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Cultural Tightness-Looseness and Spiral of Silence: A Cause-and-Effect Study of A Good Girl's Guide to Murder

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Abstract
The Cultural norms and values play an important role in human life. They may become a source of flourishing or a hindrance to self-growth. The people within a community may choose to live either with justice by raising their voices or with inequality by staying silent. This study explores these issues in the novel A Good Girl's Guide to Murder. The study uses a qualitative design to analyse the text. Purposive sampling and thematic coding are used to extract the data. Primary and secondary sources have been consulted for the study. Gelfand et al.'s (2006) theory of cultural tightness-looseness and Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann's (1974) Spiral of Silence are adapted as a theoretical framework. It is a cause-and-effect study; both theories are found in interplay in the text. The study determines that tight cultures are more likely to develop the spiral of silence on many intricate issues, which cause injustice and inequality, and make the minority suffer. But there is always a minority voice that overcomes the societal pressure and frees the victim. The study has implications for literary readers, researchers, and rigid societies to consider the consequences.

Keywords: A close case, Little Kilton, Cultural tightness, Cultural looseness, Spiral of silence, Reversal of the spiral.

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1. Introduction

All over the world, thousands of cultures and societies exist. Despite many changes that make them distinct cultures, all the cultures are more or less similar. Humans are social beings bound by some norms, rules and regulations. Without any constitution or unwritten rules, a society may not be called a society, but rather a jungle. Depending on some factors such as geography, nature, internal values, etc., a culture may be made tight or loose. According to Gelfand *et al*.'s (2006) theory of cultural tightness-looseness, some communities have tight cultures, and some have loose cultures. Tight cultures have strong norms, offering less tolerance and severe punishments; loose cultures have few norms and a more flexible system of implementation. Both systems have benefits and side effects for the group members. In tight cultures, there is a higher chance of the prevalence of discipline and in loose cultures, it is less. On the other hand, tight cultures restrict the growth of members, as they impose many rules and boundaries, while in loose cultures it is greater. Additionally, loose cultures provide equal freedom to all, while in tight cultures the deviants may be ethnic or racial minorities suffering from injustice.

Cultures, either tight or loose, need to ensure justice and equality for the majority as well as minorities. To a greater extent, it is not the lawmakers, but rather the members of a community who decide whether to live with justice or injustice. When groups remain silent about the inequality and injustice for others, they indirectly decide to suffer themselves. Usually, the minority keeps silent, as stated in the theory of spiral of silence by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1974). They fear isolation and rejection by dominant members of society. But despite the pressure of the majority, there is always a minority who raises their voice and stands up to the unfair. It is that voice that provides justice to society.

Holly Jackson's (2019) *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder* is a good representative literary work of these situations. As Leng *et al*. (2023) note,

Cultural tightness and looseness play an important role in responding to a variety of threats. In this novel, we observe that cultural tightness has responded differently to two deviants: Sal, who is an outsider and Andie, who is a white person but deviates from the norms. Similarly, for Triandis (1995), Tightness-Looseness is 'situation specific': a culture may be tight in one situation and loose in another. The novel confirms this by showing tightness in some situations and looseness in others. This tightness leads to the development of a spiral of silence which intentionally or unintentionally supports the true culprits and makes the innocent suffer.

A Good Girl's Guide to Murder is the first book of a trilogy written by Holly Jackson. It is a story about a murder case that Pippa Fitz Amobi attempts to re-investigate. Two young friends, Andie and Salil, were murdered five years ago. The case was closed by then, and Sal was declared the murderer of his girlfriend Andie as well as accused of his suicide. Pip could never believe that Sal murdered Andie because he was a nice guy who had helped her on a few occasions. When she gets EPQ for high school, she decides to reopen this case in her project and find out the true culprit. Initially, it was a project, but then it becomes her personal interest, and she works as a detective, with help from Sal's brother, Ravi. While doing this, she goes through many efforts and hardships. She faces social pressure and murderers' threats to quit the case, but she does not. She completes her project and proves Sal's innocence, who was murdered by their tutor, Elliot Ward. In the course of the investigation, Andie's murderer, Becca, her sister, is also discovered, who had unintentionally hurt her and let her die. The police reopen the case, and Pip, in her final presentation, condemns the social norms and collective crime of punishing an outsider family for doing nothing.

This study aims to reflect the social vices caused by cultural tightness and stigmatisation, their effects in the form of the spiral of silence, and the extended

consequences of both. It uses Holly Jackson's novel, *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder,* as a data source and means to generalise the findings to practical life. It shows how societal rigidity makes people believe and follow the majority, and how the minority suffers due to the silence of the dominant group.

2. Literature Review

This section presents a review of existing works on the novel A Good Girl's Guide to Murder and the theories applied to this study. Some scholars have explored the novel from different perspectives, discussed below. Cultural tightness-looseness and spiral of silence have also been examined by researchers and are therefore mentioned in this review.

This study uses Cultural Tightness-Looseness, an anthropological and psychological concept that measures the strength and weakness of social norms and the degree to which cultures tolerate rule violations within a community. Scholars have also compared these concepts with other concepts, some believing them to be similar and some dissimilar. According to Minkov et al. (2025), Tightness-Looseness was earlier equated with Individualism-Collectivism, as Triandis (1995) believed that collectivist cultures are tight in nature, while individualist cultures are loose. For Gelfand et al. (2006), individualism-collectivism means the extent to which society forces strong ties to in-groups versus freedom or independence from the group. They viewed IC as unrelated to following social norms. For Fischer et al. (2009), "individualists within collectivistic cultures are more strongly guided by group norms, duties, and obligations" (p.188). In Stamkou et al. (2009) words, "reactions to norm violations vary across cultures as a function of the importance that is attached to group obligation and social order (p. 948).

Spiral of Silence is a Political Science and Mass Media theory. It is a public opinion theory of communication which states that people do not express their

views when they think that they are in the minority. They remain silent due to fear of isolation from the community. According to Kennamer (1990), individuals are less likely to participate in discussion on an issue in an environment where the information is against their opinion. Moreno-Riano (2002) tested the environment of spiral of silence and the conceptual hierarchy of views. He classified them into different levels: micro, macro, and group, and studied their effect on respondents. It was inferred that an individual's consensus group's opinion influences an individual's opinion, and their perception of macro/group opinion complements the majority view. Dalisay (2012) viewed that people are inclined to express their opinion when they perceive their view to be supported by local media and the public, especially under the condition of using conflict avoidance. Similarly, Huge and Glynn (2013) pointed out that minorities receive delayed responses. On the macro level, Bowen and Blackmon (2003) demonstrated that the environment of view in the workgroup affects the expression of employees, especially if it's about the decision of following the voice of the organisation or keeping silent, and about true personalities.

Suryanti et al. (2025) explored the modelling of personal agency through Fiction, using A Good Girl's Guide to Murder as a data source. According to them, it's a young adult novel presenting a gripping narrative of mystery that offers extensive opportunities to explore psychological and social changes through Pip, the main character. It investigated the potential of fiction as a pedagogical tool that bridges learning theories and young adult fiction, which analyses the way the protagonist embodies Bandura's social cognitive theory. The study offers new insights into their integration. The study reveals how the protagonist's agency shapes her decision-making and resilience in handling complex situations. The findings show the potency of young adult literature in demonstrating basic learning principles and in modelling personal agency for its audience.

Likely, Purnami et al. (2025) applied John G. Cawelti's classic detective formula to A Good Girl's Guide to Murder. It used a qualitative method to explore the narrative structure of the novel. The research focused on identifying the elements of the formula that constructively shape the narrative events. Data were collected through reading and note-taking. The findings show that the novel follows six structural stages identified by Cawelti's (1976) theory: (1) introduction of the detective, (2) crime and clues, (3) investigation, (4) announcement of the solution, (5) explanation of the solution, and (6) denouement. The novel has adapted the classic model to contemporary fiction, featuring a teenage detective. Additionally, the conventional detective narration has become more innovative by using multiple formats: emails, interview transcripts, and diaries. The study highlighted Jackson's novel's successful blend of traditional genre standards and modern storytelling methods, which provides a new detective experience while maintaining the basic structure of traditional mystery fiction.

Additionally, Putri and Arini (2024) have explored feminism in A Good Girl's Guide to Murder. Feminism is a movement that emerged as resistance to the oppression of women caused by patriarchal cultures in societies and literary works. The study attempted to figure out the types of feminism depicted by the main character in the novel. It applied Rosemarie Tong's theory to categorise different types such as radical and liberal feminism. A qualitative descriptive method was used to analyse the data. The findings reflect liberal and radical feminist aspects of Pip. Liberal feminism is highlighted where Pip gets equal rights in education and liberty, and Pippa's ambitions and desires are not controlled by patriarchy. For radical feminism, Pip depicts radical libertarian and cultural feminisms. Further, Sudhashini et al. (2025) also conducted a study on feminism in the same novel. It emphasises its role in authorising young women and cultivating critical engagement with themes of equality and justice.

Moreover, Binu and Nivedhaa (2024) have conducted a comparative study on Holly Jackson's A Good Girl's Guide to Murder and its Netflix Adaptation. The novel was first published in 2019, in which Pippa investigates a closed case. The story was adapted into a Netflix series in 2024, directed by Poppy Cogan, with Emma Myers portraying Pip. The study explored the similarities and differences between the two, focusing on narrative structure, characters' portrayal, thematic representations, and the challenges of adaptation. The Netflix series A Good Girl's Guide to Murder is faithful to the novel in many respects but offers a new interpretation by using visual and cinematic elements. The series focuses more on interpersonal dynamics and emotional depth, highlighting aspects of the story that the novel leaves understated. However, the unique narrative structure of the novel, with its multiple approaches, remains unparalleled in encompassing quality. The media bring strengths to the novel, allowing for deeper intellectual engagement with the mystery, and the series provides an emotional and visual experience.

The above-mentioned studies show that *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder* has been studied from other perspectives but is open to the exploration of some concepts such as Cultural Tightness-Looseness, Spiral of Silence, and some others. Besides, the theories used in this study are adapted from other fields and not used in literary texts. They have been used in their original fields to explore and explain different phenomena, but are new to apply in literature.

3. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative textual analysis. It uses the novel, *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder*, as the primary data source, while some secondary sources, such as research articles and journals, are also used. The technique of purposive sampling is used to collect data, as lines representing Cultural tightness-looseness and the Spiral of Silence are extracted and analysed. The data have been collected

through close reading. Thematic coding was done to trace instances of cultural tightness and the spiral of silence.

Basically, the study is a cause-and-effect study, where cultural tightness is shown as the cause and spiral of silence is used to show the effect. Conversely, the loosening and spiral reversal, represented as the consequence, are also highlighted in the study.

The theoretical framework is interdisciplinary, adapted from two different fields. Cultural Tight-Looseness theory is a psychological anthropological theory which was initially introduced by anthropologist Pertti Pelto (1968), and then expanded by cross-cultural psychologist Michele Gelfand and her colleagues in 2006. It views some cultures as having tight social norms while others have loose cultural norms. Tight cultures ensure conformity and punish those who break the rules. It has low tolerance for deviance and strong monitoring and control. Loose cultures have flexible rules and greater tolerance for rule violations.

Spiral of Silence is a theory of Political science and Mass Communication proposed by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann in 1974. It states that people hide their opinions when they think that they are in the minority. They adhere to the majority opinion due to the fear of isolation or social rejection. Media plays an important role in shaping public opinion by highlighting majority views, which makes minorities feel more isolated and hinders their voice.

4. Analysis and Discussion

The ironic lines, "Five years ago, schoolgirl Andie Bell was murdered by Sal Singh. The police know he did it. Everyone in the town knows he did it," written on the back cover of the novel, reflect the spiral of silence prevailing in the town as well as the cultural tightness existing there. The emphasis on ‘he did it’ shows how tight and rigid the beliefs against a Singh (an Indian) were developed. "The

police know" and “everyone in the town knows” show how the chain starts and how it grows into a spiral.

Both theories, Cultural Tightness-Looseness and Spiral of Silence, work together in this novel. Usually, it's the rigidity of culture that silences people, but when cultural norms become a threat to the townspeople, they break the silence and loosen those norms. In Triandis's (1989) words, “tightness may result from too much looseness, and looseness from too much tightness. Thus, culture is dynamic, ever changing.” p. 512 *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder* is one of the best representations of the interplay of these concepts, cultural tightness and spiral of silence. Some characters act as culture-tightening and spiral-making agents, while others act as culture-loosening and spiral-reversing agents. The cultural tightening agents are the police and townspeople, who had closed the case earlier and silenced Ravi (Sal's brother), while Pip and Ravi are loosening agents. Similarly, the spiral of silence was initiated by the murderers but strengthened by the police, which resulted in the silencing of the whole town.

Cultural tightness interacts with the spiral of silence because Little Kilton does not accept deviance and punishes it harshly, such as ostracising Sal's family and blackmailing and attacking Pippa for reopening the case. Some characters believe and know that Sal was innocent. Still, they were silent either due to cultural tightness, such as Sal’s friends, or the spiral of silence, such as Andie's friends aware of her behaviour, and Cara, who also thought Sal was innocent. Correspondingly, Noelle-Neumann (1974) writes, “Voicing the opposite opinion, or acting in public accordingly, incurs the danger of isolation.” (p. 44) Both tightness and the spiral of silence work together on Ravi, Sal’s brother, who was silenced by the police, and culture had even grown tighter. Sal, being an outsider (different class and ethnicity), was a perfect victim as tight cultures need to expel someone to reaffirm their rules. Andie was also a norm violator, as she had

loosened the culture for herself by getting involved in drug selling and unethical actions. The tight culture solved the crisis of her murder by blaming another deviant, Sal. During the investigation, when Andie's character gets revealed to them, Ravi says, "Andie sounds like a piece of work, … 'And yet it was so easy for everyone to believe that Sal was the monster." (p. 87), which shows that Andie's character is even more deviant and worth investigating but people supported her because she was from them and Sal was the 'other'. They did not use only the simple 'murderer' for him but a 'monster', as if he was habitually chaotic. They gave them such names to present him as more terrifying and hateful. When Pip and Ravi meet Naomi's friend, Natalie, to ask her some questions, for the same cause, Natalie points to Ravi: "It must be hard for you too,' … "how much this town worships Andie Bell Kilton's saint and sweetheart. And that bench dedication she has: *Taken too soon*. Not soon enough, it should say" (p. 89). Natalie was the girl whose life was destroyed by Andie and was suffering even long after Andie's death.

Pippa works as a culture-loosening agent who challenges the norms and faces threats and social media attacks because she has become a threat to culture's stability.

Pippa's Attitude toward Silence and Culture-Tightness

Pip is the one who recognises that there is a story hidden behind the silence of the town about the case and their gossip against the Singhs. As she tells Ravi, "Because I don't think your brother did it- and I'm going to try to prove it" (p. 6). She knew that the cultural norms were supporting the true culprits and blaming the innocent who had a different ethnicity. The town had collectively decided to close the case, and any questioning was socially sanctioned. Pip goes against the norms to loosen the culture and uncoil the spiral of silence by interviewing Andie's and Sal's friends and suspects of the closed case. She is the only friend and supporter

of Ravi in his brother's case. As Ravi says, "I'm guessing you and I are in the minority there" (p. 24). Pippa, being a brave girl, faces the threats and consistently follows the investigation. Usually, the spiral of silence makes a minority keep silent, especially when society is so tight against someone, but Pip decides to reopen the case; she tries to loosen the culture once rigid and reverse the spiral of silence. With her friends, he gets the first note asking her to "stop digging" (p. 72) into the case. But she hides it and develops a spiral of silence about the blackmailers. From that first note to the last one, "This is your final warning, Pippa. Walk away." (p. 194), she doesn't let any of her family and friends know about it. Every time she gets the note, she becomes scared inside but does not step back. She keeps it a secret from her parents, who would otherwise ask her to quit. In Gelfand et al. (2007) words, "individuals in tight societies experience a much greater degree of normative restrictiveness across societal institutions as compared to individuals in loose societies." (p. 3) She even loses her dear dog, Burney. When she comes to know that Elliot Ward, her friend's father and their teacher, is the murderer and blackmailer, she does not waste a minute to call the police and prove Sal innocent. With Pippa's effort, finally, "A family was set free from the grave weight they'd carried all these years. And through all the hurt and doubt that would come, it was worth hanging on to" (p. 269). The police reopened Andie's case. Although Pip had known Andie's killer as well, she left the rest to the police to handle and did not follow further, because Andie's murderer was her sister, Becca, *A good girl guided to murder*.

Sal's Family as a Minority and Isolated Voice

In the novel, Sal's brother Ravi is the best representation of a minority voice and isolated figure. As explained in the theory of spiral of silence, he could not even question or investigate his brother's case. He was shut up by the police and isolated from the community. He went silent when the police asked him to keep quiet.

When they found themselves in a tough situation, his parents also asked him to quit. In a conversation, he tells Pip, "I tried to do what you're doing, three years ago. My parents told me to leave it alone, that I was only going to make things harder for myself, but I just couldn't accept it" (p. 45). This aligns with Noelle-Neumann's (1974) view, "public opinion can be described as the dominating opinion which compels compliance of attitude and behavior in that it threatens the dissenting individual with isolation," (p. 44) He would not shop in the town but went to another town because townspeople looked down on him, and the rigidity of culture did not allow him to live among them. In Ravi's words, "Yeah, we usually shop out of town… But milk emergency" (p. 38). Their house was considered a haunted place; no one visited their house. Children used to get scared while passing by their house. As the narrator writes:

> Their home was like the town's own haunted house; people's footsteps quickened as they walked by and their words strangled and died in their throats. Shrieking children would gather on their walk home from school, daring one another to run up and touch the front gate. (p. 4)

It was the community's unfair attitude towards them. They had not done anything wrong but were labelled. Noelle-Neumann (1974) claims that people "observe which views are gaining strength and which are declining. This is a prerequisite for the existence or development of public opinion as the interaction of individual views and the supposed view of the environment." (p. 45) The narrator extends the lines, "Pip had always wondered why they didn't move. Not that they had to; they hadn't done anything wrong. But she didn't know how they lived like that" (p. 4). Even when Pip was investigating the case, she could not keep Ravi in front because people would always call him a murderer's brother. When Pip decides to interview Ravi, her friend Lauren asks her, "Oh, but … what are people going to think if they see you going into Ravi Singh's house?" (p. 18), to which Pip says that she

doesn't care about people. When Pip asks the journalist Stanley Forbes why he called Sal 'killer', 'murderer', and 'monster' in his articles without using 'allegedly', and asks for evidence. He says, "Almost too many to list. Evidence aside, he was the boyfriend, right? And it's always the boyfriend or the ex-boyfriend. Not only that, Salil was Indian." (p. 20), which clearly shows his labelling of Sal. No written rules confirm that a boyfriend must be her murderer if a girl is killed. His calling him 'Indian' emphasises that he was considered a deviant and stigmatised, worth being called a murderer without any evidence.

The society was so cruel to them that they made them forget Sal's death and made them grieve for not letting them grieve: "It's not just that he's gone. It's that … well, we're not allowed to grieve for him, because of what happened. And if I were to say "I miss my brother", it makes me some kind of monster" (p. 24). The burden of social isolation and abandonment was so heavy that when they finally knew that Sal's murder was proven, the words they express carry a mixture of happiness and pain as if a heavy weight was lifted from their shoulders, "Nothing can bring him back, I know that. But we have, in a way. Sal was murdered, Sal was innocent, and now everyone will know." (264), not because that they doubted their son and brother, Sal, but the voices against him were so loud that proving his innocence was as if they got him back.

Andie's and Becca's Unique Role

Andie and Becca, two sisters, have different natures and attitudes. Growing up in an unhappy and depressing family environment, they are almost opposite in nature. As Gelfand et al. (2007) record some scholars who view, "In tight societies, parents emphasize rule abidance, monitor their children's behavior, and have stricter socialization tactics" (Holloway, 1999; Ho, 1981; Pearson, 1984, as cited in Gelfand et al., 2007, p.3). Similarly, the girls were living in a strict environment where they were not finding peace. But their father was not strict in a protective

way, rather taunting and criticising them, as Becca's friend Jess says in her interview about their dad:

> It was just the way he spoke to them, the girls and Dawn. If you saw it a couple of times you would think he was just trying to be funny. But I saw it often, very often, and I think it definitely affected the environment in that house. (p. 102)

Andie becomes louder and seeks to break the norms by getting involved in drugs, bullying and unethical roles. Becca becomes quiet and prefers to stay by herself. In Jess' words:

> Oh, Becca never, ever wanted to talk about her dad. But, yes, it was obvious it played havoc with their self-esteem. Andie started caring so much about what she looked like, about what people thought of her. There would be screaming matches when their parents said it was time to go out … Becca became obsessed with her flaws; she started skipping meals. It affected them in different ways, though: Andie got louder, Becca got quieter. (p. 102)

Although they have different natures, the environment seems to elicit the same reaction from both. Andie, sick of her father's attitude and not getting allowance, deviates from the norms and starts selling drugs. Becca tolerates her father's attitude but goes mad at Andie's reaction when she tells her that her friend Max had rape her, taking help of the drug she had sold to him. She unintentionally lets her die and then disposes of her body. She admits it by saying:

> I watched her die and did nothing. And because I had thought it was me who hurt her head, and there were scratches on her arms from me, signs of struggle, I knew everyone – even my parents – would think I'd meant to kill her. Because Andie was always so much better than me. My parents loved her more. (p. 279)

When she comes to know that Pip has reopened the case, she starts blackmailing her, and when she finds her near the discovery, she almost attempts to kill her, but then loosens the grip around her neck: "I can't do it,' Becca said, moving her hands back to hug herself, 'I can't." (283), showing the goodness and innocence inside her.

Characters' Private Doubt and Public Silence

There were many characters in the novel who either knew that Sal was innocent or doubted the case because of Andie's character, but no one was ready to articulate it publicly. This is consistent with Noelle-Neumann's (1974) view when she says:

> Willingness to expose one's views publicly varies according to the individual's assessment of the frequency distribution and the trend of opinions in his social environment. It is greater if he believes his own view is, and will be, the dominating one or (though not dominating now) is becoming more widespread. (p. 45)

When Pip interviewed people, they would reveal evidence and doubts showing that Sal was innocent, but they were not ready to accept it publicly. In the beginning, from every interviewee, she would get the answer, 'Sal did it', which is what she wanted to investigate. But over the novel, the culture was loosening, and the spiral of silence was uncoiling. Andie's friend Emma reveals in her interview:

> Erm, it's just, I don't want to speak ill of the dead, you know, but … I've had five years to grow up and reflect on everything and when I think back to those times I don't like the person I was at all. The person I was with Andie. (p. 56)

These lines show that Andie was not a good girl. Sal's friends also knew that he was not a murderer, but they were silenced by a dominant voice who asked them

to lie to the police. On Pip's asking, "Do you think Sal killed Andie that night?" Sal's best friend, Naomi, opines, "Not the Sal I knew,' … 'He was the best, the nicest person" (p. 33). To the same question, his other friend Max Hastings replies, "He had to have done it, didn't he? I mean, if you're asking if I thought my friend was capable of murder, the answer would be no way" (p. 36). Later, when Pip makes them reveal the truth, Naomi says:

> We- me, Max, Jake and Millie- we all got a text on that Monday night. From an unrecognized number. It told us we had to delete every picture of Sal taken on the night Andie disappeared and to upload the rest as normal. It told us that at school on Tuesday we had to ask the head teacher to call in the police so we could make a statement. And we had to tell them that Sal actually left Max's at half ten and that he'd asked us to lie before. (p. 180)

This was the actual murderer (Elliot Ward) of Sal and the silencing voice who wanted Sal to be known as murdered. He was the one who was trying to silence Pippa as well, and blackmailing her to step away, but she didn't.

Reversing the Spiral of Silence

Pip is the main agent of loosening the culture and spiral of silence. The line written on the front cover of the novel, "A closed case. An A-grade student who won't let it go …" shows her strong determination to uncover the truth. In the beginning, people were not willing to accept that Sal might be innocent, but gradually the coil was softened:

> What happened next in the Andie Bell case is quite confusing to glean from the newspaper reports. There are gaps I will have to fill with guesswork and rumours until the picture becomes clearer from any later interviews; hopefully Ravi and Naomi – who was one of Sal's best friends – can assist with this. (p. 13)

Pip starts with guesswork and rumours, which provides a lot. Although in this case the rumours were all going against Sal, during the investigation she could take help from existing clues and some information provided intentionally or unintentionally. Ravi, Sal's brother, also collaborates with her to start working to prove his brother innocent. That's why when Pip gets tired:

> It crossed her mind that maybe she had gone too far this time for a homework project. Maybe. But this wasn't just a project anymore. This was for Sal, for Ravi. For the truth. She could do this for them. (p. 116)

She decides to melt the rigidity and break the silence. Even after getting criticised and threatened, she thinks: "I just have to keep chasing, even when the path is resisting me" (p. 97).

Andie's friends, in the beginning, seem hesitant to talk about her, but they gradually disclose her nature and character. They do not seem to like her any longer but still keep secrets because the majority in the town tends to represent her as innocent. They would not easily break the norms and talk about their friend, but their interview reveals many facts about Andie and her family. Emma tells Pip:

> I'm not saying any of this because I mean that Andie deserved what she got. No, no that's not what I mean at all, no one deserves to be murdered and put in a hole. I only mean that, appreciating now the kind of person Andie was, I can understand why Sal snapped and killed her." (p. 56)

Her words show that Andie was no longer the admiring figure for them she once was. They had reflected on her toxic nature and almost considered her worth murdered. Though her friend, she could not say it clearly, and thought Sal to be a murderer because he was the one close to her and framed to be her killer, as the whole town believed he was. It reflects how, when the spiral reverses, fear reduces, and minority voices emerge, resulting in culture-loosening.

As Noelle-Neumann (1974) believes, "in the process of public opinion formation, observation of changes in the environment precedes changes in one's own opinion" (p. 49). Ravi notices that the spiral of silence is gradually reversing and they are making progress towards the evidence. "I know that my brother was innocent now, even if no one else does yet. I've waited over five years; I can wait a little longer. And in the meantime I'll keep looking into our open leads" (p. 220).

Sal's friends have kept the secret for five years because they were made to. A culture-tightening agent has blackmailed them and asked them to change their statement to the police. They would not expose the truth until Pip forced them to break the silence, leading to the discovery of the actual murderer. As Max eventually said:

> Someone knew what we had done. They said that if we didn't do everything they asked, they would tell the police what we did to that man. So we did it. We deleted the pictures, and we lied to the police. (p. 182)

Max and his friends had mistakenly hit a person by car, and now they were afraid that the people or police might get to know and punish them. The murderer, Elliot Ward, knew about this secret from his daughter Naomi's diary. So, he sent them a message from an unknown number, blackmailing them into giving a statement against Sal; otherwise, he would inform the police. That was what actually made Sal look like a murderer when his friends changed their statement. But as Pip viewed: "An innocent life was taken, and everyone in this town turned it ugly in their mouths, turned him into a villain. But if a villain can be made, then they can be unmade." (p. 186), she proved him innocent and set them free from the social curse. Thus, a girl loosened the culture for a non-native victim and reversed the spiral of silence.

5. Conclusion

Nothing can conclude this study better than Pip's closing lines, "But there was one final player in this story, Little Kilton, and it's us. Collectively we turned a beautiful life into the myth of a monster. We turned a family home into a ghost house. And from now on we must do better" (p. 290). It's always the townspeople or one's community that label someone and make their life miserable. It's a collective practice that destroys beautiful lives and turns them into hell. In the story, Sal's family was the victim of this collective practice. His family and their house were isolated and abandoned by people. They were not ready to interact with them; those who did were also questioned. The townspeople and police played a negative role in their lives. Instead of investigating and supporting the innocents, they called them 'murderers' and 'monsters'. The author's word choice, 'myth', 'monster', and 'ghost house', in the above lines, shows cultural tightness and rigidity towards the outsiders. Even after discovering the true murderers, the writer does not use such harsh words for them, which indicates flexibility and looseness for the natives. Although they were also arrested, they were not condemned so much; neither are their families shown isolated and abandoned. The culprits' families seem to be allowed to spend their lives normally.

The spiral of silence is also reflected there. 'Collectively' refers to collective action and majority opinion. The little Kilton decided that Sal was Andie's murderer because he was her boyfriend and an Indian. The police closed the case, believing that 'Sal did it'. A dominant voice silenced all the voices, but according to the theory of spiral of silence, there are always some people/characters who raise their voices despite social pressure. Pip is the character who doesn't keep quiet no matter how much society and the murderer pressure and threaten her. The study implies that society plays a crucial role in people's lives. Instead of labelling and making others' lives miserable, humans

should help and support other social beings. The dominant and majority voice should not be accepted without investigation. The minority deserves to be treated humbly, and their voice should not be silenced.

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