

*Exploring the Dynamics of Violence and Power in School in Thai Teen Series  
“Girl From Nowhere”*

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**Abstract**

Exploring the Dynamics of Violence and Power in School in Thai Teen Series “Girl From Nowhere” is a qualitative research. The objective is to investigate and analyze the issues of violence and power in schools portrayed in the series ‘Girl From Nowhere’. The study found that ‘Girl From Nowhere’ presents various forms of violence—physical violence, including both physical and psychological acts of violence; structural violence, manifested through hierarchical structures or class orders associated with unequal power; and cultural violence rooted in the belief systems upheld in a society that perpetuates certain norms. This societal acceptance contributes to various types of violence. This violence is also linked to power in different dimensions embedded within society, involving the use of power by teachers and students, as well as the power of key characters like Nanno, portrayed as a character possessing superhuman qualities who holds ultimate power in penalizing individuals who exert violence in schools.

Keywords: School Violence, Power, Teen Series, Girl From Nowhere

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## Introduction

The Global School-based Student Health Survey 2021 by the World Health Organization revealed that 25% of Thai children aged 13-17 years experienced physical violence within a year. Social media has further highlighted school violence, with incidents among students—such as physical altercations and verbal threats—and teacher violence, including punitive measures like cutting students' hair for rule violations, sparking public concern.

School violence is not only reported in the news but also explored in the Thai teen series *Girl From Nowhere*. The first season aired in 2018 on GMM 25 and reaching a global audience with its second season on Netflix in 2021, the series adopts a unique narrative approach. Each episode features Nanno, a mysterious student who confronts a particular issue in a different school, with episodes inspired by real-life incidents. Unlike typical teen series, *Girl From Nowhere* addresses structural social problems beyond individual issues, reflecting societal conflicts within school settings.



Figure 1-2: Posters of the Series *Girl From Nowhere*, Season 1 and Season 2

The series has generated significant viewer responses, with many people sharing personal experiences of school-related violence online. Producers Phawit Chitrakorn and Damisa Ongsiriwattana noted that, after the show aired, female viewers began opening up about their experiences with bullying, which sparked support and discussion within the fan community.

As a fictional narrative, *Girl From Nowhere* mirrors and constructs societal realities, allowing the creators to blend real issues with imaginative storytelling. The researcher observes that the school violence depicted in the series is deeply connected to power dynamics, highlighting both teacher-student power struggles and peer violence. This study analyzes the portrayal of violence and power within the series' narrative framework.

## Research Objectives

1. To study the presentation of forms of school violence in the series "Girl From Nowhere."
2. To examine the dimensions of power depicted in the series "Girl From Nowhere."

## Theoretical Concepts Used in the Research

### Concept of School Violence

Kanokporn Klindokkeaw and Adipon Euajarusphan (2022) categorize violence into three types: **Direct Violence**, **Structural Violence**, and **Cultural Violence**. Direct violence includes observable actions that inflict physical or psychological harm, such as hitting or verbal abuse. Structural violence is more insidious, embedded within social structures and systems, and manifests through power dynamics that create unequal hierarchies, often in ways that are not immediately visible. Finally, cultural violence is perpetuated by societal beliefs and traditions that legitimize certain forms of violence, leading to the normalization of harmful attitudes and behaviors. This form of violence shapes societal perceptions, making some violent acts appear acceptable or even justified. Together, these categories offer a comprehensive framework for analyzing the types and sources of violence, especially within school environments.

According to UNESCO's *School Violence and Bullying: Global Status Report* (2017), school violence can be categorized into four main forms. **Physical violence** includes harmful acts, such as corporal punishment and bullying, intended to cause physical pain or discomfort. **Psychological violence** encompasses emotional abuse, such as humiliation, intimidation, and other behaviors that can harm a student's mental well-being. **Sexual violence** refers to harassment, abuse, or any other non-consensual sexual behavior affecting students. Finally, **bullying** involves repeated actions intended to inflict pain, humiliation, or distress, including both in-person bullying and cyberbullying. These classifications help in understanding the different dimensions of school violence and provide a basis for analyzing its portrayal in media and educational contexts. This study uses these concepts to classify and explore the origins of violence depicted in *Girl From Nowhere*, examining how the series presents violence within the school setting.

Steven Lukes (2004) defines power in three dimensions. **The First Dimension** involves overt actions where power is visibly exercised, such as directing or commanding others to act. **The Second Dimension** refers to more subtle forms of power, where influence is exerted indirectly, often through non-decisions or by setting agendas that limit choices without overt confrontation. **The Third Dimension** represents the most profound form of power, where authority shapes beliefs and perceptions so that people accept power structures as legitimate, often unconsciously. This dimension aligns closely with ideology, as it creates an environment in which alternatives seem either unnecessary or nonexistent, reinforcing established authority as natural and unquestioned.

This third dimension aligns with the analysis by Wasan Pounpunwong and Panuwat Foojakham (2020) on authoritarian power in educational institutions, where power is legitimized through ideologies and rituals that encourage students to accept teachers' authority. This hierarchy grants teachers the power to discipline students, sometimes disproportionately.

### Theoretical Perspectives on Media Portrayal

The Meaning Theory of Media Portrayal proposes that media functions as a powerful tool for constructing and interpreting meanings, shaping how subjects are depicted and influencing viewers' perceptions of reality and ideology. This theory examines the methods media uses to

present subjects, the reality it constructs, and the ideologies it supports, which, in turn, affect audience behaviors and beliefs.

As a form of fictional media, series blend imagination with storytelling to provoke emotional responses. This theory is useful for analyzing how *Girl From Nowhere* portrays violence through its aesthetic and narrative choices, shaping audience perceptions of school violence.

## **Research Methodology**

This research employs a qualitative approach to analyze the series *Girl From Nowhere*, focusing on its depiction of violence and power within a school setting. The study covers both seasons, totaling 21 episodes: Season 1, which premiered on August 8, 2018, on GMM 25, and Season 2, released globally on Netflix on May 7, 2021. The analysis is limited to episodes that address school-related stories and conflicts, including eight episodes from Season 1—*The Ugly Truth*, *Trophy*, *Social Love*, *Wonderwall*, *Trap*, *Thank You Teacher*, and *BFF*—and four episodes from Season 2—*Pregnant*, *True Love*, *Sotus*, and *Liberation*. The study uses textual analysis to explore the series' portrayal of these themes.

## **Research Findings**

The study of violence depicted in the series *Girl From Nowhere* reveals several types of violence and power, categorized as follows:

### **Physical Violence**

The analysis shows that physical violence is a central element of the narrative in *Girl From Nowhere*, used to advance the story and captivate viewers. The series presents physical violence in various forms and intensities, often to help characters achieve their goals. For example, in *Wonderwall*, physical assaults are used to coerce victims; *The Rank* features a violent confrontation among female students competing for beauty; *Trophy* depicts a character injuring herself with a hammer to avoid performing; and *BFF* shows a group of friends luring Nanno to a secluded spot, where they severely beat her while covering her head with a bag. These portrayals of physical violence are integral to the series, driving the plot and eliciting strong emotional reactions from the audience.

The depiction of physical violence in the series reveals that confrontations often occur among female students. The motives for this violence include betrayal (as seen in *Wonderwall*), desperation leading to survival tactics (*Trophy*), jealousy over the victim's status and beauty (*Wonderwall* and *The Rank*), and issues of love and jealousy resulting in violent behavior (*Social Love* and *BFF*). These motivations are deeply personal and individualistic. The perpetrators of this violence face consequences for their actions, as determined by the creators' direction for the characters. This setup underscores the themes and messages each episode aims to convey to the audience.



Figure 3-4: Depiction of Physical Violence in *Girl From Nowhere*

### Structural Violence

In schools, structural violence is reflected in the power relationship between teachers and students, where teachers are positioned above students and have the authority to discipline or control their behavior. This form of violence is evident in *Liberation*, where the teacher's authority over students is highlighted, illustrating that students must comply with school rules without question or challenge. Those who question or resist are subject to disciplinary action. The director portrays the administrative teacher as an intimidating figure, instilling fear in the students and reinforcing the hierarchical power dynamics within the school.

The portrayal of strict teachers controlling students' behavior is further exemplified in the episode *True Love*, which features Naruemon, a strict teacher at an all-girls school. Teacher Naruemon uses her authority to enforce a school policy separating male and female students, following the school's decision to admit male students to address financial issues. She believes that boys would undermine the school's moral standards. Although this episode does not depict physical violence, the enforcement of discriminatory school rules based on Teacher Naruemon's personal biases represents structural violence. This is evident in how students must comply with rigid rules, restricting their freedom and reinforcing the hierarchical control within the school environment.

Structural violence can also manifest in the form of unequal hierarchical arrangements, as illustrated in the episode *The Rank*. This episode depicts an all-girls school that places great importance on students' physical beauty, with real-time rankings based on appearance. Those who rank in the top ten receive special treatment and access to the prestigious "Leht Fah" building, reserved for students deemed attractive—akin to a higher social class. Each year, a "Shining Star" award is given to the most beautiful student. The rules and privileges associated with these rankings create competition among students who aspire to join the elite group, reflecting structural violence through privilege and inequality. As a result, when one character aspires to be the most beautiful in the school, she resorts to violence against a more beautiful peer to secure the top position. While this character becomes a perpetrator of violence, she is also a victim of the structural violence imposed by the school's hierarchy.

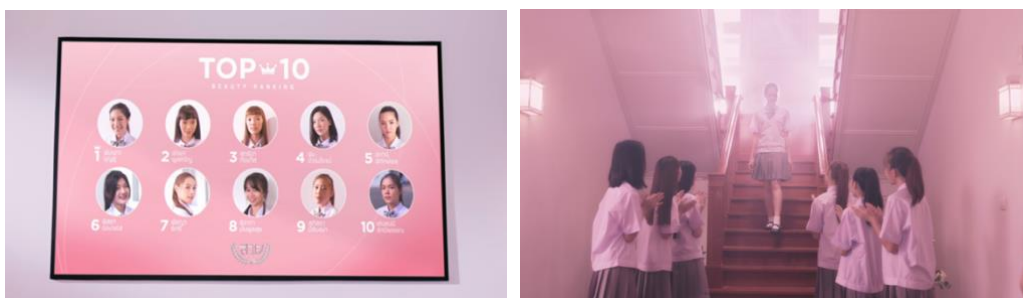


Figure 5-6: Structural Violence in the Form of Ranking and Privilege of the Superior

## **Cultural Violence**

In the context of schools, cultural violence is evident in the authoritarian relationships that exist, such as those between teachers and students or between senior and junior students. These dynamics are perpetuated through social learning and become normalized within the societal framework. There is a particular cultural acceptance of teachers using their authority to reprimand or punish students. When such punishments cause physical or psychological harm, they constitute acts of violence. Despite experiencing this violence, students often acquiesce to the unchecked authority of teachers, influenced by societal values and narratives like "improvement through corporal punishment." This ingrained cultural acceptance allows for the perpetuation of violence as a standard practice within educational settings.

Cultural violence, illustrated by the binary thinking that contrasts high-achieving students with average students, is reflected in the episode *Trophy*. The series depicts a school that prioritizes and values students who excel in various fields to enhance its reputation. Students with outstanding abilities receive ample attention and support, while those without notable achievements face pressure to discover their own talents and contribute excellence. The intense pressure from both peers and teachers leads to Pui and Mew, two close friends among the less remarkable students, frequently being demeaned by Teacher Ploy. Eventually, when Pui is declared the new prodigy of the school after winning first place in a Thai literature association contest, Mew becomes highly envious. This envy drives Mew to follow Nanno's advice to copy an artwork from the internet and present it as her own, which wins a top prize and boosts the school's reputation. Mew becomes special in the school, but when it comes time for her to showcase her talents at the annual event, she uses a hammer to injure her hand as an excuse to avoid performing. The self-inflicted violence Mew engages in is a direct result of the school's pressure on students to meet the standards of excellence it imposes.

Cultural violence, manifested through the authoritarian relationship between teachers and students and deeply ingrained in societal norms, is evident in the episode "Liberation." The story unfolds at Phannana Witthaya School, known for its long-standing strict rules that are rigorously enforced. Students who violate these rules face severe punishment. The authority figures in the school include Teacher A, a strict and intimidating disciplinary teacher who monitors students' adherence to the rules with vigilance, creating an environment where students submissively comply with the school's rigorous regulations and strive to be model students in the eyes of adults.

When Nanno joins the school as a new student, she perceives the rules as unfair and outdated. From her first day, she challenges these rules, sparking a significant shift as other students begin to question and defy the system. This resistance against the authoritarian regime will be further explored in the following sections of the research.

## **Teacher's Power**

In the series *Girl From Nowhere*, the power dynamics between teachers and students are portrayed across several episodes, reflecting the creators' intent to highlight underlying issues within the school environment. The most tangible conflict arises between teachers and students, characterized by power and hierarchical relationships. In the context of Thai society, where respect for teachers is deeply ingrained, educators are often granted authority to admonish or even use violence under the guise of benevolence and a desire for students' success. This power comes with a sense of legitimacy, allowing teachers to exercise control

over students. Conversely, students, conditioned by societal norms to respect and obey teachers, often acquiesce to this authority, illustrating how cultural values perpetuate the acceptance of such power dynamics.

In many cases, the violence teachers use against students is intended to maintain their authority and suppress dissent. Teachers are granted legitimacy and trust by parents to guide and discipline students within the school environment. As institutions with large numbers of students, schools must enforce rules to ensure order and prevent chaos. Consequently, teachers, as enforcers of school regulations, have the authority to control, monitor, and correct behavior that deviates from societal norms. This authority can sometimes lead to violence. For example, in the episode *True Love*, Teacher Naruemol imposes a rule segregating male and female students. Students comply with this rule without objection, demonstrating how the enforcement of such regulations can lead to a form of violence, even when it is masked as a means of maintaining order.

In the episode *Liberation*, Teacher A, the disciplinary teacher, strictly enforces the school's rules and expects unquestioning obedience from students. Any student who questions or breaks the rules is punished by being locked in the "repentance room" until they show remorse and agree to follow the school's rules. This creates a climate of fear, reinforcing the power of the school's authority and discouraging students from challenging or intentionally breaking the rules. Furthermore, in the episode *The Ugly Truth*, Teacher Win sexually abuses female students and threatens the victimized students that if the victims tell anyone else the secret, the victim's clip will be released online and the victim's future will be ruined immediately. Of course, this threat makes the victims afraid and not dare to tell anyone. These things reflect the students' fear of allowing the teachers to use their power and commit violence without daring to stand up and question or resist the teacher's power.

The researcher observes that teachers, as educators responsible for instilling moral values and guiding students' behavior, inherently hold power over their students. This authority, when coupled with the control teachers exert within the school environment, makes it relatively easy for them to employ violence against students. Such violence can manifest through disciplinary punishments, derogatory remarks, verbal abuse, and humiliating acts. For example, news reports often highlight instances where teachers have physically punished students for violating dress codes or have disciplined them harshly for behavioral infractions, sometimes resulting in physical harm. This situation reflects a broader societal value that venerates teachers as benevolent figures who, despite their use of violence, are perceived as acting out of a desire to correct and improve their students. Consequently, such actions are often justified under the guise of fostering students' moral development and conformity to societal norms.

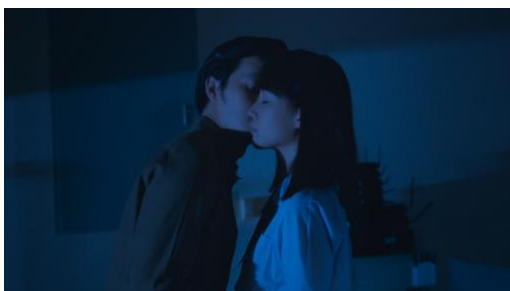


Figure 7-8: Teachers' Use of Power in Sexual Harassment and Physical Violence



At the same time, while teachers wield authority by enforcing school rules and resorting to violence against students who break these rules, they also possess the power to overlook or violate these rules if it serves the school's ideology or their own interests. This dynamic is illustrated in the episode *Trophy*, where Mew follows Nanno's advice by claiming internet artwork as her own, leading to her school's acclaim. When another student publicly exposes Mew's dishonesty, the principal, instead of punishing her, protects and praises Mew for her contribution to the school's reputation. Although this scenario is presented with a satirical twist, it highlights a critical example of teachers using their power to turn a blind eye to misconduct, prioritizing the school's prestige over ethical standards and the proper verification of achievements. This reflects a broader issue where authority figures can manipulate or disregard rules to maintain their own or their institution's standing.

### Student's Power

The series also explores the power dynamics between students and teachers, highlighting their resistance and struggles for autonomy. In the episode *Liberation*, the students, oppressed by the authoritarian rule of Teacher A, unite in rebellion. They forcibly detain all the teachers in the gym and coerce them into confessing their wrongdoings. This illustrates that students' power over teachers cannot be achieved by an individual alone but requires collective action. However, their newfound authority is short-lived; a violent act by one student against a teacher triggers fear and internal conflict among the students. Their power further dissipates when the school principal uses a gun to threaten and disperse them.

Ultimately, the principal capitulates when the true power lies with the students, symbolized by their collective use of mobile phones to record and expose the situation. This scene illustrates how mobile phones and social media have become formidable tools for empowering the oppressed, capable of shifting power dynamics instantly. The episode *True Love* similarly demonstrates students exploiting communication apps to maintain relationships in defiance of school rules banning interactions between boys and girls, reflecting their ability to navigate and subvert oppressive controls within their environment.



Figure 9-10: Student Resistance and Power Struggles Through Social Media

Additionally, the research reveals that the power dynamics among students themselves are a significant theme. Students not only unite to resist unjust authority from teachers but also wield power over their peers. This is often observed in the way senior students assert dominance over juniors. For example, in the episode "Sotus," seniors exert control through violent initiation rituals, while in "The Rank," beauty is used as a means to gain privileges and special treatment within the school.



## Nanno's Power

Nanno is the main character in the series *Girl from Nowhere*, and the background of her creation was explained by Kongdej Jaturanrasamee, one of the show's writers, in an interview with The101.World. He described the character's conception, noting that Nanno was designed to represent the existing malevolence in society, which manifests in various ways depending on the storyline and her actions. Kongdej compared Nanno to characters from the series *Black Mirror*, highlighting her ability to transcend the boundaries of realism and fantasy, depending on the context of each episode. This blend of realism and fantasy in her design makes Nanno a unique and defining figure in the series.



Figure 11: Nanno, the Main Character of the Series Girl From Nowhere

From Kongdej Jaturanrasamee's interview, it is evident that Nanno was created as a fantasy character—a mysterious girl with no clear origin. Her background remains unknown, and both the audience and the characters around her perceive her merely as a new student entering the school. Nanno's role is to provoke, incite, and guide other characters into making morally questionable decisions, thereby revealing their darker sides. This aligns with the statements made by Phawit Chitrakorn and Damisa Ongsiriwattana, the series producers, in an interview with *The People*, where they described Nanno as "the new girl in every school. From the first day she introduces herself to the last day she leaves, the school will never be the same. She represents all forms of women from every era. Her presence will disrupt those around her, causing them to reveal aspects of themselves they may not even know. Some people love her, some want to be her, and some want to kill her. But no matter the outcome, each new episode will always have Nanno as the new girl." Thus, Nanno's appearance is akin to the daughter of Satan, showcasing the darker aspects of human nature, with the school serving as a testing ground for these moral challenges.

Thus, while Nanno endures violence from her peers and teachers in the series, she always finds a way to make the perpetrators learn from their actions. The violence depicted in the series serves to engage the audience in observing the karmic outcomes of these actions. Nanno represents a victim of school violence within Thai society, but with a significant difference: she possesses the power to exact revenge on those who harm her, which is virtually impossible in real life. Consequently, the series constructs Nanno with a mysterious power to confront and challenge individuals driven by authority, desire, hatred, and violent instincts.

Nanno's role as the new student in each school is deliberately designed to disrupt the status quo and challenge the existing power dynamics. Her actions, which involve both power and violence, serve as a form of retribution against those who have previously exerted power or

violence over her. Although she does not always use direct, eye-for-an-eye violence, the consequences of her actions often lead viewers to feel a sense of satisfaction and agreement with Nanno's form of justice.

By creating Nanno with such extraordinary power, the series explores themes of moral judgment and retribution, presenting her as a force that unsettles and punishes those who perpetuate injustice. Her presence in the narrative serves to expose and confront the systemic issues within schools and society at large, making her a symbol of both retribution and moral reckoning.

## **Conclusion & Discussion**

The series *Girl From Nowhere* transforms the ideal vision of schools as safe, nurturing environments into a depiction of violence and power struggles. Schools, as portrayed in the series, become sites of physical and sexual violence, bullying, and systemic abuse, reflecting the creators' intent to address both individual and structural issues within educational settings. The series highlights the authoritarian power systems that legitimize teachers' use of violence to control and suppress students and depicts students responding with violence to resist this oppression. Additionally, it explores intra-student power dynamics, such as seniority hierarchies, revealing how violence and power struggles permeate even the most protected spaces like schools.

The analysis of the series *Girl From Nowhere* reveals a significant relationship between power and violence. Those in power tend to use their authority to inflict violence on those without power, particularly evident in the school setting, where a clear division of power exists between teachers and students. Teachers are granted the legitimacy to enforce disciplinary actions against students who violate school rules, with these regulations serving to control and punish the powerless. The hierarchical structure makes it difficult for those being governed to challenge those in authority, reflecting a microcosm of broader societal power struggles where conflicts and dominance are perpetually at play.

Additionally, societal values and discourses emphasize the respect and obedience students owe to teachers, imbuing them with legitimate authority to instruct and correct students, guiding them to become virtuous members of society. However, this power can lead to violence when teachers use their authority to impose disciplinary measures on students who violate school rules. When teachers wield their legitimate authority to engage in excessive and harmful punishment, it results in both physical and psychological damage to students. Thus, the authority of teachers, while justified in its intent, can also manifest as violence when misused.

Conversely, violence can also serve as a tool for establishing power, particularly among students within the school. In this context, violence among students often stems from the hierarchical power dynamics enforced by teachers. Senior students typically wield authority over junior students, leveraging the seniority system to assert dominance. Junior students are expected to show respect and deference to their seniors. Direct violence among students manifests through acts that induce shame and fear, such as intimidation, physical assault, and bullying. This type of violence is employed to assert superiority and enforce compliance. Ultimately, if such violence reaches the attention of teachers—who hold the highest authority in disciplining students—the power to adjudicate and impose punishment remains with the teachers.

The study of violence and power dynamics in schools, as depicted in the series *Girl from Nowhere*, presents a clear exploration of these themes. However, examining similar adolescent series could provide additional insights. Future research is recommended to focus on analyzing how different adolescent series depict violence and power dynamics. Understanding the techniques producers use to create narratives and characters that reflect these themes will offer a broader perspective on their representation in Thai teen series. This approach will help provide a more comprehensive view of the various ways these issues are portrayed and addressed in adolescent media.

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