



## VERONICA ROTH AND NATURE Vs NURTURE- A Reading of Veronica Roth's Divergent Trilogy

SUVATHIGA GOVINDARAJU<sup>1</sup>, Dr.M.LEELAVATHI<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of English, Bharathiar University

<sup>2</sup>LRG Govt Arts College for Women, Tirupur, Tamilnadu



### ABSTRACT

The interaction between Nature and Nurture is highly about human development and behavior. It is a subject of study in behavioral genetics. Nature is defined as the DNA of the individual, where as Nurture is described as their destiny. Nurture refers to individual experience and learning as the main causes for human knowledge and development. The scientific study of changes which occurs in human beings over the course of their lives is known as Developmental Psychology. One of the most significant issues in the Developmental Psychology is about the relationship between Nature and Nurture. Veronica Roth's *Divergent* Trilogy also offers something deeper which brings up the ideas about Nature Versus Nurture, Family expectations versus Individuals free will. Although the children inherit the genes of their parents they are yet separate from their parents. No person truly belongs to another. To conclude that it is very much evident that the theory of Nurture makes more sense than the theory of Nature. Indeed without the influence from the outside world where we would be? Without influence we all will certainly lack all the basic skills including talking, walking and so on. One's personal identity must be developed through the environment. We need more than just nature in the modern age. Therefore it is important to incorporate both nature and nurture in our lives.

KEY WORDS: Identity, Psychoanalysis, Nurture, Environment, Behavioral Genetics.

©KY PUBLICATIONS

"Nature versus nurture" is a phrase which is used widely to express the long-standing scientific debate about whether we are mainly "made" by our genes or whether influences from the environment. The concept Nature versus Nurture was first coined by Francis Galton (1822 to 1911) who was greatly influenced by the book *On the Origin of Species* written by his cousin Charles Darwin (1809 to 1882).

One of the oldest debates in the history of Psychology is about Nature versus Nurture. Today, we know that both play a significant role in human's

life. Some people believe that it is genes which affects our way of life and some people believes that it is none other but our environment that greatly influences our lifestyle and some believe that both has tremendous impact on one's way of life. Indeed in certain cases both our nature (our genes) and our environment roughly play an equal role in human life.

Medicine and Science have been considered as a huge source of inspiration for many Fiction writers. In the contemporary dystopian setting the theme of Medicine and Science has

already proven popular among the young readers. Young adult novels including Speculative and Contemporary have used the elements of neuroscience in their narratives in the recent years. Neuroscience is typically something which exists around or is done to the characters. These types of novels can be found in numerous sub-genres of young adult fiction including Science Fiction, Speculative Fiction and Contemporary Fiction.

The interaction between Nature and Nurture is highly about human development and behavior. It is a subject of study in behavioral genetics. Nature is defined as the DNA of the individual, where as Nurture is described as their destiny. Nurture refers to individual experience and learning as the main causes for human knowledge and development. The scientific study of changes which occurs in human beings over the course of their lives is known as Developmental Psychology. One of the most significant issues in the Developmental Psychology is about the relationship between Nature and Nurture. It seeks to understand that how our personalities are shaped by our environment including culture and parents. There are few factors which plays a significant role in human development. There are: Biological, Psychological, Socio-cultural, and Socio-economical and Socio-environmental factors. Genes and environment work together. Therefore many researchers believe that there is a reciprocal interaction between Nature and Nurture that they both shape who we become.

An early philosopher such as Plato and Aristotle tries to identify the driving forces behind human behavior. Nature and Nurture were identified as the primary driving forces of human behavior. Plato strongly believed that behavior and knowledge were due to innate factors. Plato also trusted that knowledge is present at birth. He further emphasis that, although the environment does play an important role in human processes, its role is unique. He also stressed that the role of environment is less it will not teach anything to the people. Its ultimate purpose was to remind people of information which they already knew. Although Plato's views are not widely accepted today, he laid

the groundwork which leads the other researchers to follow.

Aristotle's view on human behavior is completely different from Plato. Aristotle differently framed a theory that human are born into this world with a blank slate. He further states that human behavior and thoughts are shaped based on the experience. Unlike Plato, Aristotle also theorized that, 'Humans were not born with knowledge, but they acquire it through experience'. Sociologists highly rejected Plato and believed that nevertheless the role of environment was also important factor in human behavior which greatly influenced many empiricists throughout history.

The modern personality theory was developed by Sigmund Freud and is known as Psychoanalytic theory. The psychiatric practice of this theory is called Psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud is also popularly known as the 'Father of Psychoanalysis'. Freud's ideas were often controversial. Charles Darwin is a strong proponent of Nature and Skinner is a strong advocate of Nurture. Therefore Freud should be placed between Charles Darwin and B.F Skinner. Freud's theory about personality has had tremendous influence on societies around the world. His theories not only influenced Psychology but also Literature, Art, Philosophy, Cultural studies, Film theory, and many other academic subjects. Freud's theory represents one of the major intellectual ideas of the modern world.

Charles Darwin strongly believed in his *Human Intelligence* that like personality intellectual traits also predominantly inherited. He further emphasis that,

I am inclined to agree with Francis Galton in believing that education and environment produce only a small effect on the mind of anyone, and that most of our qualities are innate. (HUMAN INTELLIGENCE)

Whereas Sigmund Freud stresses that each individual has a strong subconscious set of developmental stages and that Nature plays a predominate role.

Jerome Kagan, the famous psychologist once said that, "Genes and family may determine the foundation of the house, but time and place

determine its form". Indeed there is a huge difference between being oneself and identifying who you are? The debate on Nature versus Nurture has been a mystery for years. What is meant by Nature and Nurture? Nature is a word often used to describe the biological aspects which shape one's behavior. Nurture is the word often used to describe the social aspect that shapes one's behavior. Every human being was born into this world with no ideas or expectations. As they grow older they eventually developed their own identity. Indeed it is crucial to know about the identity we get was really developed or was it already exists within oneself? Such question will subsequently lead to the great debate in the concept of Nature and Nurture.

Judith Rich Harris in her famous book, *The Nurture Assumption: Why Children Turn out the Way They Do*, she challenges the concept of the personality of adults is highly determined by the way in which children are raised by their parents. She also admits that the role of genetics in shaping one's personality has long been accepted in psychological research. She further emphasizes that even the identical twins who share the same genes are not always same in their choice and personality. She concludes by stating that without the help of Nurture it is not at all possible to predict one's personality.

In the contemporary period there is a remarkable shift from stories which showed realistic events and situations in order to portray the inner experiences and sometimes irrational psychology of human beings. It is important to know that, there are two major qualities which mark this shift: 1. The Quest for Self Identity, and 2. Expressionism.

There is a fact which we need to know about Contemporary American Literature is unlike classical dramas where the heroes go on a quest for some object or symbol out in the world where as, characters or protagonist in the contemporary literature is always on a quest for Self Identity and it has been present in the Novels, Short Stories and Dramas since 18<sup>th</sup> century. The problem of identity is one of the most critical factors in most of the American fictions. Young Adult Fiction puts young readers

in the most important position of the literary movement by acknowledging and celebrating the real life problems and issues of young people. *Divergent* is the debut novel of American Novelist Veronica Roth set in post-apocalyptic Chicago. Today's Chicago, too, is a segmented city, but it does not have separate addresses for its identities for the way New York does. It places huge importance on coming to terms with one's own identity.

Veronica Roth's *Divergent* Trilogy also offers something deeper which brings up the ideas about Nature Versus Nurture, Family expectations versus Individuals free will. It has been divided into five Factions and the Factions are: Abnegation (the Selfless), Erudite (the Intelligent), Dauntless (the Brave), Amity (the Peaceful), and Candor (the Honest). The faction system is introduced to us as a way in which groups of people dedicate themselves to different virtues. Each faction told in *Divergent*, was founded on the belief that a specific vice was to blame for the world's evils. Those who blamed dishonesty formed Candor, those who blamed cowardice became the Dauntless, those who wanted to avoid selfishness became Abnegation, those who don't want to be ignorant became Erudite; and those who hate aggression became Amity. In this sense the choosing ceremony, teenagers are asked to decide which virtue they want to live in their future. Children are brought up in their parent's faction until their 16 years. Once they turn sixteen years they have to choose which faction going to have for the rest of their life.

Beatrice Tris Prior, the protagonist of the *Divergent* series was initially brought up in the Faction Abnegation. She moved to the Faction Dauntless during her choosing ceremony which surprises not only her parents but also herself. Tris's brother Caleb's transfer to the Faction Erudite also surprises Tris and his parents. One more important character in the *Divergent* Trilogy is Tobias Eaton. He was also raised in the Faction Abnegation and moved to the Faction Dauntless. Tobias eventually turned as the leader of the Faction and changed his identity as Four. Nevertheless all the characters in

Roth's trilogy confronts the conflict between individual free will and family expectations.

Similarly, the protagonist in J.K Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosophers Stone* undergoes a great change in his life. In this imaginative fantasy fiction the protagonist Harry is portrayed as pathetic boy living in a bad environment with his miserable uncle and his family knowing nothing about the true nature of his being. One fine day the character called Hagrid visited Harry in his uncle's home and reveals Harry's true Nature to himself that he is a Wizard. He further justifies that he belongs to entirely different environment that he is currently residing. Harry moved to Hogwarts into the Wizard world along with Hagrid where he learns of his own history and eventually discovers his true Nature. Even though he had never had parents or relatives to teach about Wizardly life but he flourished. In this book, *Harry Potter and the Philosophers Stone* the protagonist Harry needed the right Nurture to identify his Nature.

Although the children inherit the genes of their parents they are yet separate from their parents. No person truly belongs to another. In the poem *On the Children* by Kahlil Gibran gives the clear vision of this concept. He writes,

Your children are not your children.

They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.

They come through you but not from you,

And though they are with you, yet they belong not to you. (1-4)

You may give them your love but not your thoughts.

For they have their own thoughts.

You may house their bodies but not their souls,

For their souls dwell in the house  
of tomorrow,  
which you cannot visit, not even in  
your dreams.

You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.

For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday. (5-11)

Kahlil Gibran is a Lebanese-American poet who brings out high philosophical thought through his simple and beautiful poems. In this poem, *On the Children* Gibran talks about the relationship between children and parents. In this poem he explicitly conveys that every child is a gift from God. Although the children live with their parents, they do not belong to them. Every child has their own identity and ideas. He further says that the only bond between parents and the child is biological. He also uses metaphorical references by comparing parents to the bows and the child to arrows. Here the archer is none other than the God himself. Again and again Kahlil stresses here the importance of children's individual views and independent ideologies not influenced by their parents.

In *Lord of the Flies*, William Golding stresses that the greatest impact in the development of our personality is nothing but our environment in which we grow up. Comparing characters in the *Lord of the Flies*, Golding explicitly makes a statement that the environment has the power to change someone's personality completely and also says that every man has a capacity to be 'Evil' from the beginning of his life. Eventually as they grow older the environment has a greater impact in their attitude. In this novel, *Lord of the Flies*, a group of kids find themselves all alone on an island. Each child portrays different personalities and manners.

At the beginning of the story, as Golding believed that everybody has the capacity of being evil kids started developing their evil characters due to the new environment in which they live. Jack is one of the major characters is a born-leader appears as a normal kid with self-control. As the story progresses, the kids started finding new problems on the island. Eventually Jack also started developing his 'evil' as a result he turns as an aggressive leader of a violent mob. It is his new environment which causes tremendous change in his personality. Another important character in the book is called Ralph who is also a born-leader. Generally he is someone who always finds solution to his problems with logic and reasoning. Eventually

Ralph also joins Jack's mob and started being evil and certainly lost his self-control and develops a new character. Therefore the new environment in which we live has tremendous impact in one's personality.

In the *Divergent* series, Roth mirrored almost a generation in the Faction system that forces teenagers to know themselves and helps them to pick one way to live for the rest of their lives. The protagonist in the *Divergent* series, Tris Prior's own identity is in crisis. She herself feels pretty conflicted. Tris is currently living in a society where she has to choose between the two forces called Nature and Nurture. Nature is about the way in which a person is raised whereas Nurture is all about individuals innate characteristics. However it has strong impact in shaping her personality. How we are raised? The environment we were used to bring up in? The teachings of our parents whether we like it or not these things that shapes the person we become.

Roth uses these two forces throughout the *Divergent* series which has huge impact in the journey of the protagonist. Fortunately, Roth explicitly projects adolescent identity crisis in the very first book of the *Divergent* Trilogy. This crisis begins when Tris, the protagonist receives an inconclusive result during her aptitude test. Therefore the pressure to choose the right Faction and the fear of choosing the wrong Faction is real and become crucial. These two forces challenge not only Tris but some other characters as well in the series even after the decision is made. The challenge is between Nature and Nurture. The force of Nurture plays a crucial role in choosing one's own identity.

In the world of *Divergent*, once the choice is made on the faction it will automatically replace the family. Tobias one of the major characters in the *Divergent* series who was often beaten by his father and told it was for his own good. The force of family during choosing ceremony is almost non-exists in Tobias case. However in Tris's case, the force of family is very crucial since she is raised from a loving family the choice is much more complicated. The

force of family is stronger in Tris's case than Tobias Eaton. Tris herself stated that,

Today is the day of the aptitude test that will show me which of the five factions I belong in. And tomorrow, at the choosing ceremony; I will decide the rest of my life; I will decide to stay with my family or abandon them. (DIV 2)

Looking at these words clearly shows the importance of family in choosing her identity. The force of family is what more connected with her choices. Roth once again stresses this conflict while Tris was waiting for her name to be called at the choosing ceremony. She questions herself that, "More than family, our factions are where we belong. Can that possibly be right?" (DIV 43).

Once again the force of family is more prominent in Tris's decision. Perhaps the reason behind the force of family is so dominant because it invokes the feeling of guilt. Anyone who leaves their faction can be seen as a traitor forever to their family. Tris also undergoes the same conflict during her choosing ceremony because she has so much love and affection towards her family. She knows pretty well that there is no alternate for this she has to abandon her family if she chooses some other faction. On visiting day, any overwhelming show of affection toward family members will be considered as an insult to the faction and eventually puts them into trouble.

Another most important reason behind the strength of the family as an influence in the adolescent choice in their identity is Nurture. Here, Nurture refers to the way in which children are raised by their parents. For instance, if we taught to act in a certain way will certainly have some impact in the rest of the lives. At the beginning, Tris fights this force of Nurture in her actions in the faction Dauntless.

In this *Divergent* series the protagonist Tris has been raised according to the Abnegation life style until she turns sixteen. She has been taught to be selfless by her parents. Although she never excels in that life style, she finds it difficult to kick the habit. However, Tris's conflict towards Abnegation is



pretty much evident in the following statement said by Tris herself. She says,

When I look at the Abnegation lifestyle as an outsider, I think it's beautiful. When I watch my family move in harmony; when we go to dinner parties and everyone cleans together afterward without having to be asked; when I see Caleb help strangers carry their groceries, I fall in love with this life all over again. It is only when I try to live in myself that I have trouble. It never feels genuine. (DIV 24)

Indeed Roth's heroine struggles with discovering her new identity. It explicitly shows that Tris's nature is much stronger than the force of nurture. Tris has been watching Dauntless for years and greatly fascinated by them. She also admits that she has habits from Abnegation which will take long time to break it. Tris's passion towards Dauntless is expressed when she said, "I didn't jump off the roof because I wanted to be like the Dauntless. I jumped off because I was already like them, and I wanted to show myself to them."

At the beginning of the novel, Tris seems to be quite uncomfortable with the Dauntless life style but she eventually recognize that Dauntless is the place where she can finally call home and actually feel at home. She also acknowledges that it never makes her nervous when she get an idea about leaving Abnegation identity instead it gives her hope. Nevertheless, the role of Nurture has a greater impact on one's Nature. As Tris looks at the mirror in Dauntless feels,

It will be difficult to break the habits of thinking Abnegation instilled within me, like tugging a single thread of embroidery. But I will find new habits, new thoughts, and new rules. I will become something else. (DIV 87)

Indeed Roth tries to convey a great message that if we pull on the thread of the embroidery, it will likely to be fall apart. Similarly, Roth's point is to say that Tris's attempt to separate herself from the habits she was raised will likely destroy her. Tris thinks that this process will be easy without realizing the fact that if she changes herself to that extent, she will no

longer be Tris. It is certain that she will be destroyed and she will be replaced by something else completely. Eventually she realizes that the force of Nurture is too hard to overcome, and by the end of the novel she does not want to overcome it. In order to prove this conflict towards Nurture she gets the tattoo of the Abnegation symbol. Despite the fact that it could be a risk in her new Faction she wants to get the second tattoo from one of the Abnegation symbol.

She says, "That symbol is part of my identity, and it felt important to me that I wear it on my skin" (DIV 316). This tattoo is also significant because it clearly acknowledges that the past as a permanent part of Tris's future. Nurture is so strong on Tris's character that even she herself questions it. She often has had a controversy about her choice about whether she picked the correction Faction. She began to realize that Abnegation is, "what I am when I am put to the test. It is what I am even when I appear to be brave" (DIV 379). Despite all these doubts Tris faces a lot of physical challenges with Dauntless.

Although Tris was raised in the Faction Abnegation until she turns sixteen years old but she picks up everything so quickly even after having no experience with something before. Tris eventually become excels at hand to hand combat, shooting and knife throwing. Throughout the *Divergent* series, Tris goes through a great change. Subsequently she surprises everyone by rising to the top of the class. When she is at her bravest, she is the most selfless. Tris is often admired and captivated by the Dauntless and their ways even before she has joined them. When she starts to doubt about her Dauntless choice, soon she realizes that she already likes them that,

I was already like them, and I wanted to show myself to them. I wanted to show a part of myself that Abnegation demanded that I hide (DIV 263).

Tris admits to herself that she always wanted more than Abnegation and only it is her adventurous nature which made her to choose Dauntless. Tris greatly enjoys herself to perform brave acts also proving to her and the readers that she belongs in

Dauntless. Even though Abnegation roots are constantly dragging at her, it is in her dauntless nature that she finds her true home. However it is very much evident that Roth wants the readers to believe that person's Nature somewhat wins out no matter how much selflessness Tris embodies. Tris also admitted that she loves the Abnegation life style and she also aware that whenever she tries to live it "it never feels genuine". Once again Roth uses perfect words which are adding more justification to the characters. According to Roth, both Nature and Nurture have influenced not only the people but also herself. Furthermore she even thinks that it is really an even combination.

The three parts of Roth's trilogy traces almost exactly three stages of adolescent in finding their own Identity. In *Divergent*, Tris is not only preoccupied with finding her own place and identity in her Factioned society, but also trying to ensure her "individual survival" by making it through dauntless initiation. Furthermore, throughout *Insurgent* Tris is preoccupied with her parents' sacrifice. *Insurgent*, and the most of *Allegiant*, too, are for a good part concerned with this stage for Tris's self-sacrifice. The third level is that of "nonviolence", and it is in *Allegiant* where Tris finds this balance between the needs of others and those of her own. Tris realizes she is defined most by her family, and finally learns what it means to be truly self-sacrificial without being unintentionally self-destructive.

Ultimately Roth demonstrates these two forces particularly on Beatrice Tris in order to illustrate how an adolescent within this world would suffer when trying to identify themselves with a certain Faction. Even today most of the adolescents facing the influence of these two forces while attempting to find the right career for them. In the present generation of adolescents are greatly encouraged to listen to their parents but might disagree with their choices. The way they raised might have an impact only in certain lifestyles but it is only their own natures would be the greatest guide for them in their choices. However both the forces hold a significant role.

Tris has accepted that, she loves Dauntless and finally feels a sense of belonging with them that

she never truly felt in Abnegation. She does not even care about the danger of showing loyalty to her previous Faction. As a result she gets the Tattoo of the Abnegation symbols. Therefore, she is impacted by both the forces Nature and Nurture. At last, Tris has achieved a sense of self-awareness that most people in this fiction seem to lack. The literature of contemporary emphasis that there is no proven study regarding which force has the greater effect on personality.

As Roth tells her readers in her blog, eventually Tris realizes that being Divergent already enables her to reconcile her different identities, "combining selflessness and bravery and love for her family and love for her faction all together under one umbrella". She is not just ex-Abnegation, or currently Dauntless, but she is a complicated, autonomous individual made up of different identity elements. When she finally accepts her Divergence as proof of her individuality, she feels like someone breathed new air into her lungs therefore she says that,

I feel like someone breathed new air into my lungs.

I am not Abnegation. I am not Dauntless.

I am Divergent. And I can't be controlled.  
(DIV 442)

The greater part of the trilogy is thus because of her Divergence, Tris is confused about whether she belongs in Abnegation, Dauntless, or nowhere at all. Ultimately In *Allegiant* Tris finally reaches a strong sense of identity, as well as a keen understanding of what she and her parents believed about selflessness which thus Constitute, literally, the end of a journey.

Most people in the real world would probably be more like the Divergent than any of the other Factions. How many of us are always Selfless similar to the Abnegation? How many of us are always punctual, kind and loving similar to Amity? How many of us are always honest even it puts us into trouble similar to Candor? How many of us are always buried in our books, conducting research all the time similar to Erudite? And how of us are always brave, jumping off the tallest buildings similar to Dauntless? Even if we consider our family and neighbors for that matter we will find most of

them would actually fall into Divergent category. Each person combines all these traits as well as many others.

To conclude that it is very much evident that the theory of Nurture makes more sense than the theory of Nature. Indeed without the influence from the outside world where we would be? Without influence we all will certainly lack all the basic skills including talking, walking and so on. One's personal identity must be developed through the environment. We need more than just nature in the modern age. Therefore it is important to incorporate both nature and nurture in our lives.

Human beings have the ability to learn and to grow. Parents, Faction systems or the Government can try to teach and guide us. The fact is what we learn from them and what we do with the information we receive from them is ultimately up to one's own choice. It does not matter how our genes are, and what we inherited from our parents. The environment in which we live does an important role in defining our personality. Nevertheless the general population and the researchers seem to agree on the fact that complex behaviors are a result of the interaction between genetics and the environment.

Research over Nature versus Nurture concludes that the 'developmental systems theory' which is a new model for personality and behavior states that the complex interaction between Nature and Nurture explains how we react. Most of the scientists believe that the genes are the center during every stage of development and it is environment factors which greatly influence the effects of the genes. However the scientific view on Nature Versus Nurture continues to be explored.

#### WORK CITED

- Roth, Veronica. *Divergent*. New York: HarperCollins, 2011. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Insurgent*. New York: HarperCollins, 2012. Print.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Allegiant*. New York: HarperCollins, 2013. Print.
- "A Q&A with Author Veronica Roth." Amazon Review. <http://www.amazon.com/Divergent-Series-Veronica-Roth/dp/0062024035/>

"A Q&A with Author Veronica Roth." Bonus Materials. *Divergent*. New York: HarperCollins, 2011.

Bethune, Brain. "Dystopia Now." *Maclean's* 125.13/14 (9 April 2012): 84-88.

C. J. "Veronica Roth: Finding Her Faction." *Publishers Weekly* 259.32 (2012): 13. Academic Search Complete. Web. 28 Nov. 2013.

Craig, Amanda. "The Hunger Games and the Teenage Craze for Dystopian Fiction." *The Telegraph* 14 May 2012. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/9143409/the-Hunger-Games-and-the-teenage-craze-for-dystopian-fiction.html>

Dominus, Susan. "Choose Wisely." *New York Times* 15 May 2011. [http://nytimes.com/2011/05/15/books/review/you/ng-adult-books-divergent-by-veronica-roth.html?\\_r=2&](http://nytimes.com/2011/05/15/books/review/you/ng-adult-books-divergent-by-veronica-roth.html?_r=2&)

Frankel, Valerie Estelle. *Buffy and the Heroine's Journey*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2010.