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## Striving For Superiority Reflected In The Main Character Of Angie Thomas's *The Hate U Give*: A Psychological Study

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### Abstract

This study analyzes the main character, Starr Carter, in Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give*, using Adlerian psychology to explore her drive, motivation, and development. Starr's feelings of inferiority, stemming from her social and economic conditions, race, and traumatic experiences, are examined. The study reveals that Starr compensates for these feelings by adopting two contrasting personas: one in her predominantly white school and another in her Black neighborhood. However, as the story progresses, Starr strives for superiority by embracing her true identity and overcoming the challenges of racism, social inequality, and personal trauma. Her final goal is to unify these conflicting identities and assert her voice as a Black woman, representing her community in the fight against institutional racism. Through creative power and striving for success, Starr transforms her initial inferiority into activism, culminating in her decision to use her voice for justice, particularly following the murder of her friend, Khalil. This research contributes to understanding how Adlerian concepts apply to literary character analysis, especially in the context of racial identity and social justice.

**Keywords:** The Hate U Give, Angie Thomas, Black discrimination, psychological issues.

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## INTRODUCTION

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5 A psychological phenomenon is one of everyday life's most frequently encountered issues. The psychological side of life can be distorted as a psychopath or different personalities encountered in normal life. The psychological phenomenon is often depicted in literary works, especially in the characteristics of the characters. There are a lot of things that may cause it.

Based on an article in *Healthy Children*, teenagers experience certain psychological problems, and the psychological effect may come from many factors such as the high tension that they face of high expectations and pressure to succeed, social media, and may cause from the world that feels scary and threatening (McCarthy, 2019)

The psychological phenomenon that impacts people cannot be averted from a larger scope of societal and economic issues happening to certain people, such as racial discrimination and poverty. Racial discrimination is the different treatment, often antagonization based on race and or the justification using inadequate reasons that put another racial group at a disadvantage (Blank et al., 2004; Wajiran, 2024).

26 Racism has been a never-ending issue in the United States, as it has existed since the colonial era since European Americans—particularly white Anglo-Saxons enjoyed privileges in matters of citizenship, land ownership, education, immigration, and voting rights (Wajiran, 2023). According to a Journal from the American Academy of Pediatrics, “Racism is a social determinant of health that has a profound impact on the health status of children, adolescents, emerging adults, and their families” (Trent et al., 2019).

30 One of the major psychological theories belongs to Alfred Adler, known as Adlerian Theory. Adler argues that all individuals are born with an inferiority complex. The condition leads to feelings of inferiority, resulting in dependence on others. Thus, the dependency on others is intact in human needs and has become a psychological standard. The inferiority that each human being carries makes them unable to compensate for their weakness in any possible way. In this case, the compensating effort is fixated on the lifestyle that one must reach superiority. Adler argues that humans expect to achieve perfection or superiority. Each person has their motives or drives to superiority, which are universal and unlimited. He believes that motives and drive for superiority are the effort to stay fit in a particular environment (McCord et al., 1956).

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7 One of the literary works that show inferiority and superiority is *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas, originally written as a short story and influenced by the author's experiences of being black and living in a black community. The novel is about the story of Starr Carter, a 16-year-old black girl who lives in Garden Heights, a neighborhood that is well-known for gangs and drug dealers. Starr Carter went to a white-majority school. Starr is also a witness to a shooting incident of her childhood best friend, Khalil, by a white officer. The story revolves around the struggle of Starr Carter being black, trying to fit in her white-majority school, which she consciously realizes her duality in her personality, overcoming her fear of being revealed that she is a witness of Khalil's death and fighting the hatred that circles inside the black community itself.

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10 Identity formation and psychological development in young adult literature are central themes in many contemporary novels, reflecting the struggles and challenges faced by adolescents as they navigate complex social, racial, and personal dynamics. In Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give*, the protagonist, Starr Carter, undergoes a profound journey of self-discovery and empowerment amidst systemic racism, social inequality, and personal trauma. As a Black teenager attending a predominantly white school while living in a marginalized Black community, Starr grapples with dual identities. This study employs Adlerian psychology to examine Starr's psychological development, particularly focusing on how feelings of inferiority and the drive for superiority shape her behavior and choices throughout the novel. By applying key concepts from Adler's theory, such as fictional finalism, creative power, and striving for success, this research seeks to uncover how Starr transforms from a character burdened by internal conflict to a voice of activism and social justice.

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1 Adlerian psychology, which emphasizes the importance of inferiority feelings and the human drive to overcome them, provides a suitable framework for analyzing Starr's character. According to Adler, individuals often compensate for their feelings of inferiority through striving for superiority or wholeness (McCord et al., 1956). In Starr's case, her socio-economic background, racial identity, and traumatic experiences form the basis of her feelings of inferiority. These factors, coupled with her attempts to navigate two different social environments, lead her to adopt dual personas: one that conforms to the expectations of her predominantly white school and another that reflects her identity within her Black community. Through this lens, the novel provides a rich exploration of how identity is shaped by societal pressures and personal experiences, making it an ideal subject for an Adlerian psychological analysis.



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This study contributes to the broader discourse on identity and trauma in young adult literature by demonstrating how Adlerian psychological theory can be applied to understand characters' complex psychological journeys. Previous studies have examined the role of race and social injustice in *The Hate U Give* (McClain, 2019; Williams, 2020), but few have applied a psychological framework that delves into Starr's internal motivations and development. By focusing on Starr's striving for superiority and ultimate self-acceptance, this research sheds light on her journey and offers insights into how young adults in similar social contexts may navigate identity formation and social activism. This approach bridges literary studies and psychology, enriching our understanding of how fictional narratives reflect real-world race, identity, and resilience issues.

## METHOD

The research methodology employed in this study follows a qualitative approach, focusing on character analysis within the framework of Adlerian psychology. The primary method used is a close reading of Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give*, with particular attention to the protagonist, Starr Carter. This method allows for a detailed examination of Starr's internal struggles, motivations, and character development. By analyzing specific passages and events in the novel, this study identifies key elements of Adler's theory, such as feelings of inferiority, striving for superiority, fictional finalism, and creative power. These psychological concepts are applied to understand Starr's behavior and growth throughout the narrative.

Data for this study are classified into two main categories: textual data and psychological concepts. The textual data consists of direct quotes and events from the novel that illustrate Starr Carter's psychological development. These are identified through the close reading of the text. The psychological concepts are drawn from Adlerian theory, specifically feelings of inferiority, fictional finalism, striving for superiority, creative power, and unified personality. These concepts form the theoretical framework and guide the classification of the textual data, ensuring that the analysis remains focused on the psychological dimensions of Starr's character.

The method of analysis involves applying Adlerian psychological theory to the textual data. The analysis is conducted in stages, beginning with identifying instances where Starr exhibits feelings of inferiority due to her race, socio-economic background, and traumatic experiences. Each identified instance is

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then analyzed to demonstrate how Starr compensates for these feelings by developing two personas and how her fictional finalism, the desire to reconcile these personas, drives her behavior. The analysis then focuses on Starr's creative power, exploring how she adapts and evolves to cope with her environment and the events she witnesses. Finally, her striving for superiority and success is examined in light of her transformation into a social activist.

The reliability and validity of the analysis are ensured by cross-referencing the psychological interpretation with established Adlerian theory. Additionally, the analysis is supported by secondary sources that discuss the impact of race, trauma, and identity in young adult literature. This ensures a comprehensive and scientifically grounded interpretation of Starr Carter's character and her journey toward personal and social success, contributing to both literary studies and psychological theory.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the Adlerian theory, there are signs of inferiority, such as displeasure, humiliation, ignorance, lack of orientation, deprivation, disparagement, physical inability, uncleanliness, sickness, and danger of death. These identified inferior feelings can be noted as the origin of an individual's point where they strive to accomplish more secure feelings to feel less inferior (McCord et al., 1956). These feelings of inferiority can be simplified as physical deficiency, mental limitation, experiences of lower social and economic status, and an individual's upbringing as a child. These signs of the inferiority of Adler can be identified in Starr Carter's personality, as shown by how Starr Carter behaves in her white-majority high school and her community.

The social and economic conditions can be seen as inferiority factors when an individual does not meet the societal standards that a community approves—such as being poor, coming from an ethnic minority race, and being treated as subordinate and unequal based on gender.

Starr Carter was not born and raised in a privileged condition. She is black and was born and raised in Garden Heights, a predominantly black neighborhood that is called 'the hood' because it is notorious for gangs, drive-by shootings, and drug dealing.

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11 She also did not come from a rich family. She tells the reader that her father was once the leader of the gang called King Lord and sold drugs. Her father was imprisoned when she was three and got out when she was six years old. Her uncle replaced her father's figure during that time. She also used to live in a one-bedroom apartment with her family. She said that she had asthma attacks often because her father and neighbors were constantly smoking. There was no proper weather support in that building. She and her family barely lived in the minimum standard of living. Blank stated that the result of the racial disparities may vary from the high rates of poverty, unemployment, residential segregation, and lower levels of education (Blank et al., 2004).

17 This condition leads to how Starr Carter lives. Her father sent her to a predominantly white majority school so she could have a better education. Maverick, Starr's father, explains this somewhat inferior condition: their unfortunate condition came from constitutional racism. Black people use and sell drugs and commit crimes, which end up in homelessness and poverty, which are the result of such a system. Small opportunities are given to the black community. Even if one can finish a diploma, one cannot be well prepared for the working world because of the lack of resources in the local school, and there is the drug industry, which also another reason that came from constitutional racism; drugs are supplied to the community and left another problem to them.

1 Racism has a deeply rooted impact on those who are in a disadvantaged position, which, in this case, is the black community. The racial discrimination that has been directed toward the black community has made parents talk about police arrest as casually as the bird and bee talk that a parent would give to their children, as Starr's parents had done, too. That gives the impression that violence, injustice, and different treatment from the officers to the black community is a common rite. Consequently, her parents do not let her go out much with the teenagers in her neighborhood, so she must help her dad at the store, which impacts her social life. She does not hang out much with teenagers her age in her neighborhood. In her neighborhood, she feels like she is an outcast; her peers in the neighborhood look at her as the black girl who goes to a predominantly white school or the girl who works in the store. She has few friends, only Kenya because she shares an older brother. There is no conversation between Starr or other friends but her family members. Starr rarely socializes with kids her age because she spends her time helping her father at the store, just like how Starr feels about her social life in her neighborhood. She feels self-conscious and disoriented about how to act about herself in her school, Williamson. At school, she is one of

Last Name

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the only black kids, and she holds herself off speaking using slang; she switches her personality because she wants to be considered well-mannered and approachable in her school, fearing to be called 'ghetto.' She tries to embody the opposite of the stereotypical black teenager.

### *Danger of Death*

Growing up in the neighborhood, she had witnessed a lot of crimes committed by her folks. One of her best friends, Natasha, was shot dead on the sidewalk in the neighborhood.

"A tattooed arm stretched out the back window, holding a Glock. People ran. Not me, though. A sudden terror surged Starr's body, and she left stunned and unable to speak at the moment. There was a broken fire hydrant, and they were playing water on the sidewalk. That happened when they were ten, and Starr noticed the tattooed arm who shot Natasha." (Thomas, 2017)

The incident of Natasha's shooting caused trauma to Starr, and she has been traumatized by the loss of a loved one since then. Her traumatic experience gets worse when she also witnesses the death of her childhood friend, Khalil Harris. They were on a drive home after there were gunshots at the party they went to. On their way home, they get pulled over by a police officer, but he does not understand why the police officer pulled him over and asked him to get out of the car, where he later shot him.

"Pow!

One. Khalil's body jerks. Blood splatters from his back. He holds on to the door to keep himself upright.

Pow!

Two. Khalil gasps.

Pow!

Three. Khalil looks at me, stunned.

He falls to the ground.

I'm ten again, watching Natasha drop."

(Thomas, 2017)

The excerpt above shows how the current event that happened to her with Khalil triggers her past trauma about Natasha. When this incident occurred, the officer also held a gun to Starr as if she were a threat. She witnessed her friends

Last Name

4-5 words of the article title.....

get shot by a police officer, and it did not stop there; the police officer pointed his gun at Starr, too; meanwhile, she was not a threat, and she kept both hands visible to him.

### *Physical Inability*

Adler describes physical inability under the subchapter of the inferior organ. Individuals with organ inferiority suffer from diseases or infirmities that overburden them. They may be discouraged by comparing themselves with those around them (McCord et al., 1956).

Starr feels inferior about her appearance. She likes to compare herself with Kenya and girls her age. She sees herself as the 'basic girl' compared to Kenya and other party members. She feels left out because she is disconnected from people in her neighborhood and does not hang out with them.

"I've always heard that everybody and their momma comes to his spring break parties—well, everybody except me—but damn, I didn't know it would be this many people. Girls wear their hair colored, curled, laid, and slayed. Got me feeling basic as hell with my ponytail." (Thomas, 2017)

The data above shows that Starr Carter feels inferior to everyone's appearance. She said that every girl at the party styles her hair in a pretty style, unlike hers. She also finds that Kenya looks attractive; she's tall, has the perfect physical features, and never wears the same clothing twice that she sees. Kenya probably can pass as a model, which she describes in detail as her response to her inferiority feeling.

### *Starr Carter's Striving for Superiority*

Adler does not describe superiority as the tendency to be superior to others; instead, he describes it as an individual feeling of wholeness because an individual's inferiority has been compensated (McCord et al., 1956). To compensate for one's sense of inferiority, a final goal ushers everyone.

A final goal is a subjective perception that an individual utilizes out of their unique life experiences, and it shapes them throughout their lives. The final goal appears for everyone, consciously or unconsciously; therefore, the individual

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himself may never understand its significance. Since it emerges, whether consciously or unconsciously, causes a permanent inferiority feeling, which later develops into a fictional goal (McCord et al., 1956).

10 The final goal of the main character, Starr Carter, is not to switch between the two personalities she creates. Throughout the story, Angie Thomas recounts Starr Carter as an individual with two contrasting personalities: Williamson Starr and Garden Heights Starr. Williamson Starr is the personality she adapts to fit in her predominantly white school, and Garden Heights Starr is the personality she adapts when she is in her black neighborhood. Hence, as the story goes on, Starr discovers that how she acts only causes her to hide her true personality. She wants to stop pretending and embrace her blackness.

### *Starr Carter's Fictional Finalism*

Adler describes fictional finalism as the goal or final state that an individual created as a guidance that an individual must reach. The goal is called fictional finalism because we strive toward that idea subjectively within us; it is not actuality. Therefore, Adler believes that this finalism has a powerful influence on every individual life (Feist et al., 2018).

25 Angie Thomas narrates a story about Starr Carter, a black teenager with an identity crisis who behaves in two contrasting environments. She always wanted to act naturally in both environments. She does not want her peers in the neighborhood to see her just as the girl who goes to a rich white kids' school, and she does not want her friends in the Williamson to call her a ghetto. She complained that she wished to be accurate and stop pretending to be two different people.

Fictional finalism also works as the principle of unity and self-consistency, meaning it shapes an individual's behavior to reach their final goal. As Starr Carter's fictional finalism has been mentioned above, she wants to be real about her identities and personalities. Therefore, she must pretend in her school to compensate for her inferiorities; she is a minority and must adapt to be accepted.

### *Starr Carter's Creative Power*



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Adler defines creative power as individual freedom in creating his or her lifestyle; simply, it is the trial and error that an individual does to adapt and evolve. Adler described it as the “law of the low doorway,” where individuals would stoop down to pass through the low doorway, or an individual may bump their headfirst and then try to find a way to pass through by stooping down. Either way, creative power allows an individual to solve their problem. (Feist et al., 2018)

The researcher identifies Starr Carter’s creative power in aiming for her final goal and her mannerisms in dealing with her problem of equipping herself with two different personalities for different environments.

That’s when I realized Williamson is one world and Garden Heights is another, and I must keep them separate. (Thomas, 2017)

This creative power that Starr Carter used to cope with her problem did not solve it at once; therefore, it shaped her unified personality, in which thoughts, feelings, and actions are all directed toward a single goal to serve a single purpose. (Feist et al., 2018).

### *Starr Carter’s Unified Personality*

A unified personality carries the principle of fictional finalism, where an individual already has a final goal; he would equip himself into the individual they are required to be. Starr Carter’s unified personality can be identified from her thoughts, feelings, and actions. It carries the identified tenets: fictional finalism and creative power to adapt. The researcher identifies Starr Carter’s unified personality through how she interacts with her friends: Chris, Maya, Hailey, and Kenya.

Chris is Starr Carter’s boyfriend; their relationship is going well because Starr can be honest about her identity, although she still hides her traumatic experiences. Hailey and Maya, her best friends, have been friends since the fifth grade. Corresponding to Starr's decision to act differently in both of her environments also affected her friendship, in which she had always put others before her because that is what she does to adapt as Williamson Starr.

Adler proposed the idea of ‘the law of the doorway,’ which states that individuals may use their creative power to solve their problems by bumping their heads or stooping. The quotation above shows that the main character, Starr Carter, stepped back and let others do what they wanted. In this case, she let

Last Name

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Hailey take the role of Joe Jonas, their favorite character, and not her to avoid conflicts.

3 One fundamental fact of human life is that we always strive upward for conquest, security, and increase, either in the right or the wrong direction. In his book, Adler describes this as a man-cosmos relationship. Even if an individual could escape, he would still find himself in the general system, striving upward from below (McCord et al., 1956).

3 Starr Carter found one way closer to reaching her final goal of being accepted by pretending for herself and avoiding conflicts; therefore, Adlerian theory states that instant adaptation to immediate reality would be nothing other than an exploitation of accomplishments (McCord et al., 1956).

The way Starr Carter just instantly adapts by pretending leads to a point where it only shelves her problems and steers her away from her final goal because there is still an ongoing battle in herself post Khalil's shooting incident.

The conversation below between Starr and Chris shows how the shooting incident had brought her trauma. Because the incident related to her identity as a black person, it made her more sensitive. Her creative power to read the room before behaving as Williamson Starr, who pretends, has blurred, and her unified personality shifted into someone defensive because of her concealment.

3 An individual effort to conceal their inferiority may be clever enough that the individual ceases to be aware of their inferiority. They are preoccupied with the consequences of the inferiority and all the objective details that subserve its concealment [...]. Unsurprisingly, we often receive a negative remark when we ask a person whether he feels inferior (McCord et al., 1956).

1 "I haven't decided which Starr I should be with him ever since. He likes both. Well, the parts I've shown him. Some things I can't reveal, like Natasha. Once you've seen how broken someone is, it's like seeing them naked—you can't look at them the same anymore." (Thomas, 2017)

The shooting incident has brought another burden for Starr Carter, as her unified personality continues to pretend and conceal; she also must carry the traumatic accident everywhere, even to her school. She sometimes gets lost in her thoughts and trauma flashbacks during the conversation, and it refrains her from communicating well.



Last Name

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As Starr Carter decides to speak up as the witness of the incident, she appears in interviews and testifies as the witness in the grand jury. When protests start to rise, and many people start talking about it, her identity as Garden Heigh Starr is revealed, especially her man-to-man conflict with her friend, Hailey. First, when Hailey unfollowed her on Tumblr because Starr posted a picture of Emmet Till, a victim of racial violence, that was the first sign that she was able to handle. Second, when Hailey makes a racist remark about 'fried chicken,' they say it is only a joke. Third, when she was being ignorant about the 'justice for Khalil' protest and the whole case. Lastly, Hailey was highly ignorant about the fact that Starr was the witness and had told her to move on with her life while it may be acknowledged that the problem was not merely a person's traumatic experience.

"I hit Hailey with my fists, and she slaps and claws me upside my head. I push her off, and she hits the floor. Her skirt goes up, and her pink drawers are out for everybody to see. Laughter erupts around us. Some people have their phones out. I'm no longer Williamson Starr or even Garden Heights Starr. I'm pissed." (Thomas, 2017)

11 The last line of the quotations above shows that that is the closure point where Starr Carter behaves out of threat and no longer differentiates Williamson Starr or Garden Heights Starr. After the confrontations and fights with Hailey, Starr Carter can finally equip herself that she no longer wants to differ her personality and finally stands up for herself.

7 Starr Carter has two best friends at school: Hailey and Maya. Maya is of Asian American heritage. Starr Carter and Maya are always excellent; Maya can be described as the peacekeeper among the three. Like Hailey, they are always on good terms because Maya never complicates Starr Carter's racial background. They even formed a minority alliance after Hailey and Starr had fought.

Starr Carter finally reaches a point where she can embrace her identity without hiding or being two different people, such as Williamson or Garden Heights Starr. When she introduces Maya and Chris from Williamson to Kenya, her friend and half-sister from Garden Heights, she no longer needs to pretend and conceal her identity.

*Starr Carter's Striving for Success*

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It has been mentioned in the theoretical framework that Adler defines striving as the relentless fight of an individual, that an individual cannot cease striving toward something, and that trying is a dynamic act. In struggling for perfection, individuals are always in distress and feel insecure before they reach the point of perfection. When an individual feels he has reached a satisfying point of perfection or security, their goal draws further on. (McCord et al., 1956).

Adler described the striving for success as the psychologically healthy individuals striving, and these individuals are motivated by social interest beyond themselves, not for personal gain. Their contributions to other people give them a sense of superiority. Social interest measures individual self-worth; it is not synonymous with charity and unselfishness. An individual with a social interest strives towards success with the purpose of perfection and completion for everyone (Feist et al., 2018).

Individuals striving towards something outside will be bound to bring themselves to the best shape. He will equip himself to solve the problem inside himself and develop his abilities. (McCord et al., 1956). An individual gains a good measure of social interest depending on the upbringing of an individual. Suppose an individual has a strong bond with their parents. In that case, they will have a strong social interest because Adler believed that the early stage of social environment is important and that it later shapes the child's style of life as an individual (Feist et al., 2018).

This subchapter of Striving for Success will explain Starr Carter's psychological development in achieving her final goal to embrace her identity as a black person; therefore, this chapter will be focused on what she does for her community rather than for her gain because striving for power is what an individual finds in others. Starr Carter is striving for success in battling her problem as a black person who identified as institutional racism, which is driven by her social interest. The striving for the success of Starr Carter can be seen through the plot, therefore, will be explained in five main points: (1) Starr Carter and the black Panthers history, (2) Khalil's shooting at license checking, (3) Justification of white police action, (4) Injustice in the grand jury decision, and (5) Starr Carter activism post grand jury decision.

### *Starr Carter and the Black Panthers History*

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23 An individual upbringing plays a significant part in the development of their social interest. As in this novel, Starr Carter conversed with her dad about the racism that black people endure. They started talking about Tupac and how he brought new meaning to the N-word, which was used as a slur toward black people as something positive. Then, they spoke about the Ten-Point Program. Starr Carter did not come from a privileged social status, and her father, Maverick Carter, made sure she was aware of and educated on their black history by making sure that she remembered the slave rebellion in 1831 and the Ten-Point Program. The Ten-Point program is the black community's call to the government about the discrimination that was thrown at black people and the demand for equality and opportunity in education and jobs.

“Black people, minorities, poor people. Everybody at the bottom in society.”  
“The oppressed,” says Daddy.

“Yeah. We’re the ones who get the short end of the stick, but we’re the ones they fear the most. That’s why the government targeted the Black Panthers, right? Because they were scared of the Panthers?”

Racial discrimination and injustice toward black people are the main drives for Starr Carter's striving, as mentioned in the subchapter on drive and motive for her strivings. Starr Carter’s father also made Starr read the Ten-Point Program aloud.

“Point one of the Ten-Point Program. Say it.”

My brothers and I learned to recite the Black Panthers’ Ten-Point Program the same way other kids learned the Pledge of Allegiance.

“We want freedom,” I say. “We want the power to determine the destiny of our black and oppressed communities.” (Thomas, 2017)

Their conversation flows more on Maverick explaining institutional racism, which eliminates black people's opportunities for education and jobs. This is the base reason why the Panthers propose the Ten-Point Program. It leads to Starr Carter’s better understanding of the situation and why she should continue to strive.

Starr Carter’s father successfully made Starr realize that something outside herself also needs to be fought for. Adler in Ansbacher also stated, “If a child is to draw together his powers and overcome his difficulties, there must be a goal for his movements outside of himself, based on interest in reality, interest in others, and interest in cooperation.” (McCord et al., 1956).

Last Name

4-5 words of the article title.....

### *Starr Carter and The Shooting Incident*

The shooting incident happened when Starr Carter and her childhood best friend were driving on their way home from a party when there was also a drive-by shooting. They were moving and stopped by a police officer asking for Khalil's driver's license.

I fight to find my voice. "He didn't mean—" "Hands on the dashboard!" the officer barks at me. "Don't move!". (Thomas, 2017)

At the incident, Khalil showed resistance toward the police, which made the officer justify that Khalil needed to be killed; therefore, Starr Carter remembered what her father had told her to do if she ever got checked by a police officer. Her position as a black person is often tormented by institutional racism; thus, this police officer does so.

Starr Carter's action is an example of a unified personality that her parents shaped since childhood to prepare her for danger, survival, and acting-wise, in this case, police checking. An individual will equip himself to overcome problems and escape danger (McCord et al., 1956). Although this incident left Starr Carter traumatized, it was her turning point in continuing to strive for her community.

### *Starr Carter and the Justification during Investigation.*

After the shooting incident, Starr Carter was left traumatized, and she had her withdrawals from her social media, Tumblr. She used to be active in voicing about racial discrimination in the past. Adler stated that individuals with excessive inferiority will draw themselves in and feel like the world is their enemy. They fight, hesitate, stop, escape, and are more occupied with themselves than others. (McCord et al., 1956).

A few days after the incident, Starr Carter agreed to testify for the investigation because she was there when it happened. She decided to go on the investigation; she was prepared for it and equipped herself the way her father had told her to be clear, do as they said, and keep her hands visible to avoid further prejudice.

Last Name

4-5 words of the article title.....

The investigator, Detective Gomez, asked her questions regarding the incident, and Starr Carter tried to put herself together to answer. She answered the questions as clearly as she could, even trying not to use slang or informal, too-casual answers to be taken seriously.

“Khalil didn’t have anything to do with the fight?”  
I raise an eyebrow. “Nah.”

Dammit. Proper English.

I sit up straight. “I mean, no, ma’am. We were talking when the fight occurred.” (Thomas, 2017).

Starr agreed to do the investigation with the hope that this would get Khalil the justice that he needed and get the officer who killed him jailed. She holds herself together as the investigator keeps asking questions, which leads to the justification of the suspected officer to the point where Detective Gomez asks whether Khalil is selling narcotics.

Starr attends the investigation accompanied by her mom, who is wary about her condition and the way the detective asks questions that only lead to the justification of the murderer.

“You haven’t asked my child about that cop yet,” Momma says. “You keep asking her about Khalil like he’s the reason he’s dead. Like she said, he didn’t pull the trigger on himself.” (Thomas, 2017).

It shows that Starr Carter already tries to fight for Khalil’s justice but ends up being asked questions that justify the murder of Khalil other than asking about the suspected officer. Thus, Starr Carter’s strive for success continues when Ms. Ofrah accompanies her to testify in the grand jury, which will be explained in the next sub-chapter.

### *Starr Carter, as the Grand Jury Testify*

The next day, after the investigation by the detective, she attends Khalil’s funeral, where she meets Ms. Ofrah, who organizes an organization that advocates for the victims of police brutality. She offers Starr guidance and counsel for Khalil’s case to the grand jury. Starr Carter’s testimony as the grand jury witness is the last part of her striving for success.

Last Name

4-5 words of the article title.....

“This is bigger than Khalil and me, though. This is about Us, with a capital U; everybody who looks like us feels like us and is experiencing this pain with us despite not knowing Khalil or me. My silence isn’t helping Us.” (Thomas, 2017).

Starr Carter acknowledges that Khalil’s incident is not only about herself and what left her traumatized but also her family, Khalil, the people in Garden Heights, and, thus, the black community. Then, she was willing to testify at the grand jury.

“The room has wood-paneled walls and no windows. About twenty or so men and women occupy a U-shaped table. Some of them are Black, and some of them aren’t. Their eyes follow us as Ms. Monroe leads me to a table with a mic in front of them. One of Ms. Monroe’s colleagues swears me in, and I promise the Bible to tell the truth. I silently promise it to Khalil, too.” (Thomas, 2017).

After a relentless struggle to earn justice for Khalil, Starr Carter finally equipped herself to bear the title of witness and speak the truth about the incident.

“Good. You came here on your own free will, is that correct?” “Yes, ma’am.” [...]

“You understand you’re not the focus of any criminal charges, correct?” Bullshit. Khalil and I have been on trial since he died. “Yes, ma’am.” “Today, we want to hear what happened to Khalil Harris in your own words, okay?”

I look at the jurors, unable to read their faces and tell if they want to hear my words.

Hopefully, they do. “Yes, ma’am.” (Thomas, 2017).

Although after investigations and trial at the grand jury, and all that Starr Carter had to fight for Khalil, he still does not get his Justice. The grand jury decided not to penalize the officer who killed Khalil.

“This is the hottest station in the nation, Hot 105,” the DJ says. “If you’re just tuning in, the grand jury has decided not to indict Officer Brian Cruise Jr. in the death of Khalil Harris. Our thoughts and prayers are with the Harris family. Stay safe out there, you all.” (Thomas, 2017)

Although her strivings may falter, the quotation below indicates that Starr Carter had reached her peak, striving for success in the story.

Last Name

4-5 words of the article title.....

“I told the truth. I did everything I was supposed to do, and it wasn’t fucking good enough. Khalil’s death wasn’t horrible enough to be considered a crime. But damn, what about his life? He was once a walking, talking human being. He had family. He had friends. He had dreams. None of it fucking mattered. He was just a thug who deserved to die.” (Thomas, 2017).

As Adler also stated in Individual Psychology, “An adaptation to immediate reality would be nothing other than an exploitation of the accomplishments [...] This goal of perfection must bear within it the goal of an ideal community, because all that we value in life, all that endures and continues to endure, is eternally the product of social interest.” (McCord et al., 1956).

### *Starr Carter’s activism after the grand jury decision.*

Starr Carter's journey to success continues after the grand jury. There were many protests regarding Khalil's justice. Starr realizes that she can take part in it. To go to the protest, she wanted to do something other than the law bureaucracy she went through.

She had done every process that she could go through for Khalil’s justice, from investigation to the grand jury, with the threats and justification of the murder that did not help at all. In individual psychology, if an individual’s feeling of inferiority has not yet been fulfilled, the emotional agitation to conquest will be more powerful and violent. (McCord et al., 1956). Starr Carter’s drive to strive becomes apparent because she experienced defeat, thus creating a greater feeling of inferiority.

“I did everything right, and it didn’t make a fucking difference. I’ve gotten death threats, cops harassed my family, somebody shot into my house, all kinds of shit. And for what? Justice Khalil won’t get it? They don’t give a fuck about us, so fine. I no longer give a fuck.” (Thomas, 2017).

At the protest, a crowd was already gathering. She went to meet Ms. O’frah and insisted on delivering an oration. When she delivered the oration, she talked about how she was the witness and that Khalil was unarmed and did not deserve to be killed. She won people’s hearts by bravely speaking up at the protest.

“My name is Starr. I’m the one who saw what happened to Khalil,” I say into the bullhorn. “And it wasn’t right.”



Last Name

4-5 words of the article title.....

I get a bunch of “yeah” and “amens” from the crowd.” (Thomas, 2017).

Starr continues protesting and throwing a chant in the middle of the crowd; she is furious about the injustice and the discrimination that she has always endured since she was a child, Khalil, and the racism experienced by the black community.

Starr Carter knows that the oration and chant are not where her fight against discrimination and institutional racism ends. Therefore, it became the last point where she strives for Khalil’s justice in the novel. Thus, Starr Carter promised herself that she would always use her voice.

## CONCLUSION

Two main points can be concluded after analyzing the novel using the Adlerian approach. First, Starr Carter achieves her goal for personal gain (striving for superiority) by embracing her identity. Second, she seeks success by speaking up as a witness with the lead for contributing to her black community.

The first point covers Starr Carter's stages that can be identified through different Adlerian tenets: fictional finalism, creative power, and unified personality. Through fictional finalism, it can be seen that Starr Carter does not want to be discriminated against. Then, driven by her final goal, she uses her creative power to adapt by separating the matters of Garden Heights, her neighborhood, and Williamson, her predominantly white high school; therefore, it does not solve her problem because she still cannot be honest about her identity and continues to pretend. Her further character development can be identified in Starr Carter’s interactions with Chris, Maya, and Hailey. Using a unified personality tenet, Starr equipped herself to slowly open up and embrace her identity as a black person, and she can finally be true about her identity and comfortable talking about her background to Chris; she even made a minority allegiance with Maya, an Asian American. Starr had to lose her friendship with Hailey because she could not accept Starr for who she was and threw ignorant and racist remarks toward Starr Carter and the black community. Finally, Starr Carter can have her friends from Williamson and Garden Heights hanging out together as she introduces Chris and Maya to Kenya and vice versa. Thereupon, Starr Carter finally reaches her striving for superiority or her personal striving because of losing her friendship with Hailey.



Last Name

4-5 words of the article title.....

The second point is Starr Carter's striving for success, which can be seen in how she fights for her black community, which is driven by her unified personality that finally embraces her identity and social interest. Starr Carter's upbringing has got her better equipped to face discrimination when she grows up. When she was twelve, her father taught her what to do if she ever got stopped by a police officer, and many more lectures about black history from her father, for example, the Ten-Point Program. By the way, her father taught her that Starr Carter always has the drive to speak up about the injustice that happened in the black community on her social media, but her turning point was the shooting of her childhood, Khalil. She tried to overcome her trauma while seeking justice for Khalil. While she strives for her success through Khalil's case, she undergoes an investigation when the question thrown upon her only justifies the murder of Khalil at the police check. She still wishes to strive by testifying at the grand jury with the help of Just Us Justice by Ms. Ofrah. Although she did not win the case, the police decided not to imprison One-Fifteen, the officer who shot Khalil. The grand jury decision infuriates her, and she joins a protest and delivers an oration, which is supported by many black people at the protest. In the end, she felt like she had done every process that she could take, from social media, investigation, and grand jury to protest, but she did not give up and will continue to strive for her community.

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