

# Unveiling the parenting paradigms in Veronica Roth's *Divergent* series through Baumrind's parenting theory

Rinupriya Kannan and Preetha Chandrahasan\*

**Abstract:** The role of a parent is important in promoting the development of character, behaviour, discipline, resilience, academic success, social skills, emotional skills, and coping skills in children. Positive parenting styles have far-reaching benefits for children, families, communities and society, and negative styles have reverse effects. This research paper conducts a comparative analysis of the parenting styles depicted in Veronica Roth's *Divergent* series, focusing on Marcus as an authoritarian parent of Four and Natalie as an authoritative parent of Tris. Through the lens of Diana Baumrind's theory of parenting styles, this study examines the behaviours, interactions, and effects of these contrasting parenting approaches on the characters' development, relationships, and overall well-being. By examining the impact of these parenting styles on the characters' development, this research paper provides insights into the influence of authoritarian and authoritative parenting within the framework of Baumrind's theory. It contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between parenting styles and individual outcomes.

**Keywords:** parenting styles, authoritarian, authoritative, *Divergent*, Diana Baumrind

## Introduction

“Parenting style plays a vital role in the well-being of the child. It is also responsible for the child's problematic behaviour” (Candelanza, Buot, and Merin 2021, 1498). Parenting styles play a significant role in shaping children's lives and have long-lasting implications for their

---

\* Rinupriya Kannan (✉)

Department of English, Sri Sarada College for Women (Autonomous), Salem, Tamilnadu, India

e-mail: rinurinu460@gmail.com

Preetha Chandrahasan (✉)

Department of English, Sri Sarada College for Women (Autonomous), Salem, Tamilnadu, India

e-mail: preesivajana@gmail.com

development. According to Sandiford (1925, 387), “It is the training then given that makes or mars children”. How parents interact with their children, set expectations, and respond to their needs influences various aspects of their social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural development. “The objective of parents is to produce human beings ... who are strong and trustworthy, and civilised citizens, and whose mission in life is development and reform throughout the land” (Altalib, Abū Sulaymān, and Altalib 2013, 72). Parenting styles also impact children’s cognitive development. Good parenting combines warmth and support with clear expectations and reasonable discipline and fosters intellectual curiosity, problem-solving skills, and academic success. It “is a long-term investment and is the key to great success in the emotional, psychological, and physical development of children” (Ibid., 4). In contrast, negative parenting styles composed of “hostility and psychological control,” (Morris et al. 2002, 462) hinder cognitive development by either failing to set boundaries or imposing excessive control.

“Parenting accounts for considerably more variance in child outcomes when temperamental characteristics of the child are taken into consideration,” (Morris et al. 2002, 462) and different parenting styles influence children’s ability to develop autonomy and independence. The objective of the research paper is to conduct a comparative analysis of parenting styles depicted in Veronica Roth’s *Divergent* series in analogy with Diana Baumrind’s theory of parenting styles. The paper aims to explore and compare the various parenting approaches portrayed in the series through the characters of Marcus and Natalie Prior, as father and mother of Four and Tris respectively, by examining how parenting approaches influence the characters’ development, relationships, and overall outcomes. Baumrind’s theory provides a well-established framework for understanding and categorising different parenting styles. It offers a comprehensive model to compare and analyse the parenting approaches depicted in the *Divergent* series. By analysing the authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles portrayed in the books, the research paper seeks to provide insights into the implications of different parenting approaches within the fictional world of *Divergent*.

### ***Divergent***

*Divergent* is a popular dystopian young adult series written by Veronica Roth. Born on August 19, 1988, in New York City, Veronica

Roth developed a passion for storytelling at a young age. With a degree in Creative Writing from Northwestern University, Roth honed her writing skills and became a prominent figure in young adult literature. Her debut novel, *Divergent*, published in 2011, catapulted her to international fame and established her as a formidable voice in the genre of dystopian fiction.

According to Gottlieb (2001, 27),

dystopian fiction ... offer a definite sense of continuity between the flawed world of the present and the even more profoundly flawed, monstrous world of the hypothetical future, where our society's errors against justice and reason become a totalitarian dictatorship of organized justice.

The *Divergent* series comprises three novels, *Divergent*, *Insurgent* and *Allegiant*, and a short story collection named *Four: A Divergent Collection*. The series is set in a profoundly flawed post-apocalyptic society of Chicago, divided into factions based on specific virtues: Abnegation (selflessness), Dauntless (bravery), Erudite (intelligence), Amity (peacefulness), and Candor (honesty). The story revolves around the protagonist, Beatrice Prior, later known as Tris, as she confronts political intrigue, personal identity struggles, and a fight for survival in the dystopian setting. Marcus Eaton and Natalie Prior are significant characters in the series, with Marcus, being the father of Tobias Eaton also known as Four, and a prominent member of the Abnegation faction. Natalie, on the other hand, is Tris' mother. Despite both belonging to the Abnegation faction, Marcus and Natalie demonstrate contrasting parenting approaches in their interactions with their children.

Marcus Eaton is a complex and influential character in the series. He is portrayed as the leader of the Abnegation faction and holds a position of power within the society. Marcus comes across as a stern and authoritative parent of Four, reflecting some traits of an authoritarian parenting style. Four, also known as Tobias Eaton, is a pivotal character in Roth's *Divergent*. He is a member of the Dauntless faction, known for his exceptional combat skills and enigmatic demeanour. Initially, Four is an enforcer of faction rules, but as the story progresses, it becomes evident that he is Divergent, with traits of multiple factions. Four becomes Tris' mentor and eventually her love interest. He struggles with his past and a complicated relationship with his father, Marcus, the leader of Abnegation.

Natalie Prior is Tris' mother and a member of the Abnegation faction. Unlike Marcus, Natalie is portrayed as more compassionate, caring, and understanding. She exhibits qualities associated with an authoritative parenting style, characterised by a balance of warmth and support along with clear expectations. Tris, the protagonist of Roth's *Divergent*, is a brave and independent young woman navigating a dystopian society divided into factions. Born into the selfless Abnegation faction, she discovers she is Divergent, possessing traits of multiple factions. Tris chooses the daring Dauntless during the Choosing Ceremony, undergoing rigorous training to prove her worth. As she hides her divergence, she faces personal identity struggles, political intrigue, and a dangerous conspiracy threatening her world. But because of her mother's support, Tris embodies resilience, determination, and a strong sense of justice as she defies societal norms and fights for her beliefs, becoming a symbol of courage and hope.

### **Baumrind's parenting styles**

Baumrind's theory of parenting styles, proposed by psychologist Diana Baumrind in the 1960s, provides a framework for understanding and categorising different approaches to parenting. Baumrind identified three main parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive.

**Authoritative Parenting:** Authoritative parents are characterised by high levels of warmth, responsiveness, and support combined with reasonable expectations and clear boundaries. They attempt "to direct the child's activities but in a rational, issue-oriented manner" (Baumrind 1970, 105). They establish rules and guidelines but also encourage independence and individuality, so they are "both demanding and responsive. They monitor and impart clear standards for their children's conduct" (Baumrind 1991, 62). They engage in open communication, listen to their children's opinions, and provide explanations for their decisions. "Authoritative parenting is distinguished by reciprocity, mutual understanding, and flexibility, which enable the parent to effectively account for, coordinate, and balance communal needs or collective goals of society and family with the capabilities, needs, and goals of the child" (Sorkhabi 2005, 559). They promote a nurturing and supportive environment while also fostering self-discipline and responsibility. These characteristics of authoritative parenting align with positive parenting, characterised by

“high levels of observed warmth and support and low levels of hostility and coercion” (Schofield et al. 2012, 263).

**Authoritarian Parenting:** Authoritarian parents are strict and demanding, emphasising obedience and conformity. Baumrind (1970, 105) says that “the authoritarian parents attempt: to shape, control and evaluate the behaviour and attitudes of the child in accordance with a set standard of conduct, usually an absolute standard, theologically motivated and formulated by a higher authority”. They have high expectations for their children and enforce rules with little room for negotiation or flexibility, so they are “demanding and directive but not responsive” (Baumrind 1991, 62).

According to Baumrind (1970, 112) those who “permitted their own needs to take precedence over those of the child, became inaccessible when displeased, assumed a stance of personal infallibility, and in other ways showed themselves often to be more concerned with their own ideas than with the child’s welfare” are authoritarian parents. Authoritarian parents tend to be less responsive to their children’s needs and opinions and rely on punishment or coercion to maintain control. The focus is on obedience and following rules rather than fostering independence or individuality. These characteristics of authoritarian parenting align with negative parenting, marked by,

hostility and psychological control. Hostility is defined as overt verbal and physical aggression toward the child. In contrast, psychological control is covert aggression and intrusive control in which parents attempt to manipulate children’s behaviour and identity through the use of coercive strategies such as excessive criticism, contingent affection, guilt induction, restrictive communication, and invalidation of feelings. (Morris et al. 2002, 462)

**Permissive Parenting:** Permissive parents are characterised by high warmth and support but low levels of control and discipline. They attempt “to behave in a nonpunitive, acceptant and affirmative manner towards the child’s impulses, desires, and actions” (Baumrind 1970, 105). They avoid setting clear boundaries or enforcing rules, allowing their children to make their own decisions without much guidance or structure. Permissive parents tend to be indulgent and lenient, often prioritising their children’s immediate desires over long-term consequences. They have difficulty saying no or setting limits.

### **Marcus: the authoritarian parent**

Marcus' parenting behaviours align with an authoritarian style, characterised by strict control, high expectations, and a lack of emotional warmth and his actions are influenced by the larger oppressive society depicted in the series. The faction-based society, with its emphasis on conformity and control, plays a role in shaping Marcus' parenting approach. These behaviours and discipline strategies contribute to the complexities and conflicts within the story, impacting Four's growth, relationships, and personal journey.

### **Demanding and directive**

Marcus establishes strict rules and expectations for his son Tobias, also known as Four. He places a strong emphasis on conformity and adherence to societal norms. He stifles Four's autonomy by enforcing strict conformity to faction rules, limiting his ability to make independent decisions. In Authoritarian parenting "individual concerns and goals are ignored or subordinated to social goals and requirements," (Sorkhabi 2005, 559) similarly, Marcus expects Four to live up to his Abnegation faction's virtues and ideals and ignores Four's individual goals. He guides and orders his son to choose Abnegation and Four's words on Marcus reveal the limitations that are imposed on him by his father, "I don't know that I would have made different choices if my father hadn't coached me, hadn't controlled every part of my aptitude test from afar" (Roth 2015, 4).

Marcus's authoritarian approach leaves little room for Four to make independent decisions or exercise autonomy and all his decisions are influenced by his father's actions, even in deciding the faction, he says "I wanted any other faction. Any other faction but mine," (Roth 2015, 6) because his hatred for his father makes him think that the only way to escape from his father is leaving Abnegation, "If you choose Abnegation, you will never get away from him" (Ibid., 22). But in reality, Four feels himself belonging to Abnegation, he says, "I was born for Abnegation" (Roth 2012, 143). So, Marcus' approach alters Four's decisions and he struggles in deciding his identity.

Marcus employs discipline strategies that prioritise control and obedience; this "control implies an unhealthy orientation on the part of parents to the psychological and emotional boundaries between parents and children" (Barber 2002, 276). Because of the boundaries created by Marcus' parenting style, Four is reluctant to share his thoughts and feelings and he maintains distance, "I don't want to talk to him about it

now, not when I can see the stress brewing inside him like a storm” (Roth 2015, 14). His distant behaviour negatively impacts Four’s emotional well-being, leaving him feeling isolated and disconnected.

Marcus relies on fear and coercion to maintain order and compliance. Barber (2002, 174) lists “Verbal hostility and corporal punishment ... as elements of coercive control”. Turner and Finkelhor (1996, 155) in their article “Corporal Punishment as a Stressor among Youth” quote Straus’ and Donnelly’s and defines corporal punishment or physical punishment as, “the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child pain, but not injury, for purposes of correction or control of the child’s behaviour”. He uses physical punishment, such as physical blows or slaps, as a means of discipline, emphasising power dynamics and asserting dominance; this induces fear in Four “the childish part of me that is afraid of the man holding the court in the living room. The man whose knuckles I know better than his embrace” (Roth 2015, 17) and it impacts his life even in his adolescence. He gets mocked by his faction mates for his fear of his father, “I saw your daddy here earlier, Eaton! Are you gonna hide? ... ‘Yeah, are you gonna hide, coward?’” (Roth 2012, 204).

**Strict Enforcement of Faction Rules:** Marcus is committed to upholding the rules and regulations of the Abnegation faction. He enforces faction-specific customs and rituals, expecting Four to conform without question. Failure to adhere to these rules is met with strict consequences. He never permits Four to possess simple things like old spectacles as memorable relics because it is ranked “with self-indulgence” and claims that “it poisons this house with selfishness” (Roth 2015, 21). He punishes Four for holding such objects with corporal punishment, “His hands collide with my chest,” “with the belt and the stripes he carves into my back” (Ibid.).

### **Irresponsive**

**Lack of Emotional Warmth:** Marcus is portrayed as emotionally distant and cold towards Four. He rarely shows affection or offers emotional support. His interactions with Four lack warmth and tenderness, contributing to a strained relationship between father and son. He seldom offers praise, encouragement, or positive reinforcement. Four addresses his father as sir, like he is his commander, “Yes sir” (Roth 2015, 15). This absence of emotional support hinders the development of a nurturing and secure parent-child bond. Marcus is not actively involved in Four’s life. He fails to engage in meaningful conversations

or take an interest in his son's well-being or interests. This lack of engagement leaves Four feeling disconnected and isolated.

**Secrecy and Withholding Information:** Marcus is secretive and conceals important details about his family's history, including the truth about Four's mother, Evelyn. He keeps her existence and the circumstances of her departure from their family a secret for many years, leaving him in the dark about his mother. This impacts their relationship and his lack of transparency contributes to a sense of distrust and confusion within the family dynamics.

Four struggles with forming secure attachments. He rarely meets people in Abnegation, and his absence creates rumours and affects his societal reputation, Four's words, "Abnegation ... convinced there's something wrong with me, that I'm ill or immoral or strange," (Roth 2015, 5) express people's perception of him. He also struggles with exploring his own identity and asserting his individuality. His father's emphasis on societal norms and expectations limits his ability to express his unique qualities and pursue his passions and interests. He develops anger and hatred toward him, his anger toward Marcus is found in his words "I want my choice to drive a knife right through my father's heart, to pierce him with as much pain and embarrassment and disappointment as possible" (Ibid., 31). Throughout the series, Four has problems making decisions and forming relationships.

### **Natalie Prior: the authoritative parent**

Natalie Prior's parenting behaviours in the *Divergent* series reflect elements of an authoritative parenting style, characterised by warmth, support, clear expectations, and open communication. Despite the faction-based society and its emphasis on conformity and control, she nurtures and guides her daughter in making decisions.

### **Demanding**

**Clear Expectations and Boundaries:** Natalie sets clear expectations for Tris and establishes boundaries to guide her behaviour. She communicates her expectations reasonably and consistently, ensuring that Tris understands the rules and consequences. At the beginning of the series, when Tris is preparing to choose her faction, Natalie through her actions of helping factionless people explains the values and principles of their faction to her. She tells Tris about the importance of selflessness, putting others before oneself, and serving



the community. By doing so, Natalie sets a clear expectation for Tris to adhere to these values if she chooses to remain in Abnegation.

**Reasonable Discipline:** While specific discipline strategies employed by Natalie are not extensively highlighted in the series, her authoritative parenting style suggests that she likely employs discipline techniques that are firm but fair. She is likely to use logical consequences, explanations, and discussions to guide Tris' behaviour rather than relying on harsh punishments or excessive control. Even when Tris violates the Abnegation rules by interfering in the conversation between her parents, she gently instructs her "Why don't you take this opportunity to listen to your father, Beatrice?" (Roth 2011, 35)

**Balancing Support and Challenge:** Natalie strikes a balance between offering support and challenging Tris to grow and develop. She provides encouragement and guidance while also allowing Tris to face appropriate challenges and learn from her experiences. Natalie cares about Tris' progress in the Dauntless initiation process and she enquires her daughter about her progress and motivates her, "How are you really doing, Beatrice? How have the fights been? How are you ranked?" (Roth 2011, 184) This balance fosters resilience, self-esteem, and personal growth in Tris.

### **Responsiveness**

**Warmth and Emotional Support:** Natalie is portrayed as a caring and compassionate mother to Tris. She offers emotional support, provides comfort, and creates a nurturing environment for her daughter. Her warmth and affection contribute to a sense of security and emotional well-being for Tris. After Tris' transfer from Abnegation to Dauntless, Natalie visits Tris on the visiting day to support her emotionally, "I start toward her, tears jumping into my eyes. She came. She came for me" (Roth 2011, 178). On the same occasion, Natalie prioritises Tris' comfort and consoles her with kind words like, "Today is a special occasion ... I came to see you, so let's talk mostly about you. It is my gift to you," (Ibid., 179). She also ensures that Tris' father still loves her, "That doesn't mean he doesn't love you, I promise" (Ibid.).

**Open Communication:** Natalie fosters open communication with Tris, encouraging her to express her thoughts, feelings, and concerns. She listens attentively, validates Tris' emotions, and engages in meaningful conversations. This open dialogue promotes trust, understanding, and mutual respect between mother and daughter.

Because Natalie is friendly, Tris can share her thoughts on Four, “‘There’s one of my instructors.’ I lean closer to her and say, ‘He’s kind of intimidating,’” (Roth 2011, 180). The space that she offers generates trust in Tris and encourages her to reveal even about her divergence, “That is my mother. I can trust her. ‘They (the results of aptitude test) were inconclusive’” (Ibid., 186).

**Encouragement of Independence:** Natalie supports Tris’ development of independence and individuality. She values Tris’ opinions and encourages her to make her own decisions, fostering a sense of autonomy and self-reliance. Even when Tris transfers from Abnegation to Dauntless and leaves their family, Natalie’s smile comforts her; “My mother is smiling” (Roth 2011, 49). Natalie sets boundaries at the same time and encourages individuality and stands by the side of Tris when she makes her decisions. Natalie’s guidance allows Tris to develop critical thinking skills and assert her own identity.

**Nurturing and Supportive environment:** Natalie provides a nurturing and supportive environment for Tris to thrive. She provides the necessary support, guidance, and love to help them meet these expectations and navigate the challenges they face in the series, “Be brave, Beatrice. I love you,” (Roth 2011, 443). When she says, “You’re my daughter. I don’t care about the factions” (Ibid., 441) it is evident that she prioritises her daughter over faction customs. Natalie’s authoritative parenting style encourages Tris to make her own decisions and value her opinions. As a result, Tris develops strong decision-making skills, as she learns to weigh the pros and cons of different choices and take responsibility for the outcomes.

Overall, Natalie Prior’s authoritative parenting style positively impacts Tris’ decision-making skills and relationship-building. Tris grows into a confident, empathetic, and independent individual, equipped with the skills necessary to navigate complex decisions and build strong and meaningful connections with others in the world of *Divergent*.

## **Conclusion**

The paper conducts a comparative analysis of parenting styles portrayed in a popular dystopian young adult series, *Divergent*, written by Veronica Roth. By analysing the characters of Marcus and Natalie Prior, the paper explores how authoritarian and authoritative parenting styles impact the characters’ development, relationships, and overall

well-being. This provides readers with valuable insights into the implications of different parenting approaches within a fictional context. It applies Diana Baumrind's theory of parenting styles to a fictional world, demonstrating the relevance and applicability of the theory beyond real-world settings.

The research highlights the importance of emotional connection, balanced authority, open communication, individuality, appropriate discipline, and emotional well-being in parenting. It emphasises the positive impact of authoritative parenting on children's self-esteem, autonomy, emotional regulation, empathy, and resilience. This study contributes to the existing literature by examining parenting styles within a fictional context, demonstrating the relevance and applicability of Baumrind's theory in analysing and understanding parenting approaches in a dystopian society. It also serves as a reminder of the importance of considering the impact of parenting styles on children's development and well-being in real-world settings. By understanding the effects of different parenting styles, individuals can make informed choices and adopt parenting approaches that foster positive outcomes for their children's growth, relationships, and overall happiness.

## References:

- Altalib, Hisham, 'AbdulḤamīd Abū Sulaymān, and Omar Altalib. 2013. *Parent-Child Relations: A Guide to Raising Children*. London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought.
- Barber, Brian K. (Ed.). 2002. *Intrusive Parenting: How Psychological Control Affects Children and Adolescents*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Baumrind, Diana. 1970. Socialization and Instrumental Competence in Young Children. *Young Children* 26 (2): 104–119.
- . 1991. The Influence of Parenting Style on Adolescent Competence and Substance Use. *The Journal of Early Adolescence* 11 (1): 56–95.
- Candelanza, Ana L., Eva Queenilyn C. Buot, and Jewish A. Merin. 2021. Diana Baumrind's Parenting Style and Child's Academic Performance: A Tie-In. *Psychology and Education Journal* 58 (5): 1497–1502.
- Gottlieb, Erika. 2001. *Dystopian Fiction East and West: Universe of Terror and Trial*. Montreal / Ithaca, N.Y: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Morris, Amanda Sheffield, Jennifer S. Silk, Laurence Steinberg, Frances M. Sessa, Shelli Avenevoli, and Marilyn J. Essex. 2002. Temperamental Vulnerability and Negative Parenting as Interacting Predictors of Child Adjustment. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 64 (2): 461–71.
- Roth, Veronica. 2011. *Divergent*. Great Britain: HarperCollins.

- . 2012. *Insurgent*. London: HarperCollinsPublishers.
- . 2015. *Four: A Divergent Collection*. HarperCollinsPublishers.
- Sandiford, Peter. 1925. Parental Responsibility. *The Public Health Journal* 16 (8): 386–390.
- Schofield, Thomas J., Rand D. Conger, M. Brent Donnellan, Rachel Jochem, Keith F. Widaman, and Katherine J. Conger. 2012. Parent Personality and Positive Parenting as Predictors of Positive Adolescent Personality Development Over Time. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly* 58 (2): 255–83.
- Sorkhabi, Nadia. 2005. Applicability of Baumrind's Parent Typology to Collective Cultures: Analysis of Cultural Explanations of Parent Socialization Effects. *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 29 (6): 552–63.
- Turner, Heather A., and David Finkelhor. 1996. Corporal Punishment as a Stressor among Youth. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 58 (1): 155–66. <https://doi.org/10.2307/353384>.