

# Abuse in Stephen King's Carrie and Veronica Roth's Divergent

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Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i  
sociologije

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Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Ljubica Matek

Osijek, 2021.

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Bachelor's Thesis

Supervisor: Ljubica Matek, Ph.D., Assistant Professor  
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## **Abstract**

*Carrie* (1974) is Stephen King's first published novel and belongs to the horror fiction genre. It depicts a sixteen-year-old girl Carrie White who was physically and verbally abused by her peers as well as her mother, which culminated at her prom when her abusers pour pig's blood all over her, making her furious. Carrie's abuse instigates her telekinetic powers, and her final humiliation at the prom night prompts her to destroy the entire town of Chamberlain. Similarly, Veronica Roth's debut novel *Divergent*, which belongs to the genres of science fiction and young adult fiction, explores the theme of physical and verbal abuse. The main character Beatrice Tris Prior experiences bullying while competing for a spot in the initiation process in order to become a member of the Dauntless faction, one of the five factions situated in the dystopian version of Chicago that nurture a certain personality trait. This paper aims to suggest that although Carrie and Tris suffered the same types of abuse, they had different outcomes because Tris had more support from the people around her and, most importantly, she managed to establish her identity, which Carrie failed to do. Namely, Tris succeeded in overcoming her traumas with the help of her friends, whereas Carrie was not properly protected, not even by her own mother who further harassed her. As a result, Tris became a self-confident, independent and ambitious young woman, while Carrie went mad and, after she had taken revenge on her abusers, bled to death from being stabbed by her mother.

Keywords: Stephen King, *Carrie*, Veronica Roth, *Divergent*, abuse

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## **Introduction**

Both King's *Carrie* and Roth's *Divergent* attracted a lot of attention by dealing with teenage problems such as low self-esteem, body image, stress, depression, peer-pressure, competition, and most of all – bullying. Since abuse is one of the main concerns of contemporary societies, this paper will analyse physical and verbal abuse experienced by adolescents as represented in the two novels. Even though the society in King's novel does not tolerate violence and punishes those who abuse others, they still fail to prevent further abuse, and, therefore, the victims are unprotected. However, the society in Roth's novel, that is, the Dauntless faction which Tris decided to join, allows violence and promotes it through their initiation process. Despite that, by comparing the two protagonists in the novels, this paper will prove that the key factors that determine the victim's destiny are the victim's personality and the provision of effective assistance in coping with the abuse.

The first two chapters will describe Carrie's and Tris's abuse respectively; the third chapter will show the ways people reacted to their abuse, mainly focusing on the people who helped them, and the fourth chapter will compare Carrie and Tris's reactions to abuse with the emphasis on the development of their identity or its absence. The paper ends with some concluding remarks.

## 1. Carrie's Abuse

Carrie's abuse starts from an early age as her mother, a religious fundamentalist, forces her to comply with her religious beliefs. If Carrie disobeyed, she would lock her in a closet. Due to her mother's unusual methods of education, Carrie behaves differently from other children and is often abused in school. For instance, she is bullied in the school cafeteria at lunch time because she got down on her knees and prayed (King). From that moment on, her peers constantly insult and torture her. She is abused not only because of her fanatic religious behaviour but also because of her physical appearance. Jessie Klein comments that "[g]irls who don't possess the perceived appropriate body capital are often targets" (69), and, as Don Tresca argues, "King's first words of description of [Carrie's] appearance make clear both her unattractiveness and her isolation from her peers; he describes her as 'a frog among swans' (4)" (153). Since Carrie has no true support nor protection, she has to cope with the abuse on her own and, what is more, she has no self-confidence. Tresca explains that "[a]s the physical description continues, [King's] words become more negative, suggesting Carrie's low opinion of herself and how she is viewed by her classmates" (153). Specifically, this is how King describes her situation:

She was a chunky girl with pimples on her neck and back and buttocks, her wet hair completely without color. It rested against her face with dispirited sogginess . . . She looked the part of the sacrificial goat, the constant butt, believer in left-handed monkey wrenches, perpetual foul-up, and she was . . . They stared. They always *stared*. (King, emphasis in original)

Nathaniel Gage Pennington claims that King's novel depicts the issue of (non)conformity present in the American culture which "lead to segregation of *Others* and a generational legacy of 'fitting in' via exclusion, scapegoating, and fanatical belief" (9, emphasis in original). As Carrie does not conform to the social norms and standards which include physical attractiveness and acceptable behaviour, people taunt her. Besides that, domestic abuse committed by Carrie's mother prevented her from maturing and thus made her distinctions from other teenagers more pronounced. The following analysis will include two types of abuse that Carrie endured – physical and verbal abuse in order to show that violence and neglect were passed on in her family: from her grandparents to her mother, and from her mother and her peers to her.

## 1.1. Physical Abuse

Carrie's mother Margaret is the first person who abuses her. Margaret became an abuser because of her traumatic past as her father was "killed in a barroom shooting incident" (King), and her mother did not take care of her. Moreover, the mother was "living in sin" (King) with another man. Consequently, Margaret turns to religion and adopts fundamentalist beliefs. She sees sexual intercourse as the greatest sin: "And Eve was weak and loosed the raven on the world, . . . and the raven was called Sin, and the first Sin was Intercourse" (King). She also wants to suppress any sexual desire, and she does not approve of wearing revealing clothes because she believes that by doing so, a woman would attract men, which would eventually lead to sex, that is, sin. In fact, Margaret even denies that she gave in to her desires and that she slept with her husband who soon afterwards died. When she was pregnant with Carrie, she believed that she had a "cancer of the womanly parts" (King), refusing to believe that she was pregnant. Her utmost hatred of skin-showing is the reason why she attacked Carrie when she was three years old. Namely, Carrie was talking to a neighbour who was wearing a bikini while sunbathing, and Margaret got angry, so she put Carrie in the closet. She soon completely lost control and tried to strangle and then kill Carrie with a butcher knife:

the poor little girl lying half in the closet and half out of it, seeing black stars dancing in front of everything, a sweet, faraway buzzing, swollen tongue lolling between her lips, throat circled with a bracelet of puffed, abraded flesh where Momma had throttled her and then Momma coming back, coming for her, Momma holding Daddy Ralph's long butcher knife (cut it out i have to cut out the evil the nastiness sins of the flesh o i know about that the eyes cut out your eyes) in her right hand, Momma's face twisted and working, drool on her chin, holding Daddy Ralph's Bible in her other hand (you'll never look at that naked wickedness again) . . . (King)

This is the first time in Carrie's life that she feels threatened, so her telekinetic powers emerge. She causes ice and stones to fall on their house and throws furniture out of the house with the power of her mind. Furthermore, King mentions a whole series of moments in Carrie's childhood when she was abused by other children:

Yet there had been all these years, all these years of let's short-sheet Carrie's bed at Christian Youth Camp and I found this love letter from Carrie to Flash Bobby Pickett let's copy it and pass it around and hide her underpants somewhere and put this snake in her shoe and duck her *again*, duck her *again*; . . . Billy Preston

putting peanut butter in her hair that time she fell asleep in study hall; the pinches, the legs outstretched in school aisles to trip her up, the books knocked from her desk, the obscene postcard tucked into her purse . . . (King)

One of the most significant examples of Carrie's physical abuse is when she gets her first period in the school locker room. Completely unaware of its existence, because her mother never told her about its biological inevitability, Carrie is shocked and scared by the sight of blood, but nobody helps her: the girls ridicule her and throw tampons and sanitary napkins at her. Alissa Burger states that "[t]his is simply the next step, the accumulation of thousands of smaller abuses that have punctuated and established their treatment of Carrie since childhood, a spark set to the kindling of a lifetime of bullying, and one which will eventually rage completely out of control" (114). Not only is Carrie humiliated by her classmates, but her mother slaps, punches, grabs her around her neck and locks her in the closet after she found out about Carrie's menstruation, believing she had done something sinful that caused the period: "She may have committed the Sin of Lustful Thoughts. She may have been listening to rock 'n roll music on the radio. She may have been tempted by the Antichrist" (King). In her own delusion, Carrie's mother rejects biological facts and interprets the world through her skewed religious point of view. Additionally, Margaret throws tea at Carrie and slaps her when Carrie tells her that she was invited to prom by a boy because she believes that their friendship would soon lead to sex, "In cars. Oh, I know where they take you in their cars. City limits. Roadhouses. Whiskey. Smelling... *oh they smell it on you!*" (King, emphasis in original).

Finally, the ultimate maltreatment of Carrie is seen at the prom night. Chris Hargensen, one of Carrie's bullies, decides to take revenge on her for not being allowed to go to prom because she skipped detention given to her due to mocking Carrie in the locker room. Hence, she arranges for Carrie to be voted Prom Queen, and then pours a bucket of pig's blood at her, humiliating her in front of the whole school. As if that was not enough, while Carrie runs toward the exit, someone puts their foot out, and Carrie falls to the floor. From her mother beating her and locking her in the closet to her peers ill-treating her, Carrie truly embodies the social outcast, an object of ridicule, and the outsider subjected to hatred, rejection, and abuse.

## **1.2. Verbal Abuse**

Carrie's physical abuse was usually accompanied by verbal abuse. As an illustration, while her mother was beating her, she would call her "spawn of the devil" (King), "Devil's child" (King), and a "witch" (King), scream at her, and accuse her of being sinful. Moreover, Carrie's peers were constantly teasing her, giving her offensive nicknames. To exemplify, they

called her “truck-face” (King), Chris once asked her “if she knew that *pig poop* was spelled C-A-R-R-I-E” (King, emphasis in original), and someone made graffiti on the school desk which said “*Carrie White eats shit*” (King, emphasis in original). Even a little boy named Tommy Erbter, a neighbour of the Whites, made fun of Carrie, calling her “ol’ fart-face” (King) while sticking out his tongue. All these examples signal Carrie’s everyday harassment as something she is used to, and rarely reacts to. Pennington asserts that Carrie does not perceive her abuse as traumatic: “she seems to have acclimated to it and now believes in its normality: a way of how Carrie deals with trauma” (22-23).

Yet, Carrie felt upset when the incident in the locker room occurred. As the girls realised that Carrie was bleeding, they started chanting “*Plug it up!*” (King, emphasis in original) and “*PER-iod*” (King, emphasis in original), while Carrie “stood dumbly in the center of a forming circle, water rolling from her skin in beads. She stood like a patient ox, aware that the joke was on her (as always), dumbly embarrassed but unsurprised” (King). One of her classmates, Sue Snell, called her a “big dumb pudding” (King) while shouting at her that she was bleeding. Carrie was severely traumatised after this event and felt the need to take revenge on her abusers. While she was walking home, she thought of harming Chris who hurt her the most as she was the initiator of the abuse, “*Imagine Chris Hargensen all bloody and screaming for mercy. With rats crawling all over her face. Good. Good. That would be good*” (King, emphasis in original). Most importantly, people used to make fun of Carrie whenever they could, and “[t]hey’ve *always* laughed” (King, emphasis in original). The fact that Carrie was a target of derision among her classmates led to a catastrophe that happened in the end. Norma Watson, Carrie’s classmate and a witness of Carrie’s bloody prom coronation, says that since “Carrie had been the butt of every joke for so long,” many of them believed that the prom night would integrate Carrie into their clique (King). However, Norma admits that after Carrie was covered in blood she looked too funny and “[i]t was either laugh or cry, and who could bring himself to cry over Carrie after all those years?” (King). The impossibility to feel empathy for Carrie and to feel sorry for her shows that she became dehumanized in everyone's eyes. The abusers – both her peers and her mother – never saw her as a real person. Therefore, Carrie was a victim of both peer and domestic violence that manifested itself in the form of physical and verbal abuse, and that separated Carrie from everyone else.

## 2. **Tris’s Abuse**

Unlike King's realistic depiction of small-town teenage life in the United States, Veronica Roth describes an imagined society in which people are divided into different

factions, based on their character traits. Tris, the main protagonist of Roth's *Divergent*, lives a peaceful modest family life in the Abnegation faction until she turns sixteen, the age at which teenagers decide which faction they will be in for the rest of their lives. Although she enjoys spending time with her family and is used to being selfless and unassuming, Tris is so fascinated with the Dauntless faction that she watches them jumping off a moving train every morning before classes (Roth). After her aptitude test that determined three factions she was fit for – Erudite, Abnegation, and Dauntless – and that also showed that she was Divergent, that is, that she possessed a particular personality trait which meant she was “a threat to the social order because she cannot be controlled” (Green-Bartlett 45), Tris decides to join the Dauntless, unaware of the risks and dangers present in her chosen faction. Since the Dauntless' main trait is courage and they blame cowardice for the society's problems, they are contrasted with the Abnegation who appreciate selflessness, generosity, and calmness. Their initiation process includes combat trainings in which the initiates fight with each other and learn how to use weapons, encouraging violence and aggressive behaviour towards others in order to defend themselves.

Dauntless compound is Tris's first encounter with violence in general and the place where she experiences abuse for the first time. Unlike Carrie, who was victimized from an early age, Tris made the choice to participate in a violent environment, but both of them experience bullying at social institutions. According to Katherine Lashley, the Dauntless faction resembles the school system which “establishes for the protagonists and readers who exactly holds power and what ideologies they must accept, what ideologies they can challenge and possibly alter” (165), and one of the social powers in the novel is bullying. As an example, Tris is being bullied because of her former faction which is considered plain, weak, and worthless, because of her physical appearance as she was short and skinny, as well as because of her accomplishments during the initiation process. Lashley implies that since “much of the novel takes place in a school-like setting, the bullies echo the situations found in a school, particularly the group mentality” (165). Tris's main bully is Peter, a Candor transfer who boosts his self-confidence by torturing the weak ones and he always does it in front of other people to prove his superiority. He is accompanied by other bullies who usually only watch the abuse and laugh at the victim. As opposed to Carrie who remains isolated throughout the novel, Tris befriends some of her fellow initiates and has support from Four, an instructor of Dauntless transfers. Accordingly, Tris is able to recover from her trauma. In fact, a combination of Tris's growing self-esteem caused by her identity formation and her being protected by her friends

and future boyfriend Four results in her healing along with her rebelling against the oppressors. But first, the next two subchapters will portray Tris's exposure to physical and verbal abuse.

### **2.1. Physical Abuse**

Prior to joining Dauntless, Tris was unfamiliar with physical abuse because her life as an Abnegation member required forgetting oneself, caring for others, and avoiding any kind of conflict, whether verbal or physical because they "weren't supposed to hurt people" (Roth). However, becoming a member of Dauntless demands physical fitness and learning how to fight and defend yourself, meaning it involves a great deal of violence which was intensified by the new leader Eric. While Four believes that the initiates who fight against each other should have the opportunity to concede because "[a] brave man acknowledges the strength of others" (Roth), Eric refutes it by saying that "[a] brave man never surrenders" (Roth), confirming his brutality and ruthlessness. Thus, Tris's first physical abuse occurs during the first stage of initiation in the Dauntless faction in her fight with Peter. Since Peter jeers Tris from the moment he sees her as he considers her timid, weak, and unfit for Dauntless, fighting against her is the perfect opportunity for him to show his supremacy. He also strives for attention which, besides wanting to establish his dominance over the weaker, is the reason he beats Tris severely, even though it is obvious that he is physically stronger than her:

I push myself up, but Peter is already there. He grabs my hair with one hand and punches me in the nose with the other . . . I try to shove him off, my hands slapping at his arms, and he punches me again, this time in the ribs . . . He shoves me and I fall again, scraping my hands on the ground, blinking, sluggish and slow and hot . . . Something hits me from the side and I almost fall over again. *On my feet on my feet.* I see a solid mass in front of me, a body. I punch as hard as I can, and my fist hits something soft. Peter barely groans, and smacks my ear with the flat of his palm, laughing under his breath . . . Something slams into my side and I scream for the first time, a high screech that belongs to someone else and not me, and it slams into my side again, and I can't see anything at all, not even whatever is right in front of my face, the lights out. (Roth, emphasis in original)

In addition to being beaten by Peter under the pretext of fighting for a spot in Dauntless, Tris is humiliated by her abusers on the account of her gender and physical appearance. Lashley emphasizes that young women are objectified by both men and women, which affects the way these women will see their bodies, femaleness, and sexuality (167). To illustrate, on one

occasion Tris goes to the dormitory in her towel to get dressed after showering, and Peter and his friends block her way, comment on her body, and then Peter pulls the towel so that she remains naked. The group laughs while she escapes to the bathroom, completely embarrassed, dehumanized, but ready to retaliate. Despite the situation being different, there are strong parallels here with Carrie's locker room incident, as in both cases the women were naked and made fun of due to their looks.

Another instance of Tris's bullying, and probably the one that influenced her the most, is the moment when Peter, Drew, and Al, who was her friend, blindfold her and drag her to the chasm with the aim of throwing her into the chasm. Not only did they hit her, throw her to the ground, and "slam [her] head against something hard" (Roth), but Peter also molests her:

A heavy hand gropes along my chest. "You sure you're sixteen, Stiff? Doesn't feel like you're more than twelve." The other boys laugh. Bile rises in my throat and I swallow the bitter taste. "Wait, I think I found something!" His hand squeezes me. I bite my tongue to keep from screaming. More laughter. (Roth)

Lashley concludes that "[t]his scene conveys how abuse can influence a woman's perception of her body as Peter displays dominance over her body whereas she does not have the power to overcome him" (168). Again, due to the sexual nature of the incident, the parallel with Carrie's situation can be found, as her sexual maturing (the onset of her period) and her mother's obsessive rejection of sexuality put the issues of female body and the control over it into the focus of Carrie's and Tris's identity. This incident also influences Tris's fear of any man touching her body and prevents her from being intimate with Four for a while, until she gains his trust. Altogether, Tris's joining Dauntless ended in her experiencing physical harassment – something she is unaccustomed to, but needs to overcome in order to shape her identity.

## **2.2. Verbal Abuse**

Lashley observes that Tris is exposed to verbal abuse as soon as she arrives to the Dauntless compound because Peter and his friends make degrading remarks about her body (167). Klein explains that "[i]n many environments, adults and students alike seem to assume that a girl's appearance – the way she dresses, her body type, or anything that makes her look 'different' – is a fair game for commentary. The harassment isn't always explicitly sexual – any mention about a girl's appearance and body can be said to demonstrate dominance" (69). The first time Peter mocks Tris happens to be him giving a belittling comment about her revealing her arm. As she falls on her arm from a moving train, she pulls her sleeve up to check



if her elbow is bleeding, but Peter uses the opportunity to demean her because she is a former Abnegation, and they are supposed to hide their body, “Ooh. *Scandalous*. A Stiff’s flashing some skin!” (Roth, emphasis in original). Tris is usually referred to as “Stiff,” which is a derogatory nickname for Abnegation. Peter even spray-painted the word across her mattress, along her bed frame, and on her pillow (Roth).

The taunting of Tris continues throughout the initiation process, so she has to deal with the insults and compete for a spot at the same time. For example, while she is practicing throwing a knife, Peter jeers at her by saying: “I think the Stiff’s taken too many hits to the head!’ . . . ‘Hey, Stiff! Remember what a *knife* is?’” (Roth, emphasis in original). One of the most disturbing instances of verbal abuse happens when Tris is in her towel and wants to get dressed. Peter and his group block her way and then make sexist comments about her body, claiming that she is “so skinny” and “practically a child,” but Drew further harasses her by assuming that “[s]he could be hiding something under that towel” and that they should look and see, which they do soon afterwards (Roth). Similarly, Tris is abused verbally in the previously mentioned incident when Peter, Drew, and Al kidnap her, threaten to throw her in the chasm, and Peter molests her. Although Tris tries to ignore the abusers and is told by Four to act weak, she snaps when Peter reads a news report that defames her native faction, especially her family. What is more important, the report was made with Molly, who abused her, as an interviewee. She made a false statement that Tris was having nightmares and that she “*heard her talking in her sleep once*” and “*[s]he was telling her father to stop doing something*” (Roth, emphasis in original), humiliating both Tris and her family. By choosing Dauntless over Abnegation, Tris took a great risk which brought her new friendships, love, and shaping of identity, but also jealousy, enemies, and abuse.

### **3. Society’s Reaction towards the Abuse**

The society in *Carrie* strongly opposes any kind of abuse, but nevertheless they do not take any significant action to preclude violence and protect the abused, thus showing both a lack of concern for the victim and incompetence in dealing with the bullies. To demonstrate, assistant principal Mr. Morton does not know how to deal with Carrie’s peers abusing her when she gets her first period, but he knows how to punish students who skip classes: “When Billy deLois and Henry Trennant, class-cutters *extraordinaire*, slunk in, he glowered at them happily and prepared to talk tough. As he often told Hank Grayle, he ate class-cutters for lunch” (King, emphasis in original). Likewise, Miss Desjardin, the gym teacher, feels helpless about Carrie’s abuse, even admitting that she knows that Carrie has “always been a group scapegoat” (King),

but, despite that, she slapped her across the face when Carrie was being hysterical due to bleeding and cramps in her stomach. In addition, Chris refuses to comply with the punishment given to her after abusing Carrie in the locker room, and not to mention that she decides to pour pig's blood at Carrie, which means she resists authority and does not fear consequences for her misdeeds. Besides school's failing in defending the oppressed and the abusers' willingness to continue the abuse without fear of punishment, Korinna Csetényi argues that the society is "responsible for forcing 'monsterhood' upon [Carrie]" (384). The society actually creates a monster out of Carrie, and, as Csetényi accounts, "[w]hen she lashes out to punish the people who made her life miserable, she acquiesces into her assigned role and actively chooses to act as a monster" (384). Finally, Carrie's mother did not fulfil her maternal duty: she instilled in Carrie distorted values, did not teach her about the menstrual cycle, and neglected her exposure to peer abuse.

On the other hand, the Dauntless faction in *Divergent* incites violence by teaching their initiates how to fight believing that "brutality does not violate" (Roth), and their instructors even practice violence upon the initiates. For instance, when Tris's friend Christina surrenders during a fight, Eric forces her to climb over the railing and hang over the chasm for five minutes to prove her bravery (Roth). Identically, Eric orders Al to stand in front of the target and not flinch while Four throws knives at the target as a punishment for failing to hit the target, but Tris objects to it by saying that what he aims to do is bullying, which "is a sign of *cowardice*" (Roth, emphasis in original). Consequently, Eric tells Tris to take Al's place and Four throws three knives, the last one nicking her ear (Roth). Despite the discouraging circumstances Tris encounters in Dauntless and the accompanying abuse, which makes it even harder for her, she is not discouraged from achieving her goals because she has support along the way. Unlike Carrie, who had little but ineffective assistance from school employees and had no true support in life, Tris experiences quite the opposite; she befriends Christina and Will during the initiation, and she falls in love with Four, and they all defend her. Tris's living in a violent environment is facilitated by people who alleviate her traumas and make her stronger. Certainly, this implies that coping with the abuse is more successful when there is a person to rely on. Further analysis will explore the effectiveness of Carrie and Tris's helpers in overcoming their abuse to prove that providing effective support to the abused has a positive impact on the victim's outcome.

### 3.1. Carrie's Helpers

#### 3.1.1. Sue Snell

In the beginning, Sue Snell is Carrie's abuser in the locker room incident, feeling "welling disgust as the first dark drops of menstrual blood struck the tile in dime-sized drops" (King), so she yells at Carrie to clean herself up and throws sanitary pads at Carrie together with other girls. Still, she feels guilty for mocking her and even thinks about it when she sleeps with her boyfriend Tommy Ross: "In the aftermath she felt low and melancholy, and her thoughts turned to Carrie in this light. A wave of remorse caught her with all emotional guards down, and when Tommy turned back from the view of Brickyard Hill, she was crying" (King). While she sits in Tommy's car, thinking about how to tell him about what they did to Carrie, "she imagines what her life will be like if she and Tommy stay together. She realizes she joined the other girls in pelting Carrie with feminine hygiene products so she could conform, and this realization brings to her mind an image of herself perpetuating the cycle of life already being completed by her mother" (Gray 41). Luis Florencio Díaz Pulido further elaborates that "[t]o find her place in patriarchal society, [Sue] must oppress undesirable females like Carrie and conform to the image of her that men desire, to the role of collaborator with the patriarchal system" (26). In other words, Sue's life has already been designed for her by the patriarchal society since she is beautiful, rich, and popular, and, because of that, she must fulfil the society expectations; so, if all the girls are abusing a girl she barely knows, she is supposed to do the same to comply with her clique.

Regardless, she decides to persuade Tommy to ask Carrie to go to the prom with him so that, as she explains to Tommy, she would "bring [Carrie] out of her shell" (King), but also to atone for her misdeed. Actually, "Sue comes to realize that, in bullying Carrie, she is losing her independence as a female individual" (Díaz Pulido 27). In a way, she wanted to shape her identity on her own "'to stave off the self that she senses she will inevitably become' because in *Carrie*, 'high school is the place where one's adult fate is prefigured and apprehended, leaving the individual either to accept his or her lot (and play it out) or rage against it'" (Truffin qtd. in Gray 42). Sue reasons that "someone ought to try and be sorry in a way that counts . . . in a way that means something" (King) because "[l]ots of kids say they feel sorry for Carrie White – mostly girls, and *that's* a laugh – but . . . none of them understand what it's like to *be* Carrie White, every second of every day. And they don't really care" (King, emphasis in original). As a result, Sue sacrifices herself by coaxing Tommy into inviting Carrie to the prom. The only problem was that, after she had been covered in pig's blood, Carrie believed Sue and

the other students tricked her: “They were laughing at her again. And suddenly it broke. The horrible realization of how badly she had been cheated came over her, and a horrible, soundless cry (they're LOOKING at me) tried to come out of her” (King). In spite of Sue’s good intentions, Carrie interprets the blood sprinkling as a recreation of the shower-room scene and thinks that all of her peers have carefully planned it to embarrass her in front of the whole school. Hence, Carrie did not recognize Sue’s generosity, but rather perceived her as cruel and vicious as all the other students. Overall, Sue did not gain Carrie’s trust, which means that her assistance, although genuine, was vague and insufficient to help Carrie deal with her trauma.

### **3.1.2. Miss Desjardin**

As previously mentioned, Carrie’s gym teacher Miss Rita Desjardin is aware of other students’ abusing Carrie, but she does not know how to prevent it. Additionally, she reacts roughly when Carrie panics over the bleeding: she slaps her and admits that she did it with pleasure. Díaz Pulido views Miss Desjardin as “the impersonation of the false, paternalistic face of the system” (26) because she is in a position of power and she feels disgust at Carrie’s onset of period, even though she is a woman: “I understand how those girls felt. The whole thing just made me want to take the girl and *shake* her. Maybe there's some kind of instinct about menstruation that makes women want to snarl” (King, emphasis in original). Regardless of that, Díaz Pulido describes her relationship with Carrie as a mother-daughter relationship (25). As Carrie is unfamiliar with menstruation, Miss Desjardin tells her more about it and how to take care of the blood, substituting her mother who was supposed to do it long before. The teacher also makes sure to punish the girls who abused Carrie, suggesting that they should be banned from attending the prom, but manages to get only a week’s detention for the bullies, and only those who skip the detention would be forbidden to attend the prom. At prom night, Miss Desjardin once again acts like a mother towards Carrie by giving her compliments, telling her about her own prom night, and asking about her feelings.

While Carrie tells her that she cannot forget what happened to her, but that it was over and therefore not worth talking about, she does not say that “she blamed them all and always would” (King), which is the crucial point for Carrie’s subsequent reaction. Correspondingly, after Carrie was covered in blood and started to run, Miss Desjardin went to help her, but Carrie “could see beneath the surface to where the real Miss Desjardin was giggling and chuckling with rancid old-maid ribaldry” (King), so she used her mind to push her away. Carrie believes that Miss Desjardin is just as evil as her classmates and that her compassion is false. On the whole, Miss Desjardin’s reactions are not enough to protect and comfort Carrie as she

previously ignored Carrie's abuse and even used violence when Carrie got period. Díaz Pulido concludes that "Carrie is unable to forget the episode in the shower room as well as to forgive those who witnessed it, including Miss Desjardin" (26), which contributes to the argument that Carrie did not trust Miss Desjardin.

### **3.1.3. Tommy Ross**

Tommy Ross played a significant role in Carrie's rite of passage – he was her prom date. Even though they have never interacted before that, Carrie accepted the offer because she had a crush on him. Burger explicates that "while Tommy and Carrie have no romantic history together, their date to the prom opens up a world of possibilities for Carrie and awakens her to the chance for love and passion" (115). Carrie's accepting the proposal is a risk she is willing to take to participate in a social ritual and possibly alter her social status. Despite the fact that Tommy was persuaded to invite Carrie to prom, his intentions were sincere, and it seemed as if he liked her; they enjoyed the time spent at prom until the catastrophe occurred. Díaz Pulido indicates that by "[a]ccepting Sue's proposal, he shows his regard for Sue and his masculinity in facing social censure because of his dating the outcast in high school" (28). In King's novel, Tommy is described as "something of a rarity: a socially conscious young man," proving his nobility and benevolence.

Then again, it is important to note that while Carrie was waiting for Tommy to pick her up, she was afraid that Tommy would not show up because it might have been a prank to humiliate her once more: "Maybe it was all just an elaborate joke, the final crusher, the ultimate punch line. To leave her sitting here half the night in her crushed-velvet prom gown with its princess waistline, Juliet sleeves and simple straight skirt – and her tea roses pinned to her left shoulder" (King). At last, when Tommy dies because a bucket hits him on the head, Carrie feels no pity because she believes he deserved it, "(tommy's dead full price paid full price for bringing a plague into the place of light)" (King). To conclude, Tommy, just like Sue and Miss Desjardin, wants to "elevate [Carrie] from the depths of social exclusion" (Burger 115), but he fails because he does not give her enough support nor does he win her trust. All of the mentioned Carrie's helpers could have done more to stand up for her and make her feel self-confident, welcomed, and loved.

## **3.2. Tris's Helpers**

### **3.2.1. Four**

Four is the character who both provokes and comforts Tris during her initiation process, and this is mainly done because of his intention to toughen Tris as well as to protect her because

he admires her and falls in love with her. Whereas Four's behaviour and attitude towards Tris seems hostile and unwelcoming, his actions prove otherwise such as when he advises her on how to fight:

“You don't have much muscle,” he says, “which means you're better off using your knees and elbows. You can put more power behind them.” Suddenly he presses a hand to my stomach. His fingers are so long that, though the heel of his hand touches one side of my rib cage, his fingertips still touch the other side. My heart pounds so hard my chest hurts, and I stare at him, wide-eyed. “Never forget to keep tension here,” he says in a quiet voice. (Roth)

Four's unfriendliness towards Tris can be interpreted as a result of his own abuse experience since his father abused him in his childhood. As suggested by Stephanie Miller, Four “has issues with interpersonal relationships, sometimes being rough with Tris,” which can be explained by the fact that Four has never experienced any kind of love except tough love (52). Slowly over time, Four recognizes Tris's ingenuity, an example being when he chooses her, in spite of her obvious physical ineptness, to be on his team in the game of capture the flag, which is a Dauntless tradition and a matter of pride. As soon as Four realises that Tris is Divergent because of her extraordinary performance in the fear landscape, he begins to protect her and suggests that she acts like a Dauntless would during the simulation so she would not be discovered. In the same way, when she fails to pass one of her instructor's fear landscape, Four humiliates her by saying it was pathetic, which is why she slaps him (Roth). Four later elucidates it the following way, “I was protecting you this morning. How do you think Peter and his idiot friends would have reacted if they discovered that you and I were...’ He sighs. ‘You would never win. They would always call your ranking a result of my favoritism rather than your skill’” (Roth).

One of the most important events that helped Tris deal with her abusers is when Four saves her from Peter, Drew, and Al who are about to throw her in the chasm. While Peter and Al manage to escape, Four beats Drew severely “in order to prove . . . that there is a man who cares about Tris and who has dominance and power over them” (Lashley 170). He then carries Tris to his bedroom and takes care of her. He also tells her to act vulnerable so that her friends protect her, even though he admits he would like the bullies to suffer (Roth). Tris and Four soon become intimate and start their love relationship, the power of which is shown when Four is in a simulation created by a cruel Erudite leader Jeanine and “that made [his] friends into enemies” (Roth), but Tris's voice gets him out of the simulation: “‘How did you do it?’ I say.

‘I don’t know,’ he says. ‘I just heard your voice’” (Roth). All in all, Four’s role in Tris’s maturing proved quite significant as he encouraged her to show her bravery and intelligence and protected her when she was jeopardized by either bullies or Dauntless and Erudite leaders. Indeed, he served to her as a mentor, a friend, and a comforter because he gave her useful advices, encouragement, and, most importantly, love.

### 3.2.2. Christina

Tris and Christina get on really well from the very beginning, when they jump off the moving train with their hands holding together. Tris even says that she believes Christina will be her first true friend only after two days of knowing each other because they already knew so much about each other:

Christina and I sat together at breakfast, and earlier she shielded me from the rest of the dormitory as I changed. I haven’t had a friend like her before . . . It’s impossible to have real friendship when no one feels like they can accept help or even talk about themselves. That won’t happen here. I already know more about Christina than I ever knew about Susan, and it’s only been two days.  
(Roth)

Lois H. Gresh writes that Christina seems to be jealous of Tris’s outstanding performance in the initiation process, but that it is justified since their lives are threatened:

. . . it sometimes seems as if Christina is jealous of Tris’s abilities and strengths. This makes it difficult to keep a strong friendship going, too, because friends shouldn’t mind the fact that one is better at sports and activities than the other. But the Dauntless initiation is an unusual situation, and so it makes sense that under the pressure of such extreme life-and-death rituals that Christina would grab a flag won by Tris during the “capture the flag” game. (103)

Although they are competitors, Christina and Tris still help each other throughout the initiation; they cheer each other up, talk about the problems, and celebrate together when one of them succeeds. They do together all the girly stuff like dressing up, doing makeup, getting tattoos, and gossiping, but most significantly they stand up for each other when one of them is in trouble. Firstly, Tris supports Christina when she is hanging above the chasm, then Christina gets some food for Tris and helps her tie the shoes when she is in pain after being beaten by Peter. Christina also defends Tris when Peter and his friends insult her, especially after they assault her, she defends Tris’s former faction, and comes into conflict with an Erudite reporter who offends them. Furthermore, she participates in “a lighthearted session of symbolic

document destruction” (Roth), that is, throwing papers of Erudite reports down the chasm, which makes Tris feel relieved. Christina never doubts Tris – even when Peter accuses her of manipulating all of them by acting weak so that they pity her and then excelling in the simulations, which prompts Will to question her intentions, but nevertheless Christina is on her side: ““Don’t be an idiot, Will,’ says Christina, hopping down from her bunk. She looks at me without sympathy and adds, ‘She’s not acting’” (Roth). Given these points, Christina’s presence undoubtedly makes Tris’s life in Dauntless easier since she is by her side whenever Tris needs her, primarily when she is bullied by other initiates. Were it not for Christina, Tris would definitely had a harder time adapting to the challenging circumstances of the Dauntless faction, and would maybe even fail to become a member of the Dauntless because Christina encouraged her throughout the process and stood against the abusers to protect her.

### **3.2.3. Will**

Will joins Christina, Al, and Tris’s company during lunch time at the beginning of the initiation process, and they spend some quality time together by hanging out with each other, teasing, and supporting each other. Will is usually the person who makes people laugh as he likes to make jokes at his friends’ expense. Still, he looks out for his friends, and he is the one who defends Tris from the bullies’ verbal abuse. As evidence, when Peter mocks Tris after he beat her and she is in pain, Will fights back: ““Feeling okay there?’ Peter says, giving me a look of mock sympathy – his lips turned down, his arched eyebrows pulled in. ‘Or are you a little...Stiff?’ . . . ‘We are all awed by your incredible wit,’ says Will” (Roth). In like manner, Will drags Tris from the dormitory, in order to prevent unnecessary violence and to make sure that Tris stays out of trouble, when she wants to hit Molly due to the false statement she made about Tris and her native faction:

Will drags me out of the room and into the hallway, his fingernails digging into my skin. Once the door shuts behind him, he lets go, and I shove him as hard as I can. “What? Did you think I couldn’t defend myself against that piece of Candor trash?” “No,” says Will. He stands in front of the door. “I figured I’d stop you from starting a brawl in the dormitory. Calm down.” (Roth)

Likewise, when Peter attacks Tris because she is ranked first after the second stage, Will intervenes to help Tris: “Will grabs Peter by his shirt collar and drags him away from me. ‘Leave her alone,’ he says. ‘Only a coward bullies a little girl’” (Roth). Finally, Will does not allow Al to come near Tris after he almost threw her down the chasm with Peter and Drew, ““Tris,’ says Al, his voice breaking. ‘Can I talk to you?’ ‘Are you kidding?’ Will squeezes my



shoulders. ‘You don’t get to come near her ever again’” (Roth). As can be seen, Will always interferes when Tris is bullied and without his assistance, Tris would not feel so confident. Will becomes Tris’s friend, protector, and voice of reason through his rational and benevolent actions which enable Tris to deal more efficiently with the abuse. In comparison with Carrie’s helpers, Four, Christina, and Will are more protective towards Tris and Tris’s relationship with her helpers is more deep and filled with trust. While Tris’s helpers defend her, comfort her and show her love, Carrie’s helpers do not even try to get to know her better and think that by doing one good thing their neglecting the abuse/abusing her would be forgotten. All things considered, Carrie’s helpers are not efficient in her overcoming the abuse whereas Tris’s helpers positively affect her traumas, implying that the abused are able to resist the abusers with the help of someone who defends them and whom they trust.

#### **4. Dealing with the Abuse**

##### **4.1. Carrie’s Dealing with the Abuse**

Carrie’s first experience of abuse at the age of three, when her mother almost throttles her, results in emergence of her telekinetic powers. It is evident that Carrie’s powers show up “in moments of extreme personal stress” (King) because her powers remained hidden until the shower room incident. Tejo Bayu Aji provides an explanation: “Since she got cruelly punished immediately by her mother, Carrie had to repress this power so that she [would] not be in trouble anymore. This repression went on until one point in Carrie’s life that could break the barrier of that repression” (46). Of course, it is when Carrie menstruates for the first time and her peers bully her that her powers re-emerge because “that event . . . [serves] as the ‘gate’ for the repressed memory to break free . . . Along with the repressed memory, Carrie also gains access to her long-forgotten telekinetic power” (Bayu Aji 46-47). Until that event, Carrie was passive in the moments of abuse such as when she went to Christian Youth Camp where other children ducked her and played “a thousand practical jokes” on her, and she went home a week early because of that (King). In particular, Carrie feels helpless while bleeding in the shower room, “Carrie backed into the side of one of the four large shower compartments and slowly collapsed into a sitting position. Slow, helpless groans jerked out of her. Her eyes rolled with wet whiteness, like the eyes of a hog in the slaughtering pen” (King).

Meanwhile, the shower room episode induces Carrie’s rage, and re-emergence of telekinesis makes her self-confident as she wants to revenge herself on the bullies with the help of her powers. Day by day, Carrie practices her powers by levitating objects in her bedroom, and before the prom she uses them to shut the door so that Margaret cannot stop her from going

to the prom (King). After the bloody coronation, Carrie is humiliated like never before and thinks how she “would pick herself up very soon now, and sneak home by the back streets, keeping to the shadows in case someone came looking for her, find Momma, admit she had been wrong” (King), but she remembers how she pushed Miss Desjardin away a few minutes ago and decides to “[t]urn on the sprinkler system and close all the doors” to see her classmates suffer, proving completely insane. The water in the gym soon reaches a live power cord, which causes a fire, and Carrie is thrilled with the panicking of her peers. Carrie then twists fire hydrants in the street and causes the explosion of the main gas station in Chamberlain (King). At this point, Carrie is already completely out of her mind as she kills innocent people she sees in the street, “She paused on the lower step, looking at the flocks of people streaming toward the center of town. Animals. Let them burn, then. Let the streets be filled with the smell of their sacrifice” (King). Afterwards, she goes home where her mother stabs her with a knife, but she manages to stop her mother’s heart, and, finally, she finds Chris and her boyfriend Billy, who helped her humiliate Carrie, and kills them by making their car crash into a tree after which the car explodes (King). In the same place, Sue finds Carrie lying on the ground, calling for her mother, and once Sue reveals that she has “no ill will for Carrie personally, no plan to get her in front of everyone and undo her,” Carrie dies from a stab wound (King).

Carrie’s potential for identity formation was doomed as soon as she was born because her mother did not want her, believing she was conceived in sin. Moreover, because of her zealous religious upbringing, Carrie was abused by her classmates, and she knew nothing about the reproductive system “[s]ince her mother has kept her in the dark about the menstrual cycle (which she considers a sin)” (Csetényi 382). Besides, Margaret abused Carrie whenever she wanted to do something that all the other adolescents usually do like showering in front of other girls or participating in a social ritual like going to the prom. Hence, Carrie’s mother is one of the culprits for her inability to find her identity and be accepted among her peers. Naturally, Carrie becomes the victim because she is abused both at home and at school and she is unable to get out of the vicious circle. Her non-conformity with other teenagers reduces her already small chances at forming herself as an adult being. Unwanted and rejected from birth until her teenage years, the only thing Carrie could do was to become the monster the society perceived her to be, so she destroys all the people who harm her and much more. Csetényi reasons: “[i]f the child is deprived of a loving home, family members or friends to rely upon, then s/he might be tempted to use the double-edged powers to cause suffering, to take revenge, especially if s/he was made to suffer unjustly beforehand” (391). Csetényi also asserts that “Carrie never

experienced unconditional love, not even from her mother, so it is no wonder that after her repeated efforts towards acceptance all fail, she succumbs to the role society assigns to her” (391). Carrie’s downfall is caused by the people around her who make her a monster, and the only time Carrie is active seems to be when she destroys her town whose citizens she blames for excluding her, whereas previously she remained passive after being abused.

#### **4.2. Tris’s Dealing with the Abuse**

In contrast with Carrie, Tris is able to withstand the abusers and even rebel against them, which happens slowly over time as she establishes her identity. In the beginning, while Tris is still searching for her self, she usually remains silent and ignores the abuse. As proof, when Peter spray-paints “Stiff” across Tris’s bed, she behaves calmly although she is angry and wants to hit him. According to Marianne Seppänen, Tris’s low self-esteem is the result of her upbringing in Abnegation where “her parents have taught her to be modest to the point where she finds it hard to believe in . . . herself or trust her talents” (26). Seppänen highlights that a positive self-esteem influences a person’s identity formation, “A person with a good self-esteem is then able to deal with failures and losses and can be happy about the achievements in one’s life” (26). After winning capture-the-flag game, Tris gains some self-confidence, which reflects on her reactions towards the abuse; Peter first mocks her while she practices throwing a knife, and then Tris retorts when he cannot hit the target: “‘Hey, Peter,’ I say. ‘Remember what a *target* is?’” (Roth, emphasis in original).

After some time spent in Dauntless, Tris becomes both physically and mentally stronger as seen when she slides down the zip line with the other Dauntless members who begin to acknowledge her strength and accept her as their member (Roth). Her identification with the Dauntless also helps her cope with the bullies because she adopts their traits such as independence, aggressiveness, mental strength, and audacity. To show that she is not intimidated by the bullies and that she no longer means to stay passive towards their abuse, Tris mercilessly kicks Molly during their fight, so Four needs to intervene to stop the fight. On another occasion, when Tris finds out that Molly denigrated her former faction, Tris reacts violently by trying to throw herself at Molly, but Will prevents her, knowing that she does not think rationally. The second stage of initiation, which focuses on the emotional preparation, displays Tris’s exceptional performance in the fear landscape, which proves her mental readiness and boosts her self-confidence. Exactly because of her extraordinary achievements Tris suffers one of her most traumatic abuses when Peter, Drew, and Al attempt to throw her down the chasm. After that, she gets an advice from Four that she should act vulnerable so that

her friends protect her from the bullies, but she “feel[s] uncomfortable, like [she is] wearing someone else’s skin” (Roth), meaning she is aware of her strength and hates to behave to be something she is not.

In the end of the novel, when the Erudite and Dauntless war on Abnegation occurs, Tris finally discovers her true identity: “I guess I am what I’ve always been. Not Dauntless, not Abnegation, not factionless. Divergent” (Roth). She realises that “when [she is] acting selflessly that [she is] at [her] bravest” (Roth), which is proven when she sacrifices herself in order to save the Abnegation members from death. She also reveals her new-found identity when she finds Peter in the Dauntless compound, working with the Dauntless leaders who attack Abnegation, and shoots him in the arm although he thought she would not, “‘People tend to overestimate my character,’ I say quietly. ‘They think that because I’m small, or a girl, or a Stiff, I can’t possibly be cruel. But they’re wrong.’ I shift the gun three inches to the left and fire at his arm” (Roth). Peter begs her to take him with her, which she does in accordance with her selfless identity. Lashley indicates that Tris risks taking Peter with her “because she desires to establish herself as Dauntless, brave and strong – not someone who will cower at the sight of a bully but will stand up to them” (173). Lashley elaborates that “she anticipates being able to stand strong against Peter and other bullies in order to protect the weak, mainly the Abnegation faction members, because they are weaker than she is and they need someone to fight for them: they need a bully to stand up to a bully” (173-174). Ultimately, “Tris develops from a physically weak, little girl, who is told by the faction’s conventions what to do and how to act, into an autonomous, independent subject, making her own decisions” (Kirchner 93). As opposed to Carrie who is deprived of a chance to choose her own life path and discover who she is, Tris manages to form her identity and decide for herself, which then helps her in dealing with the trauma of abuse.

## Conclusion

To summarize, the paper has shown that both King's Carrie and Roth's Tris experienced physical and verbal abuse, but that their surroundings were different: Carrie lived in the town of Chamberlain where bullying was not approved of, and Tris lived in a dystopian version of Chicago, more precisely in the Dauntless faction where violence was instigated by their leaders. Nonetheless, the paper has proven that the abusers can be overpowered by the provision of effective support to the victim and the victim's disposition regardless of their environment. While Tris became a determined, self-reliant, and ambitious young woman since she established her identity and had friends who helped her in coping with the abuse, Carrie failed to overcome the abuse, which is why she destroys her entire hometown and eventually dies as well. The reasons for Carrie's downfall are that her mother, as a religious fanatic, instilled in her distorted beliefs, neglected her, and abused her while she was supposed to be her biggest support, that she was abused by her peers because of her unusual behaviour and overall appearance, and lastly the school employees, Sue, and Tommy who failed to protect her after abuse. As a consequence, Carrie did not gain trust in other people and believed that everyone was evil and deserved to die, so she became exactly what they thought she was – a monster, killing almost all people of Chamberlain. Carrie remained passive during her abuse experience, until the fatal prom night when she actively chooses to harm everyone who was in her way. On the other hand, Tris, unlike Carrie, feels loved and protected by her friends and boyfriend, and turns against her abusers to show them they cannot harm her because she is brave and strong. In conclusion, King's *Carrie* and Roth's *Divergent* exhibit instances of teen abuse to accentuate contemporary issues of adolescents and the impact it has on teens' identity development as well as to demonstrate the different outcomes the abused have due to their (in)ability to overcome the abuse. Indeed, they offer a lesson for the whole human kind.

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