STEPHEN KING'S AMERICAN VISION FROM CHILDHOOD TO ADULTHOOD:

CARRIE, *THE LONG WALK*, AND *IT*'S CHILDREN DIE FOR THEIR FUTURE

by

Nathanial Gage Pennington

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Radford University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in the Department of English

Thesis Advisor: Jamie L. McDaniel

May 2019

Jamie L. McDaniel 5/2/19

Dr. Jamie L. McDaniel
Thesis Advisor

Date

Moira P. Baker 5/2/19

Dr. Moira P. Baker
Committee Member

Date

Amanda Kellogg 5/2/19

Dr. Amanda Kellogg
Committee Member

Date

ABSTRACT

Stephen King's impact on modern Gothic horror and American culture is unquestionable. By examining three of his novels, this thesis analyzes what King reveals about culture and its inadequacies, especially concerning adolescence and trauma in American society during the 1970s and 1980s. The organization is chronological, beginning with his first novel *Carrie* (1974), moving to *The Long Walk* (1979), and finishing with *IT* (1986), what some critics consider his masterpiece.

In *Carrie*, I will examine how King uses adolescent trauma as a tool to show how American cultural norms of conformity lead to segregation of Others and a generational legacy of "fitting in" via exclusion, scapegoating, and fanatical belief. I argue that King suggests trauma – the spectacle of trauma as well as the processes of gazing and staring inherent in that spectacle – can result from the enforcement of conformity while also serving as a window into the psyche of an individual as well as the psyche of the American culture.

Moving from constructions of femininity to those of masculinity, *The Long Walk* shows how capitalism acts as a primary source of toxic masculinity by suggesting that this capitalistic way of understanding the world produces a type of collective trauma for the young men in the novel, whether by the rigid endorsement of heteronormative standards, the fear of falling over the homosocial cliff into the homosexual canyon, or through the uses of patriotism to control possibly "alternative" ways of being and experiencing the world. Setting this novel apart from *Carrie* is its focus on a collective trauma, rather than the individual trauma. Because of this shift of focus, the novel gives us a wider lens in which to view the traumas that are perpetuated by American culture. Also, *Carrie* follows that of a teenaged girl, while *The Long Walk* focuses

almost exclusively on teenaged boys. This provides variety in who we see the trauma in as well and makes suggestion about gender roles at the same time.

Finally, Stephen King's *IT* uses trauma and fear, from children to adults, to reveal inadequacies in American culture. By recognizing the trauma of child abuse, child neglect, racism, misogyny, domestic abuse, and homophobia, *IT* works to unveil the source of these traumas in the process of claiming and healing traumatic experiences, and hopefully, ultimately providing a solution to these negative aspects perpetuated by cultural hegemony of marginalized groups. *IT* provides the most variety out of the three novels as it discusses the trauma of African Americans, women, and men. Also, the novel discusses more closely the trauma of young children, and how that trauma is translated into their adulthood and the impact that it has on them there, especially through nostalgic constructions of the past that operate according to a principle of forgetting as much as remembering.

DEDICATION

This essay is dedicated to my wife, Natalie. Without her, none of this would have happened, and I am, and will always be, in your debt for pushing me to achieve my dreams.

This is for you, baby girl.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank all the English professors that I have ever had the pleasure to be a student under. Both Henderson and Radford have provided excellent opportunities for me to study what I love and have allowed me to grow as a writer, a reader, and a scholar. Thank you, Dr. Todd, for teaching me to always question everything, and for always pushing me to be better and to do better. Dr. Thomson, thank you for your constant delight in teaching English and your bottomless well of kindness and knowledge. Dr. Miles, without your support and guidance I do not believe that I would be where I am today. Thank you so much for that and for all that you have done for me. Your classes were among my favorite at Henderson, and I learned so much about literature and writing in them – especially Southern American Literature and African-American Literature. I would not have been exposed to it if not for your classes. Dr. Baker, your constant pushing and support and unbridled enthusiasm for what you do amazes me, and I thank you for that, and I have been lucky and privileged to be your student. 600 taught me so much, and I wouldn't be here without that class. Thank you for serving on my thesis committee. Dr. Kellogg, since before I arrived at Radford, your emails have been supportive and welcoming. Thank you for your kindness and for all that you have taught me in being a good teacher, and for the experience of teaching in a jail! Thank you for serving on my thesis committee. Dr. Jamie McDaniel, I *know* that I would not have been able to complete this thesis without your help. Your immense knowledge on the subject and your writing skills have made this the best paper that it can be. More importantly, though, your kindness and guidance in this process has been what has got me through this. Thank you so very much for all the help that you have given me during this process and for all the time we spent together discussing various works of fiction. It really was a blast.

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INTRODUCTION: STEPHEN KING'S IMPACT ON AMERICAN FICTION AND AMERICA'S IMPACT ON STEPHEN KING

Stephen King is known worldwide for his novels, horror and otherwise, and the incredible pace at which he composes them. This pace has sparked many topics of debate concerning his various novels, short stories, and essays. Many of these stories have, of course, been adapted into many different versions of media, which has increased King's popularity among readers. However, for many academics, popular success does not equal quality results, with some scholars seeing the two as mutually exclusive categories. For example, Greg Smith, in "The Literary Equivalent of a Big Mac and Fries?: Academics, Moralists, and the Stephen King Phenomenon," discusses the similarity between Shakespeare's vast popularity during his lifetime and King's, but contrasts the difference in how they are viewed as writers (331). Scholars and most popular audiences alike view Shakespeare as a "fantastically talented, intelligent, and complex writer," while King does not receive the same esteem (331). Consequently, Smith poses the question "why?" Why do literary critics leave King left out of the group of acclaimed contemporary American novelists, such as Toni Morrison or John Irving (331)? The answer to this question stems from a few different sources.

One of the issues has to do with the fact that most of the films produced from his literature have lacked quality by most common cinematic standards. Adaptations such as *The Lawnmower Man*, which takes the script of a completely different movie and inserts a single scene with someone mowing the lawn so they can use the King name, or *The Langoliers,* which boasted horrible special effects and hammy over-acting, contribute to this problem ("Ranking"). Even *Cell*, with its all-star cast of Samuel L. Jackson and John Cusack, failed because of a weak screenplay ("Ranking"). These problematic adaptations lead those viewers and readers who have

not encountered King's work to assume that his written language is just as awful as the film's cinematic language (Smith 332). Another issue with King's lack of popularity in academic circles relates to the Gothic horror fiction genre that the public usually associates with King (Smith 332). Jamie McDaniel writes in his article on ableism and the horror genre, "Many times, film critics view horror as a lower, derivative genre due to its graphic depictions of violence and sex, and this critique is often warranted in films designated torture porn, for example" (635-36). As a result, many readers and viewers create a snap judgment concerning King's work and other examples of horror whether or not they contain problematic representations of race, gender, and sex. Finally, the fact that he is the most popular author of all time, Smith posits, is coupled with the "fallacy that the artistic merit of something decreases in direct proportion to its monetary and popular success" (332). As King points out, "I have a marketable obsession," namely, culture's longstanding obsession with fear and horror (*Night Shift* xiii). He has even worried that some of his writing might be used for nefarious purposes. An interviewer with *Playboy* once asked, "Are you ever worried about a mentally unstable reader's emulating your fictional violence in real life?" King replied, "Sure I am; it bothers me a lot" (Beahm 42). In fact, King pulled his novel *Rage* from publishing after the Columbine shootings, fearing that his work about a fictional school attack would encourage more shootings (1977).

However, more recently, additional scholarship has appeared about King's works, both his own writings and their adaptations, which suggests that his works are beginning to be looked at in a critical light and accepted in more academic circles. Brandon Benevento's "When Caretaking Goes Wrong: Maintenance, Management, and the Horrific Corporation in Stephen King's *The Shining*" discusses masculinity, sexuality, and family in a corporate, industrial, and individualistic America. Scholar Kathleen Margaret discusses King's relationship to his fans and

his method of writing in "The Rape of Constant Reader: Stephen King's Construction of the Female Reader and Violation of the Female Body in *Misery*." She writes that King's "greatest moments of creative joy seem to come when he can reduce us to the submissive position of female audience to his masculine creator," and she lambasts him throughout her article with quotations from various writings and interviews where he discusses his writing process, and those who read his work, both deservedly and undeservedly (111).

As you can gather from these examples, the scholarly consensus remains ambiguous concerning King's place in American literature, especially because several books contain problematic portrayals of women often replicated in the horror genre. Academics both support and oppose King's works, and some authors even simultaneously accomplish this dual approach to King's texts. Erica Joan Dymond's "An Examination of the Use of Gendered Language in Stephen King's *Carrie*" looks at the language that the novel uses and argues that it often better represents a male audience rather than a female one. Though she writes about his failure in *Carrie* to connect with women, she blames this on his inexperience as a young writer rather than on any explicitly misogynistic beliefs and commends his representations of women as he gains experience (98). Many of the more recent articles use a feminist lens to view King's work. This new turn seems to stem from the fact that he does have many female fans and characters. Additionally, his female characters in more recent texts are often fully realized personas with strong senses of agency, such as Dolores Claiborne from the novel that bears her name, Donna Trenton from *Cujo*, and Susannah Dean from *The Dark Tower* series. This support extends outside of academia and into King's public persona. Looking up "Stephen King Feminist" on Twitter will yield a plethora of different results, with many users lauding King's feminism in his novels ("Stephen+King+Feminist - Twitter Search"). However, many scholars seem to agree that

he fails to write feminist characters and that this support of King's feminism is not universal. Just as Dymond posits that King fails to correctly write the female character of Carrie, Sara Martín Alegre, whose essay "Nightmares of Childhood: The Child and the Monster in Four Novels by Stephen King" discusses exploitation of the child in horror and the anxiety of parenting in the twentieth century, also argues that King fails in this feminist regard with the character of Charlie from *Firestarter* (110-111).

This thesis will use these articles and others to reinforce the ideas that I argue King makes about a racial, gender, sexual, and classist society that is America. Specifically, I will look at how King uses children and young adults in *Carrie*, *The Long Walk*, and *IT* to reveal how these problems often begin, how they adapt and evolve across generations, and how they affect some of the least powerful members of our society. Trauma acts as a nexus point that brings these children and young adults into conflict with the ways that racial, gender, sexual, and class issues are legitimized. Though I will only be looking at three novels, King posits throughout most of his writings that American culture propagates and perpetuates traumas. Examining each of these three novels in the order they were published will reveal King's themes throughout his writings, which condemn these practices of racism, sexism, and classism.

In *Carrie*, I will examine how King uses adolescent trauma as a tool to show how American cultural norms of conformity lead to segregation of Others and a generational legacy of "fitting in" via exclusion, scapegoating, and fanatical belief. I argue that King suggests trauma – the spectacle of trauma as well as the processes of gazing and staring inherent in that spectacle – can result from the enforcement of conformity while also serving as a window into the psyche of an individual as well as the psyche of the American culture.

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This thesis contributes to the field of Stephen King scholarship by revealing techniques he deploys to critique the inadequacies in our culture, even as he lives as a white, cisgender, and

incredibly wealthy man. Also, this thesis will use trauma theory and related discourses to show how King uses trauma as a gateway to discuss other issues, such as racism. Often, the characters are not discussing the issues that are symptomatic of King's American culture until they have suffered from it. The use of fear also is underappreciated in his works. Of course, he is known as perhaps the best horror novelist of all time; however, King uses fear in a way that shows his "constant reader" how exactly those racist, sexist, and classist characters we hate are driven to do the things they do. Even likable characters are driven to do things that they would not normally do without some type of fear operating as a catalyst. This fear perpetuates much of the trauma of his novels, and a cycle of trauma and fear is created from which there is often no escape.

An early influencer of mine that pushed me to write this thesis comes from the forward of King's collection of short stories titled *Night Shift*. He writes:

> Fear makes us blind, and we touch each fear with all the avid curiosity of self-interest, trying to make a whole out of a hundred parts, like the blind men with their elephant. We sense the shape. Children grasp it easily, forget it, and relearn it as adults. The shape is there, and most of us come to realize what it is sooner or later: it is the shape of a body under a sheet. All our fears add up to one great fear, all our fears are part of that great fear—an arm, a leg, a finger, an ear. We're afraid of the body under the sheet. It's our body. And the great appeal of horror fiction through the ages is that it serves as a rehearsal for our own deaths. (xxiv)

This idea of fear is important to me, and this thesis, because of his theory with children and fear, especially this idea of relearning it as adults. This fear, I posit, is not only the fear of our own death, which King discusses in the passage, but also a general fear about losing a job or another relatively mundane occurrence. That fear, then, is translated to whomever or whatever took that

job, whether man or machine. Often, traditionally marginalized groups become the target. Children, he says, grasp it because many are taught at a young age that physical and psychological difference from the norm or the average is bad, evil, or problematic. More specifically, children learn that African Americans and whites are the same, and should be treated the same, if, of course, they are not being told otherwise. When Mike Hanlon (a black character) and Bob Gautier (a white character) from *IT* are talking, Bob is trying to explain to Mike that "nigger" is not a bad word, and we see that Bob does not see Mike as different from him (677). Bob does not understand what "nigger" means. Instead, he uses his own assumptions about his relationship with Mike and the context in which he has heard the word used from his father to interpret its meaning. When he grows older, however, he will likely have the painful and traumatic history behind the word explained to him and most likely proceed with a different, racist, mindset. Bob relearns what it means to interact with and think about when it comes to African Americans. This process is similar with characters Henry Bowers and his father Butch Bowers. In this relationship, Butch explains all the negative connotations of "nigger" and makes sure that his son accepts racist ideals. This is when they relearn racism, or another marginalizing ideology, as adults because they are experiencing this fear for the first time. They are not being told what to think by their parents but have also been influenced by what they have learned during childhood. When they experience a job loss, or something similar, then they can associate that feeling with something nonsensical such as racism. The fear of losing a job is not something that a child usually worries about, but it is something felt as an adult.

CHAPTER 1: *CARRIE*: STEPHEN KING'S NOVEL OF FEMALE ADOLESCENCE AND THE TRAUMA OF CONFORMITY

Stephen King's debut novel *Carrie* follows an outcast teenage female with telekinetic abilities and explores the limits of high school bullying and parental (over) control. Eventually, Carrie grows tired of all the abuse that she has received and lashes out, destroying almost the entire town of Chamberlain and her fellow classmates in the process. Sue, a classmate and survivor of the attack, is interviewed throughout the mostly epistolary novel; these interviews usually follow first-person or third-person omniscient sections devoted to Carrie. During a moment of reflection, Sue thinks:

> The word she was avoiding was expressed *To Conform*, in the infinitive, and it conjured up miserable images of hair in rollers . . . of joining the PTA and then the country club . . . of pills in circular yellow cases . . . of fighting with desperate decorum to keep the niggers out of Kleen Korners . . . armed with signs and petitions and sweet, slightly desperate smiles. (53-54)

Much of the novel seems as if it should focus on the idea of "fitting in" during high school, and much of it is. However, the novel goes beyond high school issues and addresses similar ones on the societal level. As we can see here, Sue thinks about the things that typical middle-class white communities have done to maintain their status. One such strategy keeps African Americans out of their city, and they use racially charged language to describe this process. African Americans are a ghostly absent *Other* of the novel; no black characters appear in the novel, though several characters mention race. The novel segregates African Americans, and the whites *in* the novel keep African Americans out of their city as well. The novel creates a similarity between African

Americans and Carrie because of their Otherness, keeping them apart from the dominant demographic due to this difference.

The novel does not offer any solutions to the problems that it presents, but it does highlight the fact that they are problems by providing a window into the culture of late-twentieth-century America. From this portion of text, we get these images of groups of middle-class white citizens, suggested by the PTA and country club, who are fighting to maintain the status quo, both in terms of gender and race. Their petitioning and sign waving evokes images of picket signs and yelling protesters, such as those of the Little Rock Nine, where the integrated black students are yelled at by white men and women. To her credit, Sue fights this urge "*To Conform*." This theme of conforming persists throughout the novel, and its connection with sexism and racism shows how the American culture of conforming promoted narrow definitions of culturally appropriate identities.

While the novel does not offer a solution, it does suggest an alternate path. That is, the current way of doing things (i.e., conformity and segregation) is not working and the destruction of a town is the end result; therefore, to solve this issue, King critiques ideologies that push for conformity across identities and the separation of Others of all types. The novel's focus on Carrie White works as a second-hand spectator to most of these injustices, as most of the issues that we encounter in the novel involve Carrie and are directed at her as well. King's *Carrie* uses adolescent trauma as a tool to show how American cultural norms of conformity lead to segregation of *Others* and a generational legacy of "fitting in" via exclusion, scapegoating, and fanatical belief. I argue that King suggests trauma – the spectacle of trauma as well as the processes of gazing and staring inherent in that spectacle – can result from the enforcement of

conformity while also serving as a window into the psyche of an individual as well as the psyche of the American culture. Often, as *Carrie* shows, both are the case.

Conformity and the *Other*

Though King's story centers on the idea of conformity and being the same as everyone else, Carrie seemingly falls short at this socially enforced goal of most teenagers. She has been traumatized by her mother since a young age, and, mostly because of her zealous religious upbringing, all the other students treat Carrie poorly, and this is a central theme of the novel. The short news item that opens the novel demonstrates the text's attitude toward the cloying, and sometimes dangerous, need to belong. In the article, Carrie's house had been struck by a "rain of stones" when she is a young child, which is the result of her telekinetic abilities (1). Directly after this moment, Carrie's classmates bombard her "with tampons and sanitary napkins" as she has her first period while in the girl's locker room and does not know what is happening (9). John Sears posits that *Carrie*'s opening of "a supernatural raining of stones is then symbolically repeated as a socially enacted ritual in the girl's 'bombarding' of Carrie" (30). Just as Carrie's first period is a rite of passage, her telekinetic episode as a young child was her first experience with telekinesis, so too is this power of hers. Both rites of passage are followed by a bombardment of some kind, whether by stone or by tampon. King is participating in the genre of American popular Gothic by citing previous works with his rain of stones—such as Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" and *The Haunting of Hill House*—conforming to the typical mode of the genre (Sears 30). While the girls in *Carrie* who are throwing sanitary napkins and tampons are also participating in this conforming social event of shaming, it was as if they had no control over themselves as "Sue was throwing [tampons] too, throwing and chanting with the rest, not really sure what she was doing—a charm had occurred to her mind and it glowed there like neon:

There's no harm in it really no harm in it really no harm—" (King 9). The girls in the locker room hate Carrie because of her difference and all that she lacks. In this scene, the girls reserve this hate for Carrie because she does not know what a period is, and this is disgusting to them, and it is something that should be changed, especially because this puts Carrie on the outside of their society (King 8-9). Even the teacher Miss Desjardin displays disgust at Carrie's lack of knowledge, as she tries to calm Carrie down and figure out why she has not properly taken care of herself (12-14). This is the first example where the reader is presented with Carrie's peers signaling her out because of her differences. The extremity of such a ritualistic ceremony to partition Carrie from the "normal" girls and to mark her difference connects to the exclusion often experienced during adolescent rites of passage ceremonies in which members of a society enter a period of liminality during which they are stripped away of identity markers that signal their place within a social hierarchy. About the liminal state in rites of passage ceremonies, Victor Turner writes, "Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (95). Liminal rites, then, render a society's hierarchical principles temporarily inoperable with respect to the liminal subject. However, King adapts this ritual by highlighting its opposite effect: highlighting her socioeconomic, religious, and sexual difference from her classmates and presenting those differences as stigmatizing features of her life.

However, even though her classmates treat Carrie as an Other, they do not know of her "telekinetic" abilities (4). The fact that she is telekinetic changes the way the reader views Carrie from this point on and endows her qualities that make her more than the average human. Also, the fact that her peers *do not* know that she is telekinetic raises questions about why exactly Carrie is hated so much. The entire quotation, offered by the third-person narrator, reads, "What

none of them knew, of course, was that Carrie White was telekinetic" (4). Because none of the book's characters know this fact about Carrie, the text pressures the reader to want to know if the other students just dislike her because they can tell that she is different, or because they are viewing something about her that is different, either inherently, or because of some other issue. This is important because their reason for disliking Carrie changes our perception of those hating her as well as our perception of Carrie herself.

After introducing Carrie and her powers, the text presents a section where Carrie is Othered physically. We are a witness to the differences between Carrie and the other girls. The novel characterizes most of the girls in generic ways typical of the visual mise-en-scène we find in teen films of the 1970s and 1980s: "Girls stretched and writhed under the hot water, squalling, flicking water, squirting white bars of soap from hand to hand" (4). This approach decentralizes the individuality of the narrative of adolescent development and their swiftly changing bodies by allowing room for only one true trajectory. Carrie, on the other hand,

> …stood among them stolidly, a frog among swans. She was a chunky girl with pimples on her neck and buttocks, her wet hair completely without color. It rested against her face with dispirited sogginess and she simply stood, head slightly bent, letting water splat against her flesh and roll off. She looked the part of the sacrificial goat, the constant butt, believer in left-handed monkey wrenches, perpetual foul-up, and she was. (4-5)

King falls into a blazon tradition here and describes individual pieces of her body. Breaking up Carrie into individual parts objectifies her and turns her into an object, or multiple objects, rather than the girl that she is, which is also different from how the other girls are described. Once the reader receives this description of Carrie, the novel provides a more explicit rationale as to why she is thought of and treated in these ways. Because the other characters do not know that she is

telekinetic, when the reader sees how she is described, especially in comparison with the other girls, then it starts to fall into place why the other characters dislike her. Teenage judgement and cliques are a common and understandable reason for dislike for others; understandable in the sense that it is a common occurrence. She is Othered in this description as well by being described as a frog, making her less than human in the eyes of the girls and the narrator. Even her hair seems to represent the lack of spirit in Carrie. Because of the way she has been treated for most of her life, it seems to have translated into her own beliefs about herself. Also, interestingly, Carrie goes on to wish that her school had individual showers because "[t]hey stared. They always *stared*" (5; emphasis in original). What is interesting about this is the relationship viewers have with a person who embodies an identity different from themselves, and staring often forms part of this relationship. Fascinated by differences, someone staring creates certain assumptions about the power dynamics between the starer and the object of the stare. The reader, in fact, participates in this relationship as a character is being described in the blazon fashion, then the reader has no other choice than to stare as well, so the blazon makes the reader stare too, which can makes us complicit in either the pain of Carrie, or allies as we recognize her pain.

The Power of the Stare Versus the Gaze

Staring, however, means something more than what these girls were doing to Carrie. Within the context of disability, race, and gender, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson defines staring in a way that goes against the often-negative connotations society associates with the practice: "Staring, it proposes, is an intense visual exchange that makes meaning. Staring here is more than just looking. The stare is distinct from the gaze, which has been extensively defined as an oppressive act of disciplinary looking that subordinates its victim" (Garland-Thomson 9).The

girls would more accurately be described as *gazing* at Carrie, then. Their gaze at Carrie subordinates her and elevates all their statuses, recalling, again, the processes of adolescent rites of passage. She is different from them, and therefore worse. Thrown tampons and sanitary napkins indicate their hatred, and this difference between them and her reinforces their self-hood and their conformity. The more that the girls act in tandem with one another, the more the text cements their superiority and pack sensibility while simultaneously cementing and degrading Carrie's difference.

In opposition to practices of gazing that highlight socioeconomic, religious, and sexual differences, staring strategically creates a possible safe space for people to empathize with marginalized individuals and to revise problematic ideas about identity and superiority. Real staring "offers an occasion to rethink the status quo" (Garland-Thomson 6). Unlike the gaze, staring is not something that is automatically rude or without meaning. The first time that Carrie is really stared at seems to initiate a change in perspective toward her, and representatives of the status quo hopefully will rethink their outlook. When Tommy goes to ask Carrie to the prom, he sees

> for the first time (because it was the first time he had really looked) that she was far from repulsive. Her face was round rather than oval, and the eyes were so dark that they seemed to cast shadows beneath them, like bruises. Her hair was darkish blonde, slightly wiry, pulled back in a bun that was not becoming to her. The lips were full, almost lush, the teeth naturally white. Her body, for the most part, was indeterminate. A baggy sweater concealed her breasts except for token nubs. The skirt was colorful but awful all the same: It fell to a 1958 midshin hem in an odd and clumsy A-line. The calves were

> strong and rounded (the attempt to conceal these with heathery knee-socks was bizarre but unsuccessful) and handsome. (100)

This is a significant point about how Stephen King's characters view the world and the people in them. Here, for the first time, Tommy sees Carrie for the person she actually is, at least more closely than how he previously viewed her. Before this moment, Tommy understood Carrie from the same perspective as her other classmates, not because Carrie filled some role as the neighborhood monster, but because he succumbed to the dominant method that the culture of teenage angst understood Carrie's way of being in the world. When he looked at her for himself, however, he saw something different because he is staring at an individual rather than gazing at an object. The passage notes the degree with which Tommy identifies with Carrie during this tender moment, something that only happens with Sue Snell in the rest of the book. Again, this passage, as does the previous description of Carrie, reads like a blazon tradition. Instead of falling back on snap judgments that interpret Carrie's actions as abnormal and monstrous, or on outdated notions of conventional beauty, Tommy understands Carrie's attractiveness through her "indeterminacy," her ability to walk between social and cultural categories of traditional femininity. Tommy's stare breaks from the tradition of conformity cultivated by the practice of gazing and begins to move down the path of desegregating Carrie from the rest of the students through the empathetic stare.

King uses this type of looking or viewing a few different ways. Oftentimes he does it with how some of his characters view racism, sexuality, gender, or other traditionally marginalized identities, and younger characters often represent this type of viewpoint, such as Tommy. Tommy, the epitome of the All-American boy-next-door stereotype, represents how American society comes to institute generational hatred of and distrust towards the Other. There

is often a tie between how children or young adults view other people based on the beliefs of their parents and how their parents view others. Tommy's reaction toward Carrie is one of the seeds of hope and solutions that King posits in the novel. In order to change this culture of conformity, one needs not to conform. Though, this not conforming does need to be done in a way that is accepting and open. And, as is suggested by Tommy's death at the end of the novel, the good works of a single person are not going to fix all cultural issues.

Exclusion of Conforming and Trauma

This culture of conforming even affects those who are supposed to be above such issues, like educators. The ending of the shower scene has their gym teacher Miss Desjardin singling out Carrie as well. She has been in the shower for too long and this is upsetting Miss Desjardin, and she comes off as irritated at Carrie when she tells her to get out (6). This is when Carrie steps out of the shower only for Miss Desjardin to find that she is going through her first menstrual cycle, which Carrie does not know about, and there is blood running down her leg (6). This moment in the book is interrupted by an excerpt from the fictional book titled *The Shadow Exploded: Documented Facts and Specific Conclusions from the Case of Carietta White* (6). The study and fictional book further demean Carrie because they place her as the center of a study. The fact that she is different enough to be studied invites the idea that she must be different from her peers. The article discusses intense moments of stress sparking her telekinetic abilities (6-7). King was likely giving the reader a little insight into how her powers worked at this moment and a little hint at what is to come, as the scene ends very stressfully for Carrie. Studying her also makes her into a medical object, turning her into something that is inhuman and more of a curiosity. She is something that needs to be studied and figured out, and ultimately fixed. As a result, even those people around Carrie who find themselves in positions to help her instead demoralize her in

ways not dissimilar to her female classmates. Rather than using the empathizing process of staring, they participate in the gaze, understanding Carrie's story as simply another problematic youth rather than as a girl in serious trouble.

The gaze is often used in scenes that elicit horror, which are not stopped in this culture of conformity; in fact, they are often furthered because everyone feels the need to join in. The catcalls of "*Per*-iod" begin as soon as Carrie's teenaged antagonist, Chris Hargensen, begins this chant after seeing the blood run down her leg (7). Soon the rest of the girls join in with her. The other girls revile her even more now because she does not know what a period is or what to do about her own, and she is described again in animalistic terms. Carrie "looked around bovinely" (8). The narrator describes Carrie as a cow here because of her looks, but it also represents a mental similarity between Carrie and a cow. That is, she is viewed as someone of low intelligence. Because the novel represents Carrie as a cow, an animal that lives in a herd, this specific animal metaphor suggests her difference from the rest of the herd, namely the other girls. She is different than the girls because of her lack of knowledge about her body and now because of her lack of humanity. Soon after this moment, the girls start to throw tampons and sanitary napkins, telling her to "plug it up" (9). What is important here is that the girls are all throwing the tampons at Carrie without any thought, becoming almost one in mind as they torment her, suggesting a hive mindset of conformity (9-10). While the girls are surprised that Carrie does not know what a period is, the newspaper article discussing Carrie, which interrupts this scene, talks about how they are also surprised that Carrie does not know about the menstruation cycle. In fact, they comment on the point that they are shocked that Carrie's mother never told her about it or took her to a gynecologist because she had not received her period until she was 16 years of age (11-12). These interruptions mimic what are called "psychogenic

blackouts," which are generally the "result of stress or anxiety" ("Psychogenic Blackouts"). It would make complete sense that Carrie cannot handle this scene, so her brain's reaction is to completely block it out. Especially considering that these blackouts are more common "after people have experienced ill treatment or trauma," Carrie would be a likely candidate for these because of the treatment received from her mother ("Psychogenic Blackouts"). Psychogenic blackouts, or pseudoseizures, hold negative connotations as these "labels seem to communicate the possibility that the doctor thinks the symptoms are being 'put on' or deliberately manufactured" (Stone et al. 570). In this study, the researchers found that patients find the label used to diagnose their symptoms as offensive, and the attitude of the doctor often contributes to their feelings (569). Just as these patients are offended and treated differently because some doctors believe them to be mad or putting it on, Carrie is not believed that she has never had her period. King legitimizes Carrie's trauma, both as she is experiencing it in the locker room, with the bombarding of tampons and name-calling, as well as with these blackouts, and what she has experienced at the hands of her mother. This is important because it recognizes psychogenic blackouts are a result of traumatic experiences such as childhood bullying, or other stressful experiences, which allows for acceptance for those who were previously thought to only be "putting it on."

Carrie's Domestic Trauma

The source of Carrie's trauma throughout the novel stems from the treatment she gets from her mother, and this shower scene is the first real suggestion to that in the text. The shower scene is followed quickly with Miss Desjardin finding Carrie covered in blood and being disgusted at the girl (12-14). There is an interesting thought throughout the novel of "self-shame" for some of those who dislike Carrie and treat her badly (14). Miss Desjardin feels it here, and

Sue seems to almost feel it in this scene as well: “Sue was throwing [tampons] too, throwing and chanting with the rest, not really sure what she was doing—a charm had occurred to her mind and it glowed there like neon: *There’s no harm in it really no harm in it really no harm*—” (9). Sue’s later shame at her actions are reflected here as she does not know what she is doing while she is doing it. The culture of conformity seemingly takes over her mind in this moment and does not let her choose differently. Similarly, Miss Desjardin feels disgust. Garland-Thomson discusses “disgust” and its relation to staring: “The sight of the unexpected body, that is to say, a body that does not conform to our expectations for an ordinary body” or, in this case, the expectation of having knowledge about one’s body, and “[t]his interruption of expectations, of the visual status quo, attracts interest but can also lead to disgust” (37). Though Miss Desjardin goes so far to defend Carrie throughout the novel, she still has this disgust for her because of her belief about what the ordinary female body should be, as do the other girls who bully her.

Similar to Miss Desjardin, who attempts to understand Carrie’s identity from the perspective of the typical high school girl, Carrie’s relationship with her mother shows how she, too, attempts to get Carrie to conform to her own style of thought, not allowing any room for her to develop a mind of her own. Carrie White comes from a “near-fanatical fundamentalist religious beliefs” family (15). When the text reveals that Carrie’s mother Margaret White probably did not know that she was pregnant until she gave birth to Carrie alone at her house, the authors of the epistolary article speculate that Margaret White “linked [pregnancy] irrevocably in her mind with the ‘sin’ of intercourse” (16). Carrie’s lack of knowledge about the reproductive system makes more sense with this information. Also, often because of her religious zealotry, Margaret White was not a well-liked person. When neighbors heard screams from her house while she was in labor, they did not check on her, one of the reasons being “dislike for her had

become so strong that they deliberately adopted a wait-and-see attitude" (16). Like Carrie, her mother seems to not be well-liked among her peers, though for seemingly different reasons. Margaret believed that "she had 'a cancer of the womanly parts' and would soon join her husband in heaven" while she was pregnant with Carrie (17). Before Carrie was even born, then, Margaret saw her as something to be cut out, something medically pathological. Even though Margaret tries to force Carrie to conform to her religious ideology, the town at large recognizes her mother's difference and isolates her from them. Their dislike of her is so strong that they will not even help her when screams are coming from her house. Not only is this dislike brought on by their differences, it is brought on by Margaret's treatment of everyone else, both because she views them all as sinners and because of her style of mothering.

Carrie's Exclusion: Inside and Out

To further show how isolated she is, Carrie has been separated by the other students in her school, and she is excluded from the main body of students. These results can be seen by many of the adults that work in the school. The principal of the school, an authority, does not even know who Carrie White is. Miss Desjardin brings her to the principal's office so that she can get her permission to leave school for the day and Morton, the vice-principal, repeatedly calls her the wrong names (18-19). Eventually, in response to this action that takes away a key part of her identity, Carrie finally seems to demonstrate anger over her misnaming and snaps at him: "*That's not my name!*" (19). With this anger both Miss Desjardin and Morton are surprised and frightened at the forcefulness of it, and his ashtray tumbles off his desk because of her telekinetic abilities, which are tied to strong emotions (19). When Carrie tells Miss Desjardin that the other girls "laughed at me. Threw things. They've *always* laughed," she is just looked at helplessly, like there was nothing that she could do (20). Miss Desjardin calls her "a group

scapegoat" (22). The implications to this are interesting, such as the fact that all the other students, and the teachers too, it seems, need a scapegoat and this is exactly her function is. Chris Allen Carter's *Kenneth Burke and the Scapegoat Process* posits that a "characteristic feature of human life is the act by which an insecure person raises his or her own self-esteem by lowering the status or attacking the confidence of someone else," which explains why Carrie is bullied so often (9). She has become that scapegoat because others use her to justify their senses of self. Even Miss Desjardin has this problem, and she tries to reason out the disgust she felt for Carrie: "I understand how those girls felt. The whole thing just made me want to take the girl and *shake* her. Maybe there's some kind of instinct about menstruation that makes women want to snarl, I don't know. I keep seeing Sue Snell and the way she looked" (23-24). Along with Miss Desjardin, Sue Snell is one of the people who exhibits shame for either how they acted or how they felt toward Carrie early in the novel. While most others, if they ever feel shame at all, do not feel it until much later. This is interesting because of Miss Desjardin's comment about Carrie as a scapegoat. For some reason, most of the people in the novel feel this way about Carrie and feel the need to treat her in such a way because of a deep-seated fear or anger that forces them to lash out at her.

Carrie's exclusion at school is not limited to ill treatment from those only at school, but it extends to those outside of the school and into the town as well. Tommy Erbter, only five years of age, rides by her on a bike as she walks home and insults her. This goes back to the scapegoat and it is interesting how he is described: "He saw Carrie, brightened, and stuck out his tongue," and then he says, "Hey, ol' fart-face! Ol' prayin' Carrie!" (28). Tommy's face brightened, as if he was made happier by the sheer fact that he knows he can make fun of her, as if it is an accepted thing, or even something that is expected. His happiness seems to depend upon her

unhappiness, as if Carrie is the scapegoat for the entire community, and they are dependent upon her for their happiness.

However, Carrie demonstrates that she refuses the mantle of scapegoat given to her by her school, her mother, and her community: an attempt at a type of agency normally reserved for those of the status quo. Carrie's actions, though, are weakened by the perspective through which she attempts to cultivate that agency, namely the abuse and corresponding trauma related to her mother's religious beliefs. Carrie manifests her own type of religious fixation, especially on Jesus. As a punishment, Margaret often locks her in a closet where a figurine of Jesus judges her for her supposedly wrong actions. The closet where Carrie is punished is described as "the worst place of all, the home of terror, the cave where all hope, all resistance to God's will—and Momma's—was extinguished" (63). Carrie can feel the terror as she nears the closet, before she is even told to go inside of it. Carrie is determined not to "break" this time, but she does, with the need to urinate overwhelming her. Carrie tells us that she has been in the closet for almost an entire day before, which caused her to faint at the smell of her waste and the lack of food (68). In describing the body in pain, critic Elaine Scarry writes, "Often, a state of consciousness other than pain will, if deprived of its object, begin to approach the neighborhood of physical pain; conversely, when physical pain is transformed into an objectified state, it (or at least some of its aversiveness) is eliminated" (6). The loss of somatic control connects both with the body's response to pain as well as descriptions of religious ecstasy, acting as a type of defense mechanism for Carrie. Additionally, Carrie leaves a Christian camp early because the other kids were treating her badly; the reader learns that Carrie is sent into the closet, presumably for punishment, for six hours after her mother picks her up (27). Though, Carrie does not talk of it as particularly traumatic or even as a punishment; she seems to have acclimated to it and now

believes in its normality: a way of how Carrie deals with trauma. Just like the anger she has expressed at the vice-principal for not knowing her name, the text reveals moments where we can see her suffering from the trauma that she has experienced, and she does want to fight back. Carrie ruminates on her past as she walks home from school and she talks about wanting revenge on everyone, comparing it to the Bible's judgement day, and hoping that they will get their comeuppance, and that she can help in this (26). She wants to "be His sword and His arm" (26). Carrie's possible fixation on Jesus demonstrates the effect her mother's physical, emotional, and psychological abuse has exerted on her outlook and perspective on others. No other evidence in the novel suggests Carrie to be the bullying type, though her thoughts represent the conventional idea that abused teenagers often become abusers or bullies themselves ("Combination of Face-To-Face"). Consequently, Carrie's attempt at demonstrating agency within this moment fails, becoming a pathological replication of the abuse she has already suffered at the hands of her mother.

Appearance plays a vital role in how people are treated in the novel, especially in its relation to being excluded and Othered. Carrie is described thusly as a child:

> "She was such a *pretty* girl," Stella Horan resumes, lighting another cigarette. "I've seen some high school pictures of her, and that horrible fuzzy black-and-white photo on the cover of *Newsweek*. I look at them and all I can think is, Dear God, where did she go? What did that woman do to her? Then I feel sick and sorry. She was so pretty, with pink cheeks and bright brown eyes, and her hair the shade of blonde you know will darken and get mousy. Sweet is the only word that fits. Sweet and bright and innocent. Her mother's sickness hadn't touched her very deeply, not then." (34)

Stella Horan is referring to Margaret White's fanatical religion as this "sickness," especially as it serves as the root of many of Margaret's issues. What is important here, though, is that this "sickness" is connected with physical appearance. Carrie was "pretty" because she did not yet have this sickness, at least in the eyes of Stella. This description occurred when Carrie was only three years of age. However, while she was in grammar school, Carrie was already being made fun of. This is when "Carrie White eats shit" was written on a desk (4). Stella describes Carrie as pretty when she was three, and it seems unlikely that much of her appearance would have changed by the time she was in grammar school. Then, this passage implies two possible interpretations. On the one hand, Carrie was infected with this "sickness" and acted differently compared to others around her, which made her into an easy target to pick on, and thus turned her "ugly," representing the sickness inside of her. On the other hand, Carrie was already "ugly," so she was presumed to have this sickness inside of her based off of her looks. In the case of Carrie, it seems to be more based off her behavior, which could negatively affect how others view her physicality. Jefferey Jerome Cohen posits the theory that "[f]eminine and cultural others are monstrous enough by themselves in patriarchal society, but when they threaten to mingle, the entire economy of desire comes under attack," and Carrie falls into both the feminine other and the cultural other (15). Because of her attempts to conform to the culture around her, they attack her even more, and turn her into even more of an Other, more of a monster, and more of a threat. The end of the novel and her attack on the town works as a self-fulfilling prophecy for those who treated Carrie the way they do. She finally becomes the monster that she has been told she was her entire life.

While it seems that Margaret's behavior psychologically traumatizes Carrie through the many admonishments she unjustly receives, Margaret also physically abuses Carrie. After her

mother learns that Carrie had to go home early because she received her first period, Margaret's reaction was unsympathetic:

> Momma had been walking toward her, and now her hand flashed with sudden limber speed, a hard hand, laundry-callused and muscled. It struck her backhand across the jaw and Carrie fell down in the doorway between the hall and the living room, weeping loudly. "And God made Eve from the rib of Adam," Momma said. Her eyes were very large in the rimless glasses; they looked like poached eggs. She thumped Carrie with the side of her foot and Carrie screamed. "Get up, woman. Let's us get in and pray. Let's us pray to Jesus for our woman-weak, wicked, sinning souls." (62)

In this passage, King suggests a combination of physical and mental abuse. Carrie is physically hit by her mother, and then kicked, because of her "woman-weak, wicked, sinning souls." As with other incidents, Margaret rationalizes her treatment of Carrie by focusing on the ways she does not meet the standards of femininity defined by her version of religious fanaticism, which allows no room for female sexuality for either fun or reproduction. That is, Margaret hits Carrie because she had her period. If any doubts existed concerning Margaret White's mental state before this scene, they are erased at this point. Her fanatical view of religion is over the top and simply illogical. It makes no sense to call the menstruation process sinful if it is something that is going to naturally happen. Margaret White is asking Carrie to be unnatural in order to be completely sinless. Carrie even says this to her mother, that it was not her fault that she had her period; however, instead of listening to Carrie, Margaret simply lists off inane reasons as to why she may have gotten her period, such as rock and roll music, lustful thoughts, or even being tempted by the Antichrist (65). The interplay between constructions of supposed natural and artificial femininity and adolescent sexuality reveal the essential arbitrariness of cultural

definitions of womanhood and the ways they are used to traumatically marginalize women who do not conform to those ideals, even from an early age.

Absence of African-American Characters

The enforcement of conformity through the tactics of gazing, staring, scapegoating, and religious fanaticism pervades *Carrie* and offers insight into the ways that conformity can promote the development of traumatic responses and thought processes, especially for adolescent girls and women. Additionally, conformity in *Carrie* guides readers to understand the similarities and differences between gender and race from this perspective, providing an intersectional version of critiques of conformity and trauma.

While the novel's mentions of race are few, they do occur at key points in the narrative, and these occurrences are almost always described in a negative light. When Carrie is famously doused in pig's blood, she is described in a manner that evokes a racial past and present in America:

> When I was a little girl I had a Walt Disney storybook called *Song of the South*, and it had that Uncle Remus story about the tarbaby in it. There was a picture of the tarbaby sitting in the middle of the road, looking like one of those old-time Negro minstrels with the blackface and great big white eyes. (199)

The text compares Carrie to a tarbaby when she opens her eyes. Being covered in blood, the only white showing is that of her eyes, which is what specifically creates this image for the narrator. Alongside the lack of African-American characters, this passage implies the locations within culture that Carrie and African Americans share similar modes of marginalization. The image of the "Negro minstrel" is mentioned throughout the novel as well as other short descriptors that evoke this image. While the town is under attack from Carrie, the townsfolk move around,

attempting to figure out what is going on and "Mrs. Dawson . . . came in a mud-pack as if dressed for a minstrel show" (236). There is a reason that King describes Mrs. Dawson in this manner. I argue that he does this to purposely remind the reader of the racist culture that the majority of America participates in, and to remind the reader of the conspicuous absence of African Americans in the novel. This happens again when "[Chris] looked at [Billy] from the floor, her lip puffed to negroid size, her eyes pleading" (259). The language of the traumatic racial traditions embodied in the tar baby figure and the minstrel show performances recalls Carrie's earlier engagement with the marginalizing gaze of her school and her community. Racial difference is a spectacle to be gazed at in order to objectify and control the Other rather than as a subject being stared at to cultivate empathy.

King uses this racist language to conjure up the image of the African American, especially with their connection with American culture. For example, King subtly leaves clues that suggest a comment on the phenomenon of "white flight." After the town has been left devastated by Carrie, "this New England pastoral lies on the rim of a blackened and shattered hub, and many of the neat houses have FOR SALE signs on their front lawns" (283). King's use of the term "blackened" does not only apply to the destruction left in the wake of the fire, but also applies to the fact that their white population now has African Americans in it. The town of Chamberlain fails because the whites sell their houses after African Americans move in. Thus, white flight enacts a form of scapegoating. Whites do not want African Americans to move in because of their racism and the town of Chamberlain fails because of their conformity and culture. Victoria Madden discusses how *Carrie* "draws attention to both the folly of a rigid classificatory system based on arbitrary exclusion as well as the dangers of abjectifying women and demonizing individuals perceived to have deviated from the norm" (19). The novel shows

how these cultural systems do not hold up, and they fail. So, while King does not necessarily offer a solution to this problem, he does show how it will ultimately lead to failure.

The Revealing of America's Inadequacies

Carrie provides a lens into an American culture where there are multiple problems, and King draws the eye to these issues and how they are unhealthy for America. Erica Dymond posits that the gendered use of language in *Carrie* "shows the young writer's limited scope" (98); however, I do not fully agree. While she does have good points on how King did not understand how to write from the point of view of a woman at this stage in his career, this does not completely take away from what he has done with the novel. King shows through Carrie's trauma the cultural ideology of conformity and how it leads to segregation of racial and gendered Others. Also, the novel explicates how this cultural norm of segregation of racial and gendered Others is passed on through generations and how difficult it is for it to be completely changed.

CHAPTER 2: TEENAGE BOYS AND THEIR WALK THROUGH LIFE: CAPITALISM, SEXUALITY, AND COLLECTIVE TRAUMA IN *THE LONG WALK*

The previous chapter looked at the societal pressures of the culture of conformity, especially for adolescent girls, and how that culture applies to other traditionally marginalized groups. In this chapter, I discuss how Stephen King's *The Long Walk* explores cultural norms in a dystopian America and suggests that capitalism is the source for toxic masculinity in the novel and in American culture as a whole. The Long Walk is an annual contest where one hundred young men, around the age of sixteen to seventeen, walk on a road until they can no longer walk. Stopping or falling below a certain speed limit disqualifies a walker, and disqualification means death. After a fellow walker is killed, McVries, a witty romantic who is close with the protagonist, has the following conversation with Garraty, the protagonist and "Maine's Own," who comes off as the boy next door that is thoughtful and genuine, and Baker, the Southerner and the third in this trio of musketeers:

> "If I get out of this," McVries said abruptly, "you know what I'm going to do?"
>
> "What?" Baker asked.
>
> "Fornicate until my cock turns blue. I've never been so horny in my life as I am right this minute, at quarter of eight on May first."
>
> "You mean it?" Garraty asked.
>
> "I do," McVries assured. "I could even get horny for you, Ray, if you didn't need a shave."
>
> Garraty laughed.
>
> "Prince Charming, that's who I am," McVries said. (79-80)

This scene is problematic because of the setting in which the book introduces homosexuality. McVries' comments are taken as a joke, and McVries presents what he says in a way so that it can be taken as a joke. While he says this statement in front of many of the other boys, it is not taken as a serious comment; however, his repeated homoerotic comments toward Garraty, and not the other characters, imply his intentions may be suggestive of some homosexual feelings. His comparison to himself as "Prince Charming" is representative of how American culture pushes young men to feel and to act in a romantic relationship.

The Long Walk event symbolizes and critiques capitalistic standards and its rigid endorsement of heteronormative standards. McVries says, "If I get out of this," with the "this" being the walk, which he hints can also get him out of the American culture of capitalism. Because he refers to a homosexual relationship in the passage, it would make sense that we would not be able to participate in that until he was out of the culture that does not tolerate that behavior. Comparing himself to Prince Charming, and saying that Garraty needs a shave, subverts this normally heteronormative male-female relationship, with McVries acting as the Prince Charming while Garraty is the smooth-faced princess. Young men being unable to express themselves emotionally or sexually is a problem throughout the text, and McVries' fear of being homosexual, or at least Garraty's and the other boys' fear, prevents them from taking his words seriously, thus not allowing McVries to discuss sexuality.

This inability to talk about sexuality is not limited to McVries in *The Long Walk*. Indeed, many, if not most, of the characters throughout the novel face similar issues. King uses more obvious trauma, such as the trauma endured on the long walk, as a gateway to talk about other traumas, like the rigid standards of heteronormative behavior enforced by capitalistic culture and what they impose on the young men of the novel. *The Long Walk* shows how capitalism is the

source of toxic masculinity by suggesting that this capitalistic way of understanding the world produces a type of collective trauma for the young men in the novel, whether by the rigid endorsement of heteronormative standards, the fear of falling over the homosocial cliff into the homosexual canyon, or through the uses of patriotism to control possibly "alternative" ways of being and experiencing the world. Setting this novel apart from *Carrie* is its focus on a collective trauma, rather than the individual trauma.

Traumas of Capitalism

Peter Felix Kellermann's *Sociodrama and Collective Trauma* compares collective trauma to radioactivity in that the emotional trauma of a people cannot be seen or detected (33). Similar to the nuclear explosion in Chernobyl, the impact of which can still be felt today, collective trauma is "profound" and "the after-effects are far-reaching" (33). While the survivor population is still attempting to recover, they are "still regularly monitored for health risks," and the children who have been born many years after the accident are "perpetually painting pictures of houses on fire" (33). This, he argues, is collective trauma, or a traumatic experience that occurs over a group of people and has a long-lasting impact on their society. The traumatic experiences that the walkers undergo during *The Long Walk* are collective trauma, and, so too is the trauma that the America in the novel experiences at the expense of capitalism. The widespread collective trauma that many Americans experience is coupled with what psychotherapist Laura Brown terms as "insidious trauma" (102). Insidious trauma is caused by "those events in which the dominant culture and its forms and institutions are expressed and perpetuated" (102). Capitalism perpetuates traumatic events as both collective, as it impacts a group of people, and insidiously, as the dominant culture is the one causing the traumatic events to occur, examples of which are presented to us by the characters in the novel.

Patriotism and Alternative Lifestyles

The other side of collective trauma – that is, the construction of limited forms of masculine identity that disallow ways of being that are not cisgender and violently heterosexual – is the use of patriotism to control alternative ways of experiencing the world. Garraty describes seeing the long walk once as a young kid, and while the walkers were walking, a speech was given: "[The Major] began with Competition, progressed to Patriotism, and finished with something called the Gross National Product—Garraty had laughed at that, because to him gross meant something nasty, like boogers" (23). Merriam-Webster defines capitalism as an economic system based on private or corporate ownership of goods ". . . and the distribution of goods that are determined mainly by competition in a free market" ("Capitalism"). This speech acts as a lesson in capitalism for the participants, detailing why Americans should be proud of it. The Major acts as the central focal point for capitalism and patriotism in the novel. The Major constantly reminds the proper behavior and thoughts of the American people, represented by "The Crowd," who have a faceless identity and lack individuality unless they step out of line and who are seen only in terms of their contributions to the event in terms of both adding to the spectacle while collectively suppressing any acts against the government. The Crowd receives specific directions about how to live and participate under the guidelines of America's capitalistic culture. The Major is often lauded as the ideal American, or an unobtainable goal of American citizen, which makes him a very popular public figure. He uses his popularity and stature to reinforce the guidelines for which an American should be striving.

Living an alternative lifestyle that is not of the capitalistic norm results in a similar punishment for those that are in the walk as for those who are out of it. Garraty's father was not a fan of the government or its agenda, and he shared his view with others:

> Garraty heard his father shouting thickly at someone into the telephone, the way he did when he was being drunk or political, and his mother in the background, her conspiratorial whisper, begging him to stop, please stop, before someone picked up the party line. (24)

Garraty's father acts against what has been culturally defined as norm, thus transgressing the boundaries of acceptable behavior despite the relative benignity of his actions. It is not normal for citizens to disagree with aspects of their government, and it is not something that is encouraged. Garraty's mother begs his father to stop talking before someone listens in on their conversation and turns him in, and, it turns out, that has happened, which is learned when Garraty tells the other walkers, "My dad was squaded" (172). This version of the American government does not tolerate any type of resistance against the established American government, and any infraction against its agenda results in rigid punishment that forces those attempting to thwart the norm into submission. It is not entirely clear what being "squaded" means in the novel. A lack of description to the term makes it even more horrific, and so, more powerful for the general populace, as well as for the reader. However, it is reasonably assumed that it either means he was forced into the military or killed, either of which would stifle his attempts to live outside the notions of propriety established through the proper political channels.

Similarly, those in power preemptively attempt to keep those who are subject to them in their control. As the walkers travel through a town,

> The cheers were thunder. A great overhead airburst traced the Major's face in fire, making Garraty think numbly of God. This was followed by the face of the New Hampshire Provo Governor, a man known for having stormed the German nuclear base

> in Santiago nearly single-handed back in 1953. He had lost a leg to radiation poisoning. (364)

The Major, portrayed as God, is viewed as a god by most of the characters in the novel, especially "the Crowd," which is who he addresses his speeches to throughout the text. He is the epitome of this patriotic hero. It makes others proud to be a part of America. Also, the New Hampshire governor's face is someone who makes others feel proud to be an American. Showing the faces of "true" patriots incentivizes the members of the crowd to maintain their loyalty to the capitalistic status quo. Both figures work as a part of the army and are seen as the most patriotic of their people. Ironically, the New Hampshire Provo Governor is missing a leg, leaving him unable to really participate in the long walk. If the long walk is viewed as a metaphor for capitalism, then since he has already reached this pinnacle of the American citizen, he no longer needs to compete. What might normally be viewed as a shortcoming or a failure, lacking the ability to walk normally, his missing leg is accepted because he is operating outside the system of capitalism. That is, the governor does not have to participate in a capitalistic system anymore because he has already achieved everything that he needs to achieve, and his role as an outsider to this system maintains the status quo, thus maintaining his own elite status.

Trauma and Capitalism

While the Major is the one who works to maintain the status quo, through the novel King calls into question the ethics of capitalistic thinking. Dr. Laura Kerr posits that "capitalism propagates traumatic stress in ways that promote the pursuit of power and status, which ultimately keeps the system functioning," which aligns nicely with much of the novel (Kerr). That is, the entire narrative of *The Long Walk* is towards this pursuit of power. The winner of the competition gets anything he wants, for the rest of his life. This is the ultimate reward in a

capitalistic society. The novel questions this prize multiple times throughout the narrative. McVries and Garraty discuss if there is a point to the game:

> "I have no idea what I'll want if I do win this," McVries said. "There's nothing that I really need" . . .
>
> "You've got a point there," Garraty agreed.
>
> "You mean I *don't* have a point there. The whole thing is pointless." [McVries responds.] (37-38)

King has identified this competitive nature in capitalistic America, and he is calling into question the prize. The cost, it seems, are the lives of those who are competing, and someone else's success is always at the cost of someone else's failure. Every time a walker dies, the closer the others are to the prize. When the boys help their fellow walkers out, it is detrimental to them. Garraty saves McVries's life and the other walkers stay away from both of them: "Walkers were keeping away . . . McVries had shown red, and so had Garraty . . . he had gone against his own interest" (138). Since capitalism thrives because of its competition-based ideology, the other walkers avoid these boys because they are not adhering to strict capitalistic standards. Collaborative ideology becomes almost disease-like and pathological in the novel. They are ostracized because they have caught the helping disease. The walkers can acquire three warnings before they are shot, so when Garraty stops to help McVries, he gains three warnings, and this is a way in which he is punished by not sticking to the capitalistic standards.

Sexuality and Homosexuality: The Pangs of Teenage Love

The relationship between McVries and Garraty is one that exemplifies an inability, or difficulty, to express their sexuality. Even though McVries can see that Garraty is a good-looking guy, commenting on the fact that he is a hit with the ladies, he promises him that he will not pick

him up if he falls, falling in line with capitalistic ideology (King 25). However, McVries breaks this promise and he does save Garraty's life by picking him up and getting him walking again. The two have a relationship, defined by Nils Hammarén and Thomas Johansson as "horizonal homosociality," which is "used to point toward more inclusive relations between men that are based on emotional closeness, intimacy, and a nonprofitable form of friendship" (Hammarén). Their homosocial relationship verges on the homoerotic, and there is repeated dialogue between the two where McVries is commenting homoerotically. In this scene, we can see that McVries has a romantic vision of the two of them together:

> McVries said, "Just go on dancing with me like this forever, Garraty, and I'll never tire. We'll scrape our shoe on the stars and hang upside down from the moon."
>
> He blew Garraty a kiss and walked away.
>
> Garraty looked after him. He didn't know what to make of McVries. (53-54)

Garraty, of course, is confused by his words and actions, as he does not know whether he is being serious or not, and, if he is being serious, he is confused because he does not know how to deal with this type of relationship. He has never learned how to react to such a situation except with disgust or denial. While homosexuality does not directly oppose capitalistic ideology, it does go against heteronormative standards, which is why this alternative way of living is not accepted or even tolerated.

Societal pressures have taught these young men that homosexuality is wrong, and they often openly demonstrate their fear and disgust of it. When talk of homosexuality or fear that one's self might become homosexual arises, participants offer stark refusals and denial of that behavior to assure others that they are indeed heterosexual and are "normal." Activities that are not inherently sexual at all are taken as wrong or perverse, and they are vehemently denounced:

"Did you like it?" Pearson pressed.

"Hell no! Who in *hell* would like a half a quart of warm soapsuds up your—"

"My little brother," Pearson said sadly. "I asked the little snot if he was sorry I was going and he said no because Ma said he could have an enema if he was good and didn't cry. He loves 'em."

"That's sickening," Harkness said loudly.

Pearson looked glum. "I thought so, too." (101)

Here, the act of getting an enema denotes revulsion because of its perceived connotation with anal sex. Pearson's little brother enjoys receiving enemas and we can see that his behavior is looked down upon by the others. It is deemed "sickening" by Harkness, and Pearson agrees, and he is saddened by the fact that his brother enjoys enemas. Even though enjoying enemas does not make someone homosexual, this seems to be how Pearson and the others are viewing it, so, since this heteronormative capitalistic society looks down on and does not condone homosexuality, he is upset because he is connected to homosexuality because his brother enjoys enemas and because his brother is less masculine because he enjoys this activity. The inability to talk about sexual identity among young men is so prevalent in this society, it turns just about everything into something sexual. The enema, in this case, is turned into something sexual, and therefore looked down upon because of the connection that has been made between it and homosexuality.

King shows how the traumatic and rigid endorsement of heteronormative standards begins early in life and is something that sticks with young males throughout their lifetime. Garraty is sleep walking during the long walk and he has a semi-conscious vision of a time when he was younger. First, he is having a semi-Freudian dream about his mother and wanting to

marry her, which transitions to Jan, his girlfriend, and ends up with a vision of him and a young friend:

> He had been five and Jimmy had been five and Jimmy's mother had caught them playing Doctor's Office in the sandpit behind Jimmy's house. They both had boners. That's what they called them—boners. Jimmy's mother had called his mother and his mother had come to get him and had sat him down in her bedroom and had asked him how he would like it if she made him go out and walk down the street with no clothes on. His dozing body contracted with the groveling embarrassment of it, the deep shame. He had cried and begged, not to make him walk down the street with no clothes on . . . and not to tell his father.
>
> Seven years old now. He and Jimmy Owens peering through the dirt-grimed window of the Burr's Building Materials office at the naked lady calendars, knowing what they were looking at but not really knowing, feeling a crawling shameful exciting pang of something. (83)

King suggests much in this scene. First, we can see homosexuality is not something that is condoned, which has already been established, but the text tells us that homophobia is something that is learned very early in life. Then, we have this comparison of homosexual behavior and walking down the street naked. Garraty's mother makes the connection for him that the type of behavior he and Jimmy were partaking in is basically the same as walking in the street naked. Because she likens the two activities, it endorses heteronormative standards by ensuring that Garraty will only act in a heterosexual manner. Garraty even feels the shame that he felt in that moment rise in him as he is walking. And, interestingly enough, he begs her to not tell his father. His father is one of the more alternative figures in the novel, which is why he is "squaded," but,

to Garraty, a young boy at the time, he views his father as the most overtly masculine figure in his life. So, his father learning of his shameful, run-out-in-the-streets-naked behavior that is not the masculine that he has be taught so far is the ultimate fear in his eyes. The end of this vision comes with him performing the more heteronormative role. There is still this shameful feeling associated with sexual experiences, but Garraty has no memory of being punished after he and Jimmy viewed the calendar, which allows him to associate something positive with this experience.

Garraty associates most of his memories about sexuality with Jimmy, which shows us how impactful this experience was for him, and also suggests a limited amount of sexual experiences, whether that be an act, or simply discussion of sexuality. Because of his mother's threat, he has some traumatic memories associated with this incident of "playing doctor." He blames Jimmy for his punishment and for breaking the heteronormative standards and can see that "[h]e thought of Jimmy Owens, he had hit Jimmy with the barrel of his air rifle, and yes he had meant to, because it had been Jimmy's idea, taking off their clothes and touching each other had been Jimmy's idea, it had been Jimmy's idea" (270). This act of hitting Jimmy does a few things for Garraty. He can get revenge on Jimmy, which might make himself feel better, even though it is unclear whether Garraty is being truthful in this moment. His continual chanting of "it had been Jimmy's idea" comes across as Garraty trying to convince himself that it was his idea. Also, him hitting Jimmy is a masculine action that begins to redeem him in his own eyes and pushes further away from homosexuality. While he is talking with McVries, Garraty thinks about the scar on McVries' face and he wonders if he left a scar on Jimmy's face: "Maybe he had a scar like McVries. Jimmy. He and Jimmy had been Playing Doctor" (209). Especially because of his relationship with McVries, he makes this connection between his past homosexual

experience with Jimmy and McVries' scars, and the homoerotic comments from McVries. Garraty seems to be suffering traumatically as he has this recurring memory of Jimmy. The association he has with the experience of "playing doctor," which is also a common middle-class experience, connecting again to capitalism, and then the punishment he received from his mother have made this a lasting impact for him.

Symptomatic Insidious Trauma

The kind of trauma that Garraty is suffering from is called insidious trauma. Psychotherapist Laura Brown argues and defines insidious trauma:

> "Real" trauma is often only that form of trauma in which the dominant group can participate as a victim rather than as the perpetrator or etiologist of the trauma. The private, secret, insidious traumas to which a feminist analysis draws attention are more often than not those events in which the dominant culture and its forms and institutions are expressed and perpetuated. (102)

"Real" trauma might be represented by the leg that the novel's New Hampshire Provo Governor had lost, or, even, the blistering and bleeding feet of the walkers. However, Garraty's trauma here is not something that the dominant culture accepts; therefore, his mother, and with the threat of his father, representing the dominant culture in this society, perpetuates this insidious trauma.

Adding to this trauma is the problem that young men had with expressing their emotions. Men, in 1970s America, which is when the America of the novel takes place, were not supposed to express their emotions, particularly when it pertained to something sexual, so they held them in and did not talk about them. In his discussion of 1970s horror, Robin Wood argues that "*surplus* repression makes us into monogamous heterosexual bourgeois patriarchal capitalists," which is exactly the type of behavior that the dominant culture is perpetuating (25). This, I argue,

is another form of insidious trauma that the young men of the novel, and consequently the young men of 1970s America, must deal with. Because the dominant culture perpetuates this behavior, such as the fact that they squad Garraty's father for expressing his emotions about this culture, the issues that the young men of the novel are having in connection with them talking about their emotions can be termed as insidious trauma. Garraty has trouble expressing himself multiple times throughout the novel, often in connection with McVries. One instance of this occurs at the very beginning of the novel when "Garraty wondered what McVries had meant, winking [at him] like that," or after Garraty slyly touched the gun of one of the soldiers, which McVries sees, he says, "'You're a dear boy, Ray,' McVries said, and then put on some speed and caught up with Olson, leaving Garraty to walk alone, feeling more confused than ever" and then after one particular scene where McVries tells Garraty that he was going to win, "Garraty licked his lips, wanting to express himself and not knowing just how" (13, 41-42, 55). He then attempts to talk with McVries about death, since that is what they are facing on the long walk, but finds himself hard-pressed to say what he is feeling. In another scene where these characters talk, McVries complains, "If you're a sixteen-year-old boy, you can't discuss the pains of adolescent love with any decency anymore. You just come off sounding like fucking Ron Howard with a hardon" (201). This complaint is against the culture in which they live. McVries wants to talk about the "pains of adolescent love," but says that when a young male teen does try to talk this way, then it comes off as perverted, or even pornographic. Bottling up these emotions can be stressful and harmful to young teens, and lack of communication about sexual subjects could lead to poor education about sex or even poor relationships because of an unwillingness to talk about sex. Looking back on the scene between Garraty and his mother, we can see that she is not willing to talk about how he and Jimmy were "playing doctor." She instead threatens him because of his

behavior, and this threat leaves Garraty confused about the situation and unwilling or unable to address latent homosexuality in his future. McVries' advances toward him confuse Garraty and leave him not knowing how to respond. This lack of knowledge leads to toxic masculinity that manifests as a lack of understanding of any type of alternative ways of experiencing the world outside of the heteronormative and capitalist norm enforced by official discourse embodied by the Major. Garraty and McVries often save each other during the long walk, where all of the other characters do not, so change definitely takes place in the novel. Their saving of each other indicates that alternative ways of living, something that is not capitalism, are possible.

Traversing the Homosexual Canyon

However, there are many times throughout the novel where we see the walkers condemning alternative ways of living as well. Usually this is homosexuality, such as the scene where a walker's brother enjoys enemas. While the characters in the novel do have the capability to learn, acceptance does not always come easily to them. There are many assumptions and stereotypical thoughts in their logic and much of their speech, often toward homosexuals, those of others race, or other genders. In one scene, Garraty stereotypes what homosexuals look like, but almost immediately corrects himself:

> The vanguard was in plain sight: two tall, tanned boys with black leather jackets tied around their waists. The word was that they were queer for each other, but Garraty believed that like he believed the moon was green cheese. They didn't look effeminate, and they seemed like nice enough guys . . . not that either one of those things had much to do with whether or not they were queer, he supposed. And not that it was any of his business if they were. But . . . (225)

Garraty continually has this back and forth relationship with homosexuality. The way in which he describes the reasons why he believes they are not homosexuals is that they did not look effeminate, and they were "nice enough." This suggests, then, that in his mind, he thinks of effeminateness and not-niceness as attributes towards those who are homosexuals. These thoughts seem to be the ones that pop up in his head first, as if they had been ingrained there. After thinking for a moment, he backs off somewhat, saying that those things did not really have to do with being a homosexual "he supposed" and going so far as to say that it was not any of his business. Correcting himself shows that Garraty's mindset could be changed, or that this was his true mindset, and that his learned behavior toward homosexuals overrides what he really feels. He ends this short scene with a "But . . ." indicating that there is still a lingering suspicion about their homosexuality and that he does not trust homosexuals. This likely has to do with the insidious trauma that he experienced as a young child, as anything associated to a homosexual brings back that shame he experienced at the hands of his mother.

While Garraty seems to manage a semblance of compassion and understanding for homosexuals, he takes it much more personally when he himself is accused of being homosexual. The group of friends that Garraty has made on the walk often get in large groups to talk to each other or gossip about the other walkers. In one of these scenes, McVries tells Garraty what his fellow walkers have been saying about them two:

> "He thinks we're queer for each other," McVries said amused.
>
> "He *what*?" Garraty's head snapped up.
>
> "He's not such a bad guy," McVries said thoughtfully. He cocked a humorous eye at Garraty. "Maybe he's even half-right. Maybe that's why I saved your ass. Maybe I'm queer for you."

"With a face like mine? I thought you perverts liked the willowy type." Still, he was suddenly uneasy.

Suddenly, shockingly, McVries said: "Would you let me jerk you off?"

Garraty hissed in breath. "What the hell—"

"Oh, shut up," McVries said crossly. "Where do you get off with all this self-righteous shit? I'm not even going to make it any easier by letting you know if I'm joking. What say?"

Garraty felt a sticky dryness in his throat. The thing was, he wanted to be touched. Queer, not queer, that didn't seem to matter now that they were all busy dying. All that mattered was McVries. He didn't want McVries to touch him, not that way. (321)

When Garraty learns that his fellow walkers think that he is gay, he reverts to a more homophobic outlook. This defense mechanism works to both deny that he is gay and to make him act as if he is not gay. While it cannot be positively known, because of all the advances McVries makes to Garraty, McVries arguably demonstrates feelings for Garraty that are more than just the result of homosocial bonds constructed via a traumatic experience. Regardless, the reaction from Garraty is enough to see that he harbors bad feelings toward homosexuality. Still, though, he tries to give McVries the option to say that it was a joke, which, when McVries asks to "jerk you off" it is too much, and he becomes defensive again. He even calls out Garraty on it, which indicates McVries' awareness of the hypocrisy and he wants Garraty to be aware too. It is hypocritical because while they have become more accepting of some things, such as non-capitalistic standards like helping each other out, they have not become accepting of homosexuality. It is as if the setting they are in, and the game they are playing, has given McVries the opportunity to be more accepting. So, when he tries to engage with Garraty on this

new opportunity, and Garraty turns him down, he points it out, even though their circumstances have changed, and being homosexual no longer means what it meant in the "real world." Garraty even wants to be touched, which might be what McVries is actually referring to in this exchange. Still, Garraty makes it clear that he does not want to be touched in that way, "queer or not queer."

Self-Sacrifice and the Road to Recovery

The Long Walk provides a lens into late twentieth century America's culture. Specifically, the heteronormative capitalist society that produces toxic masculinity. King's novel works to subvert this heteronormative capitalistic society. The novel recognizes that they are there and fights against, while at the same time conforming to, these ideals, showing the reader exactly the types of ideologies that were being followed during this time period and their affects. King uses trauma as a gateway and a tool to talk about these things. The boys on the long walk never talked about the issues they discuss in the novel before the novel took place. Their environment and the pain that they go through shows them that there are alternative ways to live than the ones with which they are presented. Even though Garraty helped other walkers out, he is the one that ends up winning. Self-sacrifice, the novel argues, is something that is not inherently harmful. In fact, it can win you a race.

CHAPTER 3: RECLAIMING *IT*: TRAUMATIC CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES AND RE-EXPERIENCES

In the previous two chapters, I have discussed the ways that conformity and capitalism promote traumatic reactions for adolescents of both sexes. In this chapter, I address the tactics that adults use to respond or refuse to respond to adolescent traumatic experiences and the consequences of such actions.

Stephen King's 1986 novel *IT* famously follows the "Loser's Club" as they defeat bullies, deal with young love, and learn to defeat a shape-changing alien who has a taste for children. The many characters in the novel – at least those that survive – contend with dramatic events that change who they are forever. Throughout the novel, antagonist Henry Bowers chases the group of seven protagonists around a small Maine town named "Derry," where he torments them and eventually tries to kill them, after some prodding from IT. Henry's hate for the group stems from a few different sources, but his life at home primarily initiates his anger. All the adolescent characters face a similar theme of being affected negatively by a traumatic homelife. Henry Bowers is not left out of this pattern, and through him King shows how fear and bigotry are passed down through generations, similar to the process we see unfold in *Carrie*. Henry's father, Butch Bowers, passes on the tradition of racism when "[h]e explained to his son that while all niggers were stupid, some were cunning as well—and down deep, they all hated white men and wanted to plow a white woman's furrow" (672). Butch makes sure that his son grows up to have the same hate for African Americans that he has, and this hate has grown out of a fear that African-American workers would take all the "white men's jobs" and steal all his women.

IT shows how this father-son relationship is problematic, as it highlights the tradition of racism passed from father to son. Unless the cycle is broken, racism will be perpetuated. The

novel, however, points out that Henry Bowers is not the one responsible for all the murders in Derry. I argue that IT, also known as Pennywise the Clown, represents the dominant culture of rhetorical monstrosity in America. When the novel reveals that "Henry Bowers, the News declared, had been the monster haunting Derry in the spring and summer of 1958," it is false (622). While Henry should not be let off scot-free, the real monster here that the news perpetuates is IT, which operates physically and rhetorically as a metaphor for the ways that traditionally marginalized identities receive the greatest amount of blame. Racism, sexism, homophobia, and (in the case of Henry Bowers) classism are all accepted and perpetuated in order to maintain systems of oppression. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen posits that "[t]he monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection," and aptly, "the monster exists only to be read" (4). Using Cohen's theory on monster culture, we can see that IT encapsulates the very aspects of the American culture that IT represents. Henry Bowers is a victim of this system, and, though he should not be absolved from his actions, the novel shows where the source of his racism comes from, which is ultimately what needs to be changed.

In his novel, King wants to show how the negative aspects of American culture are perpetuated through children. Henry learns this lesson of racism as a young child and he can never overcome it. Living with "a constant litany" of "the nigger, the nigger, the nigger. Everything was the nigger's fault" makes overcoming such a mindset seem almost impossible (673). Henry's childhood was traumatic in the way in which his father treated and taught him, and the society in which Henry lived did not punish him for his beliefs or the actions he performed because of them. Similar experiences of trauma occur for the other children in the novel. The traumas they are experiencing are not often spoken of or even believed to be trauma because "kids grow up" (962). What the novel posits is that when kids grow up, they forget the

trauma that they experienced as kids and have adjusted to it by the time they are adults. Because they have adjusted to it, they no longer consider what they have experienced when kids as traumatic, and therefore they do not take precautions against perpetuating that same behavior that caused their trauma as children.

Perpetual Trauma in Children

The novel *IT* recognizes this fact, and the recurring appearance of IT, every twenty-seven years, represents the special, never-ending connection that kids have with monsters: "kids grow up. In the church, power is perpetuated and renewed by periodic ritualistic acts. In Derry, power seems to be perpetuated and renewed by periodic ritualistic acts, too" (908). As Cohen believes, the monster always escapes; "[n]o monster tastes of death but once." And "its threat is its propensity to shift" (5). Monsters continue to return, taking on different meanings and representations that are dependent upon the specific cultural moment in which they are created. The quotation in King's novel continues with an apt question: "Can it be that IT protects Itself by the simple fact that, as the children grow into adults, they become either incapable of faith or crippled by a sort of spiritual and imaginative arthritis?" (908). The answer of said question is a resounding "yes." The power is perpetuated and renewed in this American culture because the adults forget their trauma as children or lack the imagination to view it as such anymore. A small, all-American town, Derry represents a miniaturized America in this instance. Throughout the novel, the continuing cycle of IT in Derry symbolizes trauma experienced as children and forgotten or altered as adults, but not always in healthy ways that create agency and therapeutic results for an individual.

Indeed, the therapy in the novel, and the cure for the negative aspects being perpetuated by American culture, I argue, is an act of remembering this trauma so that the cycle can be

contained and ended. Cathy Caruth argues that "[t]he historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all" (187). Keeping this theory of trauma in mind, trauma will not be thought of as a negative event if the individual remains altogether unaware of the experience. Instead, the traumatic experience needs to first be reclaimed and revalorized for it to be experienced. Once the adults of *IT* remember their traumatic experiences as children, they can move on and defeat IT the monster and, as a result, better negotiate the racial, gendered, sexual, and classist structures embedded within society. Stephen King's *IT* uses trauma and fear, from children to adults, to reveal inadequacies in the American culture. By recognizing the trauma of child abuse, child neglect, racism, misogyny, domestic abuse, and homophobia, *IT* works to unveil the source of these traumas in the process of claiming and healing traumatic experiences, and hopefully, ultimately providing a solution to these negative aspects perpetuated by cultural hegemony of marginalized groups. To show this, this chapter will examine scenes from different characters in the novel, specifically analyzing a traumatic event or traumatic experience during their childhood as well as the subsequent reclaiming of that experience as adults.

Bill's Trauma

The trauma that Bill Denbrough, who is arguably the protagonist of the novel, experiences is that of child neglect via the death of his brother. His trauma stems from the fact that IT killed his brother Georgie in a violent way. The trauma of losing a sibling at such a young age, and in such a manner, falls in line with a general definition of trauma: "[T]rauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic events" (Caruth 181). One of Bill's defining features is his stutter, which makes him almost unable to communicate throughout the novel. This stutter is tied to the traumatic experience of his brother's death. An adult Bill, who is

beginning to remember the events of Derry, talks about how he got over his stutter with his wife, stating, "All of that helped, but mostly it was just forgetting Derry and everything that happened there. Because that's when the forgetting happened" (141). In this way, Bill's approach to his past works according to the idea of nostalgia. A theorist of nostalgia, Nicholas Dames, writes, "Nostalgia is as much self-definition as memory; it consists of the stories about one's past that explain and consolidate memory rather than dispersing it into a series of vivid, relinquished moments, and it can only survive by eradicating the 'pure memory,' that enormous field of vanished detail, that threatens it" (4). Thus, though nostalgia is often understood through processes of memory, it depends as much on forgetting the bad times as remembering the good. He gets over his stutter by forgetting what has happened in Derry, and when he begins to remember his experiences, he starts to stutter again. This relapse indicates that he is not over his traumatic experience or that he has not come fully to terms with it yet. Instead, he has remembered his childhood nostalgically: forgetting the bad and highlighting the good in order to create a coherent narrative of his past.

Indeed, the novel implies that this form of nostalgic remembering and forgetting predominantly happens with childhood memory. The trauma Bill has experienced because of his brother's death is not the same as child neglect, at least not on Bill's part. After Georgie's death, the Denbroughs are incapable of coping with their child's death, and they no longer fulfill the role of "parent" to Bill. He has happy memories of Georgie and him sitting between his parents on the couch as they serve as "bookends." However,

> Bill had tried to be a book between them while they were watching TV since George's death, but it was cold work. They sent the cold out from both directions and Bill's

> defroster was simply not big enough to cope with it. He had to leave because that kind of cold always froze his cheeks and made his eyes water. (245-246)

In trying to be "the book" between his parents, Bill attempts to enact a narrative that works at forgetting in order to more fully control his parents' feelings about Georgie and remember the good times with him. While it was not purposeful on his parents' part, they do not play the role as parents that they once did, and Bill suffers the effects of it. This fading role his parents play in his life took completely forgetting the events that transpired to get rid of his stutter. Bill never fully healed and integrated Georgie's death because he never received the attention that he needed from his parents. In one scene, he attempts to break the ice with his parents by telling a joke that he has heard at school. Bill can hardly get through the joke because of how bad his stutter is, and when he finishes it, his parents were not even listening (246). His stutter gives him anxiety in most social settings, and it is no different here: "Bill sat there, sweating but cold—so cold," and it is because of his trauma that his stutter is so bad and gets worse since the worse he stutters, the more embarrassed he feels (246). Bill starts to believe he was so "cold because he wasn't *really* the only book between those two ends; Georgie was still there . . . and perhaps it was not from his parents but from George that the big chill was really coming" (246). S. Rufus discusses the ways in which trauma often presents the use of certain types of language as a way to deal with abuse; she writes, "We who were traumatized with words and looks by toxic parents who believed they were doing their best, when we were too young to know otherwise, too young to believe this was anything but universal, normal, justified." Bill understands that his brother's death is what has created this gulf between him and his parents, and he even begins to come to the understanding that for them all to heal, they need to grieve as a family because Bill literally does not and cannot have the words to comfort or console. Bill approaches his crying father one

day and is soon sent off, and at the same time he can hear his mother crying in another part of the house, he thinks, “Why are they crying so far apart?” (247). The problem here is that they are no longer functioning as a family as they are too caught up in their own grief to help their son that is still alive through his grief. Because of this, Bill never really gets over Georgie’s death and therefore his stutter comes back with the memories of his brother’s death.

However, Bill comes to understand that nostalgic forgetting is not the healing salve it promises to be. Though his childhood memories bring back this traumatic marker of stuttering for him, Bill is finally able to deal with the trauma and integrate it. In order to defeat IT, the Loser’s Club needed to get in touch with the children they were when they originally defeated IT twenty-seven years earlier. Bill has a moment of believing and integrating all that he believed as a child into the adult that he is now, and this was the key to defeating IT (1074). How, then, does Bill’s trauma connect to the American culture that King is critiquing? Jesse Nash posits that King is saying with his writings that the American family is “judged to be inadequate because it does not prepare its members to deal with the imaginary,” the imaginary here, being IT, or the trauma that stems from IT (Nash 154). I agree with this assessment, and, while King does not make it clear in the novel how dominant culture perpetuates, it seems to be more of a symptom of the culture’s inability to provide space for healing. As Sara Martín Alegre posits, this is “a failure which the child pays the highest price” (105). Children are often at the center of King novels, and this is because of the assertion that the nuclear family structure does not work as it should.

Bill’s remembrance of his past traumatic experiences is enough for him to defeat IT, but his memories are not enough for his wife Audra, who is left comatose after the battle with IT. For Bill to completely integrate his past experiences, he must connect with his bike, named

"Silver," which is one of the only sources of freedom and power that Bill felt when he was a kid after his brother's death. Now, as an adult, he must connect with Silver again for him to get over what he has gone through, and it is not until he has achieved this that Audra awakens once more. The most important connection that Bill must make to connect with his inner child is that of belief. As a kid, Bill rode Silver through the streets of Derry at a breakneck speed, riding through stop signs and weaving in and out of traffic dangerously. Young Bill *believed* that he would not die, or get hit, and so he never did. Adult Bill, riding a much older Silver, must connect with young Bill on this level to completely integrate this trauma and become a fully functioning husband, which is why she wakes up as they are riding through the streets of Derry as adults at a breakneck speed, weaving in and out of traffic (1151). Bill and Audra's exhilarating ride through town is the final barrier for Bill, and we can tell that he has finally crossed this barrier when Audra awakens on the back of the bike and touches the erection that he now has. When they get off the bike, their shared sexual urges symbolize the divide between young Bill and adult Bill who has finally come full circle and has now fully integrated the past experiences of trauma into his life, enabling him to become who he was meant to be without anything holding him back.

Beverly's Trauma

In comparison to Bill, Beverly Marsh, the only female member of the Loser's Club, experiences much trauma both as a child and as an adult. She is abused as a child by her father and then is abused by her husband years later. While Bill's traumatic experience of his brother's death would have fallen under the definition of trauma, Bev's traumatic childhood may not have been classified so generally. Her trauma would fall into the category that psychotherapist Laura Brown argues for and terms as insidious trauma:

> "Real" trauma is often only that form of trauma in which the dominant group can participate as a victim rather than as the perpetrator or etiologist of the trauma. The private, secret, insidious traumas to which a feminist analysis draws attention are more often than not those events in which the dominant culture and its forms and institutions are expressed and perpetuated. (102)

Her father, though poor, would still identify as a member of the patriarchal culture as a white cisgender man. Seen as the head of the household, no one would have questioned what he saw fit to do in his house, especially if what he was doing was seen as more of a punishment, rather than actual abuse. Beverly's father, then, controls the public narrative of trauma that circulates throughout the town of Derry, demonstrating the sense of power he portrays to Beverly. As a result, when Beverly hears voices down the bathroom sink's drain, which then spurts a fountain of blood into the bathroom, she does the sensible thing and yells for her father. Al Marsh, though, cannot see the blood like Beverly can, and he grows angry toward her. During their interactions, he often says, "'I worry about you,'" which he does during this bathroom scene, and then "[h]is hand swung and spatted painfully against her buttocks," and he once again repeats, "'I worry a *lot*,' and he hit her again, harder . . . 'An awful *lot*' and he punched her in the stomach'" (402). Throughout this scene, and others, we can see that this is common behavior from him, as she knows what to do to limit the amount of hits that she receives, such as not crying as loudly in this scene. Beverly's entire childhood is traumatic because of these regular beatings that she receives at the hands of her father.

King's inclusion of Beverly's abuse scenes legitimizes them and recognizes them as traumatic. At the same time, though, King depicts the Derry citizens as understanding this abusive behavior as simply the actions of a father trying to control an unruly teenager. Al never

receives any type of reprimand for his behavior, making change difficult. Other men in the story will grow up with similar behavior and will be prone to behave in the same way as adults. In addition to the physical abuse, the narrative suggests that Al Marsh has also sexually abused Beverly. Al Marsh has very peculiar interactions with Beverly, which suggest that he might be sexually attracted to her, or that he has sexually abused her in the past. When she first yells for her father, he asks, "'Was someone peekin at you, Beverly? Huh?' There was concern on his face but it was a predatory concern, somehow more frightening than comforting," so it seems here that he is more worried about protecting Beverly as a type of property rather than protecting his daughter out of any sense of duty to his family (401). His repeated expression of worrying about her is also similar to this and seems to suggest that he is more than simply worried about her well-being. The day after the bathroom incident, her mother asks, "'Bevvie, does he ever touch you?'" (409). She is implying a sexual touch, and Beverly is confused and does not understand what her mother is talking about. While Beverly never indicates that her father has sexually abused her in any manner, evidence shows otherwise. The novel uses this incident to critique cultural definitions of trauma by creating a hierarchy of abuse: A white man can physically abuse his daughter without question, while sexual abuse is only questioned behind closed doors away from the eyes of the community.

As a result, the cycle of physical and sexual abuse continues. Beverly Marsh's worst experience in the novel with her father goes much further in connecting Al Marsh with generational trauma. After Al Marsh has learned that Beverly has been playing in the Barrens with the Loser's Club, he grows incredibly angry and repeatedly hits her while he questions her. Her mother was concerned with Beverly's sex before, and her father comes out directly to accuse her about it as well. He tells her to "'Take [your pants] off, I want to see if you are intact'" (919).

Her father is worried strictly about his daughter's virtue, but not about Beverly herself, reflecting the idea of Beverly as his property that has shaped his point of view throughout the novel. As she looks into his eyes, "[s]he screamed again at what she saw there . . . Her father was gone. And Beverly suddenly understood that she was alone in the apartment with It, alone with It..." (919). As he beats her and her blouse comes up, she notices that her father is looking at her the same way that other boys her age look at her, and he continues to order her to take off her pants so he can make sure that she is "intact" (921), so she "ran. She ran from It" (925). This chase scene happens throughout the town of Derry and as the pair run through the town, some citizens comment on the fact that she is running away from her father. They assume that she is just running away from him because she is afraid of the punishment she is going to receive, which, she is, but they are not considering the fact that at this moment there is anything wrong with the scene; in fact, they are letting it happen and even condoning it through their lack of action. According to Richard Felson's *The Reporting of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault by Nonstrangers to the Police*, the community at large woefully under performs when it comes to reporting domestic violence, and *IT* critiques this lack of action on the part of community members, an acknowledgment of the particular likelihood that strangers will not report observed domestic violence.

Beverly manages to escape from her father in this instance, but she does not manage to avoid more abuse later on in her life. This time, her abuser is her partner. She has been with Tom Rogan for many years when she receives the call that she needs to return to Derry, which triggers the memory of her childhood. Because she figured out how to subvert the norm related to abuse as a child, namely avoidance, she was able to escape her father's abuse. However, because she forgot this knowledge as she got older, she no longer thought herself capable of escape and

agency. The first thing that she gets back when she starts to remember during this phone call is this agency. As the novel introduces us to Beverly's adult character and to Tom, we see that she has been very subservient, and she mostly takes the abuse from her husband without much complaint – similar to the silent voices of Derry's community members she encountered. However, as soon as she gets this phone call and her memories begin to return, she fights back, beating her husband as he beats her, and she leaves him to return to Derry (118). Beverly is still suffering from the traumatic experience of her childhood, but she no longer remembers that experience, so she cannot integrate it. When she does start to remember it, she knows that she has got out of a similar situation with her father before and that she can do it again, and this gives her power and freedom to subvert the silence propagated by community fears of getting involved with domestic violence.

Her freedom, of course, is not so easily achieved, and it is not until she fully remembers her past that she is finally able to even admit to the others of the Loser's Club that her husband is abusive, and then finally free herself from him. The novel shows how Beverly was able to recognize that what she was going through is trauma, which she was unable to do with her father until that final chase scene, and which she was unable to do with Tom for a long time because she had convinced herself that that was what love was. When she does finally remember and integrate her traumatic experiences, she is able to live freely and without this weight, creating her own narrative agency and breaking the silence that too often allows victims of domestic violence to continue being violated.

Mike's Trauma

Mike Hanlon of the Loser's Club, the only African-American member, is also the only member who does *not* lose his memory of the incidents that have occurred during their

childhood. What, then, does this suggest, if anything at all? Answering that question will come easier after looking at an incident that Mike experienced as a kid. As we saw in the introduction, Henry Bowers and his father are racist, and the short dialogue that we read is directly before a scene between Henry and Mike. Henry bullied everyone in the Loser's Club, and many outside of it, but he bullied Mike the worst and does not hide Mike's skin color as the reason. As Mike is walking towards town, he is cut off by Henry, who says, "'Gonna make me a tarbaby . . . [y]ou're not black enough, but I'll fix that" (675). The "tarbaby" remarks recalls the similar remark in *Carrie*, which turns her into a spectacle. Similarly, Henry wants to turn Mike into a spectacle by burning his body, which alludes to cross burnings popular during the novel's setting. After a short chase scene, Mike is caught in a large mudhole where Henry jumps on top of him yelling, "'Niggerniggernigger!'" and "'Now you're black!'" as he rubs mud all over him and down his shirt and pants and his ears and up his nose (676). Of course, this is traumatic, but he has other experiences that are even more traumatic than this. What is important about this scene is the conversation that takes place after, and I argue that it works as a possible explanation as to why Mike does not forget, in addition to his not leaving Derry, while all the others do.

Most of the others in the Loser's Club can forget their childhood traumas as adults and function somewhat despite them, whether through nostalgic forgetting for Bill or through breaking silence for Beverly. Mike is unable to forget his traumas. After walking home and telling his parents what happened with Henry, his mother wanted her husband to call the cops. His father, though, does not do this because the current chief of police is racist, and he knows that he will get no help from him (676). He then goes on to explain that Henry's father Butch Bowers has "'told [Henry] that hating niggers is what men are supposed to do. It all comes back to that'" (676). Mike, then, does not forget the traumatic experiences of his childhood because

the burden of correcting these culturally determined narratives concerning racial propriety is too much to overcome. His father continues, "'He's going to have to deal with it all the rest of his life, as I have dealt with it and you have dealt with it,'" and this is why he never forgets. The others in the Loser's Club, except Beverly, can all, eventually, find a spot in the world where they are accepted into the dominant American culture, as they are all white men. All of them "grow out" of their innate loser-ness that makes them the targets of bullies and they all become very successful. Though Beverly is abused in her marriage as an adult, she does own an extremely successful clothing company, while Mike is the only one with a mediocre job, which he even points out at their reunion dinner as adults, especially in comparison with the others (518).

Like his father said, Mike deals with racism his entire life, and so he never has the room or the opportunity to forget his traumas like the others. Through Mike's character, the novel suggests that racial trauma is the most insidious of traumas due to its ever-present nature. His mother asks, "'Isn't there ever any getting away from it?,'" meaning racism, to which his father replies (676):

> "No. There is no getting away from the word nigger, not now, not in the world we've been given to live in, you and me. Country niggers from Maine are still niggers. I have thought, times, that the reason I came back to Derry was that there is no better place to remember that." (677)

Like Bill's lack of language that occurs as a result of his trauma, Mike's trauma results from the presence of demeaning language. Whereas Bill must get words in order to integrate his trauma, Mike must attempt to escape them, which the novel suggests is an impossible task. Relatedly, Mike's father uses the word "remember" in that it holds the connotation that it *can* be forgotten,

and this statement holds true because Mike does stay in Derry, and he does remember. However, Mike's father says that the world that they live in will not be a world where there is no racism. Regina Hansen suggests that Mike Hanlon serves "as the conscience and memory of *IT*'s Loser's Club" and that oftentimes "blacks are used symbolically by whites in their own morality tales" (172).

I agree that Mike does work as the memory of the novel, but not in a way that he is used only as a symbol in a white morality tale. He serves as a type of living scrapbook for the Loser's Club because he does not have the luxury of forgetting like his white male friends do, which reveals the inadequacies of American culture concerning race. Like his father has said, he must deal with it, or IT, for the rest of his life because of how innate racism is in American culture. As Mike listens to his father, he remembers a conversation he had with Bob Gautier "who tried to explain to Mike that nigger could not be a bad word, because his father used it all the time." This important memory shows the difference between the relationship between Henry and his father, and Bob Gautier and his father, as Bob continues to try to explain that "'[i]n fact, it was a good word . . . [my] daddy said, 'His head is as hard as a nigger's,' and 'That man works like a nigger'" (677). Again, language is key. All of these things Bob believes are good things as Bob tries to explain, but Mike felt "a terrible sadness that made him feel like crying. He had seen honesty and good intent in Bob's face" (678). While not all the relationships between a white father and son lead to the same type of racism, they often still lead to racism. Bob does not even know the terrible association with the word "nigger" because he trusts and loves his father so much. This type of relationship, I argue, is even worse, perhaps, then that of Henry and his father. Henry's behavior is violent to an extreme that he may eventually be punished by the law and stopped, as that type of behavior is somewhat less acceptable in this American culture,

though it does work in Henry's favor if he is ever accused. Many of the whites in the town of Derry would not have, and did not, condone this type of behavior. Bob's father, on the other hand, is a much less violent type of racist, and as such, would not be pointed out or even seen as racist, and would therefore not be stopped, like the ways that the community understands Al Marsh and his relationship to Beverly. This type of racism has an easier time persisting in American culture, which leads to a much more insidious type of trauma rather than an overtly violent one.

The final battle has the Loser's Club defeat IT, and somewhat metaphorically defeat the dominant American culture concerning the traumatic dimensions of race, gender, and class. This time, Mike thinks to himself, "I'm forgetting things" (1136). While Mike is the only one to remember the events the first time around, he will not be remembering them the second time. This time, he writes in his journal, "they really *did* kill It" and he feels a "[d]ull panic" and "sneaking relief" at this (1136). Even though Richie says, "Then this time it's really over," in response to the news that Mike is forgetting, it is not completely over, as there still is racism in the dominant American culture. But perhaps what King is suggesting is that there *can* be a world where the American culture is not racist. While Mike's memories are fading, he does keep everything that has happened in notebooks that he contains. However, like his memories, the notebooks are fading as well, and this seems to suggest that while Mike is trying to remember the racism and traumatic experiences that he and the others went through, they are starting to semi-unwillingly go away. He is not completely unhappy that these memories are fading, only that with these memories so too do the memories of his friends fade.

Remembering of Traumatic Experiences to Heal

Stephen King's *IT* successfully reveals the inadequacies of dominant American culture for addressing the insidious trauma associated with systemic racism, sexism, and classism. While *IT* does offer some solutions to these problems, such as avoiding nostalgic longing for a previous time period, most of the larger problems, such as racism and sexism, are not so easily solved. Mike will still be a victim of racism throughout his life, as his father stated, and Beverly Marsh will still undoubtedly be the victim of sexist remarks and thoughts. In all, King fails with Beverly as she is the only member of the Loser's Club who is continued to be bullied into adulthood. Though Beverly is more than capable of taking care of herself and is even the only one who can handle the sling shot to defeat IT, her story is lacking in that she *does* need a man to completely get over all that she has gone through. Of course, the novel does not condone domestic abuse and the type of man that Tom Rogan is, so as soon as Beverly receives that phone call from Mike, she does fight him off successfully. However, she does end up as almost a prize for Ben Hanscom at the end of the novel when the pair get together and eventually marry, as Ben has now reached the epitome of heteronormative masculinity as a good-looking and physically fit male. Indeed, Beverly's final legacy is that of a child that she has with Ben. And, of course, *IT*'s infamous child sex scene cannot be left out of this analysis either. King's use of sex while they are children seems to be used as a plot device to bring the Loser's Club closer together and to allow them to grow up. Unfortunately, though, as Beverly has sex with each of them in turn, this scene seems more to depict her as an object being used rather than as a ritual to keep the group together. The entire scene is so wrong that it is difficult to grasp the necessity of it in the novel, as it does nothing for Beverly except for making her into a character with less agency. Beverly is not given the same amount of acknowledgement for the abuse that she endures as Mike is. King

uses stereotypical heteronormative solutions, and they do not work. Beverly's company is a clothing company, which is very much a trope. Also, when she returns to Derry as an adult, she finds that she is still in love with Bill, and the pair have sex, similarly to how they had sex as children. And, in the end, Beverly's trauma is healed because she fulfills the role of the heteronormative mother by marrying Ben and having a baby with him. While Mike's trauma of racism that he will experience his entire life is horrible, it has been acknowledged in the novel. King can recognize that Beverly has undergone trauma, but he cannot (or at least *does not*) provide a way out for her that is not sexist, nor does he completely acknowledge the trauma that she has experienced like he does with Mike. However, the novel does do a nice job of recognizing some of the many different traumas that are experienced, especially the insidious traumas that are not often seen as traumatic, even if he does not recognize them all equally. Alegre posits that "*IT* focuses on the idea that only by repressing the memory of the horrors of childhood may the child grow up into a healthy adult," which, I argue, is not what happens (110). None of the adult members of the Loser's Club grew into a healthy adult. While they may have been successful, all of them had issues or problems because of the un-claimed traumatic experiences they had while children. It is not until they remember, not repress, the memory of their horrors that they can then move on and become healthy adults.

CONCLUSION: KING, HORROR, AND TRAUMA: MAKING AMERICA GREAT AGAIN, ONE STEPHEN KING NOVEL AT A TIME

Stephen King's works contain diverse experiences of trauma, and this thesis has connected these expressions with the identities of children and adolescents. By focusing on the experiences of these young characters, the novels I have examined show how the sources of major trauma do not always lie in specific violent events. Instead, culture often marginalizes, denigrates, and delegitimizes the existence of those people deemed unworthy or monstrous. As a result, they become targets of systematic behaviors that produce and sustain traumatic lived experience and the damage it causes. *Carrie* shows how the American cultural norms of conformity and the act of coming together as one lead to the separation and scapegoating of those who do not fit in with the culturally defined standards of normality. King uses trauma as a catalyst to show the unhealthy relationship of fitting in, which serves as a window into both the psyche of the individual and the psyche of American culture. *The Long Walk* acts as a metaphor for capitalistic American society through both the book itself and the annual Long Walk competition. *The Long Walk* uses trauma as a catalyst as well. It is not until the characters in the novel are experiencing trauma during the Long Walk that they begin to discuss and recognize the trauma that they are already experiencing in their daily lives under the yoke of capitalism that leads to toxic masculinity. Finally, *IT*'s use of trauma focuses on the transition of childhood to adulthood and how unclaimed experiences can affect adult lives if not reclaimed and revalorized via a framework of understanding. Revealing how the American Nuclear family is not automatically a successful model for living, the novel suggests that children are often traumatized because of this failure on the part of adults, usually the failure on the part of the parents.

This thesis expands the way in which we should view King's theory on American childhood, the family, and culture in general. I could see how this type of analysis can also reveal the inadequacies that he sees in our culture in other King texts. Novels such as *Under the Dome*, *The Shining*, *The Running Man*, and even his short story collections, such as *Night Shift* or *Full Dark, No Stars*, could reveal other diverse representations of trauma and fear by King and their relationship to dominant culture standards of living. For example, his short story "Trucks" involves vehicles developing a mind of their own and driving for themselves, and as we follow the group of humans that are trapped in a diner, we see that they are quickly enslaved by the vehicles who force the humans to fuel them, or die (*Night Shift* 197-222). This seems to be a comment that we *are* slaves to our vehicles, and that we care more for them than our fellow humans.

Similarly, future scholarship could examine King's more recent works. This thesis has looked at novels from mostly the beginning of his career. *Carrie* was his first published novel, and *The Long Walk* was a story that he had already written before its published date of 1979. *IT* is the latest work in this project, published in 1986, twelve years after *Carrie*. As we have seen and as other academics have pointed out, both novels suffer somewhat because of their lack of feminist female characters, not to mention the sometimes-violent male ones. Perhaps an examination of his more recent works would reveal a more polished outlook for King's presentation of feminism, like Erica Dymond posits, "for King, with personal maturity comes creative maturity. *Carrie*'s use of language provides a glimpse of where King began—and appreciation for the manner in which his work grows over the decades to follow" (98).

Furthermore, what may be found through an examination of other texts is an even more critical view of the American culture in which he participates: an irony likely not lost on King. A

longer study could see if King's use of trauma shifts throughout his career, especially as new generations of parents and children become more open to traditionally marginalized identities. This approach could be particularly interesting as King is famous for using different snippets of American culture in his writings, such as the quotations from different American game shows on each of the chapter headings in *The Long Walk*, and it might be fruitful to see how his writing has evolved over almost four decades of authorship. Indeed, today's current state of American politics looks to be excellent fodder for new King novels, and he often comments on the state of events on Twitter. From, "The ads say President Trump is delivering results. He's also delivering hate speech, a pack of lies, and a national debt that's going to crush out grandchildren," to "When Blabbermouth Don talks about who has the bigger nuclear button, I think we all know what he's talking about. It's your basic dick-measuring contest. Sad!," King does not shy away from commenting on cultural moments in America (Haysom). Because of King's beliefs, and his pace of writing, it would be surprising if he did *not* write a novel or two where he discusses how he believes the current government's administration will influence the future of America and the trauma that it will perpetuate.

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