



JMS: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies

Vol. 1, No.2 April 2026, Page 50-54

P-ISSN: XX-XX

E-ISSN: XX-XX

Available Online at <https://pusatpublikasi.com/index.php/jms/index>



Tris Prior's Desire for Equality in *Divergent*: A Psychoanalytic Approach

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Abstract: Film as a contemporary form of literary expression provides a powerful medium for exploring human psychology and social structures. This study examines the desire for equality of Tris Prior, the protagonist of the film *Divergent* (2014), directed by Neil Burger. Previous studies on *Divergent* have analyzed Tris through Jungian, Eriksonian, Marxist, and feminist frameworks, yet none have specifically examined her desire for equality as a psychological necessity through Freud's structural model of the psyche. To bridge this gap, this research employs Freud's psychoanalytic theory, focusing on the interrelation of the id, ego, and superego. A qualitative research design was applied using the documentation method, with data collected through repeated viewings of selected scenes, dialogues, and plot events from the film. The findings reveal that Tris's id manifests as an impulsive drive for freedom in the First Jumper scene; her ego emerges as a rational, goal-directed decision in the train boarding scene; and her superego is reflected in her deep internalization of the faction system's norms as expressed in Tris's dialogue with Jenni to the Choosing Ceremony. The dynamic interaction of these three psychic structures culminates in Tris's assertion of her *Divergent* identity, which represents the psychological fulfillment of her desire for equality. This study concludes that Tris's pursuit of equality is not merely a social or political act, but a psychological necessity driven by the tension between instinctual desire, rational judgment, and internalized moral values.

Keywords: Desire for Equality; *Divergent*; Freud; Psychoanalysis; Tris Prior

I. INTRODUCTION

Literature serves as a medium through which humans represent and interpret experiences, emotions, and social realities. It transcends linguistic and cultural boundaries by providing creative expressions that reflect human consciousness and psychological complexity. As literary forms continue to evolve, they extend beyond traditional written texts into modern media such as film, which integrates visual, auditory, and narrative elements to convey meaning. Film, as a contemporary extension of literature, constructs meaning through character, plot, and symbolism while addressing issues related to identity, morality, and social hierarchy (Klarer, 2023). As such, film provides a dynamic platform for examining psychological and social phenomena through character representation.

One film that exemplifies these concerns is *Divergent* (2014), directed by Neil Burger. Set in a dystopian society divided into five factions, the film portrays a rigid social system that categorizes individuals based on singular virtues. This system limits individual identity and reinforces social inequality. The protagonist, Tris Prior, is identified as a *Divergent*, an individual who cannot be confined to a single category. Her position within this system generates both internal and external conflicts, as she struggles to reconcile her multifaceted identity with a society that demands conformity. Through her decisions, moral dilemmas, and responses to authority, Tris reflects a continuous tension between personal identity and an unequal social structure. This tension reveals not only her psychological conflict but also her resistance to social oppression, which is driven by a deeper desire for equality.

Previous studies on *Divergent* have applied various theoretical perspectives to analyze Tris Prior's character, yet several limitations remain. Septiani et al. (2022) examined Tris's id, ego, and superego using Freud's model but focused primarily on descriptive classification without connecting these psychological structures to her underlying motivation for equality. Other studies have approached the character from different perspectives, such as Jungian (Qowiy, 2024), Eriksonian (Shafira, 2022), Marxist (Saputra, 2021), and feminist (Maheswara & Prastiwi, 2023) frameworks. While these studies provide valuable insights into identity formation and social oppression, they tend to emphasize either internal harmony or external social conditions without fully addressing the psychological mechanisms that drive Tris's resistance. As a result, Tris Prior's desire for equality remains underexplored within Freud's psychoanalytic framework, indicating a clear research gap.

To address this gap, this study examines the desire for equality of Tris Prior in *Divergent* (2014) using Freud's psychoanalytic theory. In this study, the desire for equality is understood as an internal motivational force that drives individuals to pursue equal status, rights, and recognition (Shaw, 2021), functioning not only as a social aspiration but also as a psychological necessity. Therefore, this research aims: (1) to identify the aspects of Tris Prior's psyche as represented in *Divergent* (2014), and (2) to analyze how Tris Prior's desire for equality influences the interaction among her id, ego, and superego.

II. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the psychological aspects of Tris Prior in the film *Divergent* (2014). Qualitative research is applied to explore the meanings embedded in character behavior, dialogue, and narrative context, which cannot be quantified. The film *Divergent* (2014), directed by Neil Burger, serves as the primary data source, with Tris Prior as the main subject due to her central role in representing psychological conflict and the desire for equality.

The data consist of selected scenes, dialogues, and plot events that reflect Freud's psychoanalytic concepts of id, ego, and superego, as well as Tris Prior's desire for equality. Data collection is conducted through repeated viewings of the film (three to five times), accompanied by note-taking to record relevant dialogues, character actions, and visual cues such as facial expressions and body language. The collected data are then selected and categorized based on their relevance to the analytical framework. Data are grouped into categories representing the id, ego, superego, and the influence of the desire for equality. Irrelevant or repetitive data are excluded to ensure analytical focus.

Data analysis is conducted using a descriptive qualitative approach by applying Freud's psychoanalytic theory to interpret the interaction among Tris Prior's psychological structures. Each datum is analyzed within its narrative context by examining dialogue, behavior, and visual cues. To ensure validity, the data are re-examined through repeated viewing and cross-checked with the theoretical framework. The findings are presented using an informal descriptive method, in which interpretations are conveyed narratively and supported by textual evidence from the film.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Three main aspects of Tris Prior's psyche are identified in the movie *Divergent* (2014), namely the id, ego, and superego. These psychological aspects can be analyzed through her actions, decisions, and dialogues throughout the film. Through these elements, it can be seen that Tris's behavior is shaped by the continuous interaction of these three psychic structures. Furthermore, her desire for equality emerges as a central psychological force that influences this interaction. Therefore, Tris Prior's character is analyzed using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Some of the data found are as follows:

1. The ID of Tris Prior

[Data 1]

Eric: "Someone's gotta go first. Who's it gonna be?" (everyone looks at each other in silence)

Tris: "Me." (steps forward, looks down into the chasm, removes her outer jacket, climbs to the edge, takes a breath, and jumps)

The data above illustrates the id as the dominant psychological force in Tris's behavior. According to Freud (1927), the id operates entirely on the pleasure principle, seeking immediate gratification driven

by instinctual impulses without regard for social norms or rational consequences. When Eric asks who will jump first, Tris responds with a single word, “Me.” without hesitation, deliberation, or external encouragement. This immediate, unmediated response exemplifies the id in its purest form. Furthermore, her subsequent physical actions, stepping forward, removing her outer jacket, and climbing to the edge of the building, demonstrate that her body acts in direct service of an unconscious impulse for freedom and self-assertion. The brevity of her verbal response and the urgency of her physical actions suggest that no rational calculation or moral consideration precedes her decision. This behavior reflects the id’s fundamental drive toward gratification, in this case the desire to assert herself within the Dauntless initiation process and to experience the freedom that Abnegation had denied her. The scene therefore establishes the id as the initial force that propels Tris toward her desire for equality, manifesting as a raw, instinctual rejection of passivity and conformity.

2. The EGO of Tris Prior

[Data 2]

Tris: “I just figured that I had to make it.”

Eric: “Who let you out?”

Tris: “I did.”

Eric: “You did? Okay”(everyone falls silent)

The dialogue above demonstrates the ego as the governing psychological force in Tris’s decision-making. According to Freud (1927), the ego operates on the reality principle, mediating between the impulsive desires of the id and the constraints of the external world by evaluating consequences and selecting pragmatic courses of action. In this scene, Tris has independently broken out of her room to attempt the train boarding challenge, an act that requires not impulsive abandon, but calculated determination. Her statement, “I just figured that I had to make it.” reveals a cognitive process, the word “figured” explicitly denoting rational deliberation rather than spontaneous impulse. She assessed the situation, identified the necessary action, and executed it based on her evaluation of reality. Furthermore, her composed response to Eric’s confrontational question, “I did.” reflects the ego’s capacity to hold firm under social pressure while remaining grounded in the factual reality of her own autonomous decision. The silence that follows and Eric’s eventual acknowledgment further confirm that Tris’s ego-driven action carries sufficient weight to command recognition from authority. This scene illustrates how Tris’s ego channels her desire for equality into a rational, goal-directed behavior, demonstrating that her pursuit of equal standing within Dauntless is not merely impulsive but strategically motivated.

3. The SUPEREGO of Tris Prior

[Data 3]

Jenni: “Well, you both have a big decision to make today. I’m sure your parents will support whatever choice you make.”

Tris: “That’s not supposed to be a choice. The test should tell us what to do.”

Jenni: “You’re still free to choose.”

The dialogue above reveals the superego as a powerful psychological force shaping Tris’s perception of identity and social order. According to Freud (1927), the superego functions as the internalized representation of moral standards, social values, and authority figures, producing a sense of obligation when these norms are transgressed. In this scene, Tris’s statement, “*That’s not supposed to be a choice. The test should tell us what to do.*” demonstrates a deep internalization of the faction system’s ideological norms. Rather than questioning the aptitude test, Tris accepts it as the authoritative determinant of her individual identity and social placement. This reflects the superego’s role in enforcing the values instilled by authority, in this case the faction system and her Abnegation upbringing, as absolute moral truths. Her discomfort with free choice reveals that her superego equates deviation from the prescribed order with moral transgression. This internalization of inequality as a natural social

condition represents the psychological constraint that Tris must overcome in her pursuit of equality, as the superego here functions as a mechanism of social control that suppresses her authentic identity.

4. Tris Prior's Desire for Equality

Jenni: "Maybe you're not quite as Dauntless as you thought you were."

Tris: "You're right. I'm not. I'm Divergent."

The dialogue above represents the psychological culmination of Tris's desire for equality, illustrating the dynamic integration of her id, ego, and superego into a unified assertion of selfhood. Throughout the film, these three psychic structures have operated in tension: the id driving her instinctual desire for freedom, the ego navigating the constraints of the faction system through rational action, and the superego imposing the internalized norms of a society that denies individual complexity. In this final exchange, Tris does not merely reject a label; she reclaims her psychological wholeness by declaring an identity that transcends the binary categories of the faction system. Her statement, "I'm Divergent," constitutes a direct challenge to the hierarchical social order that has systematically denied her the right to equal recognition and self-determination. According to Shaw (2021), the desire for equality functions as an internal motivational force that compels individuals to pursue conditions of equal status, rights, and treatment. Tris's declaration embodies this force at its most fully realized: having moved through impulsive self-assertion (id), strategic self-advocacy (ego), and the gradual dismantling of internalized social constraints (superego), she arrives at a point of psychological equilibrium in which her desire for equality is no longer suppressed but openly affirmed. This moment therefore confirms that Tris's pursuit of equality is not a singular act of rebellion, but the culminating expression of a sustained psychological process shaped by the ongoing interaction of her id, ego, and superego throughout the narrative of *Divergent* (2014).

IV. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the desire for equality of Tris Prior in *Divergent* (2014) through Freud's psychoanalytic framework, focusing on the interaction among the id, ego, and superego. In response to the first research question, three distinct aspects of Tris's psyche were identified through selected scenes and dialogues. The id is manifested in the First Jumper scene, in which Tris's response, "Me." and her immediate physical action of jumping into the chasm exemplify an instinctual drive for freedom and self-assertion. The ego is represented in the train boarding scene, in which Tris's statement, "I just figured that I had to make it." demonstrates a deliberate, reality-based decision through rational deliberation rather than impulse. The superego is illustrated in Tris's dialogue with Jenni before the Choosing Ceremony, in which her belief that "the test should tell us what to do" reflects a deep internalization of the faction system's moral and social norms as authoritative truths.

In response to the second research question, the analysis demonstrates that Tris's desire for equality functions as the underlying psychological force driving the interaction among her id, ego, and superego. The id generates the initial impulse to seek freedom beyond the faction system's constraints. The ego channels this impulse into rational, goal-directed behavior enabling Tris to navigate and resist social inequality. The superego, initially a force of constraint that binds Tris to the faction system's norms, is gradually overcome as her desire for equality asserts itself with increasing force. The culmination of this dynamic is Tris's declaration, "I'm Divergent." which constitutes a moment of psychological integration in which all three structures converge to affirm her identity beyond social categorization. This study therefore concludes that Tris's pursuit of equality is not merely a social or political act, but a psychological necessity driven by the tension and eventual resolution among her instinctual desires, rational judgment, and internalized moral values. Future research may extend this analysis by examining other characters in the *Divergent* series through a comparable psychoanalytic framework, or by applying Freud's structural model to other dystopian narratives in which protagonists challenge systems of social inequality.

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