

Unsettled Boundaries and Insidious Trauma in Stephen King's *Carrie*

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Abstract

*This article examines the concept of unsettled boundaries and insidious trauma in relation to Stephen King's *Carrie* (1974). Mulcahy argues how the titular character is viewed as monstrous due to her inability to hide abject features of her female body, specifically her menarche. In relation to abjection, the article relies on analyses presented by Julia Kristeva and Barbara Creed, who explain the abject as the border between the rational and the irrational. This article discusses how menarche is presented as a traumatic event due to societal discomfort with the abject female body, how Carrie's body as a feature of the monstrous feminine is heightened by her supernatural abilities (which awaken around the same time as her menarche), and how she views herself as a witch. Mulcahy analyses how Carrie views fitting in with society as a way of escaping from her insidious traumatic experiences, and discusses that, when this attempt to fit in fails, she is unable to overcome her trauma and instead succumbs to the monstrous feminine image as which society views her.*

The concept of abjection is concerned with what unsettles and lies outside the boundaries of the rational subject. In *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva describes the abject as that which “is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses” (Kristeva, 1980, p. 2). The features of abjection, such as vomit and faeces, are associated with anxiety aroused by the abject due to its capacity to unsettle the boundary between inside and outside. Corporeal features of the female body, such as menarche, are abject, and thus unacceptable within the realms of everyday society. Women are required to hide any traces of the natural body, which instead “must bear no trace of its debt to nature” (*ibid.*, p. 102). The experience of repressing natural features of the female body contributes to the idea that femininity is monstrous. In Stephen King's *Carrie* (1974), the titular character suffers from insidious trauma due to her peers and mother abusing her as they see her as abject, which leads to her internalisation of misogynistic ideas concerning the female body. The novel focuses on a teenage girl who has just experienced menarche, and as well as this, has gained supernatural telekinetic abilities. There is an exploration of the abuse she faces due to her abject status, which ultimately culminates in a prank that consists of spilling pig's blood on her at her senior prom and leads her to react by carrying out a violent revenge through the use of her telekinesis. Carrie attempts

to escape her association with the abject in order to fit in with society, and as such, her identity places her in a liminal space. The relationship between corporeal femininity and abjection in the horror genre has been discussed by theorists such as Barbara Creed (1993). She argues that the concept of a border is central within the horror genre, and that which is monstrous threatens “to bring about an encounter between the symbolic order and that which threatens its stability” (Creed, 1993, p. 216). The horror of *Carrie* strongly relies on the idea of corporeal femininity threatening the stability of a constructed patriarchal society, and Carrie’s status as the monstrous feminine is gained due to her inability to exist within the boundaries of socially acceptable femininity. This article explores Carrie’s role as abject amongst her peers, which is shown through her naivety towards her menarche, which occurs at the same time as the awakening of her telekinesis. Her telekinesis not only serves as a metaphor of her status as abject, but also acts as a defence mechanism against her abusive mother. Carrie’s attempt to fit in with society to escape her insidious traumatic experiences is analysed and how her inability to do so leads to her attack on the town, and subsequent death. Overall, this article aims to highlight the relationship between Carrie’s status on the borders of society and her insidious trauma.

Patriarchal society commonly views the female body as abject. Menstruation is considered one of the most abject qualities of the female body, as women are instructed to hide all signs of blood. At the time of the publication of *Carrie* in 1974, menstruation was sparsely represented in any other genre than horror. Creed makes note of the fact that “it is the horror film that we must turn for any direct reference to woman’s monthly cycle” (Creed, 1993, p. 77). In the horror genre, menstruation is represented as abject, and thus is reflective of the taboo status of discussing menstruation in society. Sherry B. Ortner (1972) puts forward the idea that, historically, women have been closely associated with nature, while men have been associated with culture. Men’s bodies are not associated with nature, and thus not bound by the same rules of cleanliness as women’s bodies. Aside from when they are wounded, the male body is not viewed as abject, but women’s bodies are framed as abject throughout various stages of life, such as menarche, pregnancy and childbirth. These stages of life are viewed as abject due to their association with nature. As Ortner notes:

It is always culture’s project to subsume and transcend nature, if women were considered part of nature, then culture would find it ‘natural’ to subordinate, not to say, oppress them. (Ortner, 1972, p. 73)

In order to remain within the boundaries of patriarchal society, at the time of the novel’s writing in 1974, women are required to hide the ‘unclean’ features of their bodies and allow culture to

subsume natural features of their bodies. Society teaches women that the natural processes that their bodies go through are abhorrent and must be hidden at all costs. These narratives are internalized and, in turn, lead to women's self-hatred towards their own bodies, due to society's disgust towards menstruation.

When women are unable to conceal their 'debt to nature', they are ostracised and viewed as abject, which can lead to experiences of insidious trauma. Judith Herman (1992) notes that the experience of insidious trauma differs from single-event trauma which is regarded as a wide-scale traumatic event, such as war or natural disaster, that is generally not a part of everyday life. The first definition of PTSD, included in the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, defines it as the psychological response as a "traumatic event that is generally outside the range of human experience" (American Psychiatric Association, 1980, p. 236). Insidious trauma, by contrast, is the result of ongoing traumatic events. Herman notes that "survivors of prolonged abuse develop characteristic personality changes, including deformations of relatedness and identity" (Herman, 1992, p. 119). It is worth examining the idea of insidious trauma resulting in the deformation of one's identity particularly in relation to women's trauma. Within a patriarchal society, women are taught to hide any bodily features considered unclean; any woman who fails to hide her 'debt to nature' is seen as an outlier. In *Carrie*, the consequences of the inability to repress one's corporeal femininity is portrayed in a traumatic manner, as the titular character is subjected to abuse by her peers and mother, due to the fear of her abject body. The trauma caused by being viewed as unclean is constantly ongoing, as the abject features of the female body are inescapable. Thus, the trauma described in *Carrie* cannot be viewed as a singular traumatic event outside the range of human experience. Carrie's trauma is the result of living in a body that is constantly associated with the abject and placed on the borders of society.

In the opening scene, Carrie is described as "a frog among swans" (p. 4), instantly setting her apart from her female classmates. Her inability to perform socially acceptable femininity is shown through her pimply skin and sweat. The other girls are successful in presenting themselves in a socially acceptable manner, and thus, their bodies are not regarded as abject. Carrie, on the other hand, is immediately associated with dirt and slime, which emphasises that she fails to embody the perceived standard of beauty for American teenage girls. The narrative defines her as "the sacrificial goat" (*ibid.*), emphasising that she is condemned to the borders of society as she represents the perceived uncleanliness of the female body. Carrie's abject status is further shown through the occurrence of her menarche. Her unawareness surrounding menstruation before this moment leads her to believe that she is

dying, and she makes no attempt to hide her bleeding. Instead, she pleads for help from her classmates, who react by pelting her with tampons and pads. As King describes the girls' laughter as "disgusted and contemptuous" (p. 7), their reaction to Carrie's menarche aligns with Kristeva's ideas on disgust as the natural response to being confronted with the abject. Kristeva argues that the "abject confronts us [...] with those fragile states where man strays on the territory of animal" (Kristeva, 1980, p. 12). When examining this within the context of the novel, it can be understood that Carrie's peers' hostile reactions are a result of her visibly displaying what is considered animal within a social space. She disrupts societal boundaries by being unable to hide her menarche, which threatens the social order regarding the idea that women are required to hide the unclean features of their bodies.

The occurrence of Carrie's menarche is a traumatic event which is heightened by her peers ostracising her. Due to her mother's severe repression of corporeal femininity to the point where she does not inform her daughter about menstruation, Carrie is unaware of the abject status of her menarche. Her first period is a traumatic experience due to her belief that she is dying, and she is subsequently attacked by her peers for explicitly displaying the abject. She is abused for her inability to hide what is considered abject, which leads to her being isolated by her peers. Existing outside of the boundaries of what is socially acceptable results in her isolation. The role of the wider community, in the case of the novel, Carrie's high school peers, in response to trauma is highly significant to the survivor, according to Herman, as she notes how "[t]he response of the community has a powerful influence on the ultimate resolution of trauma" (Herman, 1992, p. 70). Carrie's fears over her menarche are met with hostility and aggression, which subsequently feeds into her view of her own body as monstrous. It can be seen that Carrie's trauma occurs as a result of societal hatred of the female body. Her female peers are taught to internalise the idea that their bodies are abject, and when they witness a girl unsettle the boundaries between the rational and the irrational, they are disgusted by her. Following Carrie's menarche, her teacher observes: "Maybe there's some kind of instinct about menstruation that makes women want to snarl" (p. 20). From this description, it is apparent that the presentation of Carrie's menarche evokes animalistic reactions from her peers.

Shelley Stamp Lindsey analyses this scene in relation to Brian De Palma's 1976 cinematic adaptation of the novel, where she discusses the portrayal of Carrie's peers before and after her menarche:

These two views of the locker room ask us to look twice at the girls, to consider them first as nymphs, then demons [...] So while Carrie's menstrual blood signals her own monstrosity, the entire locker room of girls is implicated in this horror as well. (Lindsey 1991, p. 35)

Carrie's peers are transformed from normal teenage girls who repress their corporeality to fit in with society, into monstrous demons upon being presented with Carrie's terrified attitude towards menstruation. Elizabeth Grosz draws attention to the fact that, within a patriarchal society, women are expected to repress their bodies, as she argues that the female body's corporeality, as well as "feelings, emotions, and psychic representations must be ignored, as must its role as threshold between the social and the natural" (Grosz, 1994, p. 10). The female body acts as a threshold between the natural and the cultural, and when Carrie unsettles the boundaries between the subject and the abject, it causes discomfort for her classmates. Therefore, the only way to restore the social order is to isolate Carrie and treat her in an animalistic manner, emphasising the idea that her body is monstrous due to her inability to repress it. This serves to intensify her traumatic experience, as she has no community to turn to for support, leading her to believe that the ideas surrounding her monstrous body are correct. Carrie's status as abject is intensified by her supernatural abilities. Her telekinesis, an ability which has remained dormant since she was a child, reawakens as she menstruates for the first time. Her telekinesis emerges in a moment of heightened distress, as she causes a lightbulb to explode once the concept of menarche is explained to her. This draws a direct correlation between her telekinetic abilities and her menstruation, signifying her status on the borders of society. The association of the female body with the supernatural portrays fears and anxieties surrounding the female body, as its natural processes are viewed as threatening. As noted, her peers already regard her as abject during this occurrence, and the emergence of her telekinesis serves to push her further outside the boundaries of society. Her supernatural abilities position her as a witch-like figure. According to Creed, the role of the witch is abject:

The witch sets out to unsettle boundaries between the rational and irrational, symbolic and imaginary. Her evil powers are seen as part of her 'feminine' nature; she is closer to nature than man and can control forces in nature such as tempests, hurricanes, and storms. (Creed, 1993, p. 76)

The shower room scene establishes Carrie as a figure who unsettles the boundaries between the rational and irrational, public and private, outside and inside. Her supernatural powers emphasise the discomfort inspired by the female body and, given that the awakening of her powers occurs at the same time as her menarche, the supernatural and the abject biology of the female body are connected. These simultaneous events serve to position her outside the boundaries of society and she is seen as a witch due to her abject status. She is not only seen as a witch by her peers and abusive mother, but also by herself, as shown through one of her fragmented thoughts after she experiments with her telekinesis in her room:

She thought of imps and families and witches.

(am i a witch momma the devil's whore)
 riding through the night, souring milk, overturning butter churns blighting crops while
 They huddled inside their houses with hex signs scrawled on Their doors. (p. 78)

The use of intrusive thoughts presented in closed parentheses, as seen above, is regularly utilised as a motif in trauma literature. This has been observed by Roger Luckhurst who notes how the intrusive thoughts “cut across the narrative in distinct typographic intrusions that collapse linear temporality to the insistent presence of traumatic timeless time” (Luckhurst, 2008, p. 100). In this case, the intrusive thought described above reflects on Carrie’s hatred of her own body influenced by her mother’s harmful beliefs, believing it to be an expression of monstrous femininity. Her intrusive thought clearly shows that she views herself as a witch, signifying the internalised hatred of her own body and the effects of being seen as an outsider by her peers. The supernatural has long been used as a means of expressing societal discomfort with the female body, as discussed by Creed,

Woman’s blood is thus linked to the possession of supernatural powers, powers which historically and mythologically have been associated with the representation of woman as witch. (Creed, 1993, p. 79)

Creed’s analysis draws attention to the fact that despite menarche being a natural occurrence, it is associated with witchcraft and the supernatural. The female body causes discomfort and disturbance in society, which is due to the idea of hiding certain female bodily processes in order to fit in with patriarchal society. Carrie’s telekinesis connects with societal ideas about the menstruating female body, as she is viewed as monstrous by her peers, and the onset of her telekinesis serves to push her further from the boundaries of society. She associates herself with the figure of the witch, who exists within her own liminal space and unsettles the boundaries between nature and culture.

The reawakening of Carrie’s telekinesis is not only connected to her menarche, but also the ongoing abuse at the hands of her mother, Margaret. Carrie inherited the idea of the connection between menarche and the supernatural from her mother, who upholds a patriarchal worldview under the guise of religion and teaches her daughter that women are inherently sinful. Her hatred of the female body can be seen through her belief that Carrie’s menarche is a sign that she is sinful, claiming that “It says in the Lord’s book: ‘Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live’” (p. 96). Margaret’s teachings uphold the idea that menstruating women are linked to the wicked and supernatural, and their inability to repress their corporeality is a sign of sin. Carrie’s telekinetic abilities reawaken moments after she is informed about menstruation for the first time, indicating the correlation between the supernatural and female biology. Prior to this, the only noted telekinetic incident occurred in her childhood during an attempt to defend

herself from her mother. The incident occurs after Margaret finds Carrie observing a sunbathing teenage girl's body, which causes Margaret to start harming herself to punish her daughter. Her reaction to seeing an adolescent girl's body, which then causes her to demonstrate anxiety about her own body, indicates Margaret's extremities in repressing corporeal femininity. Her distress indicates her belief that the female body must be completely covered up and repressed. After Carrie is yelled at by her mother, she causes stones to rain on their property, portraying the first sign of Carrie's status as an outlier.

Her mother self-harms in an attempt to punish her daughter for expressing curiosity about the female body, and in response to this punishment, Carrie's telekinetic powers emerge. Carrie's first telekinetic response is not only indicative of her existence outside the boundaries of society, but also acts as a manifestation of her trauma due to her mother's abuse. As Herman notes,

The language of the supernatural, banished for three hundred years from scientific discourse, still intrudes into the most sober attempt to describe the psychological manifestations of chronic childhood trauma. (Herman, 1992, p. 96)

Carrie's supernatural abilities are tied to her abject female body, which has been repressed as a result of her mother's abuse. As her powers do not emerge again until her menarche, it is clear that her powers have a direct association with the aspects of female biology that her mother tries to repress. The thread of abuse can be followed as Margaret self-harms to punish Carrie as a child, and after Carrie's menarche, she physically abuses her daughter and locks her in a closet. Carrie's telekinesis emerges as a response to her mother's abuse, which is directly tied to the repression of women's bodies. Her supernatural abilities can be seen as a manifestation of the trauma she experiences as a result of her internalisation of the harmful way that her mother, and wider society, views the female body. She uses her telekinesis in order to protect herself from her mother, but as well as this, her powers create a tangible manifestation of the abject status of the female body. Her view of her body as monstrous and existing on the borders of society is influenced by her mother's teachings, and her telekinesis acts as both a manifestation of her monstrosity and as a defence mechanism against abusers to counteract traumatic experiences.

The insidious nature of Carrie's trauma stems from the fact that she is unable to escape her status as an outlier in society. In order to escape the margins of society, she attempts to perform femininity in a socially acceptable manner. She attempts this by dressing up and putting on makeup when preparing to attend prom. As well as this, she explicitly makes it clear to her mother that she wishes to be seen as normal:

Momma, please see that I have to start to... to try and get along with the world. I'm not like you. I'm funny – I mean, the kids think I'm funny. I don't want to be. I want to try and be a whole person before it's too late to – (p. 94)

Her desire to fit in with her peers emphasises the isolation that she feels existing on the borders of society. By obtaining the chance to partake in a regular high school event, she sees an opportunity to escape the insidious trauma that has emerged from her inability to repress her abject body. As well as this, she expresses her desire to be a 'whole person', which indicates that her abject nature leaves her without a complete identity. As Pete Falconer notes in relation to her identity,

Her classmates and gym teacher view [Carrie's menarche] as evidence of excessive innocence and naivete, her mother as the consequence of sinful thoughts or some other impurity. As a virgin, her character remains unconfirmed and open to interpretation. (Falconer, 2010, p. 127)

Taking this analysis into account, it is clear that Carrie's identity cannot be easily categorised. Her mother sees her as sinful due to her developing body, while her peers isolate her due to her naïve attitude towards menstruation. Despite the idea that they abuse Carrie for opposing reasons, their hatred of her is entrenched in their discomfort with her unsettling of the boundaries between rationality and irrationality due to her abject body. Her attempt to present herself as a normal teenage girl by trying to fit with her peers and repress her corporeal femininity is a way of establishing a solid identity and escaping her existence as a feature of the abject. As her traumatic experiences are inherently tied to her witch-like status, her recovery from her insidious trauma can only occur once she is accepted into society.

Carrie exists within a liminal space between nature and culture, represented by her status as abject combined with her desire to fit in with general society. However, Carrie is viewed by her peers as a sacrificial goat: she represents the role of the nature within a cultural society. As noted earlier, Ortner demonstrates that nature is seen as something to be subsumed by culture, as she notes how a cultural society relies "precisely on the ability to transform – to 'socialize' and 'culturalize' nature" (Ortner, 1972, p. 73). Nature is viewed as something to be transcended, and thus, the corporeal female body is understood as something outside the boundaries of the rational subject. It is something that must be jettisoned in order to achieve subjectivity, and within the novel, Carrie is punished for failing to jettison the natural. After being awarded the title of prom queen – a supposed signifier of her acceptance into society – one of the antagonists drops pig's blood on her, remarking, "Pig blood for a pig" (p. 114). Once again, this draws a connection between the abject protagonist and animalistic tendencies.

Despite her attempt to find a place within her society, Carrie is unable to escape the natural realm.

The spilling of pig's blood serves as a reminder of her traumatic experience of menarche:

...she was red and dripping with it, they had drenched her in the very secretness [sic] of blood, in front of all of them and her thought
(oh... i [sic]... COVERED... with it)
was coloured a ghastly purple with her revulsion and shame. She could smell herself and it was the *stink* of blood, the awful wet, coppery smell. In a kaleidoscope of images she saw the blood running thickly down her naked thighs, hear the constant beating of the shower on the tiles, felt the soft patter of tampons and napkins against her skin as voices exhorted her to plug it UP; tasted the plump, fulsome bitterness of horror. They had finally given her the shower they wanted. (p. 180, original emphasis)

Her reaction to having blood poured over her is one of disgust and shame. As her mind immediately returns to the memory of her first period, it serves both as a reminder of the traumatic event and of her menstruation as animalistic. The view of her own body as animalistic serves as a way of dehumanising her. As she is incapable of hiding her abject body, she is seen as having the same level of worth as an animal. Her brief social acceptance through her victory as prom queen temporarily shows her that despite her past shortcomings in performing femininity, she has been accepted within society. However, the spilling of pig's blood and subsequent public humiliation emphasise that she is seen as an outsider and add credence her mother's accusations of her being a witch. Since the emergence of her telekinesis, she has seen herself as witch-like, but attempts to repress her powers to fit in. However, the spilling of pig's blood on her leads to the idea that the abuse and insidious trauma she faced throughout her life were a punishment for her true nature as the monstrous feminine, which is a result of her association with nature rather than culture, a status that she then chooses to embrace through the prom massacre.

Carrie's undeveloped identity is formed by harmful ideas about women's bodies, as taught to her by her mother and the general society around her. She accepts her place as a witch, as a menacing force that exists on the boundaries of society by causing death and destruction with her telekinesis. She uses her telekinesis to trap and murder her classmates, and then leaves the school to inflict the same destruction upon the town. Her actions can be correlated back to her earlier understanding of witches as figures that ride through town in the dead of night and destroy everything. Her understanding of her body as one belonging to a monstrous witch also correlates to her mother's misogynistic teachings under the guise of religion. She lives out her mother's predictions: "And didn't Momma say there would be a Day of Judgement" (p. 21).

There is a connection between this prediction of a Day of Judgement and Margaret's constant assertions that Carrie is a witch and spawn of the devil. It can be argued that Carrie inverts the legacy that Margaret imposed on her, through constant verbal abuse, by being the one to deliver the Day of Judgement. Carrie's positioning as abject aligns with Kristeva's observations on the relationship between the abject and religion:

[Abjection] finally encounters, with Christian sin, a dialectic elaboration, as it becomes integrated in the Christian World as a threatening otherness – but always nameable, always totalizable. (Kristeva, 1980, p. 17)

Kristeva's argument indicates that the teachings of Christianity form the abject into something tangible, indicating that the abject is a representation of sin.

In the novel, Margaret's teachings define Carrie's monstrosity and sin through her menarche. Therefore, the natural occurrences of women's bodies are viewed as a representation of 'threatening otherness'. The fact that she has pig's blood dropped on her emphasises that she is seen as a representative of that which must be exiled from society in order to keep the perceived social order intact. Margaret's teachings allow for Carrie to settle into her role as the harbinger of destruction to the town. Her transformation into the monstrous feminine is a direct result of her mother's abuse, as seen through the echoing of one of her mother's phrases: "Time to show them a thing or two. She giggled hysterically. It was one of Momma's pet phrases" (p. 184). Her embrace of her mother's ideals comes directly after her peers reject her, and this emphasises the toxicity of her mother's attitude towards the world and towards her daughter. Due to the fact that she never had a positive community to reach out to in order to help her cope with her insidious trauma, she is led to concur with her abuser's teachings about the world and woman's place in society, and by believing that Margaret is right about the rest of the world being sinful, Carrie approaches her victims with ruthlessness. Her lack of mercy towards the other members of the town emphasises how her worldview has been completely warped from years of captive abuse and the belief that the female body is monstrous.

Carrie is willing to damage her body through the extensive usage of her telekinesis for the purpose of inflicting revenge on the society that is responsible for her insidious trauma. Her attack on the town is her attempt at confronting her trauma, but as her attempt ends with her death, it is not a successful confrontation. According to Herman, "[h]elplessness and isolation are the core experiences of psychological trauma. Empowerment and reconnection are the core experiences of recovery" (Herman, 1992, p. 197). Isolation has been central to Carrie's experience due to the fact she is viewed as abject. She lacks the positive social connection required to help her develop a more positive sense of self. She succumbs to society's harmful

ideas surrounding the female body, as shown through her destruction of her hometown. Once she has destroyed the town, killed many of her peers and her own mother, she has exhausted her body to the point of death. Shortly before she kills her mother, she is stabbed, and the combination of this attack alongside the physical and mental toll of intense usage of her telekinesis leads to her death. Therefore, she verges on becoming what is considered to be the strongest feature of the abject, which is the corpse. Kristeva claims the corpse, “seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life” (1980, p. 4). She also claims that imagery of the abject must be “thrust aside in order to live” (*ibid.*), therefore showing that the body without a soul is regarded as something that unsettles the boundaries between the rational and irrational. When Carrie is discovered by Sue Snell, one of her surviving classmates, she once again exemplifies the abject through her dying body. She forces Sue, much to her horror, to witness her final thoughts as she dies. This mirrors the opening of the novel, where Carrie inspires fear and disgust through her presentation of female corporeality, and at the end of the novel, she unsettles the boundaries of everyday life by presenting that which must be confined to the borders of society. The way Sue feels upon being telepathically pulled into Carrie’s mind in her dying moments aligns closely with Kristeva’s observations on being in the presence of death,

She tried to pull away, to disengage her mind, to allow Carrie at least the privacy of her dying, and was unable to. She felt that she was dying herself and did not want to see this preview of her own eventual end. (p. 229)

According to Kristeva (1980), individuals are pulled towards the abject despite their discomfort, and this is reflected through Sue’s inability to pull away. Carrie unsettles yet another boundary, as her dying thoughts set her on the edge between the living and the dead. In this moment, she represents death as a feature of the abject, as she openly displays what is repressed for the sake of rationality in society, starting with menstruation and ending with the corpse.

Carrie’s death not only serves to solidify her status as abject, but it also portrays her failure in overcoming her trauma. Her final thoughts are shown to be solely focused on her now deceased mother, ‘(momma i’m [sic] sorry where)’ (p. 230), which shows the inescapable quality of trauma. Despite the fact that her mother is dead, Carrie still cannot pursue a life outside of the chronic abuse she faced and cannot escape her abject role in society. The fact that Carrie cannot exist independently of her mother is inherently abject, as it collapses the boundary between two distinct identities. Creed makes note of the fact that eventually “the child rejects [the mother] for the father who represents the symbolic order” (Creed, 1986, p.

212). While a father figure is not present in the novel, Carrie's brief attempt to fit in with the symbolic order of society marks her attempt to reject the mother, which she ultimately fails to do, as she dies believing that her mother was right about her monstrosity.

The novel's fragmented format informs the reader that Carrie's identity as either monster or victim is still heavily debated following her attack, indicating that even in death, she is still not viewed as someone with a solid identity within society. The narrative is interspersed with excerpts from various journal articles and books that aim to define Carrie's identity as either victim or monster. These excerpts begin a debate about whether or not Carrie is monstrous. As these various sources attempt to make sense of Carrie's attack, it is noted that both medical and psychological writers on the subject agree that Carrie White's exceptionally late and traumatic commencement of the menstrual cycle might well have provided the trigger latent for her talent (p. 9).

This analysis draws a direct correlation between menarche and dangerous supernatural powers, which draws on historical ideas of women being viewed as witches when they are unable to control their abject bodies. In relation to Brian de Palma's adaptation of the book, Lindsey discusses how female sexuality is frequently presented "as monstrous and [this] constructs femininity as a subject position impossible to occupy" (Lindsey, 1991, p. 34). In the aftermath of Carrie's destruction, the secondary sources presented in the novel come to the conclusion that her supernatural powers are a sign of the dangers of corporeal femininity. However, throughout the narrative, Carrie is presented as desperately trying to escape her abject status and presents a desire to be normal. To be accepted by society would result in her departure from the liminal borders on which she exists, which would also entail escaping the trauma she faces as a result of her abject status.

The spilling of pig's blood on her indicates that she would never be able to exist within the confines of society. She is marked as abject, and her mother's teachings on her role as a witch were correct. As mentioned above, Herman discusses the importance of a positive community in assisting a trauma victim, but when the victim is denied this type of community, it damages their core sense of self. According to Bessel Van Der Kolk, when trauma victims feel out of control, they "often begin to fear that they are damaged to the core and beyond redemption" (Van Der Kolk, 2015, p. 2). Carrie's transformation into the monstrous feminine is caused by the harmful ideas surrounding her own body, damaging her sense of self. Her confrontation of her trauma involves destroying her body as well as the society responsible for her abuse. The follow-up reports and articles about her attack continue to attempt to decipher her identity, which indicates she is still not whole. As Falconer notes,

Carrie White is manipulated, discussed, interpreted and subjected to conspiracies both helpful and malevolent in intent. In short, she is treated as if her identity has yet to be solidly established. (Falconer, 2010, p. 127)

Indeed, the various articles presented in the novel either try to present her as a victim or, alternatively, they contribute to the harmful idea that she is monstrous due to the awakening of her telekinesis at the same time as the occurrence of her menarche.

Ortner's essay on nature and culture (1972) defines the two as being a binary, emphasising how men are always associated with culture, while women are associated with nature. In order to fit in with culture, women must hide their bodily processes that are deemed abject. Women who do not hide their abject nature have historically been associated with outside figures such as witches. As explored above, *Carrie* conveys the trauma that comes with being associated with the animalistic. The consistent abuse described throughout the course of Carrie's life, particularly in the weeks following her menarche, indicates that her powers are a response to the insidious trauma she has faced. These powers act both as a defence mechanism and as a manifestation of the idea that she is an outcast in society due to her corporeal femininity. Her desire to fit in with her peers shows an awareness that she may escape the abuse from her peers and mother by shifting away from the natural and into the cultural. Therefore, she exists within a liminal space. She shows a desire to be a part of cultural society, but her body inherently ties her to the natural, therefore isolating her. This isolation leads her to internalise the misogynistic ideas presented by her mother that she is monstrous, and when blood is spilled on her, she succumbs to the status of the monstrous feminine. Due to the fact that she exists within the liminal space between nature and culture, there is a lack of a supportive community that she fails in overcoming the trauma caused by her mother's abuse and harmful ideas about the female body. Ultimately, Carrie's existence within a liminal space conveys isolation from her peers, and leaves her unable to escape the trauma that is caused by societal misogyny.

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