the racialized stereotypes she strives to avoid in her predominantly white private school, illustrating the constant self-monitoring required in a segregated environment.

The text directly maps the linguistic process of re-appropriating historically charged racial slurs. The term "nigga" is discussed in the context of Tupac Shakur's effort to give it a new, empowering meaning, redefining the acronym as "Never Ignorant Getting Goals Accomplished." This is a deliberate act of using the slur's letters to construct a positive, aspirational phrase. Likewise, the term “T.H.U.G. L.I.F.E.” is transformed from a gang-related term to a social critique, meaning "The Hate U Give Little Infants Fucks Everybody." This linguistic move turns a label of overt deviance into a touching statement about the destructive cycle of systemic racism.

2.3 Thematic Interpretation: Systemic and Overt Racism

Systemic racism is deeply embedded in the narrative, primarily through its manifestation in the criminal justice system and economic inequality. The most striking example is the unjust traffic stop and subsequent murder of Khalil by Officer One-Fifteen. Starr’s life is defined by the existence of systemic threats. She was forced

to have "the talk" by her parents at age twelve, a survival guide on how to interact with police (keep hands visible, don’t make sudden moves), which shows that the system necessitates a survivalist approach for Black children in police encounters. The officer escalates the situation, from pulling them over for a broken taillight to shouting demands and ultimately firing shots, based on the assumption, as Starr realizes, that they "were up to no good. Because we’re black and because of where we live." This act illustrates the fatal consequences of a system that views Black citizens as inherently criminal and suspicious.

Overt racism, which involves conscious prejudice and explicit discriminatory actions, is shown through the behavior of Starr's white friends at her private school, Williamson Prep, and through the media's reaction to Khalil’s death. Starr is subjected to explicit prejudice in the form of racial stereotyping and microaggressions. Her friend Hailey makes a "fried chicken comment" directed at Starr, relying on a deeply rooted and painful racial trope. Hailey compounds this offense by refusing to apologize, claiming she was not being racist and becoming defensive, which is a form of racial gaslighting designed to invalidate Starr’s experience of being racially targeted.

The prejudice also manifests as posthumous character assassination used to justify Khalil's murder. Hailey refers to Khalil as a "drug dealer" and a "gangbanger," overtly

dismissing his death by callously stating, "Yes, get over it! He was probably gonna end up dead anyway." This sentiment dehumanizes Khalil and suggests his life was disposable because of his race and neighborhood. Finally, Hailey exhibits denial of racial history and violence by refusing to acknowledge the gravity of Black pain, demonstrated when she unfollowed Starr on social media because she didn't want to see a picture of Emmett Till, calling the historical image of the mutilated teenager "disgusting shit," thus erasing a painful chapter of racial violence and Starr's connection to it. Together, the systemic structures and the overt individual prejudices create the atmosphere of violence, denial, and injustice that defines the book's central conflict.

2.3.1 Starr's Two Worlds: Linguistic Evidence of Segregation

Starr Carter's life is split into two separate worlds: her home neighborhood, Garden Heights, and her school, Williamson Prep. This division forces her into a constant state of code-switching, where she has to change her language, behavior, and even her personality depending on where she is. The linguistic evidence in the text clearly shows the strict segregation between these two places.

Starr struggles with the fact that in many settings, she cannot simply be herself. She admits there are places where "it’s not enough to be me. Either version of me." She must maintain two distinct personas; the Starr who is rooted in the communal,

slang-heavy culture of Garden Heights, and the Starr who is polite, quiet, and carefully filtered for the mostly white, affluent environment of Williamson Prep. The pressure to code-switch, changing her vocabulary and tone is the direct result of this segregation, as one linguistic style is rejected or misunderstood in the other world.

In Garden Heights, the use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and local slang acts as a test of cultural authenticity and belonging. The most potent evidence of this is the insult "bougie" (short for bourgeoisie). This term is used by her friends to criticize her perceived adoption of white, middle-class customs. Starr's internal fear of being labeled "bougie" and her defensive thought "That's not on some bougie shit, either" shows that adopting formal or Standard English, which is acceptable at Williamson, is viewed as an act of cultural betrayal in her neighborhood.

At Williamson Prep, Starr's linguistic goal is to avoid racialized labels that the white environment imposes on Black students. She is forced to meticulously manage her tone and assertiveness to prevent being slotted into the stereotypes of "the Angry Black Girl" (if she expresses strong emotion) or "The Weak Black Girl" (if she is too passive). These phrases represent the linguistic surveillance she is under; she must change her voice and grammar (code-switch) to maintain a non-threatening, compliant persona that is acceptable to the white majority.

The segregation is further demonstrated when her friend uses the demeaning term "wigga" to criticize Starr's white boyfriend, Chris, for wearing "J's" (Jordans). This shows that clothing and style are viewed as extensions of racial and cultural identity. The slur itself is a combination of the word "white" and the n-word (nigga) which is used to linguistically condemn Chris's attempt to adopt Black culture, confirming that these cultural elements are strictly policed tokens of a segregated community space.

2.3.2 The Language of Injustice

The language of injustice is surrounding police brutality and the justice system which reveals a clear linguistic strategy used to criminalize the victim, justify the use of force, and frame the subsequent legal and social battles. For instance, the language used by the media and figures of authority actively works to shift the blame from the police officer to the victim, Khalil. This is done through the strategic application of criminalizing labels. Khalil is immediately and repeatedly labeled a "drug dealer" and a "gangbanger". These terms are not presented neutrally but are used to taint the narrative and suggest his death was an inevitable consequence of his lifestyle, reducing the focus on the officer's action.

The media contributes by pairing the victim with the racially charged label "thug" and selecting a negative photo to create the "thugshot". This shows how language and

visual representation are co-opted to manufacture a narrative that diminishes the victim's humanity. This criminalizing language is also directly collocated with the language of justification. Uncle Carlos, who works in law enforcement, introduces the idea that Khalil's drug dealing status "could explain Brian's decision if he felt threatened". This linguistic move links criminality with the officer's fear, implicitly excusing the shooting as a reasonable response.

The corpus analysis of the text shows how key judicial and physical concepts are linguistically linked to the main characters and events like the term "justice" is found to collocate most frequently with "khalil". This linguistic association confirms that the novel's central conflict and the community's emotional and political focus is the fight for accountability concerning the deceased victim. The word "dead" is directly collocated with both "cop" and the legal term "charged". This collocate data summarizes the entire judicial dilemma: the death of a young Black man is linguistically tied to the police officer who caused it and the legal action (or inaction) that follows.

The linguistic segregation present in the text extends to the framing of racial groups in the context of the justice system and protest. The corpus contexts show that participants in protests or public events are frequently identified by their race, such as

"protesting tonight, ‘black’ and ‘White’". This highlights that race is a central linguistic marker in the discourse surrounding injustice. Individuals associated with external, non-community roles, like the media or reporters are identified by race and role "white man in a shirt and ‘camera," “White” indicating the race and “camera” the role (reporter). This suggests that media and outside scrutiny are often racially coded, further emphasizing the perspective divide in interpreting the events.

2.3.3 The Role of Language in Internalized Racism

The role of language in internalized racism in the text is profound, primarily manifesting as self-censorship and the psychological fear of becoming a stereotype. Starr constantly regulates her own speech and behavior based on the racist labels imposed by the dominant white culture at Williamson Prep.

The most significant evidence of internalized racism is Starr's creation of two distinct, opposing personas that she must perform to survive in her segregated environments. This mental process is driven by the linguistic stereotypes she seeks to avoid. Starr avoids speaking too passionately or assertively at school for fear of being reduced to the label "The Angry Black Girl". The word "Angry" becomes a powerful modifier that automatically negates any legitimate feeling or argument she might have, forcing her to dilute her genuine voice. Conversely, if she is too quiet or submissive, she

risks being seen as "Weak," which she suggests is equally dangerous. This demonstrates how external, racist language has been internalized to create an impossible linguistic tightrope walk. She is not reacting to her own feelings but to the racist language the world uses to categorize her.

Internalized racism also manifests as Starr's self-critique regarding her appearance and the judgment she anticipates from her home community about her class status. At the party, Starr looks at the other girls and feels "basic as hell with my ponytail". She judges herself against the high standards of style in her community ("laid, and slayed"), showing an internalization of community pressure which itself is a product of social and economic conditions. Starr constantly checks her own language and attitude for signs of being "bougie" or “stuck-up”. When she feels the need to justify her thoughts "That’s not on some bougie shit, either", it proves that the fear of being labeled a class traitor or culturally inauthentic is a powerful, self-imposed constraint on her behavior and thoughts. This is internalized classism and cultural racism, she is afraid of being perceived as having "sold out" to the white, wealthy world.

The language surrounding her boyfriend, Chris, and his use of Black cultural elements highlights the internal conflict over what is acceptable and what constitutes betrayal. Starr’s friend calls Chris a "wigga" for wearing "J's" (Jordans) and attempts to

talk in the local style. Although Starr defends him by saying "He is not a wigga," the friend's application of this diminishing term shows that the community strictly oversees the boundaries of cultural expression. Starr's reaction of having to defend her white boyfriend from a racialized cultural insult which forces her to manage her identity conflict publicly, confirming that internalized rules govern the acceptance of outsiders and their language. This situation gives external existence to Starr's internal struggle over where her loyalties and her language should lie.

Altogether, the role of language in internalized racism for Starr is the creation of a heavy psychological burden through self-censorship driven by the fear of becoming a stereotype. This manifests as an impossible double standard as she constantly monitors her speech and actions to avoid being labeled as "The Angry Black Girl" or "The Weak Black Girl" in white spaces, proving she is reacting to the racist language of others rather than her own feelings. Furthermore, this internalized pressure includes cultural observation, where she constantly checks herself to avoid being called "bougie" by her community, a fear that proves she has internalized the judgment against adopting the customs of the privileged white world. This fear of both external and internal linguistic judgment forces her to navigate her life by suppressing her authentic voice.

CHAPTER THREE

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF IDENTITY CRISIS

3.0 Introduction

The identity crisis in *The Hate U Give* is immediately established through the protagonist, Starr Carter's internal monologue, which centers on the concept of duality and inauthenticity. She clearly states, "I'm not even sure I belong at this party. That's not on some bougie shit, either. There are just some places where it's not enough to be me. Either version of me." This foundational struggle is the core theme, where Starr must constantly "code-switch" between the "Garden Heights Starr" and the "Williamson Prep Starr," resulting in a feeling that neither persona is her whole, true self. She is defined by what she is not in both worlds—she is not "cool" or recognized by her peers in her neighborhood unless she "earns" it, and she is "cool by default because I'm one of the only black kids there" at her predominantly white school, a status based on her difference rather than her character.

This forced duality generates a powerful sense of alienation and performative identity in her own community. Starr feels like an "invisible" outsider at the Garden Heights party, finding herself standing "against the wall by herself like an idiot." Her internal commentary reveals the necessity of censoring her own life; she avoids

mentioning Taylor Swift, a musician she enjoys, and instead fabricates a story about a J. Cole party to make her Williamson life seem palatable or "cool" to her neighborhood friends. The accusation from Kenya, "you act all that" because she attends a wealthy school, crystallizes the identity crisis as she is perceived as a traitor to her community simply by existing within the other one, forcing her into a cycle of self-censorship and lying ("I can lie though") to maintain a fragile social standing.

The thematic focus then shifts abruptly from a social identity crisis to an existential crisis triggered by trauma and racialized violence. The identity problem is literally a matter of life and death, immediately recalling the life-saving instructions from her father, which dictates how a Black person must behave in the presence of the police, "keep your hands visible" and "do whatever they tell you to do." This "survival talk" is an integral, non-negotiable part of Starr's identity that she must always carry, regardless of which "version" of herself she is trying to be. The moment the police shooting of Khalil occurs, the social anxieties of her divided self are violently overridden by the singular, devastating reality of being a Black witness to racial injustice, which ultimately forces her to drop her dual personas and confront the world as a trauma survivor and a potential activist, indicating the collapse of the two separate worlds she fought so hard to keep distinct.

3.1 Lexical Indicators of Dual Identity

The use of personal pronouns and self-reference in the text immediately highlights the protagonist, Starr Carter's, fractured identity and sense of social dislocation. The narrative begins with a definitive use of the first-person singular 'I' that expresses isolation and self-doubt: "I shouldn't have come to this party" and "I'm not even sure I belong at this party". The crucial self-descriptive statement is the admission that "it's not enough to be me. Either version of me". This establishes 'me' not as a single, cohesive entity but as a divided object that is failing a social test in both its manifestations. Furthermore, the initial physical self-reference, feeling "basic as hell with my ponytail", uses 'me' to describe a subjective feeling of inadequacy against the heightened aesthetic standards of her neighborhood, structuring her self-perception as constantly insufficient.

The novel solidifies this internal conflict that Starr has by defining the parameters of her two distinct selves, demonstrating how the pronoun 'I' is shaped by external environment. In Garden Heights, she feels the need to "earn coolness," where her identity is reduced by others to a simple external label, "Big Mav's daughter who work in the store," which overlooks the complex 'I' (what she thinks or feels) inside. Conversely, her 'I' at Williamson Prep is granted superficial status; she is "cool by

default because I'm one of the only black kids there". This reveals that both versions of 'me' are externally defined rather than authentically chosen. The need to maintain these separate selves forces the narrating 'I' to actively censor its own story, as seen when she chooses to lie or omit details about her school life to the Garden Heights group, prioritizing the preservation of a fabricated, acceptable self over true self-expression.

Furthermore, the onset of racialized trauma abruptly shifts the focus of self-reference from social belonging to basic survival. The 'I' is immediately anchored by a non-negotiable, singular identity when her father's survival instructions flood her mind: "Starr-Starr, you do whatever they tell you to do". The use of her proper name, 'Starr-Starr,' a term of familial affection, grounds her in a core identity defined by family and safety rather than social context. The traumatic event overrides the former preoccupation with whether 'I' belonged or if 'me' was cool and the self-reference becomes singular, only focused on the need to survive the impending threat, effectively collapsing the dual personas into a single, vulnerable subject witnessing violence.

Starr's narrative voice operates in Standard English (SE) when she is internally processing or describing her Williamson Prep life, only to abruptly switch to African American Vernacular English (AAVE) when challenged in Garden Heights. This shift highlights her dilemma: she has to watch her language to avoid being labeled "stuck-up"

or “bougie”. The main narrative voice generally conforms to SE structure and grammar, such as "Between the headache... and the nausea... I’ll be amazed if I cross the room" and "I know this is the moment I’m supposed to remember her, but I don’t". This SE foundation allows her to articulate complex feelings of alienation that her AAVE-loaded conversational self might not allow. The theme of identity is illustrated in how SE and specific vocabulary are overtly marked as "white" by her Garden Heights peers. Bianca labels Williamson students by their "white" associations: "White kids love popping pills" and listening to "Taylor Swift". This forces Starr to actively suppress the SE version of herself and her preferences (she admits the Taylor Swift comment is “somewhat true, but I’m not telling them that”). Her use of SE is a defense mechanism at Williamson, but a liability in Garden Heights.

During the initial moments of the police stop, code-switching stops entirely, replaced by a singular focus on survival language. The language used is simple, direct, and imperative, reflecting the gravity of the situation: "Starr-Starr, you do whatever they tell you to do... Keep your hands visible. Don’t make any sudden moves". This is a survival language that transcends social code-switching. However, when Khalil interacts with the cop, he breaks the "talk" rule by challenging the officer, “What you pull us over for?”, using slightly non-standard syntax common in AAVE ("What you

pull" instead of "Why did you pull"), reinforcing a defiant Garden Heights persona at the most dangerous possible moment.

3.2 Collocational Patterns of Identity Conflict

The primary conflict is established through the collocation of identity terms with modifiers of fragmentation and deficiency. Starr states, "it’s not enough to be me", directly modifying the central personal pronoun with a phrase indicating inadequacy. The self is further divided into "Either version of me", where the noun "version" collocates with the quantifier "Either," creating a definitive linguistic construct for her dual identity. This internal splitting is then juxtaposed against the external label that attempts to reduce her complexity as “Big Mav’s daughter who work in the store”, a fixed, functional collocation used by her community to define her.

The language of the Garden Heights community is defined by AAVE-inflected collocations centered on superficial image, judgment, and defiance. Terms related to image frequently collocate with superlatives and judgment, in “basic as hell with my ponytail”, “freshest kicks”, and the repeated accusation that she is "all that" and "stuck-up". The core conflict is expressed through the collocation of action and negation with her community's opinion, such as "Do I look like I care what people think?" and “Folks kill me, thinking they know what I think”. This pattern emphasizes

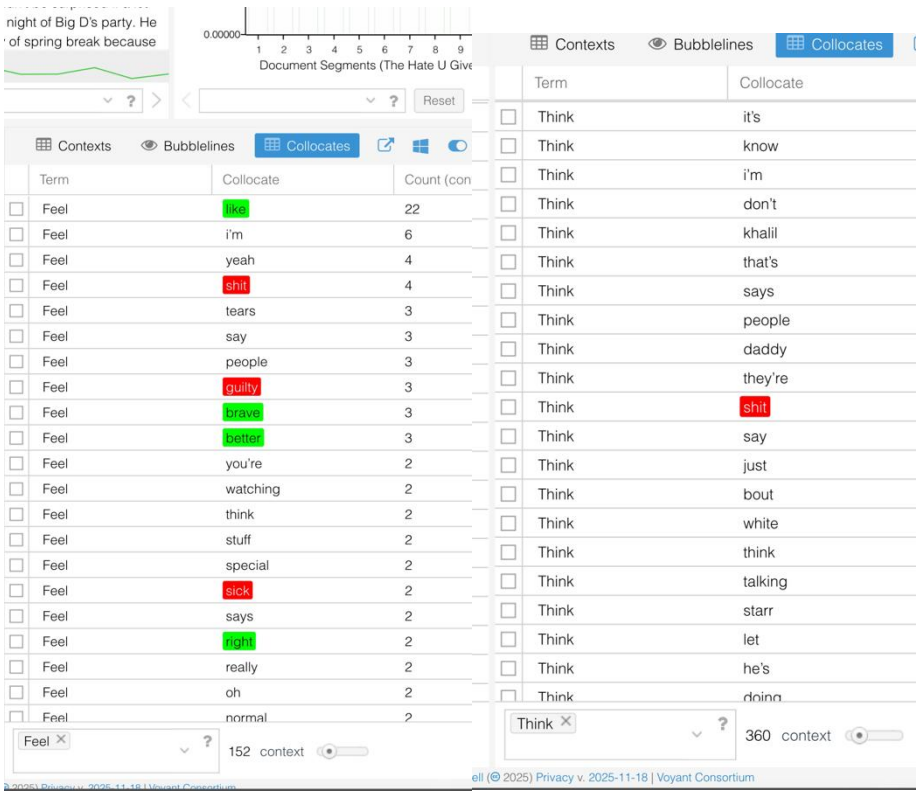
the overwhelming social pressure to perform a specific identity.

The Williamson Prep identity is established through collocations of privilege and contrast. The term “Williamson” collocates with “Prep,” setting up the opposition with "Garden Heights". Starr clearly states the privilege granted to her there like “I’m cool by default because I’m one of the only black kids there”. Her social survival is linked to “play it cool”, but this necessity is contrasted by the difficulty in her neighborhood “I have to earn coolness in Garden Heights”. The linguistic split is further emphasized by the community's collocations used to dismiss Williamson like “li’l lame white-kid suburb parties” and their association with “popping pills” and “Taylor Swift”, these vocabulary is both socially and linguistically distinct from Garden Heights.

3.2.1 Collocates of 'Feel' and 'Think'

The verbs 'feel' and 'think' function as crucial linguistic markers in the excerpt, describing the cognitive (what Starr perceives and judges) and emotional (what Starr experiences subjectively) landscapes of her identity conflict. The collocational patterns around 'think' reveal the overwhelming cognitive burden of external judgment and self-censorship. The verb repeatedly links Starr's consciousness to the inspection of others: "Folks kill me, thinking they know what I think," a hyperbole that captures her frustration with being perpetually misunderstood by her own community. The core

conflict is crystallized in the direct collocation of 'think' with her perceived arrogance in novel, "People already say you think you all that," forcing her internal world to be defensive and guarded. Furthermore, Starr's own cognitive process is marked by uncertainty, as seen in the phrase "Maya and I are cool. I think," revealing a lack of secure knowledge about the relationships in her Williamson Prep life. This continuous self-monitoring and external mental projection demonstrate that her 'thinking' is not a free, independent function but a survival mechanism designed to navigate social and linguistic minefields.



Conversely, the collocates of 'feel' expose Starr's intense emotional isolation and physical discomfort within the social pressure cooker of Garden Heights. The verb frequently links her emotional state to terms of inadequacy and negative physical sensation as she is "feeling basic as hell with my ponytail," connecting her self-worth directly to her appearance and her inability to meet local aesthetic standards. More profoundly, she notes she "feel(s) like that a lot around here," the 'that' refers to her emotional state of being "invisible" or being an outsider. This collocational pattern establishes that social alienation is not merely a thought, but a deep-seated, painful feeling. This isolation is briefly broken only when 'feel' collocates with nostalgia and genuine connection during her interaction with Khalil, as she suddenly "feel(s) like I'm ten again," linking her current emotion to the safety of an uncomplicated past.

Ultimately, the contrast between the two verbs showcases the duality of her crisis, her 'thinking' is a constant, exhausting calculation aimed at controlling how she is perceived, while her 'feeling' is a strong, subjective experience of alienation and discomfort. This division illustrates how her fragmented identity is sustained by cognitive vigilance but undermined by emotional vulnerability, a pattern that is violently disrupted when her focus shifts from social anxieties to the primal fear of the police stop, overriding both her social 'think' and her social 'feel' with the singular

importance of survival.

3.2.2 Collocations of Key Names

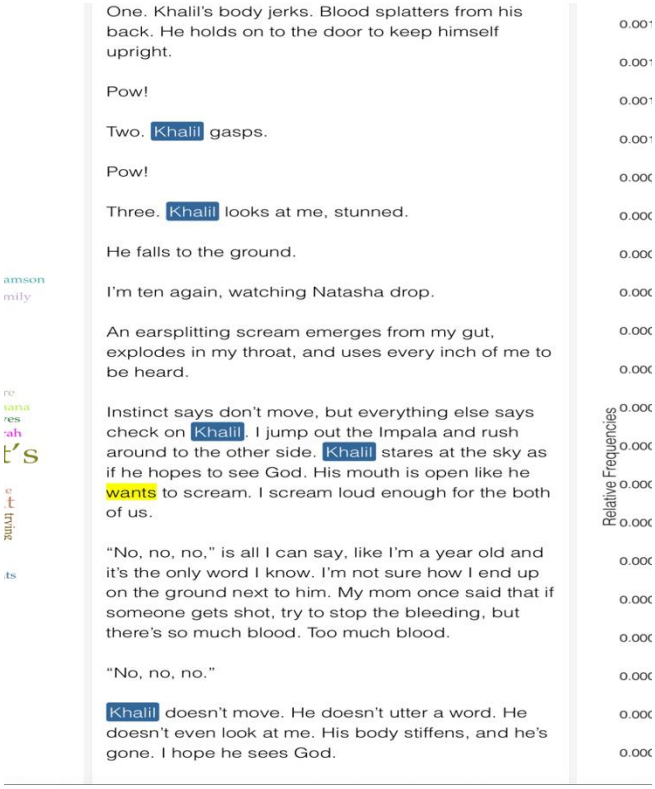
This analysis shows how words cluster around key names like Starr, Kenya, Khalil and Williamson Prep(name of place) in the text maps Starr's conflicting relationships and the different social rules that govern her life in Garden Heights. These word pairings define her two worlds and the tragedy that connects them.

The name Starr is the center of the entire conflict, but the words used with it show a sharp divide between how she is seen by her community and how she is protected by her family. To her peers, Starr is reduced to a fixed, descriptive phrase "Big Mav's daughter who work in the store." This is a limiting label that defines her only by her father's status and her job. It’s a way for her community to control what they think she is. In contrast, her father uses the loving nickname, "Starr-Starr," which is then followed by words of survival, "do whatever they tell you to do" and "Keep your hands visible." This shows that the deepest, most important meaning of her name is tied not just to social status, but to vulnerability and safety in a dangerous world.

Kenya on the other hand, acts as the main voice of Starr's neighborhood, and the words linked to her are all about criticism and policing Starr's identity. Kenya's name is closely paired with accusatory language, like she is the one who "gives me the look" and delivers the powerful judgment that Starr "act all that" (stuck-up or superior). She enforces the boundaries of the neighborhood, saying Starr "don't know nobody" because of her life at her private school. This shows that Kenya's influence is to constantly pressure Starr to follow the community's rules and appearance, forcing her to earn her place.

Another key name is Khalil, he is the character who bridges Starr's past innocence and her current trauma. The words linked to his name show a mix of warmth, risk, and tragic defiance. When Starr and Khalil saw each, his name connects to the phrase "feel like I'm ten again," linking him to a shared, easy past. This shows he represents her roots and a rare, genuine emotional connection that existed before the identity conflict started. His current life is linked to words of danger, like his breath smelling like "blunts" (marijuana), showing his involvement in the street life. Crucially, his name is collocated with the final, tragic act of defiance against the police: "What you pull us over for?" This action, which breaks the rules of survival, directly connects Khalil's

name to the violence that ends the party and forces Starr's two worlds to crash together.



Williamson Prep is a key name in the novel, and it can be collocated with Starr's friends , like Hailey, who also attend Williamson Prep. The words linked to this place are all about difference and privilege. The school's name is collocated with images like "white kids," listening to "Taylor Swift," and taking "pills." These words are used by the Garden Heights crew to define and dismiss Williamson, creating a clear cultural separation. Williamson is the source of Starr's divided self. It is where she is "cool by default" just because of her race, meaning her whole identity there is based on being different from the privileged people around her.

3.3 Thematic Interpretation: Navigating Two Worlds

Starr's linguistic performance of identity is an intricate and necessary act of code-switching, demonstrating how she consciously adjusts her language to fit the distinct social and cultural rules of her two environments: the predominantly Black, working-class Garden Heights and the affluent, mostly white Williamson Prep school. This is not simply changing clothes; it is changing the very way she thinks and speaks to achieve social survival in each place.

In the Garden Heights environment, Starr's performance is defined by her fluency in African American Vernacular English (AAVE), which signals her cultural

membership and authenticity. The language in this section is rich with specific slang like "bougie shit", descriptive AAVE phrases such as "laid, and slayed" (for hair), and grammatical forms unique to the dialect. The most critical part of this linguistic performance, however, is self-censorship. Starr actively omits parts of her Williamson life like enjoying Taylor Swift but instead fabricates stories or uses culturally acceptable names like J. Cole to avoid being labeled a traitor or "acting all that." Her language becomes a defensive barrier meant to shield her from the judgment of her friends like Kenya, showing that her words are chosen for acceptance rather than for honest self-expression.

Conversely, her linguistic performance for Williamson Prep is rooted in mastering and maintaining Standard English (SE). While the book is set in Garden Heights, Starr's internal voice and narrative structure are consistently clear, grammatically neutral SE. This language is the currency (accepted) of her school life, where she gains status simply by being present and conforming to the educated, middle-class norms. She is "cool by default" at Williamson, meaning her linguistic performance is subtle. It's the quiet, constant maintenance of correct, non-slang language that allows her to fit in without drawing attention. Her SE narration allows her to analyze and articulate her dilemma, demonstrating that SE is the language of her critical thought, while AAVE is

the language of her social engagement.

Ultimately, the entire system of linguistic performance abruptly collapses when the police stop occurs. All social codes, both AAVE slang and Williamson formality are instantly replaced by a singular, vital, and imperative language of survival. The rules dictated by her father, such as "Keep your hands visible" and "do whatever they tell you to do," are delivered in stark, simple English. This shift shows that in the face of racialized violence, identity is no longer a choice of performance but a matter of compliance. This system, however, fails tragically when Khalil performs an act of linguistic defiance (resistance), challenging the officer with the tone and word choice rooted in his neighborhood persona "What you pull us over for?", proving that in this critical moment, using strong or toughs language can become a fatal act.

3.3.1 Starr's Evolution:The Resolution of the Identity Crisis

Starr’s initial state is defined by fragmentation and inauthenticity. The text illustrates that her identity crisis is a social burden which she attempts to manage through code-switching and careful self-presentation. Her internal monologue clearly states the problem, "it’s not enough to be me. Either version of me." This demonstrates that her crisis is about performance, neither the "Garden Heights Starr" (who feels "basic as hell" and under judgment) nor the "Williamson Prep Starr" (who is "cool by

default" only because of her race) is her true self. Her language during this phase focuses on social anxieties, the need to censor her love for Taylor Swift and the pressure to avoid being labeled "bougie" or "all that." This crisis is characterized by avoidance and the maintenance of a separating wall between her two worlds.

The presence of the police officer and the subsequent shooting of Khalil act as a violent, immediate resolution to the dual nature of the crisis. The social worries that defined Starr's initial state; who is watching her, what she is wearing, what she should say, become immediately irrelevant. The text marks this shift by introducing the life-or-death language of her father's survival instructions, "the talk." Her identity is suddenly no longer about choice or performance but about compliance and vulnerability. The core of her self is reduced to the necessity of survival, defined by the simple, stark instructions: "Keep your hands visible", “Don’t make any sudden moves”, “Only speak when they speak to you” and "do whatever they tell you to do." This is the point where the two "versions" of Starr collapse into a single, terrified self, equally subject to the dangers of systemic racism regardless of her school or her clothes.

Finally, the ultimate evolution in the text is the forcing of Starr into the role of the witness. Her crisis moves from internal separation to external compulsion. Before the shooting, she was trying to hide parts of herself; afterward, she is forced to confront the

single, devastating reality of racial injustice that has violently claimed her friend's life. This new identity is defined by a sense of moral importance and inevitable public action. By becoming the sole witness to Khalil's death, Starr’s future self will no longer be determined by who she chooses to be, but by what she must do, which is to speak the truth. This trauma effectively resolves the initial, superficial social crisis by replacing it with a profound, unavoidable moral mission, setting her on a path toward a unified identity rooted in activism and justice.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF POVERTY AND CLASS

4.1 Lexical Indicators of Socioeconomic Status

The text repeatedly highlights the severe economic pressure and uncertainty that leads individuals to desperation and dangerous choices. The extreme financial duress is clearly articulated by Khalil, who states he got tired of having to choose "between lights and food", a direct expression of economic scarcity so profound that it forces a choice between basic survival needs and paying bills. Khalil dismisses legitimate employment as a viable option, stating, "That li'l minimum-wage job your pops gave me didn't make nothing happen". This underscores the inadequacy of legal work for those struggling to meet living expenses. The text mentions a "cash advance place" near the family store, which Daddy (Mav) visited around holidays. This points to historical financial strain, as cash advance/payday loan services are typically used by individuals facing an immediate, desperate need for money and signify a cycle of debt. The text connects scarcity to systemic issues when Khalil reveals his grandmother was fired from the hospital "cause she was sick" with cancer and undergoing chemo, demonstrating the catastrophic lack of a financial safety net for illness.

Wealth in the Garden Heights setting is often characterized by the display of luxury goods, particularly those linked to status and hip-hop culture, which, in some cases, signals the acquisition of money through illegal means. Expensive sneakers can serve as a key marker of wealth. For instance, the narrator and Khalil discuss a specific pair of Jordans, noting they "cost about three hundred dollars" and connecting their purchase directly to the owner making "big money". This clear valuation indicates material goods as evidence of financial standing. Khalil's appearance after being "busy" (drug dealing) is marked by symbols of instant wealth, indicating "The brand-new Jordans, the crisp white tee, the diamonds in his ears".

Aspiration is a central theme, manifesting as the desire to transcend the cycle of scarcity, often through two contrasting paths which is the legal, difficult route or the fast, illegal one. Starr's attendance at Williamson Prep is the ultimate symbol of her parents' economic aspiration for her: a planned route out of poverty through education and mainstream social access. Her parents operating the local store is an example of legitimate work used to fund this aspiration. Khalil's decision to pursue the quick "money" from drug dealing is presented as a forced aspiration that emerged from the desire to protect his family from scarcity (poverty) when legitimate work fails, stating, "I'm doing what I gotta do". Even within scarcity, there is a desire for dignity and

belonging, seen in the emphasis on dressing well with "freshest kicks" and stylish hair for a party, which illustrates that social status and self-worth are tied to material appearance.

4.1.1 Linguistic Markers of the Garden Heights vs. Williamson Dichotomy

The linguistic markers associated with Garden Heights describe an environment of danger, communal understanding, and economic struggle. The language is raw (strong) and immediate, heavily incorporating African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Garden Heights is painted as a landscape of decay and danger. The atmosphere is marked by a "haze lingers over the room, smelling like weed," and the sound of "loud-ass music." Violence is normalized and expected; the environment promises not just "babies in the winter" but also the ever-present threat of "somebody getting shot," characterizing the area as a "battlefield." This uncertainty (perilous) is visible in the physical neglect as "most of the houses are abandoned and half the streetlights are busted." Identity in Garden Heights is hard-won (challenging) and authentic. Starr must "earn coolness," and her status is defined by local knowledge, such as being "Big Mav's daughter who work in the store." The shared vernacular acts as a bond, that is, residents know what "busy" truly means (a euphemism for drug dealing), and they use culturally specific phrases like "bougie shit," "Folks kill me," and "holla at him." The informal,

rhythmic use of words like "kicks" (shoes) and the frequent use of the intensifier "ass" firmly roots the language in a distinct cultural space.

The language used to describe Williamson reflects affluence, insulation, and cultural superficiality (shallowness). This environment is characterized by stagnant wealth and a lack of genuine understanding of Starr's home life. Williamson is the setting of Starr's "white-people school," a place of material excess. Friends live in "mini-mansions," and school events, such as a prom with a "midnight in Paris" theme and elaborate "chandeliers," are highly formalized and costly displays of wealth. This environment is physically distant and emotionally removed from the realities of Garden Heights. Starr's identity here is suppressed, she is "cool by default" because she is one of the "only black kids there," which makes her an exotic token rather than a fully integrated member. The language highlights the cultural gap, like Williamson's "white boys wear Converse and Vans, not no J's [Jordans]," and their recreational drug use is defined by "popping pills" (Molly), contrasting with the weed of Garden Heights. The environment fosters a different kind of anxiety, the feeling of not truly belonging, despite being outwardly accepted among the "bougie girls."

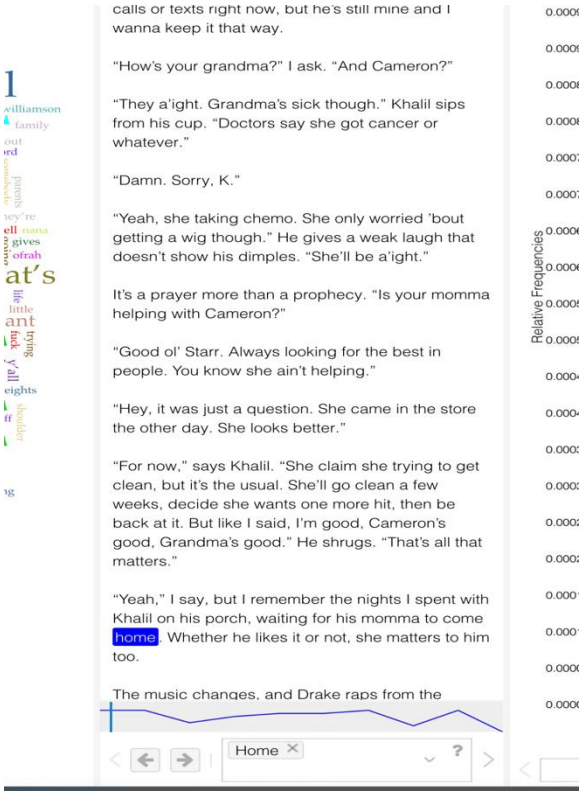
The contrast forces Starr to maintain two separate versions of herself, creating a central tension in the narrative, "There are just some places where it's not enough to be

me. Either version of me." This linguistic and social code-switching is a survival mechanism. She shifts her vocabulary, behavior, and social references depending on the setting, demonstrating that the difference between the two environments is not just geographical but fundamentally linguistic and cultural. The need to constantly evaluate which "code" to use highlights the profound division between the danger-filled authenticity of Garden Heights and the privileged isolation of Williamson.

4.2 Collocational Patterns of Poverty

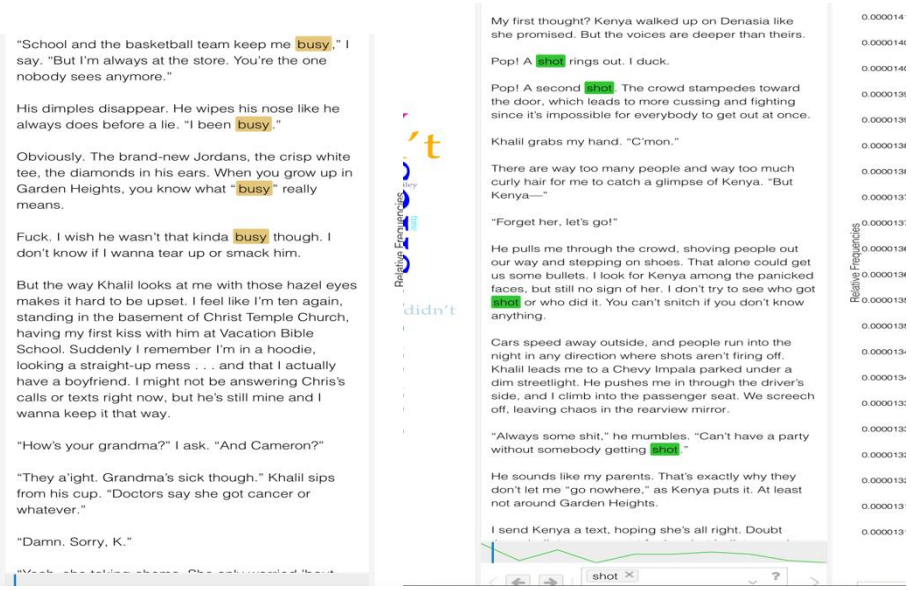
The word 'Home' in Garden Heights is defined less by comfort and more by its function as a fragile economic fortress constantly threatened by a lack of funds. The key collocate of 'Home' is the implied threat of functional failure. The most profound evidence of poverty is Khalil's statement about having to choose "between lights and food." This phrase directly links the financial maintenance of the home (paying utility bills) to basic survival needs. The home becomes the nexus (central link) where the harsh reality of poverty (the inability to pay for basic services) is experienced. The 'Home' exists within an economically infected landscape. Starr describes nearby streets where houses are "abandoned" and "streetlights are busted." These visual markers of physical decay are direct consequences of poverty and civil neglect, contrasting the individual effort to maintain a personal home against the larger failure of the

environment. Conversely, the home is also a base for fighting poverty. It collocates with the family's legitimate economic activity which is running the store (Big Mav's store). The store, located near the home, is the center of the family's attempt to use honest work to provide for the home and its inhabitants.

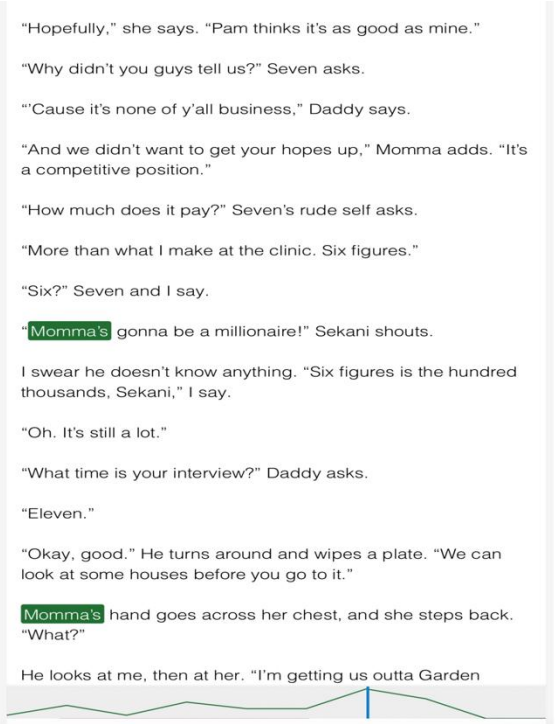


'Community' in Garden Heights collocates with themes of shared experience, intense loyalty, and the internalized violence that arises from economic desperation. The community is bound by a collective awareness of poverty's limitations. They share language, such as understanding the word "busy" used to insinuate illegal activities like stealing drugs, which signifies that illicit economic activity is a familiar, if tragic,

response to the insufficiency of legal work or legal income to make ends meet. The community shares the hardship, but also the methods of survival. The most dangerous collocates are related to violence and conflict. The community is described as a "battlefield" where the threat of "somebody getting shot" is common. This violence is rooted in the economic struggle, as the pursuit of quick money through illegal means (gang activity) turns the community itself into the center of danger for its members. The community demands fierce loyalty and is marked by the constant fear of being a "snitch." This focus on silence is a direct response to poverty's consequences, reflecting the need for self-preservation against both gang violence and the external legal system (police). In the absence of economic security and trust in outside institutions, the community enforces its own rules to survive.



The family is positioned as the central institution committed to escaping poverty through legal and aspirational means. The primary purpose of the family's actions is protection and long-term security for its children, an objective that constitutes its own difficult economic hustle. This is evident in the parents' commitment to legitimate work; Starr's mother is a nurse applying for a potentially "Six figures" management role, and her father runs a local store. These efforts represent the slow, honest hustle required to fund the family's ultimate survival strategy illustrated with removing Starr from the extensive influence of poverty and danger by sending her to the affluent, safe environment of Williamson Prep. Furthermore, the family functions as a training unit, passing down crucial survival knowledge, such as the "talk" for dealing with the police and the rules of code-switching, preparing Starr to navigate a world hostile to her community and ensuring the family unit survives the external threats of the justice system and racial bias.



"Hopefully," she says. "Pam thinks it's as good as mine."

"Why didn't you guys tell us?" Seven asks.

"'Cause it's none of y'all business," Daddy says.

"And we didn't want to get your hopes up," Momma adds. "It's a competitive position."

"How much does it pay?" Seven's rude self asks.

"More than what I make at the clinic. Six figures."

"Six?" Seven and I say.

"Momma's gonna be a millionaire!" Sekani shouts.

I swear he doesn't know anything. "Six figures is the hundred thousands, Sekani," I say.

"Oh. It's still a lot."

"What time is your interview?" Daddy asks.

"Eleven."

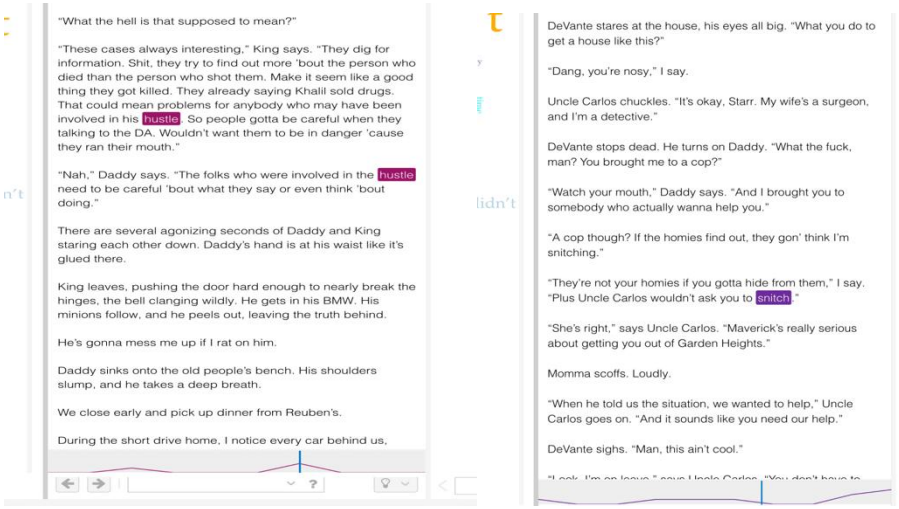
"Okay, good." He turns around and wipes a plate. "We can look at some houses before you go to it."

Momma's hand goes across her chest, and she steps back. "What?"

He looks at me, then at her. "I'm getting us outta Garden

The term 'hustle' and its conceptual collocate 'busy' defines the alternative economy driven by a fierce, desperate need for money when legitimate options fail. This type of hustle is not a choice of greed but a strategy of survival. Khalil articulates the core justification, stating he got "tired of choosing between lights and food" and is now "doing what I gotta do" to provide for his family. The language of the hustle promises quick material reward, seen in Khalil's acquisition of expensive J's and his possession of "big money," all of which signify successful illicit work. However, this path carries the highest cost, it collocates with the constant threat of violence, the cultural importance of silence ("snitch"), and entanglement with powerful, dangerous figures

like King, demonstrating that the hustle places its practitioners at war with both the legal system and the internal threats of their own community.



The corpus demonstrates that poverty in Garden Heights creates a rigid division in the language of survival. Family-led efforts focus on an expensive, long-term legitimate hustle aimed at achieving stability outside the community. In contrast, the street hustle offers an immediate, high-risk solution to financial scarcity by providing the necessary money to keep the lights on and food on the table. The economic struggle is thus manifested as a moral conflict for the community's youth, who are forced to weigh the slow security offered by family against the immediate, life-threatening necessities provided by the street hustle.

4.3 Thematic Interpretation: Generational Poverty and Inequality

The text clearly shows that poverty is not just a temporary lack of money but a

cycle passed down through generations because of limited options. When legitimate work fails, the hustle becomes the only way to survive. For example, Khalil started dealing drugs because his grandmother, who was suffering from cancer, was fired from her job at the hospital. Her illness which is a health crisis immediately led to a financial collapse that impacted the whole family. Khalil chose to pursue the risky hustle because the minimum-wage job he had couldn't even solve the basic problem which led him to having to choose "between lights and food." This illustrates how poverty forces young people into dangerous alternatives, which often leads to prison or early death, ensuring the cycle continues for the next generation.

The two settings, Garden Heights and Williamson Prep are used to highlight the extreme unfairness in what society provides to different groups. Garden Heights is marked by physical decay, "abandoned" houses and "busted streetlights", which proves that the neighborhood is neglected and receives few public resources. Williamson, in contrast, features "mini-mansions" and expensive parties, showing vast wealth and privilege. This distinction in the environment symbolizes a fundamental inequality in opportunity. Starr has to practice code-switching, changing how she talks and acts in order to fit in at the rich school. This is a survival skill necessary to overcome the inequality that sees her Garden Heights identity as "less than." Meanwhile, the

privileged youth at Williamson engage in their own risky behavior (like popping pills), but they do not face the same life-or-death consequences or institutional scrutiny (inspection) as the youth whose actions are driven by the necessity of the street hustle.

The most dangerous form of inequality is the one enforced by institutions (primarily the police) that treats residents of Garden Heights as a threat. The hustle is a desperate attempt to survive poverty, but it is immediately criminalized. For the family in Garden Heights, the police are not protectors but a systemic threat. Starr's parents had to teach her the "talk" for police interactions, confirming that the justice system is viewed as an enemy. Khalil's death is the ultimate thematic statement on this institutional inequality, the desperate measures taken to escape poverty are met with lethal force which reinforces the issue that simply living in a poor community makes one vulnerable to state violence. Poverty, therefore, is a condition of extreme risk enforced by an unequal legal system.

4.3.1 The Burden of Class Difference on Starr's Narrative Voice

Starr’s narrative voice reveals that class difference functions not just as a backdrop, but as an active, crushing burden. This burden forces Starr to fracture her identity, resulting in a constant, exhausting performance of self-censorship and "code-switching" to navigate the breach between Garden Heights (scarcity/danger) and Williamson Prep

(wealth/privilege). The burden of class difference on Starr's narrative voice is heavy and exhausting because she feels forced to constantly change who she is to survive in two completely different worlds. To manage this, Starr engages in "code-switching," which means she changes her language and behavior depending on where she is. She explicitly mentions that she has to "flip the switch" in her brain to become "Williamson Starr" when she enters her wealthy school. In this version of herself, she is extremely careful not to use slang, even though her white friends use it to try to look cool. She feels she has to censor herself to avoid confirming negative stereotypes, she holds her tongue so people won't label her the "angry black girl" or call her "ghetto". This constant policing of her own voice creates a barrier between her true thoughts and what she actually says out loud.

There is also a confusing paradox in how her identity is viewed in these two places. At her rich school, Williamson Prep, Starr feels that she is "cool by default" simply because she is one of the few black kids there, as if her race is a trendy accessory for her white friends. However, back in her own neighborhood of Garden Heights, she feels she has to work hard to "earn coolness," which she finds more difficult than buying expensive sneakers. This creates a strange pressure where she feels objectified at school but inadequate at home. She sees the physical difference in wealth, noting that her

friends live in "mini-mansions" while her house is just "mini," which makes her feel the need to keep her two worlds completely separate to avoid judgment or embarrassment.

In addition, Starr's narrative voice struggles with the weight of "betrayal." Her proximity to wealth (through school and her boyfriend Chris) makes her question her loyalty to her home and her identity. This burden affects her relationships, especially with her boyfriend, Chris. Because he is white and wealthy, Starr struggles with a deep fear that she is "betraying who I am" by dating him. She hides her reality from him for a long time because she is terrified that if he sees where she comes from, the "broken-down cars" and the projects, that he will only see her as a "charity case" or a girl from the "ghetto." This fear forces her to silence her grief over Khalil, she cannot fully share her pain because his death is tied to the poverty and violence she tries so hard to hide from her Williamson life. She admits that she didn't trust Chris enough to show him her true self, fearing he would judge her background.

Ultimately, this pressure creates a split in Starr's mind, often called a "double consciousness," where she is always watching herself through other people's eyes. Her internal thoughts are honest and fluent in the language of her home, but her external voice at school is polished and guarded. She admits that "Being two different people is so exhausting". She lives in constant fear that if she "slips up," she will ruin the careful

image she has built. It is only when her two worlds violently collide, like when Chris comes to Garden Heights or during the riots, that she begins to stop performing and starts blending her two voices into one authentic identity.

4.3.2 The Language of Opportunity and Aspiration

The language of opportunity and aspiration in *The Hate U Give* reveals a landscape where "making it" usually means "getting out." Success is described as something that happens elsewhere, while staying in the neighborhood is often portrayed as a trap caused by a lack of choices. In the book, education is treated as the ultimate lifeline. The language used to describe Williamson Prep highlights access to things Garden Heights doesn't have. Starr's father explains clearly that neighborhood schools "don't get the resources to equip you like Williamson does," which is why they send their children there despite the cost. Getting a diploma is treated as a major victory of survival, when Seven graduates, his father tells him, "You’re going places, no doubt," and that contrasts this success with the sad reality that "a lot of young brothers don't get theirs". In this world, graduating isn't just a normal school event, it is described as a rare escape route.

Aspiration is the hope for a better future which is almost always described as leaving Garden Heights. When the family visits their potential new home in Brook Falls,

the language shifts from words about danger to words about safety and peace. Starr notices "freshly paved streets" and "open garage doors," realizing that in this place, people don't have to worry about theft or violence. This contrasts sharply with Garden Heights, where success is hard to find. Momma's personal goal is to land a job paying "Six figures," a phrase that signals entering a new economic class that allows them to buy safety. Moving isn't described as abandoning their people, but as a necessary step to "protect my family".

Additionally, the text uses the language of necessity to explain why young men turn to the "hustle" (drug dealing). It is not described as a greedy desire to be rich, but as a forced choice because other doors are closed. Daddy explains that "Corporate America don't bring jobs to our communities," which leaves the hustle as one of the only ways to survive. Khalil's story is the perfect example of this, he didn't sell drugs because he wanted to be a criminal, but because he "got tired of choosing between lights and food". In Garden Heights, the "opportunity" to sell drugs is actually a trap that endangers lives, whereas real opportunity is something reserved for the wealthy environments like Williamson.

Ultimately, in *The Hate U Give*, the language of opportunity and aspiration paints a stark picture where "making it" is synonymous with "getting out." Education at

Williamson Prep is portrayed not just as schooling, but as a vital escape route because the neighborhood schools are deprived of the resources necessary for students to succeed. True aspiration is defined by the physical act of relocation, where moving to a place like Brook Falls represents the ultimate achievement of safety and peace of mind. Conversely, the "hustle" of the streets is redefined not as a greedy ambition for wealth, but as a desperate survival trap where young men like Khalil are forced to sell drugs just to pay for basic needs like lights and food because of the absence of legitimate corporate jobs in their community.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of the Study

This research employs a corpus-assisted approach to analyze Angie Thomas' novel, *The Hate U Give*. The study investigates the linguistic and thematic construction of racism, systemic injustice, identity crisis, and poverty. By combining computational text analysis with literary interpretation, the study aims to provide insight into the social anxieties and lived realities of Black individuals navigating contemporary American society. Chapter two examines systemic racism through the high-frequency keywords "Black," "White," and "Cops," revealing that "Cops" collocates heavily with violent terms like "tear," "gas," and "death". The analysis shows how media language (e.g., "thug," "gangbanger") is used to criminalize victims and justify police brutality. Furthermore, it finds that the word "justice" is linguistically bound almost exclusively to the victim, Khalil, indicating that accountability is the central conflict of the narrative.

Chapter three focuses on the protagonist's "dual identity," showing how she "code-switches" between the African American Vernacular English (AAVE) of her neighborhood and the Standard English (SE) of her prep school to avoid stereotypes.

The corpus data highlights her internal fragmentation through phrases like "Either version of me" and the fear of being labeled "bougie". The study concludes that this identity crisis is violently resolved when the trauma of the shooting forces her two worlds to collapse into a singular mode of survival.

Chapter four examines the lexical indicators of socioeconomic status, framing poverty as a cyclical trap rather than a temporary condition. The analysis focuses on the term "hustle," distinguishing between the "legitimate hustle" of Starr's parents (working to leave the neighborhood) and the "street hustle" (drug dealing) which characters like Khalil turn to out of desperation to choose between "lights and food". The study uses collocations of the word "home" to show it is viewed as a fragile fortress threatened by financial failure. Furthermore, the chapter contrasts the physical environments of the two settings, the "abandoned" houses of Garden Heights versus the "mini-mansions" of Williamson, to illustrate how the text linguistically maps inequality and the lack of opportunity.

Overall, the study concludes that Angie Thomas's *The Hate U Give* uses linguistic analysis to demonstrate that systemic racism is a constant threat (evidenced by the violent collocations of "Cops"), which forces the protagonist to adopt a fragmented identity via constant code-switching. Ultimately, the novel frames poverty not as a

personal failure but as a necessary survival trap ("choosing between lights and food"), confirming that true opportunity and safety are only attainable through the difficult process of "getting out" of the marginalized community.

5.2 Findings

The text clearly portrays racism as the most dominant theme in the novel because racial terms appear very frequently and it is repeatedly connected to violence, power, and inequality. Words such as Black, White, cops, justice, and dead appear at high rates, proving that the novel constantly returns to issues of policing, racial identity, and racial conflict. The collocations of “Black” and “White” reflect how the two racial groups are often discussed side-by-side, showing a constant comparison of privilege versus disadvantage. The collocates of “cops”, words like “tear,” “gas,” “death,” and “Khalil”, clearly show that encounters with police are strongly linked to brutality and danger. The word “justice” appearing mostly beside Khalil’s name shows that the pursuit of fairness in the story is centered on racial violence. Altogether, the data demonstrates that the language of the novel is built around systemic racism and that racial power structures shape almost every major event in the text.

The corpus also shows that Starr’s identity crisis is not just emotional but strongly reflected in her language. Through the distribution of personal pronouns,

code-switching markers, and repeated self-descriptions, the data reveals two distinct versions of Starr: “Garden Heights Starr” and “Williamson Starr.” Her frequent use of phrases like “I don’t belong,” “either version of me,” and “I feel” or “I think” highlights the pressure she faces to perform two separate identities. Collocates such as “bougie,” “angry Black girl,” “cool by default,” and “stuck-up” show how Starr constantly monitors how others see her. Meanwhile, the sudden shift in language during the police encounter: short, direct survival instructions, forces the two identities to collapse into one frightened self. By tracking these linguistic patterns, the corpus makes it clear that Starr’s identity is split across her two worlds, but the trauma of Khalil’s death ultimately pushes her toward a more unified and authentic voice.

Finally, the text also reveals that poverty and class struggle are deeply woven into the language of the novel. Words tied to hardship, such as “food,” “lights,” “money,” “minimum wage,” “store,” “cash advance,” and “bills”, appear repeatedly, showing constant financial pressure within Garden Heights. The contrast between Garden Heights and Williamson is also clear in the vocabulary, Garden Heights is described through AAVE expressions, words linked to danger, and terms for survival, while Williamson is described through words connected to wealth, comfort, and privilege. Collocations like “lights and food,” “minimum wage,” “busy”, and “fresh kicks” reveal

how economic struggle shapes daily decisions. At the same time, words associated with Williamson; “mini-mansions,” “popping pills,” and “white-people school”, highlight a world of excess and security. The text therefore depicts that socioeconomic conflict is not a background theme but a constant presence that influences behavior, opportunity, and identity.

5.3 Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to literary studies by bringing a new quantitative perspective to the analysis of *The Hate U Give*. While most scholars focus on racism, identity, and activism through close reading and theory, very few have examined the theme of poverty in the novel, even though it is a major issue shaping Starr’s world. By using corpus tools to track words related to money, hardship, and survival, this research highlights how deeply poverty influences the characters’ decisions and the structure of the community. By using corpus methods such as word frequency, collocation, and context windows, the study provides measurable evidence for the theme of racism, identity crisis, and poverty. This means the arguments are not based only on interpretation, but also on patterns that appear repeatedly in the novel’s actual language. As a result, the study offers a fresh approach to understanding how Angie Thomas constructs systemic racism and social inequality through vocabulary, repetition, and

narrative emphasis, and also expands literary scholarship by revealing an overlooked theme and proving it through measurable linguistic patterns, not interpretation alone.

This study also contributes to corpus linguistics by showing how corpus tools can be successfully applied to a single young adult (YA) novel, something not often done in digital humanities research. Instead of relying on large text collections, the study demonstrates that tools like Voyant Tools can uncover meaningful patterns even in one work of fiction. The analysis shows how frequency, collocation, and context windows help reveal racial tension, identity struggle, and especially the under-discussed theme of poverty. It also proves that corpus tools work well with modern language features such as AAVE, slang, youth dialogue, and code-switching. This makes the research an example of how corpus linguistics can be applied beyond traditional corpora, supporting the analysis of identity, culture, and social issues within one novel.

5.4 Recommendation

Based on the analysis of this study, future research can build on this study by comparing *The Hate U Give* with other young adult novels that explore race, identity, or poverty. A comparative corpus analysis could show whether the linguistic patterns found here, such as the dominance of racial terms, the use of code-switching, or the presence of poverty-related vocabulary also appear in similar YA texts like *All*

American Boys or *Dear Martin*. This would help scholars see whether Angie Thomas's use of language is unique or part of a larger pattern in contemporary YA literature. Another possible direction for future research is to expand the corpus to include interviews, speeches, or author commentary to see how Thomas herself discusses themes of racism, identity crisis and poverty. Researchers could also look at how audiences respond to the novel by analyzing social media posts or book reviews using digital tools.

In addition, the corpus findings from this study can also be used in the classroom to help students better understand the novel and its themes. Teachers can show students how often certain words like Black, White, cops, or justice, appear in the book, helping them see how language shapes meaning. Using simple corpus tools, students can explore how certain words cluster around characters, events, or emotions, which makes discussions about racism, identity, and poverty more concrete and grounded in the text. This approach can also help students understand code-switching, stereotypes, and systemic injustice by showing the actual patterns in Starr's language. Teachers can use the quantitative data to guide conversations about why certain themes dominate the novel and why poverty appears so frequently even though many scholars rarely discuss it.

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