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Dystopian Cinderellas: "I Follow Him into the Dark"

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DYSTOPIAN CINDERELLAS:

"I FOLLOW HIM INTO THE DARK"

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by

Courtney Rae Lear

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ABSTRACT
DYSTOPIAN CINDERELLAS:

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Research indicates that adolescents use fiction as a template for mitigating problems in their own lives based on the ways that fictional characters handle conflict. Dystopic narratives extrapolate on the potential sociopolitical consequences of contemporary social issues that adolescents face. In recent years, authors of young adult fiction have proliferated dystopian novels about disciplinary societies that conform to Michel Foucault's Panoptic frameworks. Using the novels *Matched, Delirium, Uglies, The Hunger Games, Divergent, The Maze Runner,* and *The Knife of Never Letting Go,* this project will demonstrate that the agency of female protagonists of young adult dystopian novels is curtailed by heteronormative constraints which reward women for being nurturing and punish them for being aggressive in Panoptic societies. If adolescent readers internalize the constructs in these novels, they will not question the problematic absence of empowerment or lack of diversity that currently plagues female protagonists and supporting characters within the genre.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER I

"SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES"

Since the turn of the twentieth century, dystopian fiction has exploded in popularity.

Contemporary booksellers eagerly await new publications with which to stock their

shelves. From the influential *We* by Yevgeny Zamyatin (1921) to the classics of the

genre, *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley (1931), *1984* by George Orwell (1949), and

Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury (1953), dystopian fiction has traditionally enabled

authors to "extrapolate on current social, political, or economic trends" by constructing

failing or failed societies that have in some way veered from the utopian ideals upon

which their governments were originally founded (Serafini and Blasingame 147).

Fictional dystopian societies are described "in considerable detail and normally located in

a time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as

considerably worse than the society in which the reader lived" (Sargent 9). To disrupt the

reader's current perceptions of that space, the societies fall victim to natural,

technological, or ideological disasters that force their citizens or leaders to rebuild in the

wake of their downfalls (e.g. dystopian Chicago divided into factions split by character

traits, or post-war United States split by utilitarian functions).

In many young adult dystopian novels, the protagonists are male adolescents who

successfully wield their agency as a tool with which they can destabilize and undermine

existing sociopolitical structures (i.e. totalitarian governments, specious scientific

experiments, or corrupt ideological tenets); however, female protagonists and their

attempts to subvert these same ideals through the use of similar strategies are more

problematic and, as such, invite careful critical analysis. Although they are supposed to be "central characters," the construction and agency of female protagonists in dystopian fiction that is written in the United States remains antiquated despite the futuristic nature of the genre.

This problem seems to be a reflection of contemporary acceptance of the validity of traditional gender roles. Nikki Jones, author of "Working 'the Code': On Girls, Gender, and Inner-City Violence," provides evidence that "[i]n mainstream American society, it is commonly assumed that women and girls shy away from conflict, are not physically aggressive, and do not fight like boys and men. . . 'mean girls' who 'fight with body language and relationships instead of fists and knives' reinforce common understandings of gender-based differences in the use of physical force" (qtd. in N. Jones 63). Female protagonists who live in heteronormative societies which demand strict adherence to traditional gender roles for the sake of survival are therefore "subject to evaluation in terms of normative conceptions of appropriate attitudes and activities" and "under pressure to prove that [they are] 'essentially'-feminine . . . despite appearances to the contrary" (West and Zimmerman 140). In other words, while the protagonists' attempts to challenge the *dystopia* may be successful, their attempts to subvert the *gender paradigm* within the dystopia ultimately fail because the genre's conventions bind them in heteronormative ways that affect the degree to which their characters are truly progressive agents of social change.

Thus, in dystopian novels, the reproduction of heteronormative gender roles appears to be an *essential* component of identity formation for characters who wish to

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develop their self-concepts in a way that will not prove threatening or subversive to the dominant power structure. If protagonists identify with performances of gender that are not strictly heteronormative, they suffer consequences that impact their overall efficacy in novels. Female protagonists are allegedly central characters fighting for dominance in worlds that are already stratified in ways that pose fundamental disadvantages to females in general (e.g. competitions of brute physical aggression in which females cannot compete fairly due to a lack of relative size and/or strength). The fact that none of these protagonists is able to transcend the limits of the gender binary without suffering consequences for challenging it in the first place is problematic. As one example, the ways in which female protagonists are allowed to be violent within dystopian novels are heavily regulated. For the protagonists to commit violence without consequence, their actions must occur within certain regulated parameters: survival against overwhelming odds, protection of loved ones, or compassion (i.e. mercy killings)—all of which are overtly feminized motivations for committing acts of violence.

Oddly, when female protagonists participate in violent interactions for reasons of vengeance, personal gain, or political subversion, they are forced into a binding moment of weakness that swiftly inhibits their agency and transforms them into "damsels in distress" who must be saved from dire circumstances—in other words, dystopian Cinderellas. This convention crucially undermines their overall legitimacy as protagonists. This "damsel in distress" motif is complicated by the absence of stable adult female role models for female protagonists to emulate in order to develop a fully

functional identity.[1] Ironically, female readers of dystopian novels face exactly the same problem in terms of identity formation when the female protagonists they consider to be role models are not actually as autonomous as they are purported to be—which is exactly what tends to occur throughout the genre.

Because most young adult dystopias are heteronormative wastelands that perpetuate the reproduction and performance of traditional gender roles, the female protagonists of these novels operate on a gendered behavioral spectrum that determines the extent to which they are capable of freely exercising agency. Their place on this spectrum is determined by their self-concepts, which are initially constructed and determined by their relationships with their mothers. Unfortunately, the mothers of female protagonists within the dystopian genre often fall short of being "healthy" role models: most are dead (or die later in the novel), depressingly weak in character (usually as the result of trauma that they never overcame), or forced to display weakness in order to avoid arousing the suspicion of the government (for their sake or their daughters'). This convention, which is usually established in the first novel of trilogies (though it may be corrected in later installments), leaves protagonists bereft of strong female role models that would otherwise guide their identity formation or cultivation of healthy interpersonal relationships. As a result of this problematic construct, "only in very few cases do [protagonists] find some way to exist eccentrically or antisocially, transcending gender

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[1] I am referring specifically to relationships formed in the *first* novels of the trilogies. Authors typically realize this gap and correct it in later novels with the formation of new interpersonal relationships. Considering the fact that these novels are typically released a year or more apart, however, adolescent readers who identify with the protagonists as they are presented in the first novels may have already internalized behaviors protagonists originally demonstrated during the period of time in which the protagonists lacked a stable role model whose behavior they could emulate.

norms" (Pratt 73).

Since they are unable to transcend gender norms, many female protagonists seem trapped in narratives that demand they find love interests before they are considered capable of achieving their full potential. One negative extension that follows the dearth of empowered protagonists in this genre is explained by Brenda O. Daly in "Laughing *With* or Laughing *At* the Young-Adult Romance," where she claims that the conclusions drawn by two ALAN Review studies which explored stereotyped gender roles in young adult romances were problematic because they tended to assume that "all romances are the same" (50). Daly cites Carol Thurston, author of *The Romance Revolution*, who posits that researchers should neither assume the homogeneity of romance nor consider the genre to be immune to social change (Daly 51). If social change is to occur in young adult dystopian fiction, however—which currently boasts a line of "dystopian romances" for girls and "dystopian fiction" for boys—then the foundational elements of the genre must change to reflect the equality that authors claim to promote by writing female protagonists in the first place.

In *The Secular Scripture, A Study of the Structure of Romance,* Northrop Frye claims that the romantic vision is the "core" of fiction; the love story is the central element of romance, and the exciting adventures on which protagonists embark are normally "a foreplay leading up to a sexual union" (24). The problem with this norm in young adult fiction is aptly identified by Daly: "But heroines, as we know—if we've read even a few formula romances—must pretend to have exceedingly small appetites, whether for food or sex" (50). If females are written as protagonists in fiction that uses

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adventures as precursors for sexual activity, then Frye is correct in his assertion that the

root of much of the resistance to the genre may be explained by the fact that a woman,

not a man, is the central character in popular romances. Notably, this means that "the

heroines of [young adult] fiction—fiction with love as its central issue—have different

developmental problems than do heroes" (Daly 51). The conscious choice of the authors

of young adult fiction to write dystopian romances that emphasize the importance of

heterosexual relationships, therefore, prevents female protagonists from making the same

choices that would be available to their male counterparts and limits the degree to which

they are allowed to exercise personal agency. The fact that these romances tend to lure

readers with the promise of empowered protagonists and fall short of fulfilling their

claims makes it easier for authors to make romance the focal point of the text rather than

the act of subverting the dystopia, even though the setting shapes the protagonists'

characters as much as their interpersonal interactions.

By appropriating locales that already exist or strongly resemble those that do

rather than imagining new ones, authors of young adult dystopian fiction combine

storytelling with social commentary. This strategy enables readers to mitigate what Cart

calls the "impact [that] comes from growing up in a violence-ridden world—the real

thing, as in the Oklahoma City bombing, the Columbine shootings, 9/11, international

terrorism, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the *imagined* but *powerfully*

visualized (and sometimes *glamorized*) violence in movies, on TV, on the internet, and in

video games. . ." (emphasis added; 33). In "Carnivalizing the Future," Kay Sambell

reinforces this concept with her declaration that dystopias "force readers to think

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carefully about where supposed 'ideals' may really lead, underlining the point that these.

. . societies will come about, unless we learn to question the authority of those in power,

however benign they may appear to be" (248). Barbara White supports this argument

with her assertion that "[t]his mixture of real life and fantasy, or genuine social events

and imaginary adventures, is appropriate to a fictional genre that delineates a turning

point in the [protagonist's] life that is of both personal, psychological import and social

significance" (qtd. in Pratt 13). In this way, dystopian literature provides a means by

which adolescents can not only identify existing sociopolitical structures and question

their legitimacy in fiction, but also apply that analysis to further their understanding of

the relationship between personal agency and the role of the government in their own

lives.

Roberta Seelinger Trites, author of *Disturbing the Universe,* claims that dystopian

fiction ". . . emerged as an aspect of postmodernism . . . as young adult novels depict

some postmodern tension between individuals and institutions" (52). This perspective is

shared by Carrie Hintz, who notes that these young adult novels incorporate dissent and

agitation in order to encourage protagonists to question the societies in which they live.

Hintz conflates utopian and dystopian fiction; these genres are admittedly easy to confuse

due to the way that dystopias come into existence.

In dystopian fiction, groups or individuals initially attempt to create utopian

societies out of a desire to foster social equilibrium and establish governments that

incorporate equality and stability as moral precepts. Unfortunately, the equality and

stability that appear to be viable from the outset never last long due to the symptoms of

the human condition and the way that power structures are affected by their presence. Since many dystopian societies are intended to be "utopias" that are predicated on equality among citizens, they are soon destabilized by individuals' or groups' desires for power. As such, the inherent challenges faced by characters within the novels seem to arise not from the *ideals* upon which these societies are founded but rather from the *execution* of those ideals by the society's progenitors. Authors of dystopian fiction therefore seem to question whether any society founded upon notions of equality can truly persist when ambitious sub-groups will always attempt to exploit the power vacuums that naturally occur in the face of an allegedly "equal" society.

In theory, the foundational tenets that reformers use to justify their establishment of a new world order make sense—especially if those tenets follow Occam's razor. If variations in appearance, personality, or ideology create conflict, then homogenizing, controlling, or otherwise segregating certain populations is the simplest course of action and therefore the best one. Unfortunately, in practice, those in power seem incapable of envisioning the dystopian extensions of what they consider to be utopias and eventually become inadvertent acolytes of John Milton's Satan: content to rule in Hell rather than serve in Heaven. Dystopias emerge when the utopias that began with good intentions descend into totalitarian nightmares; therefore, many utopian conventions also apply to dystopias because each kind of society invites similar kinds of social commentary and political criticism.

In adolescent literature, dystopian worlds are far more ubiquitous because they allow adolescents to encounter and address contemporary social problems vicariously in

formerly utopian worlds—problems that would not exist in purely utopian literature.

Therefore, while many critical articles evaluate utopian fiction, their conjectures also

apply to dystopian fiction because dystopian worlds were originally intended to be

utopian and would thus share similar sociopolitical infrastructures—before those

infrastructures collapsed. Hintz explains the purpose of these novels in the following

way: "In utopias [dystopias] written for young adults, political and social awakening is

almost always combined with a depiction of the personal problems of adolescence.

Sometimes an adolescent who feels out of place must attempt social integration within a

utopia or dystopia, or an adolescent must negotiate for power or autonomy. . ." (255).

Even Hintz's analysis refers solely to the utopia and then broadens to include its

counterpart, which suggests that some critics are beginning to acknowledge the structural

qualities that the societies share.

      Recent criticism has identified the many formulaic conventions of dystopian

literature, but critics still seem to face challenges in their attempts to pigeonhole the genre

with a simple, universal definition. For many critics, the natural starting point is the

utopia, which is coincidentally fraught with precisely the same problem:

> Indeed, as Levitas argues, there is not even any general agreement to the
>
> basis on which definition might be made. Some commentators see utopia
>
> as primarily a formal category; others are more concerned with its
>
> content—the nature of the society imagined; while others still focus on the
>
> function which utopian imagining is designed to fulfill. (Ferns 10)

Christopher S. Ferns cites critic Gary Saul Morson's definition of utopias that even he

admits is incomplete due to its exclusion of recent works that challenge the tradition of

previous utopian works. Morson claims that a work can only be considered utopian "if

and only if it satisfies each of the following criteria: (1) it was written . . . in the tradition

of previous utopian works; (2) it depicts . . . an ideal society; and (3) regarded as a whole,

it advocates . . . the realization of that society" (qtd. in Ferns 10). He then reiterates the

formal problem:

> . . . utopian fiction is an inherently hybrid genre, incorporating so many
>
> features of contiguous modes that definition inevitably becomes
>
> problematic. . . . Indeed, one of the recurrent problems in utopian
>
> fictions—its often awkward blend of the fantastic with the stolidly
>
> mimetic—may be seen as rooted in writers' own uneasy consciousness of
>
> the novel as a desirable model to emulate. (Ferns 11)

Hintz classifies utopian fiction as a hybrid genre as well:

> All utopias are hybrid genres, so it is no surprise that utopias for young
>
> adults contain at least two major elements: the developmental narrative
>
> and a consideration of political organization. . . . Readers encounter such
>
> elements as a rigorously planned society, charismatic leaders or
>
> masterminds, control of reproductive freedom, and the prioritization of
>
> collective well-being over the fate of the individual. In utopian writing for
>
> children and young adults, however, there are several unique elements.
>
> The child or young adult often becomes the central character in the utopia
>
> or dystopia. (254)

Dystopian fiction is therefore technically a sub-genre that evolved into a genre in its own right out of necessity once life began to imitate art and readers needed more opportunities to understand events like terrorist attacks that strongly mirrored those in novels such as *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood. As a result, dystopian fiction has gained the literary traction necessary to achieve the kind of mimesis previously claimed by utopian fiction. Dystopian protagonists who are pitted against dominant power structures are often restricted to finding ways of enacting change *within* existing social norms and structures since blatant anarchy often proves ineffective and is swiftly curbed by the government. This construct further limits their agency but also forces them to analyze the most effective means of destabilizing the status quo short of engineering a coup—which is exactly the kind of problem that adolescent readers face when grassroots social movements fail to curb the growing levels of corruption that they see in places with powerful political capital (i.e. Wall Street and the 99% movement).

Many of these dystopian societies are merely ghosts of their "utopian" origins (which is made clear through references to the societies they displaced) that explore political subjects with which adolescent readers are starting to become familiar through socialization (e.g. classism, ethnocentrism, war, gender disparities, politicized violence, communality, agency, etc.). Young adult readers can therefore trace parallels between these dystopias and their own societies and between the protagonists' experiences and their own. This interactive reader-response enables young adult readers to engage critically with the text by extrapolating on sociopolitical trends (e.g. government surveillance, preoccupation with physical aesthetics, or potentially dangerous

technologies) and recognize the potential significance of these realities in their own lives.

Dystopias are harbingers of a calamitous future; their sociopolitical structures are described in detail so that adolescents can form their own critiques of the societal systems as well as the "often immobilizing complexities governing the relationship between justice, state, and individual" (Braid 49). Although *many* dystopias are post-apocalyptic, it is important to note that not *all* of them are[2]. Depending on the nature of the society depicted in the novel, authors of young adult literature use apocalyptic themes to capitalize on the fractured relationship between the present and the future so that they can "advocate and critique models of community and human behavior [and focus] on children as catalysts for social change and/or reform. . ." (Bradford et al. 10). These models are important to explore because adolescents in this day and age are required to develop autonomy in a world that has become increasingly globalized, yet research suggests that this generation is more apolitical than children of the 1950s or 1980s. According to the United States Census Bureau,

> There were large declines in youth voting among all race groups and
> Hispanics in 2012. Non-Hispanic whites age 18 to 24 and 25 to 44 showed
> statistically significant voting rate decreases, as did young Hispanics 18 to
> 24 years of age. . . Voting rates increase with age: in 2012, the percentage
> of eligible adults who voted ranged from 41.2 percent for 18- to 24-year-

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[2] This distinction is important: post-apocalyptic novels focus on the mitigation of a cataclysmic disaster and the society's subsequent struggle for survival. While a post-apocalyptic society can *become* dystopian, the two are *not* analogous. Dystopian literature presents an oppressive society that has *achieved* stability and social equilibrium at the expense of freedom or some similarly essentialized facet of human nature. In dystopian societies, the society itself is already established and its ideological flaws are subject to critique.

olds, to a high of 71.9 percent for those 65 and older. ("United States

Census Bureau")

However, in "Engaging 'Apolitical' Adolescents," Melissa Ames disagrees that

voter turnout statistics provide evidence that the younger generation is apolitical,

specifically *because* adolescents (read: future voters) choose reading material which has

explicit political undercurrents. In the wake of recent natural disasters, wars, and

instances of domestic and international terrorism that leave adolescents desperate to

understand their place in such a volatile environment, authors have taken it upon

themselves to fill the void that accompanies the well-meant attempts of adults who wish

to protect the "innocence" of their children. According to Ames, "the popularity of the

young adult dystopia, which is rife with [current events, global politics, environmental

concerns, and ethics debates involving scientific invention, human trafficking, and social

equity], suggests that [adolescents are] actually quite interested in these topics. . . " (3),

though she stipulates that fiction seems to be their preferred method of approach.

Although the level of civic engagement is still relatively low among the younger

generation (e.g. voter turnout, communication with elected officials, participation in

political demonstrations, etc.), Ames supports her claim with evidence from Steven

Wolk's contention in "Reading for a Better World: Teaching for Social Responsibility

with Young Adult Literature" that civic illiteracy is the true epidemic[3].

This epidemic of civic illiteracy may be partially explained by the fact that

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[3] Wolk cited examples of adolescents who were asked a dozen questions about well-publicized current events (such as the name of the Speaker of the House or how many American troops had been killed in Iraq) and only answered 5.5 of the questions correctly.

Americans have not fought any battles on American soil in decades, so American citizens

have largely been sheltered from the horrors of war. In "War Documentary Brings Home

the Distant and Forgotten," Rene Moraida explains that "[during *Restrepo*] . . . we [the

audience] could see glimpses of war and hear what combat is like, but we could not smell

the war, or touch it, or make it real and tangible" (1). Moraida cites reporter Michael

Ollove of the *Christian Science Monitor*, who suggests that the lack of American civic

engagement might also be attributed to the fact that the horrors of the wars in

Afghanistan and Iraq were made "invisible" when the government decided not to

reinstate the draft. This invisibility grew when the Bush administration prevented the

media from allowing American citizens to witness the arrival of flag-draped coffins

bearing the bodies of American soldiers so that Americans could more fully distance

themselves from the realities and horrors of war ("War Documentary"). Since teenagers

generally rely on their parents for news and tend not to watch televised stories of disabled

soldiers who have suffered traumatic physical disfigurements and other war-related

horrors, they remain apathetic to the political process because they tend not to understand

how it "affects" them—unless it is a close friend, classmate or relative who brings the

reality of the war home with them in a more tangible way. In essence, they often remain

ignorant of issues that might otherwise prompt them to vote until they are able to

personally relate to the events that are happening elsewhere in the world.

　　　To this end, Ames's explanation of the proliferation of dystopian novels after 9/11

is valid. In her estimation, the novels mediate fictionalized scenarios by exposing

adolescents to traumatic events in a "safe" manner that provides "a sort of emotional

security blanket" for individuals in a post-9/11 world[4]. The fact that teenagers are reading

and responding to these themes "suggests that they are seeking a safe space to wrestle

with, and perhaps displace, the fears they play upon. . . fears that are set and, not

unimportantly, *resolved* amidst the comfortable narrative threats of young adult

narratives: coming of age rituals, identity struggles, romantic love triangles, and so forth"

(7). Since today's adolescents will determine the shape of tomorrow's political

institutions, young readers devour novels which speak to one of their greatest

insecurities: whether or not they are capable of enacting positive growth or change in a

country that is growing increasingly ideologically stagnant (i.e. American

exceptionalism).

This thesis will contribute to the critical conversation by drawing attention to the

antiquated construction and problematic media representation of female protagonists as

they are currently framed by young adult authors. The disparity that exists between the

abilities of male and female protagonists to sustain healthy interpersonal relationships

and commit violence must be elucidated in order to call attention to the negative impact

that such "role models" might have on the identity formation of adolescent readers—

especially since popular culture and the media tout these protagonists as strong, powerful

role models. As a case study of the young adult dystopian genre as a whole, the texts

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[4] Before the 9/11 terrorist attacks on United States soil, many adolescents (myself included; I was in seventh grade at the time) didn't have any context by which to understand the magnitude and effect of terrorism because we had no experience to judge it against. To adolescents, such attacks appeared completely "out of the blue," so to speak. We were cloaked in a cultural ignorance that touted patriotism and ethnocentrism over globalization and cultural awareness, and we were at a complete loss in terms of how to respond because we had no idea that we *could* do anything, much less what to do if we could enact any sort of change in the first place.

analyzed in this thesis include *Matched* by Allie Condie, *Delirium* by Lauren Oliver, *Uglies* by Scott Westerfield, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, and *Divergent* by Veronica Roth. In order to fully illustrate the difference in representation that exists as a function of the protagonist's gender, the aforementioned texts will be compared to two dystopian novels with male protagonists— *The Maze Runner* by James Dashner and *The Knife of Never Letting Go* by Patrick Ness. This analysis will examine whether it is possible for men and women to form truly equal partnerships in these texts as well as how the nature of those partnerships affects the agency of the female protagonists.

To better understand the nature of the genre, it is necessary to situate young adult dystopian novels with female protagonists in their proper historical context. Roberta Seelinger Trites' *Disturbing the Universe* provides a brief background of the *Bildungsroman* genre from which these novels evolved. Susanne Howe finds that, historically, *Bildungsroman* are "novels in which the protagonist comes of age as an adult," which are distinct genres in that the *Bildungsroman* "presuppose[s] a more or less conscious attempt on the part of the *hero* to integrate *his* powers, to cultivate *himself* by experience" (emphasis added; qtd. in Trites 10-11). The use of masculine pronouns in this definition is intentional; Louis F. Caton affirms that "[t]the *Bildungsroman*. . . has a perceived history of only turning the boy into the man, not the girl into the woman" (126). Similarly, Trites emphasizes that the protagonist's growth is not accidental or simply a matter of normal development; rather, it is a self-conscious quest on which the *hero* embarks to achieve independence, which makes the *Bildungsroman* an "inherently Romantic genre with an optimistic ending that affirms the protagonist's entry into

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adulthood" (11).

In Trites' estimation, the *Bildungsroman* is inherently androcentric. She criticizes the attempts of scholars such as Wilhelm Dilthey and Jerome Buckley to define the *Bildungsroman* as an inherently Romantic genre that ends with the protagonist's entry into adulthood. She claims that, in this genre, "[t]here is no place for a female protagonist. . . [which] proves to be something of a procrustean fit for someone trying to demonstrate that the *Bildungsroman* is about finding the capacity to love and to work" (12). Some critics have posited that the *Entwicklungsroman* (the "development novel") is the more accurate descriptor of novels with female protagonists because it is another genre in which protagonists experience growth but do not reach adulthood by the novel's end. Regardless of which genre these novels occupy, however, Annis Pratt identifies the more immediate, enduring problem as the way that either genre approaches the construction of female protagonists: "it seems clear that most authors conceive of growing up female as a choice between auxiliary or secondary personhood, sacrificial victimization, madness, and death" (Pratt 36). If female readers use young adult fiction as an agent of socialization, they will have a much more difficult time cultivating agency in lieu of accepting their traditional gender roles as long as the genre perpetuates antiquated conventions and the media equates minor evolutions in characterization with empowerment. This problem does not end with the novels themselves; even adolescents who do not read the narratives can be influenced by the film adaptations and the media

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hype that follows them.[5]

Maria Tatar's article in the *New Yorker* laughably pits Katniss Everdeen from *The Hunger Games* against Bella Swan from *Twilight* to determine which is the "stronger" female character. In the article, entitled "Sleeping Beauties Vs. Gonzo Girls," dystopian protagonists are "quick-witted, fleet-footed, and resolutely brave. . . . Surrounded by predators, they quickly develop survival skills; they cross boundaries, challenge property rights, and outwit all who see them as prey. . . . They're also committed to social causes and political change" (Tatar). This may be an apt description of *some* of the heroines named—like Lisbeth Salander from *Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* or Hanna from *Hanna*—but this description does not fully apply to *dystopian* protagonists, who (unlike their male counterparts) are not permitted by conventions of the genre to "victimize" their assailants or to allow their aggressive feelings to become actions so they do not run the risk of losing the reader's sympathy. For this reason, female protagonists encountered by adolescent readers may not live up to the media's hype and may therefore inadvertently impart harmful messages to young girls about how to mitigate the socially-constructed conflict between femininity and strength.

Although the topic does not fall within the primary scope of this thesis, the glaring absence of non-white or homosexual protagonists that play enduring, pivotal roles deserves critical attention in future criticism of the genre. In young adult dystopian

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[5] One of the most intriguing differences between the *Hunger Games* novel and its film adaptation is that the film actually de-emphasizes the love triangle between Katniss, Peeta, and Gale whereas the novel makes the triangle a central plot element. Arguably, the film is not handicapped by this omission, but is rather strengthened by it.

fiction, the fractured relationship between heteronormativity, white privilege, and violence is illustrated by pervasive structures that obstruct the presence and freedom of these kinds of characters. As such authorial decisions problematically imply, culturally or sexually diverse protagonists are clearly marginalized: their absence or lack of visibility means that there *are* no precedents for social norms to which non-white or homosexual protagonists can adhere or which they can observe because their very presence is considered unwelcome and/or subversive. Until non-white and homosexual protagonists are given their own adventures and their own dystopias to destabilize, readers who identify with these characters receive the blatant message that their contributions in fiction and in life are secondary to those of their white, heteronormative counterparts. This thesis does not intend to ignore issues of race, class, or sexual orientation, so this problematic construction is necessary to mention considering the current genre is a testament to the stories of protagonists who are predominantly white, heteronormative, and homogeneous.

If the goal of young adult literature is truly to provide means by which adolescents can recognize themselves in fiction and mitigate their problems based on the characters' actions, then the current underrepresentation of culturally and sexually diverse characters contributes to the continued relegation of marginalized groups to secondary personhood. To further accentuate this point, overtly homosexual characters (i.e. those who have been "outed" by authors and emerged from the proverbial closet) and culturally diverse characters often commit suicide or are killed during the course of the trilogy, which does not bode well for their inclusion as primary characters. Due to this

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odd manner of representation, it is unclear as to whether gay characters are merely included for the sake of tokenism or in a genuine attempt to demonstrate inclusion. The fact is, young adult dystopian fiction as it currently stands is a "white," heteronormative genre where diversity is as rare as "happily-ever-afters."

Naturally, one of the first places that adolescents turn to for guidance (i.e. role models) in terms of understanding their places in the future is the fictional representation of future worlds they may one day inhabit. Parents are one source of information and guidance from which adolescents gain knowledge about the world around them. However, the natural separation that occurs as adolescents grow older means that they begin to obtain the knowledge that guides their opinions from peers, the internet, and the media because those agents are more visible and prevalent in their lives. In the absence of strong role models, they use fiction to bridge the gap between what they know of the world as it is now and what it might become in the future. If empowered female protagonists are more widely represented in fiction—unlike protagonists who become "damsels in distress" in the face of danger—some readers' fear and confusion may abate when they read about *true* heroines upon whom authors do not merely force traditionally "male" characteristics like aggression and ruthlessness on a "tomboyish" figure. The contemporary *traditional* heroine in young adult dystopian fiction is passive and tends to rely on the men in her life to chaperone her adventures; an *empowered* protagonist should actively rely on her own sense of self-worth to make decisions without surrendering her sense of self at the whims of others. Until authors of young adult dystopian fiction construct protagonists whose performance of gender is not merely an adaptation of

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masculinity, their readers will fail to see that heteronormativity is currently normative but does not have to be the norm. Further, until female protagonists have the agency to make choices that have lasting consequences they actually experience in the narrative, readers may develop unrealistic ideas about consequences for their own actions and indeed feel unprepared for those that come to pass in their own lives.

CHAPTER II

"I MAY BE ACCUSED OF ARROGANCE . . ."

Mass media, publishers of young adult fiction, and even the authors of young adult novels themselves have marketed the female protagonists of young adult dystopian novels as subversive agents of change who challenge heteronormative gender roles to successfully topple totalitarian regimes. Based on this marketing, one might expect these characters to have constructed an identity, a sense of self, which rejected the limitations of socially validated gender roles and the gender binary. Gender socialization and identity formation, therefore, are two of the most significant factors in determining whether or not a dystopian female protagonist will overcome the structures that establish and enforce gender norms as well as the "modes of production" within her society. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels define the mode of production as "a definite form of expressing . . . a definite *mode of life* . . . As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and *how* they produce (emphasis added; 42). The idea that individuals essentially *are* the sum of their productive efforts is fundamentally intertwined with the relationship between the young adult novel and the conventional female role that many feminist critics have historically identified, critiqued, and condemned.

Understanding the media's role in adolescent identity formation is foundational for addressing the problematic construction of female protagonists and the conventional roles they play in young adult dystopian fiction as well as the corresponding film adaptations despite the media's claims about the protagonists' alleged "empowerment."

First, the advances in (and proliferation of) technology have ensured its growing influence on children's socialization—especially considering the reduction in time that is dedicated to familial interactions in the United States today. In *The Rediscovery of 'Ideology'* Stuart Hall argues for the distinct discursive power of media because "the media becomes part and parcel of that dialectical process of the 'production of consent'—shaping the consensus while reflecting it—which orients them within the field of force of the dominant social interests" (87). In essence, since the media simultaneously shapes and reproduces social constructs (a dubious chicken-and-egg process), it is difficult to determine whether the media reflects the gender norms internalized by consumers or whether it establishes those norms in the first place.

When female protagonists are ascribed unrealistically prodigious skills or encounter *deus ex machina*s in dire circumstances, these conventions paradoxically function at the expense of the protagonists' autonomy by relegating them to a secondary role: the "damsel in distress" who must be saved by a male love interest. Despite the media's claims to the contrary, the current construction of female protagonists in young adult dystopian fiction ultimately limits their development and autonomy in distinctly heteronormative ways and handicaps any form of "empowerment" to which they might otherwise have laid claim. Female protagonists in this genre prototypically establish heterosexual romantic relationships (which often appear in the form of love triangles), reproduce their mothers' or primary caregivers' performance of gender roles, and engage in violent interactions with antagonists—some of whom are government officials. These interactions have distinctly gendered implications, and the protagonists' abilities to

exercise agency depend on the reasons behind their use of violence and the manner in which that violence manifests. These constraints do not support their empowerment because, as protagonists, they should be able to use any of the tools at their disposal to mitigate dangerous situations without requiring constant rescue at the hands of someone more capable or "strong" than they are. If the media continues to claim that these protagonists are "empowered" (or, worse, if the authors themselves perpetuate such a claim), impressionable readers may internalize conflicting messages about gender and agency that could negatively impact their identity formation and maturing senses of self.

In "Stripping for the Wolf," Elizabeth Marshall cites the results of numerous studies which analyzed books that received Caldecott Awards or Honors. The activities and images in these books were defined as either stereotypical or atypical according to the categorization of sex roles, and they echoed the findings of studies conducted in the 1980s and 1990s which "found more female characters depicted but concluded that the portrayal of women and girls remained narrow" (259). Marshall cites the predictable results of the content analyzed within these studies:

> Boys appear as independent characters with *instrumental* and *active* roles, while girls emerge as *passive* and *dependent*. In general, content analysis hinges on a commitment to generalizability and reliability that *requires a definition of gender as a binary* made up of two stable variables, *male* and *female*. It also illustrates a liberal feminist agenda, the central concern of which revolves around "women's nature and its identity or difference from the nature of man. (emphasis added; 259)

Since the traits listed in these results are staples of every novel within the young adult dystopian genre (and can easily be tracked by any critical reader who takes the time to do so), the media's tendency to classify female protagonists of young adult dystopian novels as "empowered" demonstrates its blissful nescience to the binary that continues to define and codify gender relations to this day. Centuries before Marshall's analysis was even conceived, Mary Wollstonecraft censured these exact characteristics in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman with Strictures of Political and Moral Subjects*:

> Women subjected by ignorance to their sensations, and only taught to look for happiness in love, refine on sensual feelings, and adopt metaphysical notions respecting that passion, which lead them shamefully to neglect the *duties of life*, and frequently in the midst of these sublime refinements they pump into actual vice.
>
> These are the women who are amused by the reveries of the stupid novelists, who, knowing little of human nature, work up stale tales, and describe meretricious scenes, all detailed in a sentimental jargon, which equally tends to corrupt the taste, and draw the heart aside from its daily duties. (emphasis added; 190)

Published in 1792, Wollstonecraft's critique is as apropos today as it was in her time. Contemporary women have made substantial strides in the battle for equality, but their patterns of thought and behavior are still intrinsically linked to the feminine archetypes upon which their gender is socially constructed. In *Archetypal Patterns of Women's*

Fiction, Annis Pratt explains that Jung's archetypal images[1] are complex, fluid variables that represent "categories of particulars, which can be described in their interrelationships within a given text or a larger body of literature" (5). Jung defines archetypes as "primordial forms" that "spring from the preverbal realm of the unconscious, where they exist inchoate and indescribable until given form in consciousness (qtd. in Pratt 3). Furthermore, Jung posits that "a single archetype can be subject to a variety of perceptions, not only from culture to culture but even within a given culture or the mind of a single individual" (qtd. in Pratt 4). Given the fact that young adult dystopian fiction is supposed to be progressive from a gendered standpoint, it stands to reason that the feminine archetype on which female protagonists are modeled should be altered by the perception of the authors who attempt to use their protagonists as champions of empowerment and equality. The fact that these protagonists are progressive on the surface and conventional at their cores is especially problematic considering that these authors have essentially misrepresented their own characters to socialize impressionable readers into perpetuating the traditional archetype of "girlhood."

In "Stripping for the Wolf," Elizabeth Marshall uses a poststructural lens to theorize "girlhood" as a socially-constituted category that "invites a reading of 'the girl' in [young adult] literature as less a *static* figure than as a *contested* character whose representation engages with competing discourses of femininity" (emphasis added; 259). Once she is commodified, the female protagonist is incapable of defining her own identity beyond the socially constructed "female" qualities of beauty, chastity, and

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[1] Literary forms that derive from unconscious originals (Pratt 3).

selflessness. Unlike male protagonists, her intrinsic worth to the novel is not based on her loyalty, courage, or strength of will.

This tendency towards victimization is explored by Susanna Kaysen in her memoir, *Girl, Interrupted*; Kaysen "questions the ways in which psychological and popular discourses about adolescence attempt to press adolescent girls into positions of vulnerability" (qtd. in "Borderline Girlhoods" 129). Elizabeth Marshall, who also contributes to the conversation in "Borderline Girlhoods," states that contemporary understandings about feminine adolescence develop from historically and culturally-bound gendered pedagogies and practices that seek to classify subjects into particular modes of adolescent girlhood. These modes arose from the concept of adolescence which has typically associated "adolescent girlhoods . . . with the white, middle-class norms of femininity . . . linked to psychological risk" (118).

However, Marnina Gonick suggests that a new concept of "girlhood" may be on the horizon. In "Between 'Girl Power' and 'Reviving Ophelia,'" Gonick investigates contemporary representations of women in the media which have established competing or conflicting definitions of femininity. Gonick defines "Girl Power" as a signification of femininity that "represents a 'new girl,' assertive, dynamic, and unbound from the constraints of femininity" and posits that these "neoliberal girl subjects" are seen as "other"—a label that can certainly be applied to female dystopian protagonists if the media's hype regarding their "strength" is any indication. The definition of femininity offered in "Reviving Ophelia," conversely, presents girls as "vulnerable, passive, voiceless, and fragile" (2). The former represents the "idealized form of the self-

determining individual," while the latter reflects "an anxiety about those who are unsuccessful in producing themselves in this way." The processes of individualization in which these characters participate "direct attention from structural explanations for inequality toward explanations of personal circumstances and personality traits" (3). In young adult dystopian novels, the structures that limit female protagonists are primarily external. These structures are imposed by the author (whether or not this imposition is conscious) and they provide the foundation (and justification) for gender stratification by the society in power; they reflect the devaluation of women as secondary beings who will eventually return to their "proper sexual roles" as wives and mothers. The gender structure to which many of these characters adhere "emphasizes factors that are external to individuals, such as the organization of social institutions, including the concentration of power, the legal system, and organizational barriers that promote sexual inequality" (Eitzen 252). Since most authors of recent works of young adult dystopian fiction are both American and female (indeed, only one of the novels explored in this project was authored by a man), the structural limitations experienced by the characters in terms of their homogenized, overtly feminine traits may simply be explained by the division between domestic and public spheres of activity experienced by women within patriarchal societies that confine women to homes and hearths in order to protect them from perilous adventures. This characterization must therefore be critically examined for clues that might elucidate the tension between conflicting conceptions of femininity and also explain the reasons behind what appears to be the slow but gradual shift from constructions of vulnerable damsels to "empowered" protagonists.

These issues ultimately boil down to the way that white, middle-class individuals

are socialized over time to construct and conceive of gender. In Western cultures, the

process of gender socialization has been intrinsically linked to the concept of

heteronormativity. In the introduction of *Interrupting Heteronormativity* by Mary Queen,

Kathleen Farrell, and Nisha Gupta, heteronormativity is defined as

> . . . the processes through which social institutions and social policies
>
> reinforce the belief that human beings fall into two distinct sex/gender
>
> categories: male/man and female/woman. This belief (or ideology)
>
> produces a correlative belief that those two sexes/genders exist in order to
>
> fulfill complementary roles, i.e., that all intimate relationships ought to
>
> exist only between males/men and females/women. To describe a social
>
> institution as heteronormative means that it has visible or hidden norms,
>
> some of which are viewed as normal only for males/men and others which
>
> are seen as normal only for females/women. As a concept,
>
> heteronormativity is used to help identify the processes through which
>
> individuals who do not appear to "fit" or individuals who refuse to "fit"
>
> these norms are made invisible and silenced. (3)

Heteronormativity pervades almost every aspect of Western culture upon which the vast

majority of contemporary young adult dystopian fiction is patterned. Albert Bandura, the

psychologist who developed Social Learning Theory, suggests a potential explanation for

why the heteronormative standpoint is so readily supported and reproduced: namely, the

fact that "complex repertoires of behavior displayed by members of society are to a large

extent acquired with little or no direct tuition through observation of response patterns

exemplified by various socialization agents" (213). The citizens of dystopias like Panem

and The Society are raised by their parents and pressured by their peers to observe social

rites that carry enormous cultural significance. In this way, they are socialized to accept

barbaric or ritualistic practices (like the Hunger Games or the Match Banquet) as the

norm. They do not need to be taught complicity; to resist is to mark oneself as "other,"

and, subsequently, to ensure one's certain death and/or exile. Citizens are raised to

acknowledge and perpetuate intricate social constructs that rely on stratified social

classes, demarcated living sectors that separate different elements of the population from

one another (structurally supportive of the class system), government surveillance, and

widespread acceptance of "tradition."   It is, of course, this final element that proves so

problematic where the establishment of social constructs and gender norms in these

dystopias is concerned.

In "Femininity as Discourse," D.E. Smith asserts that "femininity is historically

and culturally situated, as we (re)create and define it through everyday interactions and

practices" (39). However, Angela Hubler challenges the concept that these "everyday

practices" (in this case, picture books or novels) socialize children and adolescents into

traditional roles with the argument that girls do not simply mimic the femininity that is

constructed for them to consume in fiction (87). Hubler makes a valid point, but she does

not account for the fact that the media has the capability to promote female protagonists

of young adult dystopian fiction as role models through powerful, culturally-embedded

practices. Impressionable adolescents with voracious literary appetites are unlikely to

question media representations of their favorite characters, especially in light of the media's powerful ability to both shape and reflect popular culture, and they in turn socialize their peers into accepting social norms that are influenced by what they read. In the end, these novels support the social construction of adolescence in which "the world expands for boys and contracts for girls. Boys enjoy new privileges reserved for men; girls endure new restrictions observed for women. Boys gain autonomy, mobility, opportunity, and power (including power over girls' sexual and reproductive lives); girls are systematically deprived of their assets" (Mensch et al. 2). Subtler, more nuanced socialization techniques—like those that are textually embedded—may not be questioned by adolescent consumers who do not think analytically about the messages their chosen forms of entertainment disseminate.

To understand the development of the empowered female protagonist, it is important to first explain why writing within the *Bildungsroman* genre presupposes a disparate representation of male and female protagonists. In *A Glossary of Literary Terms,* Abrams and Harpham state that, within the *Bildungsroman*, "the subject of these novels is the development of the protagonist's mind and character in the passage from childhood through varied experiences—and often through a spiritual crisis—into maturity; this process usually involves recognition of one's identity and role in the world" (225). The definition of the *Bildungsroman* would further seem to lend itself to the classification of young adult dystopian fiction because dystopias by their very nature enable adolescent readers to ". . . imagine a future they desire, envisioning a present that can begin to build toward that future" (Hill 102). Readers are challenged to critique

existing sociopolitical structures and critically assess potential ways to subvert calamitous futures or situations that result in a loss of innocence (Godbey 16).

Although there is an almost painful irony in her claim that the *Twilight* saga can be categorized as a "bildungsroman proper," Leisha Jones frames the *Bildungsroman* as novels of development that encompass "an individual's arduous, conflicted growth through and into a social order, initiated by loss and extrafamiliar bonding" (440). Protagonists of young adult dystopian fiction are not only required to construct their identities within established social constructs and evaluate their roles in society, but they must also experience loss and use their pain as a catalyst to commence formative journeys for self-actualization. At face value, this description would appear to lend itself to a narrative that is accessible by protagonists of either gender so long as the protagonist in question experiences opportunities for growth (to scaffold his or her passage from childhood to maturity) and develops an identity that is congruous with his or her "role" in the world. However, Penny Brown notes that "[m]ost commentators on the *Bildungsroman* refer back to the model established by Goethe . . . identifying a narrative based on the fundamental beliefs in the possibility of human perfectability and in social and historical progress which will accommodate and facilitate the physical, moral, emotional, intellectual, social, and spiritual growth of the individual" (1).

This definition is complicated by Jerome Buckley, author of *Season of Youth,* who identifies what he considers to be the primary characteristics of the *Bildungsroman* genre—namely, that the protagonist is assumed to be male, and the nature of the experiences in the novel is decidedly male-oriented. Other principal elements that he

identifies include

> an extended and sensitive treatment of childhood; a serious conflict
>
> between the protagonist and one or more representatives of the previous
>
> generation, often his father; a movement from rural or provincial society
>
> to the city; the hero's intellectual, moral, or aesthetic education; his
>
> initiation into the mysteries of love, frequently through two women, [1]
>
> one who arouses his ["lower"] sexual instincts and [2] one who appeals to
>
> the "higher" reaches of his mind and character; his concern with money,
>
> status, gentlemanliness; and his "search for a vocation and a working
>
> philosophy." (18)

Recently, theorists have criticized the lack of critical attention paid to the significance of

gender in the definition of the genre; namely, that "novels focusing on the female hero

are still excluded from the category *Bildungsroman*, while the category of fiction itself

continues to be an important paradigm conceptualizing selfhood" (qtd. in Lehleiter 24). If

the *Bildungsroman* assumes the protagonist to be male, the fact that recent narratives are

framed differently depending on the gender of the protagonist becomes more significant.

In young adult dystopian novels with female protagonists, protagonists must make the

transition from adolescence into maturity—which, unlike male protagonists, requires the

presence of male characters to act as love interests and quasi-spiritual guides (without

whom their quests would ostensibly fail). The question lies not with their development,

but with the social limitations placed on their roles.

This important distinction has roots that stretch back to the late 1700s. According

to Christine Lehleiter, the most influential text for the definition and understanding of the

Bildungsroman was established by Schlegel's *Meister* essay, which was written in 1798.

She claims that Schlegel's definition and assessment of the *Bildungsroman*

"'masculinized' the genre and prepared the framework for the exclusion of the female

protagonist from the possibility of a development toward autonomy" (Lehleiter 23).

Schlegel's definition clearly contributed to the changing definitions and descriptions of

the *Bildungsroman* which can be observed in the 1925 and 1958 editions of the *Specialist*

Lexicon of German Literary History ("Female Selfhood around 1800" 23). Whereas the

earlier versions of the Lexicon are more gender-inclusive, the 1958 version includes a

definition by Hans Heinrich Borcherdt that exclusively focuses on the male protagonist

and his maturation: "The depiction of the young man of those days who enters life at

happy dawn, searches for related souls, encounters friendship and love, struggles with the

realities of life, matures as a result of a variety of experiences, finds his identity, and is

certain about his task in the world" (qtd. in "Female Selfhood around 1800" 23). Thus

far, genre's "masculinization" has lasted for over a century—and over time, the "organic"

understanding of the self that emerged from this definition shaped the critical

understanding of the genre and led to the assumption that the female *Bildungsroman* for

the development of the autonomous female self could not be written.

This problem is explored by Lehleiter in "Inheriting the Future, Generating the

Past*," where she explains that

> Eighteenth century authors were convinced of the discursiveness of the
>
> self. It is only the nineteenth century, which invented the term

Bildungsroman, that increasingly worried about the emancipating, but also

disturbing power of such a concept of the self. From the late eighteenth

century on, we can observe the attempt to naturalize and essentialize the

self and to describe its development in organic terms—an agenda that had

negative consequences for women, because their role became limited to

sexual and reproductive qualities and they were thereby excluded from the

right to selfhood. (52)

Lehleiter argues that this exclusion is a factor of the notion of selfhood that has defined

the *Bildungsroman* genre since Schegel's *Meister* essay and suggests that it is Shlegel's

naturalization and masculinization of the self that continues to shape critical

understanding of the novel today and exclude females from the ranks of the

Bildungsroman.

When female protagonists are forced into these molds, Lehleiter warns that

"transferring traditional male models to female characters raises misleading expectations

of a positive hero and a coherent self" ("Female Selfhood around 1800" 24-25). In

essence, female protagonists in young adult dystopian novels merely mimic masculine

gender stereotypes in lieu of constructing their own identities because masculinity is

considered to be synonymous with strength, which is a stereotypically male attribute.

Problematically, this practice disseminates conflicting messages to readers about what it

means for a female to develop a "coherent self." Since "the strong girl, who often serves

as a model 'feminist,' relies primarily on white, Western, middle-class, heterosexual

notions of femininity," male heroes are insufficient models for identity formation; the

female construction and performance of gender is externally imposed by social norms that are contradistinctive from those prescribed for males (Marshall 260).

Because most of these problems hamper female protagonists' development of a "coherent self," the fact that many young adult dystopian novels with female protagonists are written in the first-person perspective is significant. In "From Margins to Mainstream," Carol Lazzaro-Weis cites the position of American critic Joanne Frye concerning this convention:

> ". . . the narrating 'I' . . . challenges the idea of a coherent feminine self that a patriarchal society attempts to impose upon women by representing the protagonist engaged in multiple roles and formulating multiple self-definitions."
>
> Frye is not arguing that a coherent self could not exist. Rather, women need to play multiple roles as part of the strategy to subvert the self imposed upon them from the outside and to move toward the development of an autonomous female identity. (14)

In *From Margins to Mainstream*, Carol Lazarro-Weis summarizes Jean Grimshaw's argument that any theory which contends "the equal validity of all perspectives and realities, with the intention of claiming that understanding is determined by gender . . . is ultimately incapable of providing the means for conceptualizing the oppression and domination of one group by another" (17). However, this criticism is invalidated under circumstances that predicate survival on self-actualization within a fully developed

dystopian patriarchy.[2] Carol Lazzaro-Weis thus diagnoses the "paradoxical limitations" of the theory that female *Bildungsroman* construct and understand their own personal realities—citing, for example, the political defeatism that occurs when protagonists collaborate publicly with the patriarchy to achieve a private success.[3]

By making this theoretical argument, however, Lazzaro-Weis fails to acknowledge the fact that identity is not constructed in a vacuum. Those female protagonists within patriarchal dystopias who lack empowered role models are required to formulate "multiple self-definitions" in order to fulfill all of the various roles demanded of them. In constructing their own realities, they are not legitimating or nullifying the perspectives or realities of those around them—they are merely negotiating their own potential to create space within structures that limit their autonomy. Brown's criticism of the *Bildungsroman* genre, therefore, is warranted. Women have different social pressures and expectations under the heteronormative constraints of patriarchal

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[2] When domination and oppression are imposed by an outside force (as one example, the agentic Erudite faction in *Divergent*), it is not gender but the dichotomy between agentic and communal traits that engenders understanding, which in this context is not gender-specific. Erudite stages a coup and implements a totalitarian regime by divesting the entire Dauntless faction of their agency using specially formulated serums that affect those who lack Divergence regardless of gender. In this case it is the aptitude for multiple thought processes and traits that engenders understanding; Tris Prior, therefore, is an example of Frye's positive assessment because she stands a better chance than many of her contemporaries (at least initially) of subverting the self that is imposed on her by her faction.

[3] An example of this public collaboration occurs in *The Hunger Games* when Katniss volunteers to take her sister Prim's place in the Hunger Games arena so that Prim does not face certain death. As the primary parental figure in Prim's life after the literal loss of their father and figurative loss of their mother, Katniss's "private success" is measured against how well she can protect her sister and keep her safe—even at the expense of her own life and autonomy. It appears to the Capitol's audience that Katniss is a brave sacrificial-lamb-turned-star-crossed-lover—which makes the Games' ratings skyrocket. However, her farcical relationship with Peeta demonstrates her willingness to play the Capitol's "Games," whether or not her performance is authentic, while working within the established rules and frameworks to fulfill her own personal agenda and return home to Prim. When she wins the Games, she achieves a "private success" by succeeding in her initial goal to keep Prim safe from harm—whether or not her public performance was authentic.

societies. Female protagonists of young adult dystopian fiction are currently unable to surmount the social constructs that prevent them from establishing autonomous self-concepts because these very constructs govern the ways that they are written into their own stories. As such, they are forced to become passive recipients of their fates—not active creators of them.

One of the chief conflicts faced by female protagonists who are establishing self-concepts is a byproduct of the clash that takes place in the formation of their self-consciousness. According to Arnold Buss, author of *Self-Consciousness and Social Anxiety,* self-consciousness comprises two distinct categories: private and public. Private self-consciousness primarily concerns one's inner thoughts and feelings, and public self-consciousness is characterized as a "general awareness of the self as a social object that has an effect on others" (qtd. in Wojslawowicz 8). Theorists argue that "some individuals are more prone to focus on the private aspects of the self, whereas others focus on public aspects. Furthermore, attention is drawn toward the aspects of the self that are the most salient *to the individual"* (emphasis added; qtd. in Wojslawowicz 7). In novels with female protagonists, the clash between the "private self" (the inner self) and the "public self" (the identity imposed by society) generally does not favor the protagonist if the author does not provide her with a foundational consciousness of self.[4] For females, however, the danger arises because what is "salient" to *them* (or their readers) may not necessarily be salient to their authors—or to their readers' societies. The distinction

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[4] Used in this context, consciousness of self is an acute sense of self-awareness. Not to be confused with "self-consciousness," which implies discomfort or nervousness with the way that one is perceived by one's peers.

between what female protagonists consider to be of personal and social importance directly impacts their formation of self-consciousness and their resistance to (or acceptance of) social constructs and gender norms.

In "Talking about 'Real Stuff,'" Sally A. Smith cites the findings of researchers who observed girls and their resistance to societal expectations and limitations; ultimately, they found two types of resistance: "(a) in girls from eight to twelve, they observed a 'political' resistance: knowing what one knows and speaking it . . . and (b) in girls entering adolescence, they observed psychological resistance," which was described as a "reluctance to acknowledge or speak of what they know" (31). The shift in resistance from the external (the willingness to assert one's knowledge in public regardless of public acceptance) to the internal (self-censorship) occurs in response to the possibility of public rejection. Two schools of thought aim to explain this critical shift: "Muted Group Theory" and "Feminist Standpoint Theory."

Kramarae defines Muted Group Theory in the following way:

> Women (and members of other subordinate groups) are not as free or as able as men to say what they wish, when and where they wish, because the words and norms for their use have been formulated by the dominant group, men. So women cannot as easily or as directly articulate their experiences as men can. Women's perceptions differ from those of men because women's subordination means they experience life differently. However, the words and norms for speaking are not generated from or fitted to women's experiences. Women are thus "muted." (55)

Feminist Standpoint Theory takes an alternative approach. Julia T. Wood delineates important theoretical differences: first, she draws a distinction between Muted Group Theory's emphasis on language and Feminist Standpoint Theory's focus on knowledge, specifically "the kind of knowledge and the ways of knowing that start from women's everyday activities and lives, which are structured by power relations" (63). Wood also argues that Muted Group Theory assumes that the likelihood of being muted is linked directly to one's status as a member of a marginalized population, whereas Feminist Standpoint Theory "requires conscious, deliberate, political struggle to understand the group(s) to which one belongs and how that group and the lives of group members have been structured by a 'partial and perverse' dominant worldview" (63).

Furthermore, the goals of each theory are disparate: whereas Muted Group Theory calls attention to the muting of women's voices and experiences and attempts to reform language so that women's experiences are fully represented from female perspectives, Feminist Standpoint Theory seeks to "develop an epistemology . . . for constructing knowledge that is based on insights arising from women's experiences and learn from knowledge that arises from women's social locations" (963). The process of constructing this knowledge need not be limited to women's experiences—in fact, the experiences of other marginalized groups prove extremely pertinent where understanding these systemic, foundational problems are concerned. In *The Souls of Black Folk,* W.E.B. Du Bois introduces the idea of the "double consciousness" that emerges in

> . . . a world which yields him [the black person] no true self-
>
> consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the

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other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this *double-consciousness*, this

sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of

measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused

contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro;

two warring souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring

ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being

torn asunder. (emphasis added; xiii)

For female protagonists, this double-consciousness is a double-edged sword. Most

women develop a "double-consciousness" because the dominant male society demands

that they be aware of the language, experiences, beliefs, and values of the dominant

society while also maintaining an awareness of their own. Female protagonists, therefore,

feel their own "two-ness"—a duality that emerges from their concurrent, conflicting roles

as heroines and damsels in distress. In *Divergent,* the amused contempt that follows Tris

through her Dauntless initiation rites as a female "Stiff" (the slang term for members of

Abnegation) is palpable; her successes are usually met with pity by those who recognize

her Divergence. As a result, she walks a fine line that demands she successfully

participate in the rites and rituals of Dauntless without revealing her aptitude for

Abnegation and Erudite lest she be discovered and surreptitiously executed by those in

power. Her very existence tips the scales by providing the impetus for social change

through her ability to think differently and therefore resist the government's control.

When taken in conjunction with other protagonists that appear in the genre, however, Tris

is not unique.

Because female protagonists of young adult dystopian novels are homogenous in terms of race, socioeconomic status, sexuality, and temperament, they are socially conditioned to react to certain stimuli in predictable ways that bear similar consequences. Critical theorists acknowledge that ". . . girls' capacity to feel anger, to be sure of their feelings and knowledge, [becomes] a liability, especially within white, middle-class contexts" as a result of their social conditioning (qtd. in S. Smith 31). Because the authors of young adult dystopian novels (with the exception of Scott Westerfield, author of *Uglies*) are generally white, middle-class women and their protagonists are typically white, middle-class, heterosexual girls (with the exception of Katniss, who lives in poverty), it makes sense that these protagonists would be conditioned to see anger as a liability and question their knowledge of or the validity of their feelings. Since female protagonists usually "grasp the arbitrary and unfair nature of power relations that structure social life and are critical of the uneven consequences of those power relations for members of different groups," their possession of a double-consciousness endangers their ability to successfully assimilate (emphasis added; Wood 64). It is in this way that their double-consciousness acts against their best interests; they have the *potential* to initiate resistance, but they are denied the social capital to actually transform power relations due to the limitations imposed by social constructs that establish hierarchies of gender and their socioeconomic classes.

These constructs are explored by Erving Goffman, who defines gender as "the culturally established correlates of sex" and gender displays as "conventionalized portrayals of these correlates" (69). Gender displays are optional performances that may

or may not be expressed to reveal clues about the underlying, fundamental dimensions of the gender binary. Gender displays require individuals to participate in interactional portrayals that convey what they intend to communicate about their sexual natures, but producing and recognizing gender displays enables individuals to reveal their *human* natures. The heteronormativity that undergirds Western society defines certain gender displays as either "masculine" or "feminine." Contemporary social constructs reinforce the idea that certain human traits or characteristics "belong" to one sex or another when, in fact, those traits are available to both sexes.

Judith Butler demonstrates how the discourse of "acts" constitutes social reality through language, gesture, and all manner of symbolic social signs in "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" (519). Citing Simone de Beauvoir's claim that "one is not born, but, rather, *becomes* a woman," Butler asserts that gender identity is not a locus of agency or a stable identity, but rather

> . . . an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted
> through a *stylized repetition of acts*. Further, gender is instituted through
> the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane
> way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various
> kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (519)

Significantly, these "gestures, movements, and enactments" constitute the *illusion* of an abiding gendered self, since the assumption that an individual identifies with any particular gender based purely on their gender displays is erroneous. While the female protagonists of young adult dystopian novels are characterized as women by their

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respective authors, some of them engage in interactional portrayals (including but not limited to clothing choices, temperaments, acquired skills, conversational patterns, etc.) that do not conform to prescribed feminine stereotypes. Based on their "stylized surface performances," therefore, readers may construe female protagonists as males who were written as females or an attempt towards facilitating literary equality rather than females who are empowered heroines by design.

Butler conceives of gender as an arbitrary relation between performative accomplishments in which both the actors and the audience come to believe and perform in the mode of belief (520). According to Butler, gender identity is not seamless, nor is it unchangeable, and the potential for gender transformation occurs in the breaking or subversive repetition of stylized, repeated acts through time. Acts that constitute gender are comparable to performative acts within theatrical contexts; whereas "theatrical performances can meet with political censorship and scathing criticism, gender performances in non-theatrical contexts are governed by more clearly punitive and regulatory social conventions" (Auslander 105). Based on Butler's theory, the potential for a cultural transformation of gender exists and may be achieved through the repetition and disruption of conventional acts that constitute meaning, especially if the actor in question is made aware of regulatory conventions and learns to reproduce them at will in the interest of self-preservation (or at the very least, underground resistance). If one's performative accomplishments are truly arbitrary and require complicity between the actor and the audience, then female protagonists of young adult dystopian novels can be considered to perform a progressive (and theoretically hegemonic) brand of femininity

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that repurposes stylized, repeated "masculine" acts to promote a gradual cultural transformation. Since the female protagonists of most young adult dystopian novels acquire skills that enable them to work *within* patriarchal frameworks for the purpose of establishing equity and balancing the social order, it makes sense (considering the snail's pace at which progress occurs) that they would learn to acknowledge and further develop those abilities in order to subvert the gender hierarchy for similar purposes and in similar contexts.

In case the protagonists' gender displays are considered too offensive or threatening by normative standards, authors include male love interests whose performances of masculinity "provide for their female counterparts models of relations with women and solutions to problems of gender relations" (Connell and Messerschmidt 838). In other words, if female protagonists are unable to be "feminine" the way that society thinks they should be, the male love interest is a plot device that re-balances the status quo and maintains equilibrium where gender norms are concerned by solving the problems they encounter that stem from gender issues—like those that arise in the midst of battle. When the female protagonist "becomes the quester, displacing the questing hero, an important convention of the romance has already undergone . . . a "revolution" . . . [and] the fact that a woman, not a man, is the central character in popular romances may account for a good deal of resistance to the genre" (Daly 51). Although young adult dystopian novels are not "billed" outright as romances—probably to entice greater numbers of male readers to the genre, as J.K. Rowling and other authors have done by choosing not to openly disclose their first names—it is nearly impossible to find a single

one of these novels that is not referred to as a "dystopian romance" on the novel's back cover or in bookstore displays. Authors who seem to have anticipated resistance to themes of female empowerment have mitigated this potential issue by incorporating a theme of martyrdom, whether it takes place in the literal form of a character death or a reassertion of gender norms that demand the protagonist sacrifice her future or her own authentic gender displays to maintain the status quo.

As Nancy Chodorow notes, ". . . engendering of men and women with particular personalities, needs, defenses, and capacities creates the condition for and contributes to the reproduction of this same division of labor" (38). Because the public sphere has historically belonged to the men who live and work there, society is masculinized and men have the power to enact social and political control by creating and enforcing sociopolitical institutions. Carol Lee Flinders argues this point with the assertion that ". . . [women don't] necessarily view themselves as 'equals under the law' at all . . . since the top administrative posts in virtually all our institutions are held by men, we live in a world that is patriarchal by default, if not by decree" (100).

To illustrate this fundamental problem and the way that it affects women in the world today, in "Working 'the Code,'" Nikki Jones examines the gender identities of inner-city girls based on the way they conduct and defend themselves in impoverished areas. Jones claims that "girls and women who defy normative conceptions of femininity and instead embrace perceived 'masculine' qualities like strength and independence are often disparagingly categorised as *unnaturally strong'* women" (emphasis added; qtd. in N. Jones 66). Jones-suggests that this phenomenon has led some theorists to investigate

the possibility of "hegemonic femininities" (66). Unfortunately, this branch of feminist theory has yet to be fully developed due to the failure of theorists to arrive at a consensus about what it means to be a "hegemonic" female. A working definition does not currently exist.

Two theorists who have attempted to define the pluralities of gender in the present hierarchy are R.W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt. Connell and Messerschmidt provide an overview of the plurality and hierarchy of masculinities which claims that "[g]ender is always relational, and patterns of masculinity are socially defined in contradistinction from some model (whether real or imaginary) of femininity" (848). However, according to Connell, there is no such thing as "hegemonic femininity." All patterns of "femininity" are covered under the overarching umbrella of "emphasized femininity," which poses obvious problems. First, it seems simplistic to lump every performance of femininity under a single heading—otherwise, "hegemonic masculinity" and "marginalized masculinity" might as well be conflated. Second, considering the fact that R.W. Connell herself is a transsexual theorist who identifies as female, the fact that her theory of masculinity essentially consolidates femininity and denies the existence of multiple femininities and their relationships to one another seems odd—especially if her gender performance is influenced by her past experiences as an individual who was born biologically male and presumably raised to perform "masculine" gender displays.

To date, it seems that only a handful of feminist theorists have even attempted to define "hegemonic femininity," despite the fact that they have not yet arrived at an all-encompassing definition. One of the only definitions is provided by Karen D. Pyke and

Denise L. Johnson in "Asian American Women and Racialized Femininities." Pyke and Johnson's definition of hegemonic femininity emerges through a comparison of the femininities of white and Asian women, and it is composed of attributes and characteristics that are culturally based:

> . . . White women are constructed as monolithically self-confident, independent, assertive, and successful—characteristics of white hegemonic femininity. That these are the same ruling traits associated with hegemonic masculinity, *albeit in a less exaggerated, feminine form,* underscores the imitative structure of hegemonic femininity. That is, the supremacy of white femininity over Asian femininity mimics hegemonic masculinity. We are not arguing that hegemonic femininity and masculinity are equivalent structures. They are not. Whereas hegemonic masculinity is a superstructure of domination, hegemonic femininity is confined to power relations *among women*. However, the two structures are interrelated with hegemonic femininity constructed to serve hegemonic masculinity, *from which it is granted legitimacy*. (emphasis added; 50-51)

Like Connell's definition of emphasized femininity, some obvious theoretical quagmires arise when this definition is examined closely.

Mimi Schippers succinctly elucidates the nature of these problems in "Recovering the Feminine Other," where she explains how hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity are related to other systems of inequality such as race, class, and ethnicity:

> . . . juxtaposing white and Asian femininities in terms of gender

hegemony and subordination poses two significant problems. First, there

is no way to identify the relationships between femininities operating

within race and ethnicity. That is, if white femininity is hegemonic

femininity and non-white femininities are subordinate, we have little

conceptual room to identify multiple femininities within race and class

groups, and more importantly, which raced and classed femininities serve

the interests of male dominance and which do not.

Second, though Pyke and Johnson suggest that hegemonic femininity

mimics hegemonic masculinity, there is no conceptual apparatus with

which to identify how *men* benefit from the relationship between white

femininity and Asian-American femininity. Although it is not difficult to

understand how the construction of white women as 'self-confident,

independent, assertive, and successful' serve white men's and women's

race and class interests, it is difficult to understand how these

constructions serve men's interests *as men*. I suggest that these culturally-

inscribed values (self-confident, independent, assertive, and successful)

are not culturally inscribed as gender traits, but instead racial/ethnic traits

and that the inequality between white women and Asian women is based

on racial hegemony, not gender hegemony. (88-89)

Schippers is incorrect in stating that these "culturally-inscribed values" are not

culturally inscribed as gender traits when the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) recognizes

them as masculine. The BSRI, a scoring instrument published by Sandra Lipsitz Bem in

1974, was originally intended as a means of facilitating empirical research on psychological androgyny but was ultimately repurposed as a tool for measuring the masculinity or femininity of respondents. Within the last twenty years, the BSRI has been widely criticized by researchers for many reasons: insufficient critical attention paid to its theoretical framework, item selection procedures, score interpretation, reliability, and cultural biases. Furthermore, Bem herself expressed concerns about the proliferation of a "scoring" instrument that she felt "inadequately prepared to develop" and which subsequently shocked her when it was widely adapted for use in research (qtd. in Hoffman and Borders 39-40). If this instrument is not legitimate, the fact that it has been widely used to substantiate articles throughout academia is alarming.

Critics have already compiled research in an effort to determine the magnitude of this theoretical quagmire. In Carole Beere's initial anthology of gender tests and measures, she found that "795 articles and 167 ERIC documents . . . used the BSRI" (Hoffman and Borders 40). Over thirty-five years have now passed since Bem created the BSRI, and in their 1998 article "Assessing the Current Validity of the Bem Sex Role Inventory," Holt and Ellis partially replicated Bem's method and found that "all of the masculine and all but two of the feminine adjectives were rated as significantly more desirable for a man or a woman . . . [which] suggests that the BSRI may still be a valid measure of gender role perceptions" (936). Holt and Ellis's replication merely corroborates the concerns of Hoffman and Borders, who remained skeptical of the BSRI's underlying theoretical framework and cautioned against its widespread use. Perhaps the most troubling implication of Holt and Ellis's findings is that sex-typing is

still prevalent and that gender norms have remained relatively stagnant since the 1970s—

or at least not as significantly as gender critics might have hoped.

The BSRI is used to assess an individual's gender role orientation, and the

following traits are merely some of those identified within in the BSRI:

> Feminine characteristics are: affectionate, cheerful, childlike,
>
> compassionate, does not use harsh language, eager to soothe hurt feelings,
>
> feminine, flatterable, gentle, gullible, loves children, loyal, sensitive to the
>
> needs of others, shy, soft-spoken, sympathetic, tender, understanding,
>
> warm, and yielding. Masculine characteristics are: acts as a leader,
>
> aggressive, ambitious, analytical, assertive, athletic, competitive, defends
>
> own beliefs, dominant, forceful, has leadership abilities, independent,
>
> individualistic, makes decisions easily, masculine, self-reliant, self-
>
> sufficient, strong-personality, willing to take a stand, and willing to take
>
> risks. (Prentice and Carranza 269-70)

By sex-typing certain traits in an effort to challenge the assumptions that previously

established the gender binary, Bem seems to be undermining her own theory. In order to

identify their role orientation and ascertain whether or not a certain trait is gendered in

the first place, individuals would need to have already internalized the social constructs

that they are supposed to be evaluating. If Bem considers the individual to be a "passive

recipient of societal forces" as opposed to a "complex being who participates in social

constructions of gender," then the implications of past and present usage of the BSRI and

its effect on current gender and identity formation theories should be questioned and

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reevaluated. Not all individuals are *passive* recipients of societal forces, nor do

individuals necessarily ascribe the same gendered connotation to the provided adjectives,

which raises important questions about what the instrument is actually measuring (qtd. in

Hoffman and Borders 43). Finally, research suggests that not only have gender constructs

changed over time, but that "[m]ore fundamental issues, particularly those related to the

BSRI's theoretical rationale and to items selection procedures, provide sufficient

evidence to warrant considerable doubt regarding the use of the BSRI in research

designed to assess masculinity and femininity" (47). Is the BSRI were proven to be

illegitimate, then numerous articles would have to be re-assessed to determine how

central the BSRI is to their claims and whether those claims are still valid in its absence.

The reliability and validity of the BSRI—or lack thereof—is of immense

significance where gender criticism is concerned, especially since it has played such an

instrumental role in shaping the way that theorists conceive of gender and social roles. In

fiction, authors generally portray women as representations of a few common archetypes:

virginal, literal or figurative orphans who are rescued by and/or eventually marry

masculine savior figures (Baecker 198), all of which are predefined "rape spaces" that

rely on a kind of "victim power" which ties women's agency to their identities as victims

(Marshall 218), or passive vessels which exist solely to perpetuate discourses that support

the status quo of heteronormativity (Gonick 11). If the BSRI is not reconfigured to reflect

the evolution of gendered traits that have changed since the 1970s, then women, real and

fictional, will continue to be chained to their "popular sexual role" simply because one of

the most widely-used gender role orientation instruments in the world reinforces rather

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than explores the gender binary. This perpetuation is problematic because it encourages the dichotomization of gendered traits and objectification of women as commodities or consolation prizes to be claimed at the end of arduous quests.

This dichotomization and objectification reproduces Laura Mulvey's concept of the "male gaze" that forces the conquering hero to evaluate the relative level of difficulty of his recently completed quest and then gauge the extent to which "his" damsel has successfully conformed to prescriptive gender stereotypes. His evaluation governs the damsel's her relative worth as a "grail object" or commodified prize. Although these stereotypes are difficult to define due to their inherently subjective nature, social psychologists designed early sex-role identity studies to explore these stereotypes according to a "trait-based measure of individual differences in the internalization of societal gender prescriptions" that ranked traits according to societal norms rather than personal opinions (Prentice and Carranza 269). If the traits are reliant upon an erroneous instrument in the first place, however, then their re-evaluation is warranted in light of these theoretical failings.

To summarize Schippers' claim, therefore, the problem with one of the primary theories of hegemonic femininity is that it is seemingly modeled on hegemonic masculinity, whose corresponding traits are validated by their place on the BSRI. This method for constructing a performance of gender raises the question of what an empowered woman is supposed to model her performance of gender on if the only existing model is legitimated by its extension from (and subordination to) masculinity in the first place. In light of the problems with Pyke and Johnson's definition, Schippers

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theorizes another definition of hegemonic femininity that she considers to have fewer conceptual failings. According to Schippers, "[h]egemonic femininity consists of the characteristics defined as womanly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (94). Clearly, some conceptual issues remain; namely, that defining a characteristic as "womanly" in the first place is subjective depending on one's race and class and merely perpetuates stereotypes as well as the gender binary. However, Schippers may be much closer to hitting the mark than any other critic or theorist when it comes to explaining the reason that female protagonists of young adult dystopian novels are subject to conventions their male counterparts do not have to endure: "pariah femininities." Schippers claims that "pariah femininities"

> . . . are deemed, not so much inferior, as *contaminating* to the relationship between masculinity and femininity. The possession of any one of these characteristics is assumed to contaminate the individual, so by having one characteristic, an individual becomes a kind of person—a lesbian, a 'slut,' a shrew or 'cock-teaser,' a bitch. Not only do these characteristics become master statuses for women who exhibit and enact them, these women are considered socially undesirable and contaminating to social life more generally. . . . *The symbolic construction of girls' sexual agency and ability and willingness to use physical violence as undesirable and deserving of sanction and social expulsion turns their potential challenge*

to male dominance into something contained and less threatening.

(emphasis added; 95)

The female protagonists of a young adult dystopian novel, therefore, acts less like a *beacon* for adolescent readers and more like a *contagion* that lurks within an empowered Trojan mare. Although Connell and Messerschmidt acknowledge that women are essential to the processes involved in constructing masculinity (albeit only in the negative sense), they suggest that hegemonic masculinity must "incorporate a more holistic understanding of the gender hierarchy, recognizing the agency of subordinated groups as much as the power of dominant groups and the mutual conditioning of gender . . . and other social dynamics" (848).

If female protagonists are supposed to have agency, however, then this hierarchical gender posturing is exactly the problem. If "hegemonic femininity" is not considered a "valid" mode of gender performance, then the only alternative for these protagonists is a construction of femininity that both mimics and remains subordinated to hegemonic masculinity. As Schippers stipulates,

> Although pariah femininities are actually the quality content of hegemonic
> masculinity enacted by women-desire for the feminine object (lesbian),
> authority (bitch), being physically violent ("badass" girl), taking charge
> and not being compliant (bitch, but also 'cock-teaser' and slut), they are
> necessarily and compulsively constructed as feminine when enacted by
> women; they are *not masculine*. (95)

Rather, they are characteristics or practices of women that are simultaneously stigmatized

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and feminized.

In order to prevent the female protagonists of young adult dystopian novels from enacting "pariah femininities," the authors never allow their protagonists' gender displays to "descend" to the point where the protagonists could be labeled as lesbians, "sluts," shrews, "cock-teasers," or bitches. If female protagonists of young adult dystopian novels do in fact enact "pariah femininities" the way they arguably appear to in every sense of Schipper's definition (as will be discussed in the next chapter), then it makes sense that their authors curtail their agency so they do not exude "too much" strength or empowerment. They cannot be as strong as the genre's hegemonic males without experiencing social backlash. Under the genre's current conventions, female protagonists cannot be hegemonic due to heteronormative constraints posed by their authors and their societies' social norms.

Without hegemonic role models who are not considered "pariahs" to help them model a foundation for their constructions of gender, female adolescent readers and female dystopian protagonists lack the recourse to autonomously construct their identities. They perpetuate the "sexual inequality [that] is itself embedded in and perpetuated by the organization of these institutions" (Chodorow 34). Since "[g]ender relations are also constituted through nondiscursive practices, including wage labor, violence, sexuality, domestic labor, and child care as well as through unreflective routinized actions," then it seems almost impossible that they would be able to achieve a fully functional construction of femininity. Both structural and cultural inequalities pose severe limitations on the manner in which they can construct that identity in the first

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place (Connell and Messerschmidt 842). Are they *supposed* to position their femininity

on the opposite side of the binary from hegemonic masculinity, or would such gender

posturing merely create a wave of female protagonists who ape the behavior of male

"heroes" to learn how to be *authentic* "heroines?"[5] The problem of gender identity is

compounded by the fact that identity formation obviously does not occur in a vacuum; if

hegemonic masculinity exists on local, regional, and global levels, as purported by

Connell and Messerschmidt, then the hybrid femininity performed by female protagonists

in various contexts is subject to similar multi-level scrutiny and must be theorized and

examined accordingly. Since the upper ranks of the gender hierarchy are already

unavailable to women who do not fit the patriarchal molds of emphasized femininity,

then there is a distinct problem with the fact that that women who are unsuccessful in

their manipulation of gender norms are subject to more stringent social criticism than

their male counterparts.

In "Doing Gender," Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman posit that gender is

interactional and is carried out by individuals in the presence of others who are oriented

to its production. The authors claim that participants in gender production deliberately

organize their activities in a way that expresses or reflects gender; this legitimates choices

made by participants that are predicated on their sex category (147). In young adult

dystopian fiction, however, these interactions are invalidated by individuals who do not

acknowledge their legitimacy. The heteronormative frameworks that support dystopias

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[5] "Hero" and "heroine" have two completely separate connotations. Men *act,* whereas women *endure,* and the success of a man's heroism is measured not by the size of the burden he shoulders but by the magnitude and significance of his heroic deeds.

only legitimate individuals who reinforce the status quo of the gender hierarchy—a convention which fundamentally handicaps female protagonists who are caught in the act of subverting the gender paradigm. To surmount this obstacle, authors of young adult dystopian novels deliberately suffuse protagonists' identities with appropriately "feminine" traits that counteract their inability to conform to stereotypical gender expectations.

As a general example, in a few of the novels that were selected for this analysis, female protagonists are faced with crises that demand they use violence in self-defense to avoid mortal peril. Authors of young adult dystopian fiction do not appear to trust readers to acknowledge the legitimacy of violent female protagonists without considering them to be "pariahs"—especially if the violence they utilize can even *potentially* be considered to have been committed in cold blood—which forces the protagonist in question to organize her subsequent activities in a way that expresses or reflects a socially constructed form of femininity. In some cases, these activities are not only illogical in light of the protagonist's immediate circumstances, but they also severely destabilize the protagonist's physical, mental, or emotional health. Often, in these instances, the author reaches down with his or her authorial hand and either transports the protagonist to safety[6] or induces a sudden blackout that necessitates her immediate rescue.

Acts that are supposed to be "empowering" are therefore often misappropriated

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[6] Sometimes without explanation, which is the case in *Divergent* when Tris screams in mourning after shooting her friend Will and she miraculously appears at the safe house soon after despite the fact that hundreds of mind-controlled, murderous soldiers are roaming the streets that could have killed her at any moment.

and caricatured by authors of young adult dystopian novels to reflect the conflict between female heteronormativity and masculinity. This problematic construct hampers the ability of authors to arrive at a literary consensus of what constitutes an "empowered" female protagonist. In an attempt to form a preliminary definition, Joanne Brown and Nancy St. Clair summarize the three-stage, rite-of-passage, initiation process that marked male "coming of age" rituals in so-called "primitive" societies: "isolation, a trial through encounters with danger that requires some sort of self-sacrifice or symbolic death and rebirth, and reunification with community accompanied by increased status" (26). At the end of the process, empowered initiates are supposed to demonstrate self-reliance, maturity, and autonomy, so the authors stress the importance of establishing a definition of "empowered girls" that distinguishes female protagonists from their male counterparts. Since female protagonists of young adult dystopian novels confront their own challenges to achieve growth, learn self-reliance, and cultivate agency, they are arguably the initiates of contemporary literature.

As initiates, female protagonists deserve to embark on quests that will challenge and prepare them to be successful and increase their status like their male counterparts rather than limit it by demanding they return to motherhood and the hearth. Brown and St. Clair offer the following definition of female "empowerment":

> . . . empowered girls in young adult fiction may find strength by valuing positive feminine characteristics instead of striving to be as competitive, assertive, and powerful as boys, even though societal norms tend to endorse those latter qualities. The definition, therefore, should include

girls whose empowerment has *more to do with gaining confidence in themselves than gaining power over others.* When they do gain power, ideally they should share it, using their sense of authority to empower others. Empowerment is not synonymous with entitlement, so *meaningful empowerment should result from purposeful action rather than innate talent or coincidental circumstances.* And because girls' stories have conventionally ended with a marriage or mating in which the female protagonist assumes a subordinate role, fiction about empowered girls must find a way to subvert that ending. (emphasis added; 27)

The authors posit two "tiers" of empowerment: a basic definition of empowered girls and a working definition of "meaningful empowerment." The latter especially is significant because it substantiates Penny Brown's observation that conventions of young adult novels with female protagonists usually leverage autonomy against the presence of exceptional talents or good fortune. However, it does seem to suggest that "meaningful empowerment" is only available to exceptional girls, which would seem antithetical to the authors' intentions by writing homogeneous characters that many girls can see as reflections of themselves and their experiences. Brown and St. Clair's definition is apt, certainly, but the nature of the young adult genre and its proclivity for initiating characters from innocence to experience are not the only reasons that "empowered girls" are so difficult to define.

In *Transforming Power: Domination, Empowerment, and Education,* Seth Kreisberg identifies the inherent problem of empowerment's root word: "power."

Kreisberg explains that power is viewed in terms of dominative relationships that

conceive of power as "*power over,*" not power *to*. According to Kreisberg, empowerment

theories maximize the power of individuals and groups, criticize paternalism, argue for

collaboration and participation, seek to equitably distribute resources, and reject modes of

relationship based on domination. He cites a theory of empowerment proposed by the

author of "Empowerment as a Purpose of Education," Mark Rosenman, who defines

individual empowerment as ". . . the development and use of mechanics which allow

control over individual and community destinies to be exercised without the oppressive

and unjust restraint of others" (qtd. in Kreisberg 21). After conceding the usefulness of

envisioning empowerment as the "process by which people come to have control over

their lives," Kreisberg explains the tension between empowerment theories and female

protagonists of young adult dystopian novels as "the failure of many empowerment

theories to substantively address the nature of relationships among people who are in the

process of becoming empowered and in the actions of empowered people" (22). At this

point in time, the adolescent girls' identity formation does not support the natural

development of empowerment because adolescents are constantly flooded by media

messages that demand they conform to limiting patriarchal roles or risk alienation. Since

female protagonists' propensity for empowerment seems to be tied to their formation of

identity and performance of gender and adolescents gain some of their knowledge of

empowerment from the protagonists they idolize, the theoretical frameworks that

influence their characterization must be evaluated.

  Female protagonists in young dystopian literature fall on a relational binary that

only allows them autonomy as long as they are chaste and unmarried. Therefore, their personhood is more likely to be called into question than that of their love interests. The fact that their personhood can be questioned at all is indicative of society's historical trend that makes women the object of male desire rather than acting subjects of their own lives. Women who are the "heroines" of Western cultural narratives are not *people*, but rather *prizes* to be won by capable suitors who must prove their *own* worthiness before they are allowed to claim what is "owed" to them for their efforts.

This sense of entitlement is reproachable, but not unprecedented. From an early age, most human beings innately understand the system of reciprocity that operates on a basis of conditional fairness. Reciprocity is a dimensional variable that is distinguished from altruism when it stems from egoistic motives; it may be positive or negative (Diekmann 489). In *Bowling Alone,* a book that demonstrates how social structures have disintegrated and people are becoming more disconnected, Robert D. Putnam suggests that the "norm of generalized reciprocity" that characterizes "efficient" societies is only reproduced by men who act without soliciting an immediate reward in the expectation that, down the road, their actions will result in some kind of karmic payoff (21). In this case, the "karmic payoff" is symbolized by the female protagonist's eventual return to her "proper sexual role" once her quest has ended. In contrast, women generally practice altruistic reciprocity, which is defined by Diekmann as: "a responder who is fully aware that . . . interactions will not continue but nevertheless returns a favor or employs a negative sanction that reduces [her] own material payoff" (492). Her actions conform to the conventions of the young adult novel and the heteronormative constraints that require

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female protagonists to practice communal traits such as selflessness and self-sacrifice. In short, even when she is the center of her own story, the female protagonist functions as the object of the male love interest's quest which is ultimately fulfilled only if she assumes the proper subservient role in accordance with his and society's concept of "true womanhood."

In *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis,* Jacques Lacan states that "[e]ach of us at any moment and at any level may be traded off. . . . The kind of exchange involved here is the exchange of individuals, that is, of those social supports which, in a different context, are known as 'subjects,' with all their supposed sacred rights to autonomy" (5). The problem is that these protagonists are not positioned as *subjects* at all; rather, they are framed as *objects* to be saved, married, and impregnated—which speaks volumes about the dubious condition of their autonomy. This assertion is confirmed by Nancy Taber, Vera Woloshyn, and Laura Lane in "'She's More Like a Guy' and 'He's More Like a Teddy Bear': Girls' Perception of Violence and Gender in *The Hunger Games.*" They write that "[a]lthough girls and women are sometimes represented as strong and capable main characters, they are, nonetheless, in the end, often tied to traditional feminine norms and representations that position them as needing rescue or confined to domestic roles" (Taber et al. 4). G.G. Bolich makes the relationship between politics and gender clear—namely, the fact that they both involve posturing for position and power (296).

When an author chooses to have a female protagonist act in a manner which conflicts with her prescribed role, the character almost always endures a "backlash

effect" in the form of social repercussions (Rudman and Glick 743). Bean and Harper examined these repercussions and found that those who do not or cannot embrace or enact gender and sexual norms experience devastating effects that result in a myriad of problems including having to endure name-calling, physical assault, and other forms of bullying or abuse from heteronormative peers. Unfortunately, these culturally accepted regulatory attempts that aim to promote assimilation with norms sometimes lead the "subversive" individual to commit suicide in order to escape the consequences of their inability to conform (13). Within the context of young adult dystopian fiction, these repercussions translate into some form of physical or psychological endangerment. Laurie A. Rudman cites a study that rated the progression of self-perceptions of women's agency over the last twenty years. The study concludes that although women are now "encouraged to become more self assertive . . . to face life's challenges rather than 'being helpless and dependent,'" they are still "discouraged from advancing their interests at the expense of others or from activities that threaten . . . the well-being of others" (49). This is demonstrated in *The Hunger Games* when Katniss is groomed to become an expert marksman and hunter by her father in order to provide for her family (which eliminates the necessity of her needing to obtain a husband or father figure to fill the provider role). When she expertly shoots an arrow at the Gamemakers to protest their inattention and ends up with the highest score of all of the tributes, her prowess as an archer paints a figurative target on her back.

Over time, these kinds of experiences perpetuate the repression of the female "voice" hypothesized by Muted Group Theory and prevent women from climbing the

patriarchal ranks into which fictional dystopian societies are typically stratified. After all, as many women have already discovered in hierarchical institutions (i.e. the military and the police force) it is "one thing to enter these highly competitive and traditionally hierarchical fields, but quite another to function freely and effectively within them" (Flinders 64). Rudman and Glick support this assertion that: ". . . women who strive for leadership positions are in a double bind: They can enact communal behaviors and be liked but not respected or enact agentic behaviors and be respected but not liked" (744). The only way for women to avoid this "backlash effect" is to temper agentic behaviors with "niceness" (i.e. the "catch more flies with honey than vinegar" approach). If they exhibit a democratic, participatory style of leadership as well as pro-social and task-oriented behaviors, they are less likely to experience the negative scrutiny that limits them in the sphere of social influence. In the dystopias constructed in young adult novels, authors constrict the agency of their female protagonists through institutionally-sanctioned heteronormative structures that allow women to be considered capable of mobility across the gender binary only if they violate communal gender norms and render themselves socially incompetent—which bears potentially dangerous consequences.

If female protagonists who can be considered hegemonically feminine are subjected to interpersonal violence, they become victims who are simultaneously held culpable for the abuse they endure (McCarry 19). This traps them in a "damned if they do, damned if they don't" framework that first forces them into direct conflict with the gender binary and then punishes them for challenging it. The performers of "pariah femininities" tend to bear the blame for what society envisions are the consequences of

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their unsanctioned gender displays (i.e. sluts are "asking for it" when they get raped because they are supposedly promiscuous, or domestic abuse victims are considered to have "provoked" their assailants). If female protagonists who perform "pariah femininities" are given the opportunity to take revenge on their victimizers, they are usually stopped before their aggression proves fatal to the other party because their anger has, at that point, spiraled beyond the extent of the control that they are supposed to exercise (and subsequently channel into guilt or forgiveness).

These "agentic behaviors" are qualified by Colin Campbell, who critiques sociologists for conflating the terms "action" and "agency" since "there is a dimension of free will, or agency, in every action" (408). Critics define agency in various ways depending on its context: agency is "the capacity for willed (voluntary) action," the "socioculturally mediated capacity to act," "the volitional, purposive, and intentional aspects of human activity," and/or "the power of actors to operate independently of the determining constraints of social structure" (qtd. in Campbell 408). Campbell states that, like definitions of empowerment, these definitions are linked by the general idea of power, which he defines as "the ability to achieve an effect, or outcome" (409). Communal behaviors (which exist on a scale that ranges from quarrelsome to agreeable characteristics) are intersected by a spectrum that codifies agentic behaviors (from dominant to submissive); from this standpoint, "on the one hand, agency can simply refer to the power possessed by individuals which allows them to engage in actions [which Campbell calls 'type 1' usage], while on the other it can refer to the fact that individuals may themselves, on occasions, act as agents [type 2]" (409).

According to Campbell, these types differ due to the fact that individuals whose actions possess subjective meaning and undertake action in "the pure Weberian sense of voluntary willed conduct" (according to German sociologist, philosopher and political economist Max Weber) possess the type of agency that refers to qualities such as "intentionality, voluntarism, choice, and autonomy"; however, Campbell stipulates that individuals who engage in performing self-conscious, willed actions do not necessarily function as agents in the sense of "acting independently of social structure" or engendering a significant social change. According to Campbell, "in type 2 conceptions of agency . . . the actions themselves are judged to possess [agentic] qualities, [whereas] when agency is used in the type 1 sense, it merely implies that these qualities apply to the means through which action is accomplished" (410). However, some theorists claim that these definitions still fail to place agency within a fully-developed theoretical framework.

Emirbayer and Mische cite the failure of theorists to distinguish agency as an analytical category in its own right—with "distinctive theoretical dimensions and temporally variable social manifestations" (963). According to the authors,

> The primary locus of agency for the iterational dimension . . . lies in the *schematization* of social experience. It is manifested in actors' abilities to recall, to select, and to appropriately apply the more or less tacit and taken-for-granted schemas of action that they have developed through past interactions. Schemas are corporeal and affective as well as cognitive patterns; they consist in the interpenetration of mental categories, embodied practices, and social organization. Moreover, they constitute

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temporal as well as relational patterns, recursively implemented in social

life (Giddens 1984). The agentic dimension lies in *how actors selectively*

recognize, locate, and implement such schemas in their ongoing and

situated transactions. While this may take place at a low level of conscious

reflection, it still requires attention and engagement on the part of actors in

order to narrow the possibilities for action within particular temporal-

relational contexts. (Emirbayer and Mische 975)

Emirbayer and Mische analytically situate the full complexity of the agentic dimension of

social action within the flow of time. Their reconceptualization of human agency as a

"temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past . . . but also

oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities and toward

the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the

contingency of the moment)" is incredibly useful in pinning down such a "slippery"

concept (963). People tend to change their actions upon self-reflection; therefore, the

ways that people understand their relationships to the past, present and future shape their

actions and change their conceptions of agentic possibility (Emirbayer and Mische 973).

The critical components of agency, as identified by the authors, are "intersubjectivity,

social interaction, and communication. . . . [A]gency is always a dialogical process by

and through which actors immersed in temporal passage engage with others within

collectively organized contexts of action" (973-74).

Since dystopian systems of paternalistic inequality reinforce traditional gender

relations, female dystopian protagonists must adhere to prescriptive stereotypes that

subordinate them to men and thus or in effect "counteract societal changes that threaten

male dominance" (Rudman and Glick 745). So long as these patriarchal frameworks

remain in place, female protagonists are bound by heteronormative constraints that

dictate their reactions to various stimuli (such as facial expressions) and constrict their

agency. By preventing protagonists from "selectively recognizing, locating, and

implementing" schemas that legitimate the "impenetration of social organizations," the

conventions of dystopian fiction only reinforce the inherent danger that females face in

their attempts to disrupt or subvert the status quo and seek a resolution that encourages

positive growth.

Echoing Annis Pratt, Penny Brown, author of *The Poison at the Source*, claims

that response patterns observed by the female protagonist only enables her to achieve

narrative resolution in one of a few ways according to prescribed modes of feminine

behavior: withdrawal, surrender (of her life or her sense of self), madness, or death (7).

Since novels are socialization agents, these prescribed manners of resolution reinforce

socially constructed "repertoires of behavior" that undermine the statuses and roles of

women in patriarchal societies. Where female protagonists of young adult dystopian

novels are concerned, heteronormative stereotypes should ideally be rendered obsolete by

protagonists' reappropriation of gender norms; however, they are not, which

problematizes the pervasive presence of these modes of resolution.

Despite the fact that authors of young adult dystopian fiction *seem* determined to

construct gender-bending, empowered female protagonists for a new generation of avid

readers, an important stipulation of the protagonists' success is noteworthy: "those

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characters who are able to overcome obstacles and achieve a degree of autonomy and

success in their chosen way of life are either exceptional in their talents or more than

credibly fortunate in their opportunities" (Brown 4). This convention ominously suggests

that autonomy and success are not, in fact, viable options for all female protagonists.

How are female protagonists supposed to measure their "success" if all of their victories

can be attributed to "exceptional" talents (which typically function as *deus ex machina*s

on their own) or advantageous accidents?[7] While not all female protagonists may *need* to

be autonomous because their characters are *content* with conforming to social norms,

those female protagonists who *do* wish to be autonomous and successful should at least

be given the opportunity without being subject to limitations that are not experienced by

their male counterparts.

In the event that the tension between female protagonists and gender norms stems

from an inappropriately conceptualized version of femininity, it is important to examine

the consequences for those female protagonists who unsuccessfully challenge the gender

paradigm. Diann L. Baecker frames *Island of the Blue Dolphins* as an archetypal

narrative in which a young, virgin, orphan girl lives in a patriarchal world that values

female virginity above all else; by the end of the narrative, she must succumb to one of

two extremes: paternalistic rescue or violent rape (195). Baecker submits that, contrary to

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[7] In *The Knife of Never Letting Go,* the male protagonist, Todd, fights for survival as one of the antagonists attempts to drown him. While most female protagonists in the same kind of situation are rescued by their male love interests to avoid appearing too agentic, Todd finds a rock in the water and beats his attacker into submission. Although finding the rock could be considered advantageous, rocks are naturally found in riverbeds. Most female protagonists tend to be rescued in absurd ways (i.e. a stampeding herd of cattle that was let in by the male love interest, in *Delirium*) or under coincidental circumstances (i.e. during the middle of the night when the rest of the compound is asleep, in *Divergent*).

common literary tropes, the romance heroine is not always literally orphaned—in some cases, she is merely separated from her family and introduced to the reader in terms of her sexual availability, however romantically or chastely portrayed (198). But in this archetype, "there is always an emphasis on their [her] beauty, availability, or vulnerability, and there is always a marriage or a rescue at the end" to celebrate or signify the heroine's return to her "proper sexual role" (Baecker 198). Disaster ensues when characters experience "role conflict," which occurs when "persons of a particular . . . category can 'see' quite clearly that they are out of place and that if they were not there [out of place], their current troubles would not exist" (West and Zimmerman 140). This conflict often occurs internally; some protagonists are content with the status quo only until others elucidate the reality of their situations and force them into a conflict that fundamentally alters the core of their identity. To illustrate this problematic construction, female protagonists of contemporary young adult dystopian fiction share similarities with the tragic heroines of Romantic works written and produced in the early nineteenth century. Although one might hope that feminine archetypes would have evolved over the course of the last century, contemporary literature does not suggest this to be the case.

Although some textually embedded socialization is to be expected of young adult fiction, an unfortunate side-effect of the dystopian genre's recent popularity is the tendency of authors to construct "romance heroines" who fail to transcend stereotypical gender norms and undermine their own autonomy by embroiling themselves in romantic intrigues. Female protagonists, when forced to reproduce characteristics of the archetypal romance heroine, are unable to challenge the gender binary so long as their thoughts,

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feelings, actions, are motivated by subplots (or central plots) that emphasize infatuation and desire as central themes. Tracie Amend claims that ". . . female characters are unable to achieve what their male counterparts accomplish—that is, their desire prohibits them from adhering to civic duties. More specifically, the women are unable and unwilling to deny their *internal selves*—they choose destructive desire over an enlightened restoration of order" (emphasis added; 255). In spite of the massive temporal gap between early nineteenth century fiction and female protagonists of contemporary young adult novels, authors of contemporary young adult dystopian fiction seem to have bought in to the idea that "destructive desire" still fundamentally comprises the female protagonist's "internal self."

Finding a single young adult dystopian novel with a female protagonist on bookshelves today that does not incorporate romance or desire as a central theme is all but impossible. In each of these novels, the protagonist's budding romance typically precludes her development of autonomy. An example of another construct that has not progressed within the last century, increasing numbers of female protagonists have eschewed relationships with their families and friends in favor of pursuing *romantic* relationships. This is not to say that their families should always take precedence over their love lives (which is unrealistic considering the social norms typical of this age group), or that relationships are antithetical to personal growth; it is merely a comment on the tendency of female protagonists to ignore their friends and family to cultivate budding relationships that may or may not succeed in the long run. In light of these conventions, impressionable adolescents may find it difficult to differentiate between the

types of relationships that should be honored and those that are established with the primary intent of upholding the patriarchy by relegating females to their "proper [or gender] sexual roles."

These potentially damaging messages are reinforced by the plethora of stories featuring star-crossed lovers, a popular theme that reaffirms foundational societal beliefs. Romance novels "(re)produce the normalcy and desirability of the traditional view of female fulfillment achieved through relationship-centered roles of partner and caregiver." Their role in reproducing traditional views would be less insidious if young adult dystopian novels were blatantly marketed as romance novels in a manner more visible than sentence-long blurbs on the novels' back covers (Johnson 60). The proliferation of traditional gender roles and its problematic effect on adolescent identity formation is noted by Robert Probst, who asserts that ". . . [t]he preoccupation with the self that is characteristic of adolescents makes them particularly receptive to fiction. They tend to identify strongly with a story's characters, share their dilemmas, and participate in the choices that the characters make, keenly aware of the values that their actions imply" (qtd. in Brown and St. Clair 9).

While not all adolescent readers accept these conventions at face value, in his seminal essay "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular,'" Stuart Hall describes one obstruction that hinders adolescents from resisting or challenging mainstream social norms: the fact that popular media "by repetition and selection . . . [imposes] and [implants] such definitions of ourselves [to] fit more easily [into] the descriptions of the dominant or preferred culture" (232-233). If female and/or male readers do not possess

critical thinking skills that enable them to identify these implanted definitions and decide to what extent they constitute valid performances of femininity, they may internalize the antiquated, heteronormative social constructs demonstrated by characters in an effort to assimilate into the dominant culture. As Brown and St. Clair correctly state, the passive girls who have dominated contemporary young adult fiction send a distinct message that communicates which performances of femininity are rewarded by society and which are condemned.

To illustrate this point, J.J. Halberstam acknowledges the fact that "the image of the tomboy can be tolerated only within a narrative of blossoming womanhood; within such a narrative, tomboyism represents a resistance to adulthood itself rather than to adult femininity" (1939). In fact, the concept of female masculinity appears functionally similar to Freud's theory of penis envy. Halberstam explains that female masculinity tends to be conceived by both hetero- and homo-normative societies as a "pathological sign of misidentification and maladjustment, as a longing to be and to have a power that is just out of reach" (qtd. in Halberstam 1739). Since all of the dystopias under discussion include populations which are punished for failing to maintain the status quo, a female protagonist with masculine traits who operates within a heteronormative gender hierarchy is arguably at risk of meeting the same fate as an oppositional political extremist: imprisonment, exile, or death. Dystopian protagonists who operate within the parameters of the reproduction of mothering model their performance of gender on that which they see demonstrated by their primary caregivers—which, in the case of most female protagonists, is usually a female to whom they are related. If the female in question is

either agentic herself (in the case of Natalie Prior of Divergent), separated physically

from the protagonist (in the case of Ellie in *Uglies* and Annabel "Bee" Gilles Haloway[8] in

Delirium) or too weak to function (in the case of Katniss's mother in *The Hunger*

Games), Primary caregivers therefore are an essential factor in protagonists' formations

of identity.

In *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender,*

Nancy Chodorow critiques the Freudian theory of gender and asserts that a person's

identity or sense of self derives from his or her earliest relational experiences. Of the

twofold cores cited by Chodorow that comprise the basis of a person's identity formation,

the first core derives from "the infant's inner sensations and emotions" around which

infants develop a "central . . . point of the 'feeling of self' around which a 'sense of

identity' [is] established" (67), and the second originates through "demarcation from the

object world" which establishes identity formation as a relational process (68). The

nature of the early infant-mother relationship profoundly affects an infant's sense of self,

its later object-relationships, and his or her feelings about its mother and about women in

general (Chodorow 77). When female protagonists of dystopian novels begin the

relational process of identity formation, the extent to which they are actually allowed to

play an active role in their own stories is impacted by the quality of the relationships they

form and sustain with their primary caregivers. To this end, the parenting styles of each

protagonist's primary caregiver(s) bear psychosocial consequences on the protagonist's

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[8] The name of Lena's mother is unknown until the second installment of the trilogy. In the first novel, she only appears in the protagonist's memories because she is believed to be dead, so her identity is initially as static as Katniss's mother's.

sense of self.

According to Chodorow, the development of a protagonist's sense of self or "self-identity" is based on consistent patterns of interaction that are cultivated when parents act as an infant's "external ego," serving both to mediate and provide its total environment[9] (58). This theory is predicated on Freud's clinical account that *"all* elements of mental life are affected by relational experience" (Chodorow 49), although he claims that the ego is primarily affected. Object-relations theorists argue that the child's social relational experience from earliest infancy is determinant of psychological growth and personality formation (Chodorow 47). In short, without a caregiving figure to guide the formation of its self-concept, an infant may not receive the care required for the development of a "true self" and may ultimately learn to reproduce subconscious operations which limit any possibility of forming, sustaining, and continuing to engender positive interpersonal relationships.

As a general illustration, if female protagonists have close relationships with their mothers or primary caregivers, they are likely to internalize attitudes of empowerment that will strengthen their senses of self and reinforce their autonomy later in the novel. Protagonists who are estranged from their mothers and/or caregivers, conversely, are often more easily misled by subversive individuals who create their own identities at the expense of the protagonist's autonomy and tend to have greater numbers of volatile or strained interpersonal relationships. If the protagonist's mother is deceased and she is

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[9] The unnoticeable, unconscious operations that people use in their psychological experience of others as defenses to cope with lack of control, ambivalence, anxiety, loss, feelings of dependence, helplessness, and envy (Chodorow 42).

forced to live with outside caregivers or extended family, her identity formation is proportionally affected by the amount of respect she develops for them and the extent to which they care for her as their own.

The process of identity formation occurs in relation to the structures that dictate society's foundational mode of production—which, in Western cultures, is heavily influenced by the sexualized division of labor and the media's commodification of women. Chodorow states that "all sex-gender systems have been male-dominated. Moreover, every sex-gender society has organized society around two and only two genders, a sexual division of labor that always includes women's mothering, and heterosexual marriage. . . .[K]inship and family organization form the locus and core of any society's sex-gender system" (9). According to Chodorow, the central and defining feature of the social organization of gender is women's mothering—society's tendency to assign the mothering role to women purely based on biological imperatives—a fact which is implicated in the construction and reconstruction of male dominance itself (9).

It stands to reason, therefore, if girls reproduce the mothering relationships that they form early in life, as Chodorow claims,then the relationship they have with their primary caregivers and the extent to which those caregivers assist in their identity formation is one of the primary determining factors in whether or not female protagonists will successfully challenge gender norms during adolescence. Each protagonist's interpretation of the prescriptive, performative aspects mandated by her gender role, therefore, is ultimately what defines her personhood and governs her fate. These golden rinterpretations are constructed in accordance with Butler's theory of gender

performance, Bolich's stance on gender posturing, Bem's Sex Role Inventory, Rudman and Glick's "backlash effect," and other social constructs that conclusively determine what an "appropriate" gender display entails.

Adolescent readers are encouraged to adhere to these norms in response to the way that the media frames these protagonists as role models. Unfortunately, if female protagonists are not the empowered role models that they are purported to be, emulation may handicap the readers' identity formation processes and ultimately destabilize their senses of self. Carol Lee Flinders frames the mother-daughter relationship in a way that makes it seem analogous to the one that exists between authors and their female protagonists: "The paradox is one that every mother of a girl confronts: You want her to be fearless, take risks, make her own choices. But as soon as she steps out of the safety zone marked out by convention for 'good girls,' she is genuinely and terribly imperiled" (221). "Good girls" reproduce qualities conducive to their future status as mothers, and their reproduction of mothering perpetuates the sexual division of labor that dystopias reproduce as a natural consequence of their accepted modes of production. As Penny Brown notes, "[t]he [successful formation of the] mother/daughter relationship . . . becomes a significant factor in many novels and love relationships are likely to loom larger and have greater impact on the female because of deeply entrenched role expectations" (7).

In "Gender in Twentieth Century Children's Books," the authors posit the danger of this particular convention: "...the underlying message conveyed to children is that women and girls occupy a less central role in society than do

men or boys” (McCabe et al. 201). The existence of romance as a staple of the

genre that permeates the core of each young adult dystopian novel with a female

protagonist is problematized by the fact that female protagonists then prioritize their

relationships over the process of discovering who they are as individuals. Worse, many of

them actually run the risk of becoming *codependent* rather than *independent.* Annis Pratt

notes that “[women’s] quests are being thwarted on every side by what [they] are told to

be and do, which is different from what men are told to be and do: when [they] seek an

identity based on human personhood rather than on gender, [they] stumble about in a

landscape whose signposts indicate retreats from, rather than ways to, adulthood” (6). As

long as female protagonists set out on courses that lead back to their “proper sexual

roles,” they are allowed to grow towards adulthood because, eventually, womanhood will

become motherhood, which is the eventual goal—one that still requires a strong *father*

for the family unit to function, if the stable families in the novels are any indication.

Otherwise, protagonists must be escorted along the road to “personhood” by *de facto*

male love interests, whose presence suggests that the female protagonists may consider

companionship to be a prerequisite for validation of their worth.

  The dangers of disseminating these messages can be illustrated by the Public

Broadcasting System’s groundbreaking new documentary, *Generation Like*, in which a

Hunger Games fan named Kaylee Lynch “likes *The Hunger Games*—a *lot.*” Her desire to

win *The Hunger Games* Ultimate Fan Challenge is motivated by the franchise’s website,

which encourages teenage fans to compete with one another by sharing content on social

media sites in exchange for virtual prizes. Because her achievements on Twitter and the

copious hours she has spent online have catapulted her into the 99th percentile of *Hunger Games* fans (according to the official website), her status as one of the "top fans" has "verified [her] centrality" and reinforced both her senses of self and of purpose. Even more troubling is the existence of social media marketing agencies that act as content supervisors and creators for celebrities: when Lynch tweeted that her "only goal in life [was] to get you [Jack Quaid, the actor who plays Marvel in the film adaptation of *The Hunger Games*] to tweet me back," she admitted that the actor's tweeted response motivated her to continue sharing content related to the film (PBS)—content that would undoubtedly generate advertising revenue with no other personal reward than a website ranking that could plummet at almost any moment and severely destabilize her sense of self. This possibility would likely not have crossed Lynch's mind, but has significant implications for the inherent fragility of contemporary adolescent identity formation.

If authors do not write characters into epilogues which emphasize their *personal* achievements and provide the "third-person omniscient" window into the characters' heads that Skinner, McCord, and Cart all promote as the primary contextualizing force of literature, then readers will continue to believe that traumatized protagonists who only escape dystopias to get married, have babies, and live happily ever after (i.e. "return to their proper sexual role") are the norm. So long as protagonists are kept blissfully distracted by love interests, they remain ignorant of the oppressive structures that maintain the patriarchal status quo and prevent them from successfully and independently mitigating conflicts against other individuals, nature, or within themselves.

Interestingly, female protagonists are often incapable of mitigating their own

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conflicts and "rescuing" themselves from dangerous situations not because they are incompetent, but because the agency that they would be required to use in the interest of autonomous self-preservation undermines the status quo upheld by the gender binary. As a result of this convention, they are only moderately able to circumvent or challenge the binary without experiencing the "backlash effect." If they encounter a situation which demands the use of violence for a reason that is incompatible with the social constructs dictating appropriate gender displays for their sex category, they are allowed to challenge the paradigm as long as they are facing mortal peril and/or lacking support from anyone who might be able to intervene defensively on their behalf.

This antiquated convention is as critically important as it is problematic. *Male* protagonists, who are ascribed dominant qualities like strength and power in accordance with heteronormative stereotypes, are *invited* to challenge totalitarian institutions and dystopian ideals because their position on the gender binary grants them the ability to utilize agency, reflect on their temporal and spatial relationships to prior, current, and future events, and ultimately re-stabilize their respective worlds by working outside of or in conjunction with the dystopia's conceptual frameworks to instigate social change.

Female protagonists, however, are at a precarious disadvantage: in challenging the binary, they simultaneously challenge their subordinated position on the hierarchy at the same time that they attempt to disrupt the institutional constructs that subordinate them in the first place. Their position is precarious namely because they lack the institutional weapons available to their opponents (like the "masculine" traits as named by the BSRI), which forces them to develop new strategies for subversion that work

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within (rather than outside) existing frameworks and require that they conform to existing

gender norms in order to influence any kind of widespread social change. This is the

problem to which Lazzaro-Weis referred when she addressed the tendency of female

protagonists to collaborate publicly with the patriarchy in order to achieve a private

success. This collaboration does not occur as a matter of happenstance; as Rudman and

Glick state, "men's dependence on women (e.g. for sex, sexual reproduction,

homemaking, and child care) creates incentives for men to ensure that women remain

deferent, compliant, and willing to enact subordinate roles" (744). By remaining

subordinated to men, female protagonists almost never experience opportunities to

demonstrate their competence without the presence of a male character who almost

always intervenes (or at least attempts to) before she can prove herself capable of

accomplishing a task that requires prescriptive masculine behaviors.

In young adult dystopian novels, male characters are ascribed the freedom to

thumb their noses at the leaders of the patriarchy due to the privileges ascribed by their

gender (i.e. their superiority on the gender binary). Females, however—by virtue of the

same constructs that elicit backlash for violating prescriptions for feminine niceness—

risk appearing *socially* deficient for engaging in behaviors that would make them appear

competent, ambitious, and competitive at the expense of others (Rudman and Glick 758).

Since all of the dystopias are pervaded by structural inequalities that mandate the survival

of the fittest at the expense of others, many female protagonists in young adult dystopias

cannot follow Rudman and Glick's suggestion to "avoid social dominance" and "display

communality" by tempering their dominance with "niceness" if they hope to survive.

The constructs that stabilize gender hierarchies are explored in greater depth by

Harry C. Triandis in *Individualism and Collectivism*. He states that individualism and

collectivism "[can] best be reflected in four patterns: horizontal individualism, vertical

individualism, horizontal collectivism, and vertical collectivism. Horizontal refers to an

emphasis on 'equality,' whereas vertical implies an emphasis on 'hierarchy'" (qtd. in

Laca et al. 4). Dystopian states are typically proponents of vertical collectivism: their

adherents see themselves as one aspect of an "in-group" (i.e. as long as the citizens in

Divergent belong to a faction, they have social capital, unlike the Factionless) but

recognize the hierarchical foundation that grants some individuals a higher status than

others. When protagonists maintain the status quo and reproduce gender norms, this

cultural pattern is reproduced. Most of these dystopias are not structured overtly in terms

of gender but rather some other hierarchy (class, occupation, genetics); the hierarchy of

gender is assumed.

If the protagonist is forced into direct conflict with the state in a way that

threatens her agency and/or her life and placed in situations that isolate her from the

collectivist hub in which she was raised, she is forced to autonomously construct her own

identity. In Triandis's terms, the protagonist develops a kind of vertical individualism "in

which the autonomous self is postulated, but individuals see each other as different, and

inequality is expected . . . Competition is an important aspect of this pattern" (qtd. in

Laca et al 4). Since competition is explicitly addressed by Rudman and Glick as a

situation that tends to negatively impact females in heteronormative societies, Triandis's

claim clearly affects the ways that the protagonists address violence and develop their

self-concepts. Female protagonists who develop vertical individualism would theoretically support Nikki Jones' assertion that violence is merely means to an end rather than an integral facet of their identity (74), whereas those who are vertically collectivist may internalize violence as an integral facet of their identity. Here, the stakes are higher should they fail to successfully integrate within the dystopia or achieve a more optimal position within the hierarchy.

Social Learning Theory also posits that the "complex repertoires of behavior" acquired through observation extends to the use of violence toward others, which is considered a learned behavior (Tyler and Melander 1359). Despite the fact that female protagonists would obviously have to have either witnessed or experienced violence firsthand in order to learn how to wield it either offensively or defensively, their use of violence is problematized because their actions are not legitimated by the genre's conventions unless their motivations for using violence adhere to those which fit with their prescribed gender roles. Unless they strategically use violence in a way that "expresses or reflects [their emphasized femininity]" pursuant to West and Zimmerman's assertions (which would be ironic under heteronormative constraints), readers would supposedly fail to sympathize with their plight as *pro*tagonists. Since they *are* limited by heteronormative constraints, however, aggressive behaviors are *allowed* by the genre's conventions but are severely limited in scope and are wholly situational. They risk facing severe consequences for operating outside of the established parameters of their prescriptive gender roles.

These limitations are almost solely dependent on the "status role" of female

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protagonists, particularly in relation to their power over others (or lack thereof). In "Communal and Agentic Behaviour in Response to Facial Emotion Expressions," the authors found that "participants reported quarrelsomeness during social interactions in which they felt criticized by others in a lower status role, but submissiveness when they felt criticized by others in a higher status role" (174). If female protagonists are already limited by communal behaviors, they may not consider themselves to be in a "higher status role" in comparison to their peers because they have either been raised by submissive caregivers or socialized within heteronormative frameworks that assume their submission as a natural facet of their sex role. As a result, regardless of whether or not authors of young adult dystopian fiction grant them lithe frames and aggressive dispositions, female protagonists' combative skills may take longer to master if their temperaments are not innately confrontational. If they have not learned to react with aggression in the face of anger, they are outmatched against their habitually quarrelsome peers, many of whom are paired with the protagonists for fighting or training purposes. Ironically, protagonists who *do* react to anger with aggression are prone to experiencing the "backlash effect" with greater frequency and severity than their more mild-mannered peers.

Some critics might counter that adolescents are more thoroughly saturated with the media and social networking platforms than with literature in an attempt to minimize its impact, which would undermine the gravity of the relationship between fiction and on identity formation. However, the climbing number of young adult dystopian novels at or near the top of best seller lists creates a process that, for many adolescents, comes full

circle even if the novels are not their first introductions to the narratives. Many young

adult dystopian novels have been optioned for film or television adaptations, and the

releases are preceded by talk show appearances, magazine articles, news stories from

prominent news outlets as well as gossip columns, and rising stardom for the actors. The

films create a wave of interest, and readers are in turn enticed to read the narratives that

they or their peers see brought to life on screen. While these adaptations are intended to

maximize profits for the film and television industries, they also reflect the growing

interest in the genre as supported by millions of dollars in sales and evolving, expanded

definitions of gender.

CHAPTER III

". . . STILL I MUST DECLARE WHAT I FIRMLY BELIEVE. . ."

The most ubiquitous element of young adult dystopian fiction is present in all of the

novels under discussion in this project: totalitarian governments that employ Panopticism

as a means of exercising power in its most efficient form. The degree to which each of

these governments uses violence as a form of social justice varies significantly. Christina

Braid, author of "Contemplating and Contesting Violence in Dystopia," argues that

> [d]ystopia asks many . . . questions, warning us about the kinds of *violence*
>
> *disguised as justice*; such phenomena, dystopia advises, prevent solutions
>
> and/or opposition to the exponential rise of widespread, seen or unseen,
>
> crimes against humanity because of *the hidden way such violence operates*
>
> *upon the individual through both the individual and the state.* (emphasis
>
> added; 50)

The "hidden way" that violence operates is both subtle and insidious, and its relative

invisibility can be partially attributed to the fact that dystopian governments selectively

preserve their histories for citizens.

This strategy, which encourages a collective loss of memory that spans

generations after the historical events have been altered, seems to have arisen from the

eighteenth-century philosophies of Jeremy Bentham, a British legal reformer who is

widely credited as the primary founder of Utilitarian thought. In December of 1786, he

wrote to a friend about the "efficacy which this simple and seemingly obvious

contrivance promises to be the business of schools, manufactories, Prisons, and even

Hospitals, if one may venture to say so to an adept" (qtd. in Steadman 2). This "contrivance," now known as the Panopticon, was intended by Bentham to be a "technological fix" for society. He claimed that, through its implementation, "morals [would be] reformed—health preserved—industry invigorated—instruction diffused—public burthens lightened—economy seated, as it were, upon a rock" (Dobson and Fisher 308). This structure exists in all of the novels in this project in one form or another, and is present in numerous other young adult dystopian novels as well.

Panopticism was explored more fully by Michel Foucault in his post-structuralist text *Discipline and Punish.* The Panopticon was first theorized as a means of protecting seventeenth-century townspersons from the plague. As he explains, the Panopticon ". . . must be understood as a generalizable model of functioning; a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of men . . . the Panopticon represents a cruel, ingenious cage . . . it is a diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form" (205). He describes the physical structure of the Panopticon in the following way:

> Each individual, in his place, is securely confined to a cell from which he is seen from the front by the supervisor; but the side walls prevent him from coming into contact with his companions. He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication. The arrangement of his room, opposite the central tower, imposes on him an axial visibility; but the divisions of the ring, those separated cells, imply a lateral invisibility. And this invisibility is a guarantee of order. If the inmates are convicts, there is no danger of a plot, an attempt at collective

escape, the planning of new crimes for the future, bad reciprocal

influences; if they are patients, there is no danger of contagion; if they are

madmen there is no risk of their committing violence upon one another; if

they are schoolchildren, there is no copying, no noise, no chatter, no waste

of time; if they are workers, there are no disorders, no theft, no coalitions,

none of those distractions that slow down the rate of work, make it less

perfect or cause accidents. The crowd, a compact mass, a locus of multiple

exchanges, individualities merging together, a collective effect, is

abolished and replaced by a collection of separated individualities.

(Foucault 456)

According to Foucault, the major effect of the Panopticon is "to induce in the inmate a

state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of

power" (201). Ultimately, the Panopticon is intended to automate and disindividualize

power for the benefit of those wielding that power against individuals who are under their

control and surveillance. In the dystopian societies that have appeared in recent young

adult dystopian fiction, this effect causes citizens to "police" both themselves and their

neighbors because they never know when they themselves are under government

surveillance. As a result, female protagonists who operate outside of the government's

surveillance are all the more subversive for having used agency to undermine those who

have gone to great lengths to exert total social control.

In discussing the Panopticon, Foucault also refers to the "theater of punishment,"

which is essentially a group of marginalized "delinquents" against which society defines

itself by virtue of their exclusion (Booker 126). Although some individuals might question the theoretical implications of such a construct (i.e. the potential for genocide, should the dominant society decide to exterminate the ostracized group), Foucault's preoccupation with the ways that power can be exercised productively was likely what led him to explore the Panopticon as "an instrument of enforcing discipline and a means of defining power relations in everyday lives" (Dobson and Fisher 308). All of the societies explored in this project feature a form of Foucault's "theater," and the degree to which the marginalized groups have power fluctuates depending on how much of the society's resources the government is willing to devote to enforcing conformity or punishing the resistant even unto death as well as to devising a politically correct cover story for its actions.

Discipline, as defined by Foucault, is neither an institution nor an apparatus: "it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, and targets" (211). To that end, a disciplinary *society* is characterized by the use of disciplinary tactics that aim to increase docility and utility of all elements in a system. It is a Panoptic modality of power that is not independent, and occurs within the development of other technologies (such as schools, factories, prisons, etc.). The theoretical groundwork upon which most of the societies in the novels are based is essentially an extreme form of Utilitarianism—one which maximizes the benefits for the privileged "citizens." To turn this vision into a reality, ambitious members and/or factions of the population either stealthily or brutally vie for power in order to enact their own perspectives of a "perfect" society.

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When an individual or a group takes power, one of the first Panoptic structures erected—which appears in each of the novels under discussion—is the "discipline blockade." As Foucault stated, the discipline blockade is a feature intended to completely enclose the disciplinary society and provide a barrier against escape attempts as well as invasion or infiltration. The blockades in these novels often appear as physical barriers that separate the dystopian societies from the mysterious outside world. To prevent citizens from wanting to escape in the first place and more quickly identify whether citizens want to escape, the dystopias incorporate what Foucault defines as a "disciplinary mechanism," an

> . . . enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded, in which an uninterrupted work of writing links the centre and the periphery, in which power is exercised without division, according to a continuous hierarchical figure, in which each individual is constantly located, examined and distributed among the living beings, the sick and the dead. . . . [I]ts function is to sort out every possible confusion: that of the disease, which is transmitted when bodies are mixed together. . . . It lays down for each individual his place, his body, his disease and his death, his well-being, by means of an omnipresent and omniscient power that subdivides itself in a regular, uninterrupted way even to the ultimate determination of the individual, of what characterizes him, of what belongs to him, of what happens to him.

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(197)

In these dystopias, the "disciplinary mechanism" ranges from various socially constructed ceremonies to invasive operations that affect individuals' minds, bodies, or degrees of agency. In dystopic societies, the disciplinary mechanism is either normalized or used covertly; adolescents either internalize it as a rite of passage for coming of age or remain unaware of its presence, temporarily or permanently. When these elements are used together, female protagonists who attempt to subvert the totalitarian government face much longer odds of success. As Victor Shklovsky states in *Art as Technique,* "[i]f we start to examine the general laws of perception, we see that as perception becomes habitual, it becomes automatic. Thus, for example, all of our habits retreat into the area of the unconsciously automatic" (qtd. in Richter 774). The presence of power that is reinforced by these conventions then becomes as "unconsciously automatic" as the discipline that it perpetuates, which in turn leads it to automatically reinforce the gender binary that constrains the agentic acts of female protagonists in heteronormative ways.

The identification of literary dystopias as disciplinary societies not only draws attention to how violence is as ubiquitous as corruption in these worlds, but also to how the different *kinds* of violence manifest within dystopian narratives. The World Health Organization's 2002 report defines violence as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation" (Krug et al. 5). Franzak and Knoll use Van Soest and Bryant's 1995 conceptual model of violence to evaluate the legitimacy

of the prevalence of violence in young adult literature. According to this model, violence is defined as "any act or situation in which an individual (or individuals) injures another, whether physically or psychologically, directly or indirectly. . . . [a] complex, multilayered social phenomenon in which conditions of oppression and aggression are present" (663).

Three types of violence comprise the actions which take place within dystopian novels, and they can be best visualized as an iceberg that floats in the ocean. Individual violence is the portion of the iceberg that sits above the water's surface: it is the most visible and can be observed when one person does harm to another. This harm can be divided into high- and low-level violence. High-level violence includes acts such as murder, physical altercations, sexual violence, and abuse, whereas low-level violence is defined as "incivilities" like psychological bullying perpetuated by peer groups which fundamentally lead to an individual's exclusion (Osler 578). Institutional violence is the massive portion of the iceberg which sits below the surface: it supports instances of individual violence because it is perpetuated by institutions like criminal justice systems, schools, or corrupt governments which commit acts of unwarranted aggression (or "unlawful uses of force") against citizens who are typically powerless to resist. Finally, structural-cultural violence (which sits at the foundation of Van Soest and Bryant's model) can be envisioned as the surrounding ocean; it exists in societies where violence is accepted as a matter of course, so the fact that it is normalized can often make it difficult to recognize.

Most critics of the violence that pervades popular culture argue that its

pervasiveness damages the moral fabric of society. "The riskiest of teen behaviors

involves violence and the resulting injuries. . . remain the leading causes of death among

all youth aged 5–19. Of these deaths, 67% result from injury, 16% from homicide, and

14% from suicide, according to the Centers for Disease Control" (Cart 32-33). In "A

Literature of Risk," Michael Cart maintains that violence is indeed *pervasive* in literature,

but he also argues that it is *necessary*: adolescents view violence through the lens of

television, movies, and/or video games, all of which lack the third-person omniscient

perspective that helps readers understand characters' psychological processes or

justifications for violence (33). Without the context provided by practicing

metacognition, adolescents become accustomed to the limited perspective in first-person

narratives and are seldom exposed to multi-dimensional thought processes that enable

them to learn and grow from their trials and tribulations. To further support the

potentially negative impact of entertainment on adolescents, Michael Kimmel notes that

"[t]he dominant emotion in all of these forms of entertainment is *anger*. From violent

computer games to . . . racist and misogynistic radio show content to furious . . . music,

the amount of rage and sensory violence to which [adolescents] have become accustomed

is overwhelming" (emphasis added; qtd. in Cart 33). This sensory overload often leaves

adolescents desensitized to violence and bemused about constructive ways to express and

process anger or aggression. If they read about characters who are able to express their

anger and process negative emotions in constructive ways, they are essentially exposed to

"self-help" strategies portrayed by fictional role models in a safe environment. This kind

of exposure is arguably more effective because the text provides guidance without

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lecturing or pontificating.

More insidious forms of violence include a combination of interpersonal and structural-cultural violence that manifests in the form of bullying. Authors of young adult dystopian literature often link bullying to a culturally embedded and/or institutionally-promoted ideology. While some critics posit that bullying can be conceptualized as a "tool for addressing issues of difference and autonomy that filter through into adolescent culture" (147), Lourdes Lopez-Romero finds instead in "You are a Flaw in the Pattern" that bullying is actually symptomatic of a "bigoted society which does not allow deviation from social norms, be they related to race, class, sexual orientation, or personality" (155). An important distinction about bullying in young adult novels is that it includes a combination of high-level and low-level violence, and neither is truly "worse" than the other because each works to exclude or ostracize the victim (a primary cause of adolescent depression and suicide).

Since females in patriarchal societies are typically positioned as objects both coveted and subjugated, female protagonists of young adult dystopian novels are more accustomed to passively circumventing or mitigating violence than actively confronting it on an individual level. This assertion is supported by a recent study that investigated the relationship between gender, threat/control override delusions, and violence, which confirmed that

> . . . stressful events, such as the delusion that one is being threatened by
>
> another . . . lead to higher rates of violence among men and lower rates of
>
> violence among women . . . because during times of stress men are more

likely than women to resort to . . . violence, while women are more likely

to seek out friends for support and nurturance, making them less likely to

engage in violence" (Teasdale, Silver, and Monahan 650).

Lissa Paul argues, "[c]hildren, *like women*, are lumped together as helpless and

dependent; creatures to be kept away from the scene of action, and who otherwise ought

not to be seen or heard (emphasis added; 150). Thus, while authors of young adult

dystopian fiction have recognized that progressive characterization is necessary for

attracting modern readers, the relationship between female protagonists and agentic

violence (or violence used in order to promote their agency) is still heavily regulated. It is

acceptable for female protagonists to *confront* and even *participate* in violence, but not to

initiate it; they are not permitted the same freedom that is ascribed to female villains

within this paradigm (the latter, ironically, are permitted and even encouraged by the

genre to be mercilessly violent).

One reason for this divisive behavioral construct may be explained by Stanley

Milgram's study entitled *Obedience to Authority.* Robert M. Cover claims that the most

developed part of Milgram's theory about violence

> . . . relies heavily on the distinction he [Milgram] draws between acting in
>
> an "autonomous" state and acting in an "agentic" state. Milgram postits
>
> the evolution of a human disposition to act "agentically" within
>
> hierarchies, since the members of organized hierarchies [citizens of
>
> dystopian societies] were traditionally more likely to survive than were
>
> members of less organized social groups [Foucauldian "delinquents"].

Concurrently, the "conscience" or "superego" evolved in response to the need for autonomous behavior or judgment given the evolution of social structures. It is this autonomous behavior which inhibits the infliction of pain on others. But the regulators for individual autonomous behavior had to be capable of being suppressed or subordinated to the characteristics of agentic behavior when individuals acted within a hierarchical structure. (301)

Although female protagonists operate within hierarchical structures that appear to follow Milgram's explanations, the progressive nature of their characterization lends itself better to one of the "alternative ways to conceptualize the facilitation of violence through institutional roles" as cited by Cover. Cover states that "[s]ome authors have, from a psychoanalytic perspective, hypothesized that formal structures for the perpetration of violence permit many individuals to deny themselves the fulfillment of aggressive wishes by 'delegating' the violent activity to others" (301). This theory offers one possible explanation for the constructs that allow female protagonists to mitigate conflict with violence under gender-appropriate conditions. Male love interests are typically the ones to whom that behavior is delegated, if the current conventions of the young adult dystopian genre are any indication. Without such a partner, female protagonists are less likely to complete their quests and emerge in one piece either physically or emotionally.

The underlying message appears to be that despite any tactical advantages ascribed to female protagonists, their survival instincts will prevail in situations where the deck is figuratively stacked against them—especially since the emphasized feminine's

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"fight or flight" instinct is characterized by submission to violence until the hegemonic male can rescue her. This construct confirms Audrey Osler's observation that the performance of traditional heteronormative gender roles is rewarded as long as they uphold traditional concepts of femininity. The impact of violence on female protagonists is not insignificant. In "Multi-Type Childhood Abuse, Strategies of Coping, and Psychological Adaptations in Young Adults," Sesar et al. state that "persons exposed to multi-type violence [are] more depressed and suicidal, and [express] more feelings of helplessness than non-abused persons. Experiencing physical and mental abuse in childhood is associated with low self-esteem, deviant sexual behavior, difficulties in coping with anger/aggression, and psychosocial malfunctioning in adult age" (407).

Since female protagonists tend not to reach adulthood in the first books of their respective trilogies (and considering the length of time that elapses between the publication of the sequels), years pass before the reader is exposed to the protagonists' coping mechanisms or problem-solving strategies for regulating emotional responses to stressors. Few (if any) of these protagonists ever actually reach adulthood by the end of the series except in epilogues. Many of these dystopian trilogies end with the female protagonist and her love interest—assuming she is still alive—walking away from the societies that have arisen after the fall of the dystopia.

Disturbingly, readers are therefore presented with role models who (under realistic circumstances) have been rendered living, breathing trauma victims and then are prevented from witnessing the post-traumatic stress or similar real-life consequences that would typically follow. Adolescent readers are therefore left with unrealistic expectations

regarding trauma resolution, especially since the female protagonists often settle down with their *pro forma* love interests for the "happily ever after" to which American readers have grown accustomed. Readers who have suffered trauma themselves are therefore taught to reproduce the social norms that are reinforced by heteronormative frameworks when what they need to learn are coping strategies that will lead to empowerment. If readers have yet to learn proper critical thinking skills or media literacy, they run the risk of internalizing dangerous attitudes about interpersonal violence that are reinforced by heteronormative discourses. This internalization may ultimately impede their emotional development later in life unless they are able to conceive and internalize working definitions of empowerment that will positively impact their identity formation; further, these definitions should enable them to autonomously mitigate conflicts without the required presence of a romantic partner.

These points are worthy of note in the context of this project because, at first glance, it seems that most of the dystopian societies under discussion have created social orders that do not predicate one's status on a hierarchical positioning of gender. Some of the societies seem to eliminate gender restrictions, whereas others are seemingly aware of gender's potential to create status differentials but do not overtly allow it to prevent individuals from acquiring social capital. This point is significant because it means that any power imbalances present within the novels are not at the mercy of social constructs, but of authorial intent. As such, if the female protagonists in the novels are somehow incapable of fully achieving their potential and this limitation is linked to their performances of gender, then it stands to reason that the people who wrote them into

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existence in the first place—their authors—either made a conscious choice to limit their protagonists' agency, or else have internalized their own attitudes toward gender to the point that they are unaware of how they are constructing and restricting their own characters.

One of the ways in which characters are restricted is embedded in the structures of their societies. All of the dystopic societies found in the novels incorporate either physical barriers that demarcate segments of the population or gerrymandered districts that separate the populace by age, personality, or utilitarian function. While the conventions which follow are by no means limited to the texts that are mentioned within this project (indeed, the formulaic model that is discussed in this project can be applied to numerous texts within this genre), the five texts selected for this project are bound by three common threads: (1) the perfunctory performances of gender that determine the extent to which female protagonists are allowed to exhibit agency in deciding both their futures and those of their heterosexual partners, (2) the reproduction of mothering and the ways that the sins—or strengths—of the female protagonists' mothers are visited upon them, and (3) the freedom (or lack thereof) that female protagonists are ascribed in their willingness or ability to use violence as a means of ensuring their own survival as well as that of their loved ones. The Panoptic qualities of the societies in which they live encumber their daily routines, and the social rituals in which they participate restrict their freedom within clearly defined boundaries. However, overall, the implicit attitudes of their authors—*not* the rule of the oppressive societies within the novels—determine the protagonists' potential for success, satisfaction, and survival.

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Matched

Of the five societies portrayed in novels with female protagonists, the one that

most blatantly allows gender to permeate its social order is the one depicted in *Matched*

by Ally Condie. As its name suggests, *Matched* is the only novel which centralizes and

ritualizes male-female relationships (with the expectation of marriage) under the purview

of the government. Citizens are forced to comply with a strict curfew, and currency is no

longer used because all of the citizens' needs are taken care of by the government.

Growing food without prior authorization is forbidden, and citizens are prohibited from

sharing food—especially at the Final Banquet that culminates the end of life for those

who have turned eighty years old. The social attitudes toward gender in this society favor

heteronormativity, which is demonstrated by the fact that citizens are socialized to

anticipate that their Match Banquets are *the* milestone of their lives in the same way that

even today many American females still believe that their weddings are the high point of

their lives and must therefore be celebrated in traditional gendered garb that emphasizes

their purported virginity (i.e. the white dress of purity). In *Matched,* statistical probability

is a way of culling the outliers when anyone fails to follow the heteronormative model; it

is presented as a political panacea for the confusion and imbalance that occurs when

agency is allowed to exist: families are monitored by "ports" (two-way televisions) in

each household, provided with portion-controlled nutrient-enhanced food rations, and

required to sleep wearing "data-tags," which compile information about their dreams so

that the Society can better anticipate their behavior. This comprehensive system of

surveillance is the Society's version of the "disciplinary mechanism" that encourages

self-policing since citizens are aware that their thoughts and actions are under constant scrutiny. Once the Society has received and compiled all of this data, citizens' actions are predicted using sophisticated psychological and statistical techniques known as "sorting"—which predicts everything from their clothing selections to their recreational activities to their aptitudes for various occupations. Constant surveillance provides these citizens with an implicit assurance of safety and security, and ironically, citizens are raised to believe that the only ones who have reason to fear Reclassification (from citizen to Aberration) are those who resist surveillance or otherwise fail to conform.

The discipline blockade that separates the Society from the Outer Provinces also separates the majority of the "delinquent" population called Aberrations from the rest of the citizens. Aberrations, in this case, are the primary actors that comprise Foucault's "theater of punishment" once they are reclassified from their status as citizens. Reclassification is yet another means at the government's disposal for enforcing discipline, which enables them to reclassify individuals as Aberrations or Anomalies if they consciously violate social norms. Aberrations are individuals whose citizenship has been revoked for one reason or another, though they still live and work in the Society alongside citizens. Children whose parents are deemed Aberrations are reclassified as well and thus forced to bear the weight of their parents' "error"—although the reverse is not a pattern of practice, possibly due to the outrage that would accompany the assertion that childrens' behavior is in some way the fault of the parents when the Society is supposed to be responsible for their moral upbringing and socialization through structured activities and interactions. Anomalies, on the other hand, are individuals who

have either openly resisted the Society or committed heinous crimes that render them

ineligible to remain in the general population and provide the impetus for their exile.

In "Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and the Dystopian Tradition,"

Amin Malak echoes Foucault with his assertion that "dystopias essentially deal with

power: power as the prohibition or perversion of human potential, power in its absolute

form that, to quote from *1984*, tolerates no flaws in the pattern it imposes on society.

Dystopias thus show, in extreme terms, power functioning efficiently and mercilessly to

its optimal totalitarian limit" (10). Malak also explains the way that "dystopias dramatize

the eternal conflict between individual choice and social necessity: the individual

resenting the replacement of his private volition by compulsory uniformitarian decisions

made by an impersonal bureaucratic machinery" (10). The power that functions

"efficiently and mercilessly" in Cassia's society is the universal distribution of a

container to each citizen that contains three colored tablets: one blue, one green, and one

red. Citizens are told that the act of carrying tablet containers is "an important step"

toward their independence. Parents carry tablets for children until their children are old

enough to take responsibility for keeping track of their own, one by one. When they turn

ten years old, children are given responsibility for carrying their blue tablets, which can

"save them" by providing enough nutrients to keep them going several days if they also

have water. When they turn thirteen, they are given the green tablets, which "calm them"

if they need calming (i.e. a dystopian Xanax). According to Cassia, most adolescents her

age take the green tablet occasionally (e.g. before a big test, the night of the Match

Banquet, or at any other time that they might need to calm down and are unable to do so

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without medical assistance). The green pill can be taken weekly without drawing the attention of the Officials, and the power structure upholds freedom for its citizens within clearly defined limits in order to provide citizens with a false sense of security that the Society is looking out for their best interests. Cassia admits that she has never taken the green tablet because of her Grandfather, who once claimed that she was "strong enough to go without it" (119).

At age sixteen, when adolescents take responsibility for the red pill, Cassia's lack of familiarity with its function suggests that it may a lesser form of the Panoptic "disciplinary mechanism" that enforces social compliance. Citizens trust high-ranking Officials to know what the red pill does, since the logic embedded within (what they believe to be utopian) power structures dictates that legitimate authority figures would not order them take the pill if it posed them any harm. By keeping the function of the red pills a secret, therefore, the Society is able to cloak its efficient execution of power under the guise of legitimacy. In this way, it can reasonably demand that its citizens adhere to social constructs which necessitate their submission to authority while also forcing them to conform in ways that render them unknowingly complicit in their own subjugation.

Part of this conformity takes place once citizens turn seventeen: They are "Matched" with their future spouses (who typically reside in other towns and provinces) and allowed a chaperoned period of courtship that takes place until the citizens turn twenty-one and are allowed to marry. These rituals suggest that the Society believes human beings to be incapable of successfully choosing their own partners and thus their own destinies because the statistical margin of error is too great; in the Society's eyes, the

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practice would be inefficient. The Society does, however, include a "safety valve" intended for outliers who decide that they do not wish to be Matched—citizens who are referred to as "Single." Unlike their Matched peers, Singles are not allowed to reproduce, which suggests that even in the Society childbearing and child-rearing are heteronormative activities reserved for couples who participate actively in the Society's most centralized and revered rituals. Since the individuals submitted into the Matching pool must be citizens, the Matching process is also a way that the Society is able to cull the Aberrant and Anomaly populations.

    Matched can certainly be considered a "problem novel" due to the conflicts that occur when the system that is supposed to reliably determine the Match of the protagonist seems to experience a malfunction. The protagonist, Cassia, embarks on a journey for self-discovery by creating narrative tension that unfolds when a supposedly "perfect" system (which operates within the framework of a disciplinary society) makes a glaring error, and in doing so, it undermines its own purported utopianism. In "The Structure of Power in Young Adult Problem Novels," Brian W. Sturm and Karin Michel describe Patty Campbell's "formula" for constructing these types of novels:

> A teenager (or a friend) becomes a victim of a social problem. This young person is statistically typical. . . . He or she struggles with the problem, and the struggle defines the issues for the reader. The good guys suggest the approved solutions and mouth the accepted current thinking; the bad guys do the opposite. There is a big scene that crystallizes the horror of the problem. *Secondary characters* are destroyed by it, while *protagonists* are

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badly damaged but survive with hope. (qtd. in Sturm and Michel 40-41)

In Cassia's case, her struggle centers on the love triangle in which she finds herself entrenched due to an alleged technological error. The "good guys" in this novel are her family and one of her Matches, Xander. The "bad guys" are Officials who seem to stalk her movements at every turn and anticipate her future transgressions. Because it is so formulaic—and because many novels on shelves today have similar predictable rinse-and-repeat dystopian-love-triangle plots—it may be challenging to understand why these sorts of novels captivate the attention of adolescents in the same way that rinse-and-repeat crime dramas captivate the attention of millions of adolescent and adult viewers every week. Sheila Egoff lists four possible reasons that problem novels such as this one engage adolescents:

> . . . [T]he problem novel has therapeutic value . . . [because] young people could find new solutions to their own issues by reading about characters in similar situations; at the very least, they might realize that they were not alone. . . .Egoff's second reason for the appeal of problem novels is that those whose lives are not problem-filled might find these novels exotic and therefore interesting. They can use them to explore how others live. . . . A third option proposed by Egoff is that a problem novel "wins its audience by flattery. Children want to feel grown-up and problem novels offer to youngsters—in simple language that they can follow perfectly well—the implication that they are ready to deal with issues and themes that are indisputably adult." Finally, Egoff proposes that problem novels

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appeal due to the titillation of "prurience and peer pressure." (qtd. in

Sturm and Michel 41-42)

The "therapeutic value" of the problem novel is severely diminished due to a

fundamental error in characterization that authenticates one of the most glaring criticisms

of contemporary young adult dystopian fiction. With growing frequency, critics are

problematizing the "whiteness" of the young adult dystopian genre: most (read: nearly

all) of the genre's protagonists and central characters lack racial diversity and seem to

almost uniformly boast Western European skin tones, hair styles, features, and coloring.

In "The All-White World of Middle School Genre Fiction," the 2000 U.S. Census

indicated "about one-third of the U.S. population of children is comprised of people of

color," but only 661 of the 4,255 reviews of genre fiction—or less than one-sixth—refer

to at least one protagonist of color (257). The reason that *Matched* in particular is being

isolated for its contribution to the "whiteness" of the genre lies in the name and physical

description of its female protagonist:

My green eyes. My coppery-brown hair, which looks more golden in the

compact than it does in real life. My straight small nose. My chin with a

trace of a dimple like my grandfather's. All the outward characteristics

that make me Cassia Maria Reyes, seventeen years old exactly. (Condie 7)

On a blog called "Latinas in Kid Lit," seventh-grade teacher Cindy L. Rodriguez

wrote a post regarding a question she asked on Twitter about the ethnic background of

Cassia, which someone forwarded to author Ally Condie. Condie responded, "She's

whatever you want/need her to be. But yes, I deliberately left that door open with

middle/last names" ("Dear Hollywood" 1). But this door is not quite as far open as Condie seems to suggest. On the one hand, Cassia's father's name is Abran, which suggests his heritage to be Latino since "Abran" is a Spanish spelling of the name "Abraham." On the other hand, her mother's name is Molly, which does not in and of itself denote any particular cultural heritage. Later in the novel, however, Molly is described as being tall with pale skin and freckles—which does not suggest that she identifies as a Latina.

Considering the uncomfortable dearth of racial and cultural diversity in young adult literature that already exists, it is odd that Condie describes Cassia's cultural background as "whatever you want/need her to be" when the problem novel she wrote may be one that her own readers attempt to use to solve problems in their own lives and realize that they are not alone. If less than one-sixth of genre fiction is written about protagonists of color, then it seems obvious that Latina readers in particular "need" an empowered protagonist (especially one who appears to have a fairly obvious mixed-cultural background) to fill the gaping void that is otherwise flooded with a veritable sea of white female protagonists who mitigate their fictional problems within structural-cultural frameworks that are supported by white privilege. Latina readers who do not have white privilege cannot use the same strategies as white protagonists and, indeed, may further alienate themselves from their families and friends if they attempt to solve their problems with tools gained from novels that do not take their unique cultural

backgrounds into account.[1]

In "White Privilege and Male Privilege," Peggy McIntosh defines "white privilege" as "an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks" (125-126). McIntosh positions white privilege in relation to male privilege. Kim A. Case claims in "Discovering the Privilege of Whiteness" that "[w]hites can rely on their privilege and avoid objecting to the racial oppression that provides the privilege" because ". . . whiteness remains invisible to dominant group members with the luxury of never having to apply race to themselves" (79). While this project does not at all intend to suggest that Condie is deliberately perpetuating any kind of racist ideology, it concurs with Case's assertion that "[m]aking whiteness visible, in order to question the assumption that white defines normal," is one current lapse where the genre could stand to improve. Such a lapse that could be easily mitigated if the author did not ascribe an ambiguous cultural identity to a female protagonist with a name that easily connotes a non-white cultural heritage (80).

This problem deserves critical attention. In "Identity Construction in Adolescent Girls," Margie Gaganakis asserts that

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[1] When Cassia wonders whether she should eat at the Match Banqet and bely the birdlike appetite that "civilized" girls are supposed to possess, such as quandary reveals the "whiteness" of her character since other cultures prizes voluptuous body types and do not have the same qualms about gaining weight the way entitled, affluent cultures do. Since adolescents in other cultures have developed eating disorders after being exposed to American media, Cassia's gender displays further support the assertion that her characterization contributes to the "whiteness" of her genre.

[t]here is a voluminous body of literature which questions the view that

culture and identity are fixed and static constructs and that these are

acquired mostly in the developmental years. Culture and identity are

instead generally considered to be continuously negotiated and

reconstructed as a result of varying places, social processes, socio-

historical periods, and local contexts. As one example, the notion

"African" can be a usable identity, but Africans also belong to diverse

communities with different local customs. This situationally specific and

context-boundedness of culture and identity stands in contrast to earlier

traditionalist views which hold that as children develop, they internalize

the characteristics and cultural traditions of their particular family or

affiliated group in an inevitable and unproblematic way. (362)

If culture and identity were indeed fixed and static constructs, then the absence of

multiracial characters in young adult literature would have little effect on adolescent

readers because their identity formation would not be impacted by the diversity (or lack

thereof) of reading material on contemporary bookshelves. Since culture and identity *are*

"continuously negotiated and reconstructed," however, the paucity of non-white

protagonists in young adult fiction communicates a subtle structural foundation of white

privilege that permeates the genre and quietly suggests (to those who are paying

attention) that the only space available for non-white protagonists in young adult

dystopian fiction is either that which the protagonists create for themselves or that which

authors create for them in special—not mainstream—novels.

Of course, there are multiple cultural backgrounds from which multiracial

characters hail, which is demonstrated in Sandra Cisneros's adult fiction novel *Caramelo*.

The protagonist—the coincidentally-named Celaya "Lala" Reyes—expresses her

understanding of what it means to be Mexican in the following passage:

> If you've never been south of Laredo, how the hell would you know what
>
> Mexicans are supposed to look like? There are green-eyed Mexicans. The
>
> rich blond Mexicans. The Mexicans with the faces of Arab sheiks. The
>
> Jewish Mexicans. The big-footed-as-a-German Mexicans. The leftover-
>
> French Mexicans. The *chaparrito* compact Mexicans. The Tarahumara
>
> tall-as-a-desert-saguaro Mexicans. The Mediterranean Mexicans. The
>
> Mexicans with Tunisian eyebrows. The Chinese Mexicans . . . I don't
>
> know what you're talking about when you say I don't look Mexican. I *am*
>
> Mexican. Even though I was born on the U.S. side of the border. (353)

Does Lala's description sound familiar? It should. Consider the first two physical

descriptors of Cassia's identity in *Matched*: "My green eyes. My coppery-brown hair,

which looks more golden in the compact than it does in real life" (Condie 7). Just as

Cisneros uses Lala as a vessel to illustrate the complex, multifaceted nature of a person's

identity that is composed of the interrelationship between various cultural traits, Condie

has constructed a female protagonist whose cultural heritage is as ambiguous and dubious

as her "real" Match. Since *Matched* is a work of young adult fiction that also fits the

narrative mold of a "problem novel," a construction of her character that definitively

allows Cassia to identify with a non-white cultural heritage could reassure a marginalized

subset of readers not only that they are not alone, but that they and their heritage are important enough to be included in the young adult dystopian canon.

Unfortunately, Cassia's ambiguous cultural background only compounds the issues that arise from her perfunctory gender displays. The first narrative acknowledgment of the gender binary in the Society occurs during Cassia's description of the gendered attire worn by Matchees to their first Match Banquet: "Boys don't have as much leeway in choosing clothes as girls do. One suit looks much like another. Still, they get to select the color of their shirts and cravats, and the quality of the material is much finer than the material used for plainclothes." Cassia's dress is clearly a gender display of which she is proud: "I *feel* beautiful in this dress: ice green, floating, full-skirted. The unaccustomed smoothness of silk against my skin makes me feel lithe and graceful" (Condie 6). Although Cassia wants to open her compact and check the mirror, she admits that she does not want to seem vain—so she glances at her face in the surface instead (7). This convention supports Judith Butler's argument that the notion of "proper" is only (albeit improperly) instilled by a compulsory system of behavior. In *Raising Their Voices*, Lyn Mikel Brown explains that

> Femaleness is voiced and mimed throughout girls' lives, but as girls move into the culture, the conventional gender/sex system and its intimate connection to idealized femininity become heightened, narrowed, and more controlled. Girls, to varying degrees conscious and unconscious of such control, react, either complying or resisting. How they respond to such attempts at socialization depends on where they are positioned vis-à-

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vis the dominant culture, as well as on the nature of their relationships

with one another and with the adults in their lives. (153)

If Cassia identified solely with the dominant culture—in this case, white culture—then

her performance of gender would not be quite so complex. Because her cultural identity

is equivocal, however, it is informed by multifaceted, multilayered cultural norms that are

engendered by her negotiation of the various aforementioned "places, social processes,

socio-historical periods, and local contexts." While it might be conventional for a white

female to aspire to be "lithe and graceful," not all cultures prize those qualities because

the constraints that are placed on females to adhere to prescriptive norms vary depending

on their context.

When Cassia is conflicted by the choice between checking her appearance in the

compact and avoiding the appearance of vanity, she demonstrates the way that "the

complexities of these girls from different social and material locations disrupt a dominant

culture wedded to discrete, abstract categories and dependent on metaphors of duality and

polarity" because, as Elizabeth Debold explains, "the categories *masculine* and *feminine*

imply norms of behavior for each sex that are related to male and female identity within

white and middle-class structure, which is the dominant discourse within the United

States" (qtd. in Brown 6). Brown further clarifies the problems that Cassia faces when

confronted with the task of constructing her own identity:

Throughout their lives, girls from diverse cultural, racial, and class

backgrounds and with different sexual identities encounter and negotiate

the voices, stories, fantasies, and explanations that regulate and maintain

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the dominant culture's polarized discourse of gender. They hear about and

witness what is deemed appropriate behavior; they learn how girls should

look or sound if they are to be acceptable. Girls are either initiated into or,

with the support of their families and local communities, encouraged to

actively resist this social construction of reality. (6)

As one illustration, the woman at the clothing distribution center where Cassia receives

her Match Banquet dress actually smiles when she punches in Cassia's selection because

"that's the one you were most likely to pick. . . . Your personal data indicated it, and so

did general psychology. You've picked things outside of the majority in the past, and

girls like their dresses to bring out their eyes" (Condie 25). Although this exchange

suggests that Cassia is successful in performing *gender* in a way that is socially

prescribed according to her status on the gender binary, her performance may

predominantly conform to white, middle-class constructions of femininity that do not

take cultural differences into account—which may ironically invalidate her performance

of *culture* and undermine her illusion of empowerment.

Although Cassia does not allow herself to be bound by the constraints that prevent

her fellow female Matchees from eating, her decision not to hide a piece of cake in her

mother's purse because "[her] mother doesn't break the rules" suggests that her family

supports the social constructs of the Society (Condie 11). Because her family operates

successfully and efficiently within the Society, Cassia at one point makes an erroneous

assumption that accompanies her practice of projection or externalization. According to

Chodorow, projection occurs when "[children] assume that others have qualities which

are in fact their own, or that they have a relation to another which is in fact an internal

relation of one part of the self to another. . ." (43). When Cassia notices that the green

Xanex-like tablet which the Society issues to impart a false sense of calm is missing from

her mother's case prior to another business trip, Molly glances up and Cassia's

disapproval leads them to avert their eyes. After some thought, however, Cassia's opinion

shifts; she realizes that "I haven't seen an example of her weakness but an example of her

strength. What she's dealing with is difficult enough to make her take the green tablet, so

it must be difficult to keep inside, to not share with us. But she is strong and she keeps

the secrets because it protects us" (233). Upon reflection, Cassia smiles to signify that she

is not ashamed of her mother's actions because "I know how hard it is to keep a secret. I

may be a sorter like my father and my grandfather before me, but *I am also my mother's

daughter*" (emphasis added; 233).

Chodorow explains Cassia's tendency toward identifying with her mother and

failing to experience their separation with the assertion that "a mother is likely to

experience a sense of oneness and continuity with her infant. However, this sense is

stronger, and lasts longer, vis-à-vis daughters" (109). Although Cassia does not take the

green pill as a personal choice, the oneness she feels with her mother enables her to

understand the potential motivations behind their separate views and in fact reinforces her

mother as an image of strength. Based on her general understanding of her mother's

empowerment, Cassia is able to construct an alternative definition of femininity that does

not equate self-medication with weakness if the situation warrants it and if the person in

question makes the conscious choice to do so in order to maintain his or her conflicting

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roles and responsibilities in various spheres, both professional and domestic.

For this reason, the boundary between agency and inefficacy is not as clearly demarcated in a society where probability is considered to be a reliable indicator of an individual's course of action. Arguably, if Cassia began choosing clothing or activities that did not align with societal expectations based on her "personal data and general psychology," she would soon find herself on the Society's radar as a potential Aberrant. Despite the prescriptive behaviors of her mother that she has learned to reproduce, this scenario would likely hold true if she began taking the green pills as well since her traditional pattern of practice has included the decision not to self-medicate. By changing her behaviors to fall outside the realm of her personal probability, she would subject herself to excess scrutiny that could endanger her life if the Society began to think that its hold over her agency had weakened. After all, a gilded cage is still a cage, no matter how brightly it shines.

Although Cassia is initially elated when she is presented with her best friend Xander Carrow as her Match at the Match Banquet, her joy is short-lived. The conventions of the young adult dystopian novel tend to disrupt the narrative in ways that are prescribed despite the element of surprise that is supposed to accompany them, so the ensuing conflict is fairly predictable. The microcard that she is given—which supposedly includes Xander's information—presents her with a photo of a different possibility: Ky Markham, whose status as an Aberration is supposed to render him ineligible for the Matching pool in the first place. When Cassia initially meets the aforementioned Official, her concerns are assuaged when the Official states that she is already aware that the face

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on the microcard "wasn't the right one" (Condie 42). It is interesting that the Official should use this particular turn of phrase, especially since it is Cassia who for all intents and purposes should be able to determine which one is the "right" one for her. Cassia's aptitude for sorting should empower her to choose her own destiny, but she instead spends the entire novel facing situations that force her to choose between the two potential Matches with which she has been presented—suggesting that, in the case of female protagonists, their destinies and their love interests are one and the same.

To reassure Cassia that this situation is indeed an anomaly, the Official notes that her department—information malfunctions—is not one that often has much work to do since Matching is "so well-regulated" by virtue of its importance to the Society. To explain the "mistake," the Official claims that her department suspects the error to have been the product of a joke or foul play. Although the Official asks that Cassia keep the information confidential from everyone except for her Grandfather, this very request sends Cassia's mental gears spinning in remembrance of the young boy who once inserted himself seamlessly into the Society as though he'd lived there all his life—Ky Markham. Cassia remains conflicted throughout the novel about the nature of her relationships with both Xander and Ky and the way that those relationships impact her identity.

Due to the fact that the Society's data mining practices are no longer considered intrusive, Officials would likely predict Cassia's Reclassification before any true subversion took place. When Cassia is initially confronted by the Official, she is forthcoming with the truth about the error on her microcard. As Cassia develops a

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relationship with Ky, however, the Official returns—at which point Cassia, who has had

plenty of time to reflect on her own estimation of the Society's efficacy and accuracy in

light of its unjust treatment toward individuals she cares about, is much less open about

her infractions. Maddeningly, the Official recites statistics that not only confirm her

assessment of the situation via Cassia's replies, but predict the end of the "tryst" based on

numerical factors that minimize Cassia's delusions of agency:

> Teenagers are hot-blooded. Rebellious. It's part of growing up. In fact,
>
> when I checked your data, you were predicted to have some of these
>
> feelings. . . . You might have feelings for Ky Markham now, but by the
>
> time you are twenty-one, there is a ninety-five percent chance that it will
>
> all be over. . . . Don't you think this happens quite often? . . . Almost
>
> seventy-eight percent of teenagers who are Matched have some kind of
>
> youthful fling. And most of these occur within the year or so after
>
> Matching. This is not unexpected. (Condie 245)

The Official explains that from this point onward, Cassia's choices are her own, but that

if she continues her relationship with an Aberration, she could be Reclassified, and Ky

could be sent back to the dangerous Outer Provinces. Here, the Society has provided

Cassia with a "limited choice" that is not really a choice at all if she wishes to remain a

citizen in the society of which her friends and family are a part; in short, her delusions of

agency are preserved to support the appearance that she has any to begin with.

Cassia, as a female protagonist who recognizes the constructs of self-sacrifice that

are considered typical for her gender, understands "why she [the Official] has to keep

things safe and stable and some part of me respects that. I hate that most of all. . . . When

I finally meet her gaze. . . She knows she's won. She sees in my eyes that I won't risk

making things worse for Ky" (Condie 247). This "respect" indicates Cassia's

fundamental misunderstanding of the fact that she conceives of "safety" and "stability" in

ways that do not reflect the Society's definitions according to their differences of opinion

regarding the effective utilization of power. She believes that the Society uses its power

to maintain its peoples' safety and stability when in fact the opposite is true—the people

are there to maintain the government's safety and stability. Cassia, who has led a

relatively sheltered life until the Match Banquet, is still inclined to trust the Society

because she has not personally experienced any consequences that would destabilize her

belief in its legitimacy. Ironically, this trust may be destabilized by the very mistake that

led Cassia to question the Society's infallibility.

Many female protagonists are portrayed as rebellious even though they seem to

prioritize romance over their role as agents of social change, some authors have written

characters with the intent to communicate the radical idea that heroines need not sacrifice

their more agentic qualities—nor their paths in life—in order to have real love. Oddly,

despite the fact that the option is available to her, Cassia never contemplates the

possibility of becoming a Single—even when her Official asks if she would prefer to

have chosen that path. The Society, of course, controls any aspect of Cassia's life that

might cultivate a desire for agency, so the Officials create circumstances through which

Cassia's career and "real love" are forced into a very real conflict. Cassia is a "sorter"—

an individual who sorts information—and she is described as being one of the best. When

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Cassia refuses to adhere to social norms and give up her burgeoning romance with Ky, she is ordered to "sort the people" who perform menial labor—including Ky.

This order is given as if in an attempt to leverage her decision-making skills under pressure against the obvious panic she must feel upon being handed the decision to determine whether or not Ky should be sent to complete an "alternative project" for "his own good." As the Official explains after the sort

> Menial laborers like these don't usually live to eighty. . . Many of them
> are Aberration status, you know. The Society doesn't worry as much about
> them reaching optimal age. Many die early. Not horribly early, of course.
> Pre-Society early, or Outer Province early. But sixty, seventy. Lower-level
> vocations in nutrition disposal are particularly dangerous, even with the
> precautions we take. (287)

Generally, the sorts of citizens who are training for their positions do not have lasting consequences. In this case, however, Cassia is told that her sort will hold—in other words, that her choice will have legitimate repercussions—because the government wants to see if she can make decisions well when she knows they have actual results (284). This sort is presented to her as a project that will ultimately increase Ky's quality of life based on the dismal working conditions he is currently experiencing. Cassia re-establishes self-confidence in her abilities by garnering strength from the thought of what Ky would do in her situation. Notice that she does not think of what her *mother* would do or what her *Grandfather* would do, but what *Ky* would do in her situation—which presents its own implications for his impact on her identity.

Although Ky ensures that he is the median of the data set—a technique he has cultivated as a means of survival—Cassia contemplates the potential impact of her actions if she were to sort him into the higher data set as one of the more efficient laborers. She muses to herself that "If I sort him into the higher group, he won't have to work here anymore. His life will be better. I could be the one to change that for him" (286). However, she acknowledges that *he* would want her to sort him into the lower group based on what he has told her of his survival tactics. Cassia is faced with the decision of sorting him as she knows him to be or sorting him as he wishes to be perceived—in short, with robbing him of his agency and making a life-altering decision for him or complying with his wishes and letting his own destiny take its course.

Cassia sorts Ky as one of the most efficient laborers and takes away his agency (regardless of whether she believed that it was for his own good), at which point she inadvertently condemns him to a position that banishes him to the Outer Provinces. Sorting him in a way that makes him appear to perform at a higher level than he currently is—which she knows he is capable of since he has told her that the median is where and how he survives—ends up punishing them both by creating a physical and emotional separation that almost leads to both of their deaths. Again, through subtle behavioral manipulation and cognitive predictions based on statistical probability, the Society has effectively created a chasm between Ky and Cassia that Cassia was manipulated into making when she sorted him into the "efficient" category. Cassia is given one last chance to change her mind after the sort, but she remembers what the Official told her about Ky's life expectancy, and she allows her decision to stand. Even though others can make

lasting decisions that determine the result of *Cassia's* life—for example, the person with whom she is Matched—Cassia is unable to do the same without suffering ramifications when her choice infringes on the agency of her love interest.

Shortly before the sorting exercise, Cassia meets with the Official, who asks*:* "You wouldn't want Xander to know about this, would you? You don't want to lose him, do you? . . . Do you regret your decision to be Matched? Do you wish that you had chosen to be a Single?" Cassia asserts her desire to be Matched and states that "I think people should be able to choose *who* they Match with." Patiently, the Official replies, "Where would it end, Cassia? . . . Would you say next that people should be able to choose how many children they have, and where they want to live? Or when they want to die?" (246). This logic is carefully engineered to present Cassia with a non sequitur disguised as a slippery slope that is embedded in the topical switch from Matching to bearing children, deciding on a residence, and ultimately choosing the manner of one's death—all aspects of life that are considered normative and which are thus regulated by the Society. Because norms in white, middle-class, heteronormative societies require that female protagonists be "saved by the right man—a white man, and not an [outsider]—and brought back into the folds of proper society," Cassia is torn between the challenge and complexity of her relationship with Ky and the safety of her bond with Xander that has been forged over many years (Baecker 200).

Ochestrated by Condie, her choice between cultivating a relationship within the Society or risking alienation from it is a false dilemma that forces protagonists to choose between two fates within a framework that leverages a heteronormative relationship

against a damaged and endangered sense of self. Despite her anxiety over the decision she faces between Xander and Ky, she is mistaken in her belief that choosing Ky is radical in the first place when she is still choosing to "Match" herself, albeit outside of the Society's control. The fact that Cassia feels pressured to choose a relationship at all suggests that her agency is illegitimate so long as she fails to even consider the possibility of choosing to be a Single when no real prejudice against Singles seems to exist within the Society. While she may believe that she would be "missing the boat" by refusing to take the opportunity for a partnership, she does not even consider the truly "radical" choice: becoming a Single. Clearly, any readers who are hoping to glean strategies for mitigating their own struggles with romantic relationships using these kinds of "problem novels" will be woefully disappointed by the news that they have the power to choose… Between waiting to be rescued by their knight in shining armor (since adolescent girls are the most patient of beings) or facing what authors imply is the bitter disappointment of solitude, with dubious (if any) middle ground.

The theme of choice and its relationship to personal agency is also reinforced near the end of the novel. As Cassia herself claims, "It is one thing to make a choice and it is another thing to never have the chance" (240). The Society reflects the ingenious nature of the "disciplinary society" that is observed by Foucault in his analysis of prison reforms which attempted to update torture techniques in ways that made torture more humane— though ultimately far more socially and psychologically damaging (i.e. public executions intended to either scapegoat individuals or make an example of subversives). Foucault conceives of power as a strategy that deciphers interpersonal relations, specifically within

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the context of discipline, as a complex social function that could also be a political tactic used for controlling the masses. For Foucault, neither knowledge nor power exists independently because the means of implementing discipline and the power that is used to legitimate it are wholly dependent on the knowledge that creates and classifies individuals within hierarchical structures (26). What he describes could be readily translated into the Society that Condie presents in the novel. Near the end of the novel, Cassia states that "Two desires struggle within me: the desire to be safe, and the desire to know. I cannot tell which one will win" (Condie 255). Unlike Katniss Everdeen in the *Hunger Games*, who chooses the man she "can't survive without," Cassia must make the choice between safety and knowledge—in other words, security and freedom. Like the protagonists in the problem novels they read, many adolescents today are about to face similar decisions with similar real, lasting consequences. Since the Society does not consider freedom to be a choice in the first place because it has created a purported "utopia" where all are free (and yet none truly are), it is significant that Cassia is again and again given limited choices to make it *seem* as if she has agency.

After Ky is removed from the Society by the Officials and taken to the Outer Provinces with other Aberrations "to fight the Enemy," Xander tells a story which demonstrates Ky's understanding of the mirage of freedom within the society. He reveals that he has known for years that the red tablets do not work on him or Ky. When they were children, Xander pulled a prank (as a result of his jealousy over watching Cassia's affection for Ky grow even then) and challenged Ky to steal two red tablets; Ky completed the mission, but stole the tablets from Xander's parents. When Xander's

parents received a citation in lieu of a formal Infraction, Xander found Ky, who held out

the red tablets. When Xander asked Ky what he was trying to do, Ky responded that "you

don't play with other peoples' lives" (Condie 352). Ironically, Cassia was trained to be a

sorter, and her entire function as a sorter would have been exactly that: "playing" with

other peoples' lives. Significantly, the character who arguably has the most moral

fortitude and general awareness in the novel—Ky—is the one who will never "fit" within

the Society; the intelligence that enables him to critique the oppressive totalitarian

structures which remain invisible to the rest of the citizens is precisely what makes him

so dangerous. Ultimately, his very nature is what motivates Cassia to make a choice

between security and freedom.

Upon Ky's departure for the Outer Provinces, Cassia is sent to work on a three-

month detail that her parents requested due to signs of "rebellion" that they witnessed in

her behavior, the cover story her parents concocted for her journey to find Ky. While she

toils in another Province, Cassia acknowledges the beautiful and cruel efficiency with

which the Society operates. She states, "[w]e wear no chains. We have nowhere to go.

They wear us down with work; they don't beat us or hurt us. They simply want to make

us tired. And I am tired" (Condie 364). After Cassia's parents acknowledge their inability

to give her the life she wants (as opposed to the life that has been statistically planned out

for her), their decision to help her by framing her exile as a consequence of rebellion

shields her from the Society's scrutiny by suggesting that she is merely adhering to the

statistical probabilities that are thought to accurately predict her behavior.

Although Cassia makes the conscious decision to give up her relationship with

Xander as her future Match, they retain their friendship. The question remains as to whether Condie continues this relationship to keep Xander as a viable alternative for Cassia so that she has a "backup plan" if she discovers that Ky has died. This plot point communicates to readers that males and females are all but incapable of forging platonic friendships with each other—or, at least, of reverting to the friendships they once had. Since Xander and Cassia never become physically intimate, despite the depth of their emotions for one another, this plot device reinforces a problematic social norm that need not be perpetuated. Authors choose to write works which socialize female adolescents into believing that their relationships *must* have romantic undertones and that their lives are somehow incomplete if males are not attracted to them.

At the end of the novel, Cassia refers to the freedom of writing: ". . . I look at my own hands, too, which move in the shape of my own inventions, my own words. It is hard to do, and I am not good at it yet" (Condie 365). Despite the love triangle in which she is the apex, Cassia finally possesses the tools to empower herself and to live with the choice she made to abandon the Society for the person she loves. This narrative does not end in a paternalistic rescue or a return to her "proper sexual role" (although, granted, she is well on her way), but it does end in what appears to be the beginning of a long road toward a life of pain. The debut novel of Condie's *Matched* trilogy only partially avoids the false dilemma posited by contemporary critics. Though Cassia may be temporarily exiled from Society and forced to complete grueling manual labor, she is living out a life of her own choosing while retaining her friendship with Xander *and* her bond with Ky in hope of a brighter future. While she is still bound by the frameworks that would certainly

result in her death if her true motivations behind joining the work detail were to be discovered, she is *temporarily* shielded from harm within an atmosphere that is supposed to eradicate her desire for rebellion when her choice to be there is an assertion of exactly the opposite. As such, *Matched* ends on a note that demonstrates its stark adherence to gendered social norms while offering the promise of Cassia's dynamic evolution into an empowered female protagonist. Unfortunately, this evolution is a long time coming and does not occur within the novel that provides the reader's first impression of her character, which makes Cassia the least empowered of the protagonists under discussion.

<p align="center">*Delirium*</p>

While the next female protagonist, Lena Haloway. arguably has more agency than Cassia does, her degree of co-dependence still leaves much to be desired in terms of characterization. *Delirium* by Lauren Oliver is a concrete example of Roberta Seelinger Trites' assertion that "we live in a society that objectifies teen sexuality, at once glorifying and idealizing it while also stigmatizing and repressing it" (91). According to Trites, the sense of empowerment that adolescents gain from an increased knowledge of sexuality "illustrates Foucault's principle of the power/knowledge/pleasure dynamic: characters who have positive experiences w

ith sexuality are usually strengthened by the experience" (96). Because love and sex are so often intertwined in ways that make them virtually indistinguishable from one another to adolescents, the fact that love is highly stigmatized in *Delirium* to the point of illegality is a troublesome indicator that the novel's central characters are not empowered by their knowledge of love and relationships. They must buy in to the government propaganda

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surrounding them or risk losing everything they hold dear—family, friends, lovers, and socioeconomic status.

Unlike the Society in *Matched,* the government in *Delirium* allows citizens to visit each other's homes, which suggests that the government either feels that it has little to fear in terms of citizens organizing grassroots rebellions or that its control over its citizens is so complete that it need not overtly control their actions to preserve the illusion of freedom. The Society in *Matched* appears to incorporate more structural propaganda into its citizens' daily lives by scheduling and streamlining citizens' leisure hours, future spouses, and the dates and times of their deaths with complete precision in the name of "efficiency." Citizens are free to choose their own leisure activities and can essentially do as they please (within the options made available to them) before curfew—another social norm that *Delirium* and *Matched* share. Since the Society is functioning well (on the surface), there is no reason for citizens to question the method behind the Panoptic madness. The Consortium in *Delirium*, however, is not so successful, as it finds it necessary to retain physical prisons (its representation of Foucault's "theater of punishment") for the incarceration of criminal offenders and political prisoners—unlike Aberrations in *Matched,* which are merely labeled as "other" so that citizens are implicitly encouraged to view them as scapegoats. Invalids in *Delirium*—like Anomalies in *Matched*—have rejected or renounced the society's tenets and chosen to live in the mysteriously-named Wilds because their very existence endangers the balance of a society that devoutly denies their existence when it is not attempting to eradicate them. Their forced exile and attempted eradication suggest that they are a more pervasive kind

of "delinquent" that is incapable of reform. Whether individuals choose to rebel or leave, however, depends on their perspective about the "pandemic" that ravaged the society before it was finally controlled through scientific means.

Delirium begins with a line that sets the tone of the narrative: "It has been sixty-four years since the president and the Consortium identified love as a disease, and forty-three since the scientists perfected a cure" (Oliver 1). The Consortium has called this disease *amor deliria nervosa* and asserted that the *deliria* must be controlled and cured to prevent the society's downfall. In some ways, the citizens in *Delirium* are given greater illusions of freedom than those in *Matched*—they are allowed to choose their own "pair" from a selection that they are given after they are cured. The Consortium offers them a limited choice in contrast to the absence of choice in *Matched* (where one either accepts one's "Match" or nothing at all). Unlike *Matched*, the propaganda in *Delirium* is disseminated in the form of a social doctrine; the totalitarian government has rewritten the Bible (which it calls *The Safety Happiness and Health Handbook,* or *the Book of Shhh*) to promote its own secular agenda—for example, the protagonist's name, Lena, which is short for Magdalena (derived from the Biblical figure Mary Magdalene). According to the doctrine in *The Book of Shhh,* Mary Magdalene is a Biblical figure who suffered from *deliria nervosa* and endured a series of failed relationships until she met a man named Joseph who eventually abandoned her like the rest of her suitors. After she beseeched God to rid her of the misery that she experienced as the result of love, He rid her of *deliria* instead and rendered her the first "cured." Like the figure Mary Magdelene in *The Book of Shhh,* Lena's sense of self oscillates throughout the novel as if to reflect

her disease or perhaps her own discomfort in asserting her independent identity.

Some critics re-define identity as a "complex and multifaceted character" and reject older definitions that evoke "an image of a bounded, rational, and unitary self—a self that is capable of agency and autonomy" (Bean and Moni 639). Oddly, even though the novel is written with first-person narration, the protagonist slowly reveals her identity in the novel. She is not even referred to by name until the end of the second chapter, at which point her cousin asks whether she is getting married on the day that she is scheduled to take her "boards"—examinations that determine with whom she will be paired after she is cured. The reader does not learn her full name, including her real surname (Haloway), until she is called by a nurse to begin her boards in the fourth chapter. The reader remains unaware that "Lena" is a nickname until she states her full name to her love interest about halfway through the novel. This fractured presentation of Lena's name complicates her identity by positioning her in relation to the extended family with whom she lives and has chosen to share a surname, which reinforces her inability to escape from the stain that her legal surname carries in the eyes of her society. Eventually, she discloses her full name by choice, though this does not occur until much later in the narrative—implying her relative absence from her own story which revolves for the majority of the text around a nameless "I." Before then, she is only "named" by others.

On the day that Lena is due to take her boards, her Aunt Carol surveys her appearance and proclaims, "[a] seven or an eight, I would say. . . . Though you won't get more than a six if you don't get cleaned up" (9). While her aunt's assessment is arguably

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intended to help her succeed in the boards, her numerical valuation of Lena's appearance communicates that Lena's performance of gender is only slightly above "average" when ranked on a ten-point scale, which seems analogous to the scale that some men use today to "rank" women as part of a primitive sociocultural ritual that categorizes and commodifies them. Though Aunt Carol insists that Lena wear makeup to her boards, acknowledging performative displays mandated by her gender and recognized by evaluators, Lena likens her appearance to "a fish, especially with my hair all pinned with metal bobby pins and clips: a fish with a bunch of metal hooks sticking in my head. I don't like makeup, have never been interested in clothes or lip gloss" (Oliver 15). She contrasts her lack of interest in makeup with her friend Hana's gender displays that conform to traditional female gender roles, but some of Hana's displays are obvious attempts to conform to what Hana's mother considers to be appropriate performances of gender. Before the boards, Hana explains that her mother "made her" bring a publication entitled *Home and Family* with her because "it will give the right impression"—an impression that Hana herself clearly does not set much store by, since she then sticks her finger down her throat to pantomime gagging in disgust (18). Her mother's strict control over her appearance does not seem to have a significant impact on her self-image due to the upper-middle-class privileges with which she is born, but the same cannot be said for Lena.

One of Lena's primary adult agents of socialization, her Aunt Carol, contributes to Lena's self-image. Aunt Carol's barbed comments have an obvious effect if Lena's self-assessment is any indication: "I'm not ugly, but I'm not pretty, either. Everything is

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in-between. I have eyes that aren't green or brown, but a muddle. I'm not thin, but I'm not fat, either. The only thing you could definitely say about me is this: I'm short" (15). Even Lena's intelligence is average. She describes herself as a "decent" student who hopes to attend college where she will be "assigned" to a major based on her strengths and weaknesses, although she stipulates that girls who do not pass their boards "get paired and married right out of high school" (Oliver 9). Everything about her characterization—from her ambiguous physical appearance to her canned responses to the examination questions—suggests an identity that does not fulfill the feminine ideal for which she has been taught to strive.

Oliver's protagonist also falls victim to another common criticism of young adult literature: that nearly all female protagonists are white, homogeneous, cookie-cutter adolescents who endure trials in order to learn strategies for mitigating their own problems. By choosing to employ the tried-and-true characterization that prioritizes convention over diversity, Oliver's work reinforces the erroneous assumption that her readers—if not all readers of young adult dystopian novels—are white, heterosexual, and middle-class. The novels perpetuate the normalization of restrictive, heteronormative gender displays in such a way that the quests of culturally diverse readers are still excluded from the young adult canon—a construct which readers may hope to see challenged as the popularity of the genre gains traction.

Lena's hidden shame is that she has been orphaned both literally *and* figuratively; the importance of Lena's impending marriage—specifically the importance of her being paired with "someone good"—is emphasized because, in this way, she can absolve her

family of the shame that accompanies the memory of her mother's suicide. She may have survived the trauma that accompanied her mother's death, but without a suitor, her worth to her current family—and the social order—is drastically diminished. If Chodorow's theory of the reproduction of mothering is any indication, the fate of Lena's mother bears disturbing implications for Lena's own future. Lena describes her mother's death in relation to the reason that she no longer visits the ocean:

> My dad died when I was eight years old. I don't remember him at all. I think—it kind of broke her, you know? My mom, I mean. She wasn't cured. It didn't work. I don't know why. She had the procedure three separate times, but it didn't . . . it didn't *fix* her. . . . I didn't know there was *something wrong with her.* I didn't know she was sick. I was too young to understand. If I had known, maybe I could have. . . (emphasis added; Oliver 156)

Although Lena does not allow herself to say the words aloud, she thinks, "*Maybe I could've stopped it*" (Oliver 156). This acknowledgement of her lack of agency is reinforced by the reproduction of mothering that both impacts Lena's identity formation and prevents her from believing that she deserves to be valued within the context of her society—and, by extension, within her current and future relationships (both platonic and romantic). As Meredith Rogers Cherland states in *Private Practices,* "[t]he desire for agency and for acts of individual resistance can be seen as signs that change and social transformation are possible, but such change is by no means inevitable (18). Chodorow would likely agree with this

claim. She asserts that

> . . . families organized around women's mothering and male dominance
> create incompatibilities in women's and men's relational needs. In
> particular, relationships to men are unlikely to provide for women
> satisfaction of the relational needs that their mothering by women and the
> social organization of gender have produced. The less men participate in
> the domestic sphere, and especially in parenting, the more this will be the
> case. Women try to fulfill their need to be loved, try to complete the
> relational triangle, and try to re-experience the sense of dual unity they
> had with their mother, which the heterosexual relationship tends to fulfill
> for men. . . . While they are likely to become and remain erotically
> heterosexual, they are encouraged both by men's difficulties with love and
> by their own relational histories with their mothers to look elsewhere for
> love and emotional gratification. (199-200)

Arguably, Lena's mother's suicide might not have posed such a significant impact on
Lena's identity formation had her mother not been so forthcoming with affection and
expressions of affirmation prior to her death. Lena was old enough when her mother died
to remember hearing the words "I love you," which profoundly altered her relational
needs by establishing an emotional bond that adults in her society did not have with their
children. Despite her assuming the role of mother to Lena, Aunt Carol offers none of the
emotional support and affirmation that Lena's birth mother did.

After most adults in Lena's society are "cured," they lack basic parenting skills

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such as nurturance that can be attributed to the way that "[w]omen, as mothers, produce

daughters with mothering capacities and the desire to mother. These capacities and needs

are built into and grow out of the mother-daughter relationship itself" (Chodorow 7). In

other words, women are taught that their maternal roles are determined by biological

imperatives that do not require any sort of relational bond. Chodorow is correct that

"women as mothers (and men as not-mothers) produce sons whose nurturant capacities

and needs have been systematically curtailed and repressed" (7). However, in Lena's

society, women *and* men are prepared for a "less affective family role" that, at its most

extreme, leads some new parents to murder their children rather than raise them.[2]

Because Lena does not have any living models on which to base her identity formation

aside from impersonal extended family members and hazy memories of her mother, she

is forced to conceive her identity in abstraction—like boys do, according to Chodorow—

which summarily affects the way that she positions herself in relation to concepts such as

power, agency, and violence.

Max Weber defines power as "the possibility of imposing one's will upon the

behavior of other persons [which] can emerge in the most diverse forms." The imposition

of one's will on others permeates all levels of violence due to the fact that "institutions

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[2] As if her mother's death by suicide was not enough to alienate Lena from her peers and create a profound disjunction between her relational needs and her emotional gratification, Lena's Aunt Carol is the literary manifestation of Chodorow's posited "systematic repression of nurturant capacities." When Lena's cousin Jenny asks whether Lena is getting married the day of her evaluation, Aunt Carol replies, "'Don't be stupid,'. . . without irritation. 'You know she can't marry until she's cured" (Oliver 11). With or without irritation accompanying her words, Aunt Carol's swift dismissal of Jenny's intelligence is all the more troubling considering that Jenny is nine years old and has obviously not received the cure; as such, she is too young to truly understand the difference between an offhand comment and a deliberate insult—which any nurturant mother would be well aware of.

have a self-perpetuating interest in instilling their ideologies into the masses in order to retain their hegemony" (qtd. in Trites 4). Foucault's definitions are similar: power is "that which represses" (*Discipline and Punish* 124). In *The History of Sexuality,* he defines it as ". . . not something that is acquired seized, or shared… Power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations" (93). In essence, Foucault envisions power as a process—the act of *doing*, like gender—rather than a commodity. Lena describes one of her first brushes with power—specifically, the power embedded within institutional violence—by relating an anecdote in which she experienced a brief moment of kinship with a rabid dog that facilitated her understanding of her role in society. She recounts having paused during her run to watch two cops shoot a "half-starved, mangy, flea-riddled," three-legged dog that had gotten loose and begun biting and snapping at everyone in the area. Lena explains,

> For the first time in my life I understood the look that people had been
> giving me forever, the same curl of lip whenever they hear the name
> *Haloway*. Pity, yes—but disgust, also, and fear of contamination. It was
> the same way they were looking at the dog while he circled and snapped
> and spit; then a mass exhalation of relief when the third bullet finally took
> him down and he stopped twitching. (Oliver 157)

Distressingly, not only does Lena conceive of her identity in relation to a rabid dog that was shot and killed by police, but she also acknowledges the communal relief which accompanied its death—and, subsequently, the relief that she believes might accompany hers. If one is to take her analogy to its logical extension, then Lena's very presence in

society is subversive and dangerous due to the power she wields in her continued ability to recognize and express love. Few others in the novel—Invalids in particular—possess the desire to wield this ability.

Like every other dystopia in this project, Lena's is a Panoptic disciplinary society—which in this case is evidenced by the "disciplinary mechanism" of the cure (specifically, the way individuals are watched to determine whether or not the "cure" has truly taken effect) and the "discipline blockade" represented by the "border fence," rumored to be electrified. Lena explains that she was "terrified of the border fence . . . I've never gotten within five feet of [it]. We've been warned not to, had it drilled into us. They told us we would fry; told us it would make our hearts go haywire, kill us instantly" (Oliver 279). As Lena later discovers, the fence is actually "dead and cold and harmless"—and she immediately realizes "how deep and complex the lies are, how they run through Portland like sewers, backing up into everything, filling the city with stench: the whole city built and constructed within a perimeter of lies" (Oliver 279). As a Panoptic disciplinary society that mandates curfew and enacts swift penalties for those caught breaking the law, the institutional violence reflects Foucault's theory of the prison system in that it "cannot fail to produce delinquents," which occurs by "the very type of existence it imposes on its inmates" whether they are isolated in cells or given menial tasks to complete (*Discipline and Punish* 266). This theory poses another significant hurdle for authors of young adult fiction to clear: if defiance and delinquency are expected as natural consequences of a disciplinary society, then can *any* "rebels" be truly subversive when the system itself anticipates their existence and actively seeks to

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eliminate them from the social order? Given the fact that adolescents are rebellious by

nature, authors of young adult fiction have the double duty of shouldering the burden of

proof that accompanies their claims to writing empowered anarchists or champions of

social justice who are not merely conforming to the expectations already established by

the genre. To put it more simply, are their "rebels" truly rebellious?

Furthermore, Foucault posits that "the prison makes possible, even encourages,

the organization of a milieu of delinquents, loyal to one another, hierarchized, ready to

aid and abet any future criminal act" (*Discipline and Punish* 267). Citizens are under

constant surveillance, and the Invalids—like the Aberrations in *Matched* (along with the

subversive Smokies from *Uglies,* the supposedly extinct members of District Thirteen

from the *Hunger Games*, and the ostracized factionless from *Divergent)*—are the

"delinquents" that regularly disrupt the status quo through the *threat* of resistance that

their very existence implies. Although "bullying" is perhaps not a strong enough term to

describe their fate should they be caught by authorities that practice institutional violence,

Lourdes Lopez-Romero asserts in "You are a Flaw in the Pattern" that "bullying . . . [is]

not [presented] as dysfunctional adolescent behavior, but rather . . . as a metaphor for

intolerance and discrimination, or as a tool for addressing issues of difference and

autonomy that filter through into adolescent culture" (147). Adolescents in these texts

must negotiate the space that they are allowed to occupy within totalitarian microcosms

that "enforce conformity by inflicting punishment, or, as Michel Foucault would put it, 'a

whole micro-penality . . . of behavior'" (Lopez-Romero 147). This conformity in

Delirium is fortified by the existence of the cure that, in reality, acts as a punishment in

the sense that it fulfills the nature of prison reforms that were posited by Gabriel Bonnot de Mably and echoed by Foucault: "Punishment . . . should strike the soul rather than the body" (qtd. in *Discipline and Punish* 16).

The cure that is mandated and administered throughout society—which social propaganda claims is more "humane" than allowing the existence of *deliria nervosa*—mirrors the penal reforms identified by Foucault with his acknowledgement of the "change of objective" in the eighteenth century that resulted in "less cruelty, less pain, more kindness, more respect, more 'humanity'" (*Discipline and Punish* 16). The cure is not considered "punishment" because citizens have only the government's propaganda and scare tactics to rely on for information about the real nature of *deliria*. They lack anecdotal evidence to the contrary. The cure is not "painful" *per se* (unless it is administered before it is considered developmentally "safe"). It merely robs individuals of the agency that would allow them to select their own romantic partners on the basis of emotion and live a life of their own choosing. The absence of love has no significance to them because they do not know what it means *to* love, which undergirds the structural-cultural violence inherent in the cure's implementation.

Before they take their boards, Hana states, "[i]f they really want us to be happy, they'd let us pick [our partners] ourselves." Lena sharply admonishes Hana, citing the social constructs that consider criticizing the system to be "the worst offense there is" (worse than falling in love, presumably) and arguing that they are, in fact, given a choice. "A *limited* choice," Hana retorts. "We get to choose from the choices that have been chosen for us." Lena snaps back in response, "Every choice is limited . . . That's life"

(Oliver 21). Unlike Hana, Lena is "glad I don't have to make someone else choose *me*"—
a subtle nod to the heteronormative constraints that place the impetus on males to initiate
romance and disenfranchise women from the same. Although Lena herself is supposedly
subversive for falling in love with Alex, the Invalid who interrupts her examination with
a literal stampeding herd of cattle, her story is archetypal in the way that it "begins with
the sexual availability of the character (however romantically or chastely portrayed) and
ends with marriage or rescue by a handsome prince" (Baecker 198). Lena expresses her
trepidation at the prospect of what will be her upcoming wedding when she is paired—
"which means I'll have my wedding *night"* (Oliver 11). Over the course of her and
Alex's relationship, she eventually becomes comfortable enough to take her shirt off in
his presence and develop sexual feelings based on the emotional affection that she
experiences as a result of their shared disclosure of intimate details about their lives.

If adolescent readers are hoping to gain some kind of insight to help them develop
healthy psychological attitudes towards relationships, however, they would be best served
looking elsewhere. Alex re-creates the Wilds in an abandoned house so that Lena can
experience a facsimile of his home in a safe, controlled environment. Her infatuation with
Alex can best be described as co-dependent—and fast approaching obsessive. She
narrates,

> Unimaginable, incomprehensible; a life lived without him. The idea
> breaks me—the fact that he's almost crying breaks me—the fact that he
> did this for me, the fact that he believes I'm worth it—kills me. *He is my*
> *world and my world is him and without him there is no world*. "I won't do

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it. I won't go through with it. I can't. I want to be with you. I *need* to be

with you." (emphasis added; Oliver 331-332)

Again, faced with a striking absence of any role models for understanding healthy

interpersonal relationships, she is left with the idea that grand, romantic gestures and

emotional intimacy should determine her self-worth. Even more problematically, she

believes that she is both incapable of self-validation and unworthy of it if her love interest

is not a prominent presence in her life. She spent the first eighteen years of her life

cultivating a meaningful friendship with Hana, but once they start developing

heteronormative relationships, they begin to grow apart. In light of this change, Lena's

self-image seems to slowly destabilize to the point where she finds it necessary to cling to

the first human being who validates her. Is this a responsible message for authors of

young adult fiction to impart? Adolescents have a difficult enough time navigating the

trials and tribulations wrought by their excessive hormones without having to sift through

novels littered with damaging messages that promote traits typical of unhealthy

relationships (e.g. codependence, obsession, low self-esteem).

If Lena were truly empowered, Oliver's decision to establish Alex as the new hub

of Lena's self-worth seems dangerous when he—like any human being—is fallible. Alex

is likely to disappoint Lena at some point, accidentally or otherwise, and thus destabilize

the fragile sense of self that she worked so hard to create after her mother's suicide.

Adolescents in this day and age are quicker than ever to utter the words "I love you"

within the context of a romantic relationship. When "I love you" becomes "I *need* you" in

their favorite novels, they can hardly be held accountable for not understanding the

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implications of these thought patterns when their secondary modes of socialization are reinforcing the idea that co-dependence is a natural part of romance.

The reader should not be surprised, therefore, when Alex suggests that Lena run away with him to the actual Wilds. As a point in his favor, he does include the caveat that she would be unable to return without risking imprisonment or death, but when Lena is faced with choosing the devil she knows or the devil she doesn't, her decision seems obvious. She has just stated that she feels herself to be incapable of living without Alex. When she asks for a moment to think, critics of young adult fiction take a collective breath of relief; *finally*, the implications of her actions are sinking in! At her hesitation, Alex makes his disappointment clear, and Lena clarifies: her refusal is not personal, but she seems to be the first protagonist thus far who attempts to break the reproduction of mothering cycle theorized by Chodorow. Lena bursts out, "[m]y mother . . . I don't want to be like her. Don't you understand? I saw what it did to her, I saw how she was… *It killed her*, Alex. She left me, left my sister, left it all. All for this thing inside of her. I won't be like her" (emphasis added; 333). Oddly, even though Lena professes her desire to escape the reproduction of mothering, the words that she uses to describe Alex's validation of her worth—". . . the fact that he believes I'm worth it—kills me" (332)—are coincidentally identical to the words she uses to describe the way that love affected her mother: "It killed her." She describes the way her mother used to wail at night "like some kind of animal," grief-stricken from being "cured" so many times. This description seems eerily familiar to the way that she identifies with the rabid dog that was shot and killed by police earlier in the novel (334). In short, despite her best attempts to break the cycle, she

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is unable to completely separate her actions from the patterns established by her mother. When she describes her mother to Alex, a sudden change comes over him—a change that gives him "eyes [that] are so wild and black, his face so unfamiliar-looking" (337). At the end of the chapter, Oliver leaves the reader with the following cliff-hanger that completes Alex's transformation into the handsome prince who gives Lena the means and motivation to rebel against the government. He tells her that he believes her mother is alive.

To confirm this, Alex takes Lena to the highly classified Ward Six, a collection of cells at the prison where political dissidents are kept indefinitely. There, he reveals that his father had been imprisoned there for fourteen years because "[h]e [Alex's father] thought for himself. Stood up for what he believed in. Refused to give in" (Oliver 350). According to Alex, Lena's mother had been imprisoned in Ward Six for the past twelve years, the same period of time that Lena's surrogate family had parroted the story that her mother had committed suicide. When they arrive at what was once her mother's cell, they discover that she has literally covered walls with the word "LOVE." Thus, Lena finally understands the reason that her mother named her Magdalena. According to the *Book of Shhh,* Joseph "gave her [Mary Magdalene] up for love," so she surmises that ". . . that's just part of loving people: You have to give things up. Sometimes you even have to give *them* up" (Oliver 379). After this epiphany, Lena's totality of self is vindicated by her experiences, and her entire outlook on life changes: "For the first time in my life, I actually feel sorry for Carol. . . . I know that the whole point [of life]—the only point—is to find the things that matter, and hold on to them, and fight for them, and refuse to let

them go" (Oliver 383). For Lena, the "thing that matters" is the very thing that her society

has attempted to eliminate: her love for others.

Like *Matched, Delirium* upholds the conventions of the young adult "problem

novel" when, at the end of the novel, Lena and Alex are caught by the government in the

process of escaping to the Wilds. Alex tells Lena to run and distracts the police so that

she can climb the fence. He states that he will be right behind her, but when she looks

back, he is cornered and shot by the police. He sacrifices himself so she has the

opportunity to escape. While the author characterizes him as savior-like by describing his

hair as "a crown of leaves, of thorns, of flames" as the police converge on him, Lena

remembers the way that she had "incorrectly" described *Romeo and Juliet* as "beautiful"

to the horror of her evaluators during her boards. Thinking back, she had "wanted to say

something about sacrifice" (439).

The "sacrificial debt" that Alex fulfills by giving her time to escape was

established when Lena decided not to mention his existence to anyone except Hana when

her trust with Alex began. Had she decided to tell others of his existence when they first

met and he was hiding in plain sight, he would have been imprisoned or killed much

earlier. Alex, covered in blood and subject to the will of the police who surround him, is

destroyed by the "crystallization" of the problem.[3] Lena, conversely, survives with the

hope that she will be able to escape from the government and fashion her own identity

free from the social constructs and heteronormative constraints that have previously

prevented her from attaining both agency and empowerment. Lena explains that "Alex

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[3] Defined by Patty Campbell's formula for the problem novel which was described earlier.

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told me to run. And so I run" (440). She runs not out of fear or subversion, but out of respect for what she considers the final wishes of a man who sacrificed his life for hers the way her mother once had. Although she is fulfilling his wishes, her decision communicates not so much a lack of agency as a choice to follow the path that she and Alex had begun charting together. Perhaps because of her mother's unconditional love, Lena is able to leave the reader with the following impression of what she has learned:

> . . . I have a secret. You can build walls all the way to the sky and I will find a way to fly above them. You can try to pin me down with a hundred thousand arms, but I will find a way to resist. And there are many of us out there, more than you think. People who refuse to stop believing. People who refuse to come to earth. People who love in a world without walls, people who love into hate, into refusal, against hope, and without fear. *I love you. Remember. They cannot take it.* (emphasis added; Oliver 441)

Her closing narration echoes what she believes were her mother's final words. Lena repeats them and thus demonstrates her successful reproduction of mothering. While Lena lacks the agency to oppose the government with her own strength, she acknowledges that Alex's sacrifice—the state of which is left to the reader's imagination, since the text never definitively states that he died during his encounter with the police— symbolizes a selfless manifestation of love that transcends the gender binary.

Her capacity for agency, however, sends mixed messages to the reader. On the one hand, the reader is left with the impression that love is a powerful force which can

fundamentally alter the core of one's being by placing that power squarely with the individual. On the other hand, Lena's decision to follow Alex and abandon her social obligations leads her to give up her family and her best friend. Granted, once Hana and her cousins are cured, they may not share the same bond that they once did; however, Lena works outside of the structural-cultural frameworks that bind her agency to undermine the goals of her society. Readers, therefore, are likely left wondering whether the pursuit of one's goals is truly worth the sacrifices that one has to make in order to see those dreams reach fruition.

While Lena is not required (as of yet) to return to her "proper sexual role," she is now banished from the only place she has called home and trapped in an endless wilderness that she must independently find a way to navigate. She has few survival skills, and the identity that she has managed to cultivate—an identity which places love above all else—will not feed her, clothe her, or shelter her. Her lack of familiarity with the Wilds places her in acute danger of succumbing to starvation or death. Ultimately, while Oliver effectively demonstrates the potential limitations of agency that female protagonists have the ability to overcome, she fails to explain what readers are supposed to do with that agency in the event that their goals are not realized in the way that they envision. Although Oliver comes close to constructing an empowered female protagonist, she does not contextualize Lena's agency by explaining how it is impacted by freedom or damaged by the loss of her primary support system. This is a classic structural weakness that often plagues the first novels of trilogies because readers make the assumption that those questions will be answered later. If they choose not to read on, however, readers are

left with a first impression of agency that leaves much to be desired—one that might have

been more positive if these kinds of plot points had not been left as cliffhangers. While

the convention of the cliffhanger pre-dates this genre, the fact that it is still used as a sales

tactic for increasing revenue by requiring later installments restricts the genre's evolution.

Uglies

If *Delirium* and *Matched* are both problem novels that depict female protagonists

of varying degrees of empowerment who struggle to develop autonomy in co-dependent

relationships, *Uglies* by Scott Westerfield departs from these constructs. As the only

novel under discussion that features a female protagonist written by a male author, *Uglies*

is primed to depict an array of friendships and partnerships without including romance as

a theme until much later. The narrative is a work of social commentary set three centuries

after an "oil bug" has decimated the present-day economy and eliminated the majority of

the Earth's inhabitants, who are called "Rusties" by the novel's citizens. Most of the

descendants of the survivors live in cities which are independently governed. Citizens are

extensively monitored and controlled by their government. They use post-scarcity

technologies that rely on electromagnetic fields and other buried metals (specifically

iron) to power their technological devices. The only individuals who have chosen to live

in the "Smoke" without the advent of technology—the "Smokies"—represent the

"delinquents" that comprise the "theater of punishment." The Smokies may be the only

rebels of whom the novel's ordinary citizens are unaware since the cities under the

government's purview are allegedly utopian. The "theater" is primarily perpetuated by

Uglies who are nervous about their impending operations as a warning of the Rusty life

that awaits them should they reject the operation.

Westerfield separates the novel's citizens by age, which makes it the first trilogy thus far to eschew cohesive family units after children reach the age of eleven. Children aged eleven and younger, referred to as "littlies," live with their parents in the suburbs. Adolescents aged twelve to fifteen are called "uglies," and they live in the dorms of Uglyville until they turn sixteen. At that point, they undergo transformative cosmetic surgery to become "pretties" and then move to New Pretty Town. Unlike citizens in *Matched*, they choose their careers and complete a final round of surgery that makes them appear older and wiser but still beautiful; then, they are called "Middle Pretties," and they move back to the suburbs to have children. Middle Pretties are discouraged from having children more than once every ten years to discourage sibling bond formation and maintain population control. At age eighty, they retire and move to Crumblyville as "Crumblies" or "Late Pretties."

This system ensures that individuals do not form or sustain familial bonds except in extremely rare circumstances. Uglies are discouraged from visiting their parents' homes when they are not on breaks from their education, which negatively impacts the strength of the parent-child bond. While the dorms in Uglyville are monitored, uglies are allowed to (and implicitly encouraged to) pull pranks—like reprogramming and hijacking hoverboards—to occupy their time, but consequences are in place to prevent them from committing more "serious business" like sneaking into New Pretty Town (7). In *Uglies,* there is no special book of doctrine or centralized matching process that determines future spouses or occupations; however, the surgery that awaits adolescents at the age of

sixteen is ascribed as much social importance as Cassia's Match Banquet and Lena's "boards." It is the central defining event of uglies' lives. The purported justification for such surgery is the society's benevolent effort to eliminate the jealousy and conflict that results from disparate physical appearances.

The society in *Uglies* may *seem* utopian to adolescent readers because sixteen-year-olds are given "perfect" features via the kind of extreme cosmetic surgery that many present-day adolescents yearn for (and some obtain from wealthy parents who pay for breast implants or nose jobs as graduation and birthday gifts). However, Westerfield later reveals that the invasive procedures used to eradicate the physical differences which make people unique actually conceal sinister hidden dangers that are later identified to be "lesions" which are left in the patient's brain after he or she receives a surgical makeover. Insidiously, the lesions render adolescents "pretty-minded"—in other words, virtually brain-dead.

Uglies begins as a narrative that primarily concerns the platonic relationship between Tally Youngblood and her best friend Peris. Peris has received the surgery—this trilogy's version of the pillbox in *Matched* or the "cure" in *Delirium*—but Tally has not, which provides the impetus for the initial conflict. Significantly, Tally's admiration of Peris's post-operation beauty is not sexual; there is no narrative or authorial suggestion that she has any kind of romantic attraction to him, which makes their friendship markedly different from the other heterosexual friendships that appear in the aforementioned novels.

If the novels under discussion coexist on a "spectrum" of empowerment (which

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appears to be the case), then *Uglies* falls squarely in the middle for a number of reasons. Unlike *Matched* and *Delirium*, *Uglies* is not established as a narrative that revolves around a romantic, heterosexual relationship—not initially, anyway. Further, unlike Cassia or Lena, Tally has the ability to rescue herself from perilous situations than either Cassia or Lena. Finally, Tally's spatial separation from her parents allows for a more holistic analysis of a female character only minimally influenced by her familial ties. This means that, unlike other characters, her development is almost purely a product of the way that she has been raised by society—not by her parents or surrogate family—making her identity formation more similar to that of boys than of girls, as defined by Nancy Chodorow in the *Reproduction of Mothering*.

The second paragraph of the first chapter begins with a line that sets a suspenseful tone: "Tally Youngblood was waiting for darkness" (Westerfield 3). The "darkness" that awaits her does not merely refer to nightfall. It also implies the eventual surrender of her conscious mind to the surgeon's knife that will not only augment her appearance but, more importantly, make her complacent. At the novel's outset, Tally actively participates in the performative, heteronormative gender displays that are established by the Committee on Morphological Standards (informally known as the "The Pretty Committee," the agency that convenes annually to set the standards of beauty). Like many other female protagonists of recent young adult dystopian fiction, however, Tally's character is also ascribed so-called "masculine" characteristics (e.g. independence, courage, cunning) that enable her to feel comfortable pulling pranks and challenging social constructs.

Her consciousness of self, however, is almost entirely predicated on her physical appearance. The reader is given the following physical description of her character: "She put her fingers up to her face, felt the wide nose and thin lips, the too-high forehead and tangled mass of frizzy hair. . . . Her face seemed to burn as the light touched it" (8). All of this information communicates Tally's dissatisfaction with her current appearance, which she considers to be even uglier in comparison to the pretties across the bridge— which makes sense, since the psychological infrastructure of her society is dependent on comparisons for maintaining the status quo.[4] She is socially conditioned to believe that her appearance is monstrous, so she naturally feels uncomfortable in her own skin.

Tally is characterized as a mischievous, adventurous, self-loathing product of social conditioning and propaganda. As one illustration, roughly three months before her operation, Tally sneaks into New Pretty Town to find her best friend Peris and reaffirm their friendship. When she finds him, she sees that the scar that she had made on his hand as a symbol of the permanence of their friendship—which mirrored a scar that still existed on hers—had been buffed over with new skin during his operation. Peris's unblemished hand symbolizes the erasure of his old life with Tally as an ugly and the genesis of his new life with the rest of the pretties. The fact that he does not seem at all perturbed by its absence is significant. This is the first time that the reader is given the sense that the operation affects more than just physical appearance. Before Tally is forced to escape, Peris and Tally briefly discuss the state of their friendship. Tally allows her

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[4] The fact that her face "seems to burn" when it is illuminated is reminiscent of the effect that sunlight has on vampires as a consequence of their unnatural existence in the light of day.

private self to manifest publicly by swallowing her pride and asking Peris to reaffirm that they are "still best friends." Peris sighs in response and tellingly replies, "Sure, forever. In three months" (20). Peris's caveat is significant: by leveraging their friendship against the successful completion of her operation, Peris in effect requires that Tally remain within the constraints that prevent her from participating in "any more stupid tricks" (18). Although his intentions may be good, Peris clearly has no regard for what empowers Tally or adds purpose to her life. He has abdicated his "immaturity" as an ugly in favor of pragmatism and summarily (albeit ironically, since pretties' lives revolve around pleasure-seeking and partying) has found Tally's relative level of maturity to be inadequate. If their interactions are any kind of model for adolescent readers, the message seems to be that growing up requires a behavioral change that is consistent with prescriptive norms. Without this change, the adolescent in question will not be "good enough" to maintain interpersonal relationships with their more "mature" peers—a potentially harmful and dangerous precedent to set.

That all of the adolescents are running around largely unsupervised raises the question as to why their parents are not in close proximity to monitor and guide their progeny's development. Roberta Seelinger Trites posits the following explanation for this construct:

> In order to be mature, they [adolescents] need to murder the parent who
> represses their power, regardless of whether that parent is actual,
> surrogate, or imaginary, so that they can fully enter into the Symbolic
> Order. Since so many adolescent novels contain parents who must be

rebelled against and adult narrators who are the source of the text's often

repressive ideological wisdom, the genre does seem to communicate to

teenagers that authority is not and should not be theirs. In communicating

such ideologies to adolescents, the genre itself becomes an Ideological

State Apparatus, an institution that participates in the social construction

of the adolescent as someone who must be repressed for the greater good.

(83)

This "murder" is not literal, but symbolic. Chodorow's theory of the reproduction of

mothering (and fathering) requires that adolescents acknowledge the constructs which

guide how they were mothered (and fathered), and the extent to which they successfully

reproduce social norms in order to legitimate their identities as women and men. To

accomplish this recognition, female protagonists must abandon their childlike attributes

and cultivate a "definitively codependent personality" that contributes to their current

sense of self which "is profoundly underdeveloped" (Flinders 69). Consequently, female

protagonists of young adult dystopian novels cannot achieve any sort of legitimate

cognitive or emotional growth within disciplinary societies. Annis Pratt asserts that "the

greater the personal development of a hero, the more true she is to herself and the more

eccentric her relationship to the patriarchy" due to "the archetypal patterns that we have

seen in women's fiction [which] constitute signals from a buried feminine tradition that

conflict with cultural norms and influence narrative structures" (169). If female

protagonists cannot develop a sense of self in the first place, they cannot be true to a

sense of self that does not exist.

The first time the reader is introduced to Tally's parents is directly after the

meeting that places her operation in jeopardy. Tally's parents, Ellie and Sol, visit her to

express their concern at the possibility that she will be denied the operation. They pledge

to "get to the bottom of it" (Westerfield 111). The way that Tallys's interaction with Ellie

is described is significant: "Ellie swept in first, gathering Tally into a hug that emptied

her lungs and lifted her feet off the ground. 'Tally, my poor baby!' . . . Even without

oxygen, it felt good inside the crushing embrace. Ellie always smelled just right, *like a*

mom, and Tally always felt like a littlie in her arms" (emphasis added; Westerfield 110).

Although Ellie is Tally's biological mother, Tally uses the simile "*like* a mom," which

signifies her inability to connect Ellie's mother*hood* with her mother*ing*.

When Tally communicates her inability to fulfill the terms of the agreement that

would allow her to receive the operation due to the "promise" she made to Shay, Ellie

gives Tally the following advice: "Tally, we all make promises when we're little. That's

part of being an ugly—everything's exciting and intense and important, but you have to

grow out of it. After all, you don't owe this girl anything. She's done nothing but cause

you trouble" (Westerfield 112). Trites claims that

> Although children's literature is capable of celebrating "childness"—the
>
> characteristics associated with childhood—adolescent literature seems to
>
> delegitimize adolescents, insisting that "adolescentness," especially
>
> immaturity, is unacceptable, even though the surface intention of most YA
>
> novels is ostensibly to legitimize adolescence. Texts accomplish this
>
> delegitimization by conveying frequently to readers that they need to grow

up, to give up the subject position culturally marked "adolescent." (83)

By minimizing the importance of Tally's promise and advising that she "grow out of" her "ugliness," Ellie reinforces the delegitimization of Tally's "adolescentness" and encourages the reproduction of social norms that will arguably damage Tally's sense of self. In *Uglies,* adolescents learn these norms from technology rather than their caregivers because education has been standardized to ensure that adolescent viewpoints are homogenized. This convention symbolizes one of the Foucauldian "discipline blockades" that prevent adolescents from forming close, sustained bonds with their parents and necessitates their reliance on institutional constructs as primary agents of socialization. The message disseminated by such practices tends to privilege "the greater good" over empowerment and agency. Ironically, Tally's involuntary journey to the rebel colony called "the Smoke" disrupts her belief in "the greater good" and enables her to challenge the constructs which mandate her prescribed gender displays.

In this novel, the concept of "power" is explored on structural-cultural, institutional, and individual levels. Van Soest and Bryant claim that violence on the structural-cultural level is "represented in world views, or ways of thinking, that accept violence as a natural part of life. . . . It is hard to see because it appears 'normal.' It is present in the way society approaches an issue or defines a problem" (qtd. in Franzak and Knoll 663). In "Excluded Girls," Audrey Osler maintains that a broader definition of violence which includes "micro-violence" or "incivilities" is helpful in understanding the experiences of girls in relation to violence and exclusion (578). Since uglies are encouraged to call each other hurtful nicknames based on physical qualities that are

considered unattractive or unappealing, structural-cultural violence is present due to the "factors leading to girls' exclusion [that] constitute a form of systemic violence in schools, which is, in turn, reinforced by the processes of exclusion" (Osler 572). While physical violence is most visible, Osler states that psychological violence is most frequently experienced by girls, and that violence among girls at school (in this case, in Uglyville) is institutionalized due to the acceptance by both students and staff that verbal abuse and psychological violence are normal.

Before she meets an ugly named Shay, Tally is excited to undergo surgery and regularly uses "morpho software" to predict what her cosmetic alterations will look like. After the two begin to interact more regularly, Tally is surprised to learn that Shay has not only *never* used the software, but that she has no desire to do so. Shay clarifies her reluctance within a context that acknowledges the uglies' lack of agency in choosing their new appearances. Tally states, ". . . I can't believe you don't have a single morph. *Please."* Shay responds, "[Using the morpho software is] stupid. The doctors pretty much do what they want, no matter what you tell them." Tally replies, "I know, but it's *fun"* (Westerfield 40). For Tally, imagining how much better her life will be after the surgery is not only productive, but entertaining. Engaging in this self-loathing exercise is similar to the way that modern adolescents compare their bodies to Photoshopped magazine covers. The narrative tension that manifests between Tally and Shay is a byproduct of the conflict between Shay's desire to retain agency and Tally's predisposition toward social conditioning. When Shay finally acquiesces to using the morpho software and they have to choose a side of her face to make symmetrical, Shay opts to use her right side because

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she "happens to like [it]. Looks tougher" (Westerfield 41). The subtle thread of resistance that permeates Tally and Shay's initial interactions is all the more significant because of the role reversal that later occurs when Shay receives the operation before Tally, an event which uproots all of their previously held ideologies. Since Shay is arguably the more agentic of the two in the morpho encounter, Tally acknowledges her assertiveness with the response, "You're the boss." This suggests that Shay's strength of will is a sign of empowerment that Tally may not yet have the capacity to adopt.

During the morpho experiment, verbal incivilities indicate that the girls' regular appearances are not "good enough" for the exacting standards of society. At one point, the text acknowledges that the symmetrical "Shays" presented by the software "already looked better than the original" (Westerfield 41). Her lips are described as "almost pretty-sized"—as though they are *almost* worthy of remaining untouched. Tally is impressed by the final product of the morpho software, but Shay is disgusted that her augmented image "totally [looks] like every other new pretty in the world" (Westerfield 42). In a sense, it appears as though the goal of the Pretty Committee is analogous to the goal of authors who construct female protagonists of young adult dystopian novels: homogenizing heroines who stabilize the gender binary by demonstrating and normalizing the performance of "feminine" traits—specifically traits which are associated with white, middle-class constructions of femininity. If Shay already resists the idea of looking like everyone else—which her society claims eliminates discrimination and ultimately fosters peace—then it would be counterproductive for her to retain her autonomy and her intelligence after the operation robs her of every quality that makes her "Shay." The

Pretty Committee's reasoning behind engineering the brain lesions makes sense—

especially since the lesions serve as the "disciplinary mechanism" that ultimately controls

the behaviors and thought patterns of pretties all over the globe. Other mechanisms

appear in the form of walls that turn into computer screens from which items can be

requisitioned (which means, by extension, that they can be used to spy on uglies) and of

interface rings that track uglies' movements and alert officials when uglies have ventured

out of bounds.

One of these mechanisms, the wall-sized computer screen, is used during the

morpho software experiment when Tally deflects Shay's reluctance to use the software

even after Shay suggests that they go hoverboarding instead. Tally pretends to agree with

Shay's suggestion, then states:

> "But first, let's get this right."
>
> "What do you mean, 'get it right,' Tally? Maybe I think my face is
> already right!"
>
> "Yeah, it's great." Tally rolled her eyes. "For an ugly."
>
> Shay scowled. "What, you can't stand me? Do you need to get some
> picture into your head so you can imagine it instead of my face?"
>
> "Shay! Come on. It's just for fun."
>
> "Making ourselves feel ugly is not fun."
>
> "We *are* ugly!"
>
> "This whole game is just designed to make us hate ourselves."
>
> (Westerfield 43)

Uglies are told that the surgery acts as a social equalizer because "everyone [used to judge] everyone else based on their appearance. Taller people got better jobs, and people even voted for some politicians just because they weren't quite as ugly as everyone else. . . . [P]eople killed one another over stuff like having different skin color [sic]" (Westerfield 43). Physical qualities are admittedly much easier to control than levels of intelligence, and both of those attributes exist irrespective of gender, so the society attempts to channel the hate that was previously targeted against the "other" by refocusing it on the citizens themselves. Unbeknownst to the citizens, a second equalizer occurs during surgery with the additions of the lesions left on their brains: varying degrees of intelligence and strength of will are also homogenized. Since both males and females undergo surgery and emerge *without assigned partners* afterward, gender does not appear to permeate social customs in *Uglies* as significantly as it does in *Matched* or *Delirium*.[5] Westerfield's society has achieved mastery over citizens by curbing cognitive growth and individuality before adolescents can develop a sense of autonomy *or* a sense of gendered differences.

The "incivilities" that occur in *Uglies* are a byproduct of the structural-cultural violence that encourages adolescents to devalue their appearances—and, by extension, themselves. Interestingly, Tally is the one who believes the social doctrine that she was taught and agrees that surgery is the only way to enforce equality. Shay counters this assertion by asking, "How about making them [people] smarter?" Tally rebuffs this notion, which significantly handicaps her empowerment by virtue of the fact that, at this

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[5] The pairing process for Middle Pretties that results in marriage is never explicitly discussed in the trilogy.

point, she has not experienced any injustice which would destabilize her belief in the government or its means of enforcing the hierarchical social order. As of yet, nothing has occurred to her that would lend itself to outright rebellion against social injustice or inequality on the basis of her gender. She does not conceive of gender as a factor in the social order. Even more intriguingly, she does not seem to connect her gender to her appearance, likely because gender is not a factor in the hierarchy at a boarding school where *all* are ugly (i.e. not pretty) and thus all are equal.

The most interesting aspect of the morpho software is the illusion of choice that accompanies its use. Uglies spend hours making new faces for themselves using the software, but ultimately, the decision about how they are going to look after the operation is made solely by their surgeons. Furthermore, after the operation is complete, the lesions prevent the new pretties from remembering what they might have wanted to look like in the first place. In this way, the government insidiously allows uglies to believe that they have agency to choose their post-surgery identities—an important facet of any regime that requires adolescent compliance—and then usurps that choice by ignoring their desires for particular physical traits and erasing those desires with the surgical "discipline mechanism" that is an essential facet of Foucault's Panopticon.

The institutional violence in *Uglies* surfaces in ". . . policies that privilege some [adolescents] over others" (Franzak and Knoll 669). Tally's agency in the novel is curtailed by a woman named Dr. Cable, who is the head of the covert and foreboding government agency called "Special Circumstances." Dr. Cable refuses to allow Tally to receive the operation (and the false sense of mental and emotional empowerment that is

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engendered by the brain-altering lesions) unless she exploits her new friend Shay and

betrays the subversive rebel colony called "the Smoke." When Tally declines Dr. Cable's

offer by echoing what she told Ellie—that she made Shay a promise—Dr. Cable

"[becomes] nothing but a monster, vengeful and inhuman," and makes Tally another

promise of her own: "Until you do help us, to the very best of your ability, you will never

be pretty. . . . You can die ugly, for all I care" (Westerfield 106). Like Katniss in *The

Hunger Games*, Tally is given the "choice" to decide the course of her fate; however, like

Katniss, her "choice" is limited. After Tally emerges from her meeting with Dr. Cable,

Ellie and Sol discourage her from coming home with them to their residence in

Crumblyville. Ellie asks, "Sweetheart . . . what other choice do you have?" (Westerfield

115). While Ellie's intentions may be compassionate, her response to Tally's predicament

emphasizes the fact that not helping Special Circumstances is the "wrong" choice

because it would result in Tally's failure to live up to her civic duties and her subsequent

ostracism as an ugly outcast. If Tally does not receive the surgery, from that point

forward, her public self—indeed, every performative act that is tied to her appearance

and construction of gender—would be delegitimized and rejected.

If Tally were able to detach her self-worth from her impending operation, Dr.

Cable would hold no power over her, so her choice to uphold the status quo and embark

on a perilous adventure is ironic because it fundamentally alters her core identity. Equally

ironical is Dr. Cable's role in ultimately providing the impetus for Tally's empowerment

as a byproduct of the self-reliance she develops over the course of her journey. Like the

protagonists investigated by Brown and St. Clair, "the surface plot or ideology

encourages highly conventional behavior for young women . . . [who] never [question] the "good girl" role [their cultures impose] on [them]" (16). Interestingly, Tally's experiences with individual violence suggest that she may actually possess more agentic traits than other female protagonists in the young adult dystopian genre. Before she embarks on her adventure to the Smoke, Dr. Cable gives her a pendant that, if triggered, broadcasts her location to Special Circumstances. Unbeknownst to Tally, the pendant is designed to send the same signal if it is damaged or destroyed. Later, Tally throws the pendant into a fire to sever her connection with Special Circumstances.

When Special Circumstances agents arrive, she is assigned a Special to help her locate the pendant. Tally uses nonsense words to confuse the Special, falsely appeals to his pride by pretending to thank him for "saving her" from falling off a roof, and uses her ingenuity to activate a hoverboard that allows her to escape. Tally's actions conform to sociocultural norms that establish the relative stupidity of uglies in comparison to Specials and thus empower her to use the structural-cultural frameworks against themselves, specifically those which subordinate women on the basis of gender as well as adolescents on the basis of age. Her simpering gratitude is a ploy that the Special does not see through because that behavior is one of the minor vestiges of traditional gender-based interactions that remain in the novel.

After her escape, Tally reunites with the Smokies who have discovered an experimental "cure" that reverses the effects of the brain lesions. Without being asked, Tally makes the decision not only to volunteer as a test subject, but to write a letter to her future pretty self that explains the situation and urges her to take the cure even though she

may be reluctant. In making such a subversive choice—a *legitimate* choice, unlike the one Dr. Cable offered—Tally takes control of her own fate and disrupts the social constructs that maintain the status quo. While Tally is by no means an "ideal" protagonist, her relative empowerment in comparison to Cassia and Lena is obvious. She finds a love interest by the end of the novel but does not rely on him to "save" her.

Although the conventional love *triangle* is missing from the first novel of this series, an unconventional love triangle does exist. Tally finds a love *interest* in the infamous David at the Smoke, which places her in conflict with Shay. Shay was one of the reasons that Tally agreed to venture to the Smoke, but David disrupts their friendship when Shay discovers that he has given Tally an extremely rare gift of gloves that will protect her hands from the burns and calluses that accompany physical labor. David also introduces Tally to his parents, which is a social custom recognized by today's adolescents as a significant step in a relationship. Shay, who has nurtured a crush on David, is understandably hurt by the attention he pays Tally and mistakenly believes that the pendant Tally was given by Dr. Cable is a gift from a lover back home. Tally promises to tell David the reason that she wears the heart pendant—a promise which ironically forces her to undermine Shay and David's trust by lying to them both—and damages both her credibility and their friendship in doing so. The irony of Tally's decision to stay in the Smoke is that the Smokies might never have been discovered by Special Circumstances had she not broken the pendant as a symbol of her solidarity. Once she breaks the pendant, the Specials quickly identify their location, and Tally is once again ripped from the new place that she has chosen to call home and the love

interest who provides her with a sense of security and belonging.

Another reason that *Uglies* falls in the middle of the aforementioned spectrum of female empowerment is that it is one of the only novels explored in this project in which the primary love interest expresses reasons for his attraction which are not superficial. The social constructs established by the government in this novel create "more permeable ego boundaries . . . [that] make a girl more vulnerable and, in some ways, more dependent" (Daly 51). However, Tally's vulnerability and dependence are two aspects of her identity that Westerfield actively seeks to disrupt with his construction of her developing romance. When Tally attempts to tell David the truth about the pendant, David explains that he "really likes" Shay, but that she is "[n]ot serious. Not you" (Westerfield 238). Tally's fingers fly to the pendant, and David acknowledges that he ". . . noticed that necklace. After your smile, it was the second thing I noticed about you" (Westerfield 239). David's acknowledgment of the rigorous demands of the Smoke have led him to seek a partner who possesses the physical, mental, and emotional strength to withstand its challenges, and he recognizes those traits in Tally based on his observations of her work ethic and her temperament.

Unlike other male love interests in the young adult dystopian genre, David also helps Tally re-frame the psychological damage she incurred from her social conditioning. He counters her claim that imperfect skin (i.e. the scratches on her face that she sustained during her journey to the Smoke) is a sign of a poor immune system, suggesting instead that the scratches are "a sign that you'd been in [sic] an adventure . . . that you'd bashed your way across the wild to get here. To me, it was a sign that you had a good story to tell

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. . . As I thought the first time I saw you—you take risks. You're still taking risks . . . What you do, the way you think, makes you beautiful" (Westerfield 264). As Nancy Flinders states in *At The Root of this Longing,* "One of the subtler aspects of the debate over "voice" and "silence" is that there is an immense difference between having permission to speak and enjoying the hope that someone might actually listen to you" (64-65). Annis Pratt contextualizes this statement within literary frameworks with the following claim: "[i]n novels of development, marriage, and social protest we have seen how patriarchal expectations thwart the heroes' quests for totality of self to the extent that they become alienated not only from the enclosures of society and marriage but also from their own bodies and minds" (74). Throughout their conversations, David expresses not only an interest in Tally's adventures and a desire to hear her story, but an appreciation of the risks she has taken to arrive at the Smoke. As someone born and raised in the Smoke, his concept of beauty is wholly separate from hers. He specifically states that it is what she *does* and how she *thinks* that makes her beautiful, not the extent to which she complies with stereotypical gender constructs.

Annis Pratt explains that "Atkinson's theory of romantic love as psychopathology is certainly borne out by the catatonic manner in which so many heroes of the modern novel back into marriages or rebel against marriages into identically destructive love affairs" (93). This text, then, is one that may exemplify Pratt's declaration that "[w]e [authors and critics] can resolve this problem [the condemnation of heterosexual passion] . . . by recognizing that the destructive attributes of romantic love stem from the friction in what Atkinson describes as the 'male/female *role* confrontation' but not from its

heterosexual quality per se" (93). Daly cites Northrop Frye's description of the romantic vision as the "core" of romantic fiction and argues that narratives have been historically gendered so that "when the heroine becomes the quester, displacing the questing hero, an important convention of the romance has already undergone . . . a 'revolution'" (51). Westerfield's revolutionary decision to construct a love interest that *empowers* Tally rather than *constrains* her conflicts with the destructive attributes of romantic love embedded as supposedly normative aspects of the genre. David enhances Tally's empowerment by encouraging her independence and valuing her thoughts and actions. Unlike other female protagonists of this genre, Tally does not start out seeking a relationship; she stumbles across a love interest later in her travels, and even after she finds him, the novel does not revolve around their romance. Her later romantic pursuit enables her to redefine her concept of agency and achieve her own goals as she *chooses* as opposed to following the path set for her by her wishing to become someone's girlfriend.

Uglies is the only novel with a female protagonist selected for this project that was written by a male author with progressive attitudes toward gender roles. This may be part of the reason Tally's story does not revolve around a romantic relationship. This "revolutionary" construct may be attributed to Westerfield's internalization of norms that are not subject to the same constraints which limit white, middle-class, female authors. The fact that female protagonists of dystopian novels written by female authors tend to display the exact traits that those authors are trying to problematize is as ominous as it is problematic. Further study may warrant an investigation of the relationship between an

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author's gender and his or her depiction of the gender roles performed by same- and opposite-sex protagonists.

The Hunger Games

Like the other novels under discussion, the connection between the dystopia in *The Hunger Games* and Foucault's Panopticon is fairly transparent. Suzanne Collins has created a dystopian vision of a postwar United States called "Panem," a plutocracy governed by the totalitarian administration situated in "the Capitol." The Capitol is geographically located in the area formerly known as the Rocky Mountains. Its role as the Panoptic watchtower—a structure which houses watchmen rarely (if ever) seen by those under their purview to encourage self-policing behaviors—is obvious. Since the end of the Uprising, the Hunger Games competition and the sophisticated camera monitoring system that watches Panem's reactions throughout the Games operate as "disciplinary mechanisms" through which the Capitol's power is made apparent in each of the districts. By these means, the Capitol maintains the order of the disciplinary society.

Panem's economy centralizes and controls each district's primary industry and forces the districts' individual citizens to rely first on the Capitol's benevolence—then, if the Capitol fails, on themselves—for the goods and services (i.e. rations and Peacekeepers) that ensure their survival. Before the Uprising, the nation of Panem was originally separated into thirteen conglomerated nation-states known as districts. At the beginning of the trilogy, only twelve of these districts are acknowledged and controlled by the Capitol. According to the government, the thirteenth district was destroyed during

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the Uprising and it stands as an example of the consequences and futility of rebellion against the totalitarian state. Each district is charged with producing, obtaining, or refining the goods of a specific industry or industries for the Capitol's consumption and distribution to other districts. Inter-district contact is illegal, so each of the twelve districts has a distinct culture that is often tied to the goods it produces and the geographical location it inhabits. The districts are numbered hierarchically according to the relative importance of the goods or services that they produce,[6] and their place in the hierarchy typically determines how wealthy or impoverished the citizens within those districts are. In this novel, Foucault's "theater of punishment" is exemplified by District Thirteen, which was destroyed by the Capitol in retaliation for its pivotal role in the Uprising—though the possibility also exists that the "delinquents" are comprised of past Hunger Games winners, who act as mentors for competitors from their Districts and generally stand as testaments to their own brokenness from being forced to live with their memories of the Games.

Katniss Everdeen, the novel's protagonist, lives in District 12—the district that mines coal for the Capitol.[7] It is located somewhere near the area formerly known as Appalachia, and it is arguably the poorest district in all of Panem. The electrified fence

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[6] District 1 produces luxury items for the Capitol and is considered to be the wealthiest district. District 2 practices masonry, manufactures weaponry, and supplies Peacekeepers. District 3's primary industry is electronics, though it also makes automobiles and firearms. District 4's industry is fishing, District 5's is power, and District 6 produces transportation. District 7 provides lumber, District 8 produces textiles, and District 9 cultivates grain. The most impoverished districts—10, 11, and 12—supply livestock, agriculture, and coal, respectively. Before the Uprising, District 13's primary industry was nuclear weaponry, which was likely why it was targeted for obliteration by the Capitol when it rebelled.

[7] The districts are written numerically when they appear in the narrative, but are spelled out when referred to in dialogue.

that encloses District 12 acts as a "discipline blockade" which prevents citizens from venturing beyond its borders. The convention of the fence itself is reminiscent of the geographical divisions between Provinces in *Matched* as well as the electrified fences that have otherwise enclosed Portland in *Delirium* and entire cities in *Uglies*. Put simply, this convention appears in some way in every novel under discussion—as well as in a growing number of young adult dystopian novels that are not discussed in this project. Like the fence in *Delirium*, this fence is supposed to be electrified twenty-four hours a day. And, like the fence in *Delirium*, it is not.

Ironically, the weakness of the district—its dearth of financial resources—creates the weaknesses in the fence that allow citizens to venture beyond its borders. From a Marxist perspective, it almost seems as though the weakness of the proletariat is what creates the structural weaknesses of the bourgeoisie and their control over the masses; Panem is only as strong as its weakest link, and District 12 is quite weak indeed. If citizens of District 12 wish to hunt for food outside of the district's limits, they must cross this fence and venture into the wilderness. This subversive act requires them to know that the fence is not constantly electrified and take advantage of this weakness for their own gain. Katniss's ability to exploit this weakness makes her subversive. Her hunting abilities come from her father's subversion. He passed these skills down to her so that she would know how to hunt for survival outside of the Capitol's watchful gaze. For all intents and purposes, where the Capitol is concerned, Katniss should not be winning the Hunger Games because adolescents in her district do not cultivate occupational skills until they enter the mines—and even then, mining is not a skill that tributes would find

particularly helpful or threatening. Because she is able to hunt, however, she has transferable skills that enable her to turn her ability to hunt animals into a talent for "hunting" her fellow tributes once she is forced into combat by the Gamemakers.

Readers who look to Panem as an example of a post-gender dystopian society are likely going to be disappointed by the reality of its social norms—if they ignore the media hype that stems primarily from its ethically ambiguous portrayal of the trilogy's protagonist. To be fair, gender norms in the Capitol are admittedly more flexible because social constructs require citizens to be decadently fashionable, which often allow instances of gender-bending. In District 12, the division of labor is stratified according to traditional gender roles that prevent women from working in the mines and instead require them to be homemakers and mothers, so performances of gender are correspondingly more rigid. Some occupations allow individuals to occupy more progressive roles (like the female butcher, or Peeta's father, the baker), but for the most part, the roles that citizens play are dependent on their gender roles. In District 12, individuals seem to accept the "fixed natures that determine life roles, occupations, traits, behaviours, values, and modes of cognition" (Regan 10). Some of those who are on the brink of starvation decide to take matters into their own hands and hunt for food, knowing they run the risk of violating the law and suffering the commensurate punishment. From her father, Katniss has learned to share her spoils with the Peacekeepers and grease the cogs of the political machine. Katniss initially resists the Capitol in order to ensure her family's survival.

Katniss's identity is closely tied to her childhood and the death of her father,

which profoundly affects the degree to which she is empowered as she begins to develop her identity in separation from her mother. After Katniss's father dies, her mother (who is never named, only referred to as "Katniss's mother") becomes virtually unable to function, which profoundly affects the reproduction of mothering and Katniss's sense of self. Katniss rejects the emulation of the maternal role, instead stepping into her father's role, ensuring that her family is fed and that her younger sister, Prim, is nurtured. As a result, Prim constructs her performance of femininity in relation to both Katniss and her mother. The style of mothering that Katniss rejects might well have been borrowed from Wollstonecraft:

> But, supposing a woman, trained up to obedience, be married to a sensible man . . . he may die and leave her with a large family. . . . A double duty devolves on her; *to educate them in the character of both father and mother*; to *form their principles* and *secure their property* (emphasis added; 282)

Because Katniss's mother fails in her role to satisfy her "double duty," Katniss picks up the slack by emulating her father and assuming the role of the family provider. She states, "at 11 years old . . . I took over as head of the family" (27). She does not *need* men to survive, and she refuses to allow love to trap her the way it "trapped" her mother upon her father's death. Part of the reason that her mother was trapped may be due to the fact that Katniss's maternal grandparents were part of the merchant class; her mother technically "married down" to be with her father in the Seam of District 12 where working-class families live. Katniss lacks empathy for her mother's failure to mother her

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properly, but she admits that this trait—her mother's demonstration of agency in abandoning her social class for love—is the only thing that could tempt her to extend forgiveness. In this way, Katniss demonstrates thought patterns that are similar to Lena's in *Delirium.* This makes sense considering both protagonists were robbed of their closest parental figures at an early age.

To fulfill her role as provider, Katniss is ascribed performative "masculine" behaviors that offset the gendered expectations which are supposed to structure her performance of femininity. The hunting boots Katniss dons symbolize her subversion of traditional gender roles, especially when accompanied by her decision to wear her father's coat and "tuck my [Katniss's] long braid up into a cap" (4). Her conscious choice to prioritize function, safety, and pragmatism over aesthetics even before the Games occur is part of what separates her from Cassia and Lena and ties her closer to—albeit further on the spectrum of empowerment than—Tally. To emphasize this separation as well as the empathy that she refuses to express, Katniss admits to having tried to drown a cat that her younger sister Prim brought home because the "last thing I [Katniss] needed was another mouth to feed" (3). Katniss contrasts her performance of femininity with her sister Prim's. Prim adopts a flea-ridden, mangy kitten and persuades Katniss to let her keep it first by begging and then resorting to tears—a technique reflective of the emotional blackmail for which men have criticized women since time immemorial.

Due perhaps to the heteronormative constraints that pressure adolescents into forming heterosexual partnerships, the conventions of the young adult dystopian genre appear to require that female protagonists be partnered with male characters who

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compensate for their lack of size, strength, strategic skills, or combative abilities and also

have the potential to play romantic roles in the near or distant future. In Katniss's case,

the first male character who seems as though he may fulfill this role is her hunting

partner, Gale. When they first met outside of the fence, she taught Gale to shoot a bow

and arrow the way her father taught her to. In return, and he showed her how to set traps

and snares. Their partnership was equal.

As a bow hunter, Katniss's choice of weaponry is inherently gendered, but not for

the reasons that most readers would think. Successfully shooting a bow and arrow

requires upper body strength that Katniss's wiry frame is somehow capable of despite the

fact that she admits herself to be malnourished. Collins digresses into a narrative

discussion of Katniss's socialization and exposure to gender norms by describing the way

Katniss was taught to "hold [her] tongue and turn [her] features into an indifferent mask

so that no one could ever read [her] thoughts. Do [her] work quietly in school. Make only

polite small talk in the public market. Discuss little more than trades in the Hob . . ." (6).

Even before the Games, Katniss conforms to the social norms that "silence" women in an

effort to ensure both her safety and that of her family. Her silence, if used effectively, is

as powerful a weapon as her bow, and is equally effective for creating distance.

Despite the subversion that Katniss's skill with a bow and arrow would suggest, a

secondary aspect of this weapon underscores the implicit way that the young adult

dystopian genre continues to subjugate women on the basis of their gender. Archery

minimizes the necessity for hand-to-hand combat and requires patience as well as

concentration to ensure accuracy. As an archer, Katniss has had few reasons to develop

closer-range fighting skills, though most adversaries would expect a female opponent to lack these skills for stereotypical reasons. Katniss's strength and size (or supposed lack thereof) place her at a combative disadvantage that will never manifest itself as long as she allies herself with a partner who compensates for these weaknesses. Unfortunately, in the arena. This flaw is likely to make itself known when she is pitted against twenty-three other tributes in a battle to the death. Katniss's choice not to hone these skills and rely instead on archery is, on the one hand, pragmatic; on the other hand, it is potentially indicative of Collins's acknowledgement that, in Western societies, "good girls" like Katniss (and her ally Rue) do not cultivate skills conducive to close-range combat because fisticuffs are not considered gender-appropriate.

While it makes sense that Katniss would excel in her chosen field, her propensity for long-distance violence suggests a narrative acknowledgement of the structures that prevent women from becoming *too* powerful or *too* proficient in multi-faceted combat skills. If Katniss is too autonomous, she risks losing sympathy from readers who do not expect women to excel in combat due to the structures that keep them subjugated both in battle and in life. Moreover, if the trilogy does not end in her eventual domestication, she risks invalidation from her peers as well as her readers by virtue of her decision not to return to her "proper sexual role." The genre allows female protagonists to wander and explore (within limits), but demands a formulaic end to the journey if they want to be legitimated.

In her mother's figurative absence, Katniss has become a father figure as well as role model for her younger sister Prim. The identity that she cultivates in response to

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those roles is simultaneously self-sacrificial and self-destructive. When Prim's name is called at the annual reaping in which the year's tributes for the Games are chosen, Katniss reflexively volunteers to take her place. Katniss herself acknowledges that ". . . in District 12 . . . the word *tribute* is pretty much synonymous with the term *corpse,*" and adds, with a painfully coincidental choice of words, that ". . . volunteers are all but extinct" (Collins 23). Although most would agree that sacrificing oneself for a sibling is an emotional event—especially when one sibling is essentially martyring him- or herself for the other—Katniss accepts the reality of the perception that will accompany her televised reaction if she does not force herself to stonewall Prim's sudden hysterics: "'Prim, let go,' I say harshly, because this is upsetting me and I don't want to cry. When they [the Capitol] televise the replay of the reapings tonight, everyone will make note of my tears, and I'll be marked as an easy target. A weakling. *I will give no one the satisfaction*" (emphasis added; 24). Not only does Katniss recognize the performative displays that will make her a target, she actively refuses to buckle under the pressure of her circumstances and "steels herself" to accept the consequences of her chosen fate. Arguably, this is one of the first times that a female protagonist in this project has made a choice early in the narrative that is *not* limited. Katniss was not *forced* to volunteer for her sister; no one suggested or required it as a course of action that was leveraged against her autonomy. The strength of Katniss's familial bond and her sense of integrity as a provider—caused by her father's physical death and her mother's mental/emotional death—is the only impetus for her decision.

In order to successfully navigate the structures that govern her survival in the

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Hunger Games, Katniss perfunctorily performs normative gender displays throughout the competition that require her to acknowledge traditional gender norms even as she subverts them. Her District 12 mentor, Haymitch, admits that her success in the Hunger Games is heavily reliant on her performative abilities: "It's all a big show. It's all in how you're *perceived*" (emphasis added; Collins 135). While Katniss does not necessarily *depend* on men, the same conventions that necessitate Gale's role as Katniss's platonic-yet-potentially-romantic hunting partner also ensure that she cannot *survive* without the addition of a second "hunting" partner—Peeta Mellark, the male tribute selected at the reaping.

District 12's sexualized division of labor makes it all the more intriguing that Peeta has achieved an unparalleled skill with camouflage from decorating cakes at his parents' bakery. His mastery of such a traditionally feminine pursuit annoys Katniss to the point of barbed sarcasm when the time comes for them to demonstrate their abilities in the rating process before the Games: "It's lovely. If only you could frost someone to death" (Collins 96). This interaction not only communicates Katniss's derision for his performance of traditionally "feminine" traits but also seems to imply an undercurrent of jealousy regarding his ability to excel in prototypically female gender displays while retaining his potential for upward mobility and success within Panem's patriarchal social order.

Katniss's relationship (such as it is) with Peeta is complicated by her friendship with Gale. Gale's ruggedly attractive features and hunting prowess make him an ideal partner for Katniss, but Katniss cannot be with a hegemonic male because his gender

performance perpetuates the subjugation of women by men. If they were to force a relationship, their partnership would be inherently unequal because his attempted stabilization of gender dominance would lead him to suppress (rather than appreciate) her agentic traits (Connell and Messerschmidt 840). Although Gale and Peeta share certain qualities (i.e. physical strength, strategic intelligence, a desire to provide for and protect loved ones), Gale's position on the spectrum of masculinity renders him less of a complement to Katniss and more of a mirror—and if she is going to survive in the long run, the Girl on Fire needs a partner whose fuse is far longer than hers. Nostalgia may bring Gale to the forefront of her mind, but Peeta is the one who comforts and nurtures her, possibly because his "marginalized masculinity" (Connell and Messerschmidt 848) is more conducive to the performance of "communal traits" (Rudman and Glick 744) that are employed by caregivers in the process of mothering.

Haymitch is the first to explicitly draw this connection after Peeta expresses his love for Katniss during his interview prior to the Games. Katniss is outraged by Peeta's unforeseen declaration, but Haymitch reminds her of her dependence on Peeta for survival: "The boy just gave you something you could never achieve on your own. . . . He made you look desirable! And let's face it, you need all the help you can get in that department" (135). Before Peeta's admission, Katniss fails altogether to create a public image that would convincingly reproduce what the audience would consider to be an "appropriate" gender display and thus garner her sympathy and/or sponsorship: "We try me playing cocky, but I just don't have the arrogance. Apparently, I'm too "vulnerable"

for ferocity. I'm not witty. Funny. Sexy. Or mysterious" (118)[8]. Her personality, therefore, may be the Achilles heel that will decide her success or failure in the Games. If she does not uphold the status quo, she will lose her only means of getting through the Games alive: the sympathy of the wealthy sponsors in the Capitol (as well as readers of young adult novels).

Despite initial appearances to the contrary, the novel seems to suggest that Katniss and Peeta's partnership can never be equal because she is incapable of "winning over" the audience on her own merits or talents. This unequal partnership engenders an alliance based more on forced reciprocity than mutual respect, at least on Katniss's part. Here, to Katniss, the *reality* of the partnership matters less than its *appearance.* Throughout the novel she states "He has done me a favor and I have answered with an injury. Will I never stop owing him?" (137), and "[i]f, in fact, Peeta did save me, I'm in his debt again. And this can't be paid back" (286). By definition, the relationship between debtor and indebted can never be equal until the debt is repaid, so Katniss's actions where Peeta are concerned are not "heroic" as long as she frames them as obligatory and compensatory rather than as subject to moral imperatives. Even her justification for choosing Peeta is contingent on reciprocity: "I do not want to lose the boy with the bread" (297). In this sense, Katniss's experience with love mirrors Cassia's, Lena's, and Tally's: each sacrifices herself for what she believes to be "the greater good,"

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[8] Even Katniss's prep team for the Games participates in the interaction that defines her gender display by molding her into the Capitol's conception of the feminine ideal with well-meant comments such as, "You look almost like a human being now" (Collins 52) in response to her ordeal with waxing, or, "By the time Cinna is through with you, you're going to be absolutely gorgeous!" (Collins 52). The underlying implication is that without the help of people who actively participate in the social interactions that define the gender binary, Katniss would never be able to fully achieve a functional performance of femininity.

which in Cassia and Lena's case is tied to the fate of their love interest and in Tally's is intertwined with the future of her society.

Although the genre's conventions *allow* Katniss to participate in structural-cultural violence, they also punish her (or those who attempt to engage her in violent interactions) for challenging the performativity paradigm.[9] Even before the Games begin, when the tributes are ranked, her autonomy is limited and her odds of survival are jeopardized. When she shoots an arrow directly at the Gamemakers out of annoyance at being ignored, she receives a score of eleven on a possible scale of twelve. Haymitch praises her hegemonic performance by conjecturing, "Guess they liked your temper . . . They need players with some heat" (108). Unfortunately, this score is only auspicious if its implications are ignored. Katniss is now situated in an ideal position to obtain sponsorship from wealthy donors, but the Gamemakers have painted a figurative target on her back that magnifies her presence to the other tributes. Thus, in giving Katniss the second-highest score possible, Collins and the Gamemakers alike have almost ensured that Katniss will need an ally now that the odds are certainly no longer in her favor—a decision that she would likely have not made of her own accord, but must now make out of necessity. Since her task is now technically to "learn how to collaborate with the patriarchy publicly in order to achieve some measure of private success," the forward momentum of the trilogy is not actually as progressive as media outlets claim (Lazzaro-

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[9] Katniss does not even appear to *believe* in her capability for violence towards potential aggressors: Peeta and Katniss initially argue with one another over who will prove the more capable in the arena; Peeta admits that his own mother believes Katniss will emerge victorious, to which Katniss responds by undermining her own agency, claiming that she is the "survivor" his mother claims her to be ". . . only because someone helped me" (90).

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Weis 19).

By acknowledging that her relationship with Peeta is based on interdependence, Katniss demonstrates a self-concept that is "likely to proceed from an awareness of [herself] as an object of the observation of others, and [has] little to do with attention to aspects of self that are private and unobservable" (Fenigstein 549). These concerns are expounded by John Berger in *Ways of Seeing,* where Berger asserts that

> A man's presence is dependent upon the promise of power which he
>
> embodies…. The promised power may be moral, physical, temperamental,
>
> economic, social, sexual—but its object is always exterior to the man. . . .
>
> By contrast, a woman's presence expresses her own attitude to herself, and
>
> defines what can and cannot be done to her. . . . There is nothing she can
>
> do which does not contribute to her presence . . . [because women are
>
> judged by their] gestures, voice, opinions, expressions, clothes, chosen
>
> surroundings, [and] taste. (Berger 45-46)

The significance of this observation to Katniss's identity formation and future course of action is clear. As a tribute whose performance is watched, evaluated, and critiqued by the entirety of Panem, Katniss must possess a double-consciousness that is sensitive to the public self she is required to portray as a means of survival. When Claudius Templesmith makes the announcement that two tributes can live if they hail from the same district, Katniss reflexively calls out Peeta's name. As she correctly explains, "Peeta, who's wounded, is now my ally. Whatever doubts I've had about him dissipate because if either of us took the other's life now we'd be pariahs when returned to District

Twelve. In fact, I know if I was watching I'd loathe any tribute who didn't immediately ally with their district partner" (247). Even if taking on a wounded ally means that Katniss may be killed by the end of the Games, *she has no other choice*. Before the rule change, her strategy was to avoid Peeta, which allowed for the expectation that someone else would kill him so that she did not have to. Now, she not only does not have to kill him, but must save him in order to hold the respect of her District.

Any pretense of agency to which Katniss might have laid claim is divested from her in this scene. The underlying message, again, is that her self-respect is dependent on Peeta's survival—which, since he is wounded, is dependent on her ability to actively pursue and kill the other remaining tributes. Since she must ally with a wounded partner during the most crucial stages of the Games, Katniss reduces her own chances of survival. However, any physical scars she receives in the arena are in no way as severe as the emotional scars she would endure if Peeta's blood were on her hands, so her course of action is predetermined by outside forces that anticipate her "communal" responses to emotional stimuli and determine her actions accordingly. Ironically, because Katniss is the "object" under scrutiny by Panem and has managed to evade mortal injuries until this point, she is the only one who bears culpability for a failed alliance since Peeta has already tried his best to "save" her by making her "desirable" in the first place. Her debt will not be paid in full unless she has exhausted every opportunity to return the favor and adopted the role of the "star-crossed lover"—no matter how inauthentic it may feel.

Her private self conflicts with her public self when she is forced to share the experience of her first kiss with the rest of Panem, and Haymitch reinforces her behavior

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with a truly masterful representation of classical conditioning. Until Katniss finally kisses Peeta—an act motivated by her acknowledgement of being "watched" by the rest of the country and her status as an object—Haymitch does not provide assistance. Once she performs the duties of her prescribed role, however, a sponsor gift is immediately dispatched. As Katniss states,

> Haymitch couldn't be sending me a clearer message. One kiss equals one pot of broth. I can almost hear his snarl. "You're supposed to be in love, sweetheart. The boy's dying. Give me something I can work with!"
>
> If I want to keep Peeta alive, I've got to give the audience something to care about. Star-crossed lovers desperate to get home together. Two hearts beating as one. Romance.
>
> Never having been in love, this is going to be a real trick. (261)

The patriarchal structure that provides Panem's underlying framework is never more explicit than it is here; although she is a protagonist, Katniss's life alone is not worth saving unless she reproduces the social constructs that essentialize women as objects of desire and/or caregivers. Despite the fact that she lacks a personal experience on which to base her understanding of romantic relationships, she reproduces her mother's role in her parents' relationship to the best of her ability based on the interactions she witnessed in the past between her parents—which forces her to emulate her mother, a role she has consciously avoided. Unfortunately, these interactions prove to be psychologically damaging to Peeta when it becomes evident after the Games that he was unaware that her feelings for him were fabricated to ensure their survival. Ironically, her decision to use

love as a strategy undermines her agency because it appears as though she lacks compassion—one of the defining traits of the empowered female protagonist—which becomes an issue only because the *author* made a choice to embed romance as a fundamental theme.

Because Gale's understanding of interpersonal relationships is functionally similar to Katniss's, his relationship with her can never be more than platonic. In Panem, identity cannot be formed independently without regard to the social constructs that govern an individual's behavior. Peeta—whose "subordinated/marginalized" masculinity enables him to utilize "communal" traits that not only identify and employ the only constructs that will truly keep Katniss safe (even against her will)—is able to quench the fire that rages inside of Katniss and support her gradual evolution from adolescence to adulthood. Gale's hegemonic traits, conversely, are only capable of stoking the fire and providing Katniss with more reasons to resist the Capitol's oppressive regime.

The various forms of relationships presented in *The Hunger Games* cast doubt on the supposed necessity of the pervasive "love triangle" convention that problematically rebrands female protagonists of young adult dystopian novels as "romantic heroines." Annis Pratt describes the dangers of these relationships with her assertion that the female *Bildungsroman* "provides models of 'growing down' rather than 'growing up'. . ." (14), and indirectly compares Collins' novels with the works of Austen, Burney, and Edgeworth by claiming that these authors "satirize excesses in courtship norms by . . . comparing the hero's pragmatic choice of mate to a less sensible couple in the subplot. The ingénue sets forth into society, pokes fun at characters who may be excessively

'male' or 'female' in their behavior . . . and then chooses a suitable mate. In this way, authors are able to both criticize marital norms and accommodate them" (14-15). In young adult dystopian fiction, the tried-and-true "love triangle" creates a comparison between the protagonist's relationship with one character to her relationship with a foil character who shares similar traits but whose masculinity does not threaten her performance of gender.

> Peeta's performance of gender is complicated by Connell and Messerschmidt:
>
>> Men who received the benefits of patriarchy without enacting a strong version of masculine dominance could be regarded as showing a complicit masculinity . . . It was in relation to this group . . . that the concept of hegemony was most powerful. Hegemony did not mean violence, although it could be supported by force; it meant ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion. (832)

While Wicklund and Gollwitzer "attempt to explain away the effects of public self-consciousness by calling it 'reliance on the dictates of others' . . . the presumed "essence" of [which] is now social dependency," their conceptualization oversimplifies the relational processes involved in identity formation (545). Connell and Messerschmidt also draw attention to the fact that "the concept of masculinity is flawed because it essentializes the character of men or imposes a false unity on a fluid and contradictory reality . . . framed within a heteronormative conception of gender that essentializes male-female difference and ignores difference and exclusion *within* the gender categories" (emphasis added; 836).

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The fact that Peeta's characterization tends to fluctuate situationally between subordinated and complicit masculinity is significant. As Katniss's love interest—initially by necessity, later by choice—Peeta "balances" Katniss's more agentic attributes by suppressing his "private self" (i.e. cognitions, emotional states, desires, and intentions) in order to make his "public self" (which involves the self as a social object) more conducive to her needs (Fenigstein 548). His agency is dependent on Katniss's performance of gender, which in this context ironically secures his survival within Panem's patriarchal social order as long as he subtly guides Katniss back towards her proper sexual role.

As a competitor who recognizes the inherent dangers of his situation, Peeta's best opportunity for survival is to deliberately present himself in the most nonthreatening manner possible, which constricts his performative abilities as well as his public self. He recognizes the danger of feigning modesty when he praises Katniss's abilities in archery to Haymitch. After Katniss's private self acknowledges that Peeta's praise of her abilities "[rubs] her the wrong way," she retorts publicly that Peeta "can lift hundred-pound bags of flour" (Collins 89-90). However, her relationship with Peeta upholds the structure of traditional gender relations as the Games progress. After Katniss is robbed of her ally, Rue, the constructs that prevent her from surviving autonomously in the Games are reinforced. After the announcement of a rule change which would allow two tributes from the same district to survive the Games, Katniss changes her situation by finding Peeta, who is expertly camouflaged and bleeding profusely from a wound delivered by another tribute. Although she undermines his masculinity by facetiously pointing out that

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his cake decorating skills saved his life, he returns the favor by "jokingly" asking for a kiss since they are supposedly "madly in love" (253). She takes this request in the spirit he intends her to, but it emphasizes her dependency on him for survival—even (and especially) if he is wounded. Like members of the military who are told "never [to] leave a man behind," Katniss does what she considers to be her civic duty and plays along for the sake of her potential sponsors. Katniss could not live with herself if she had to face her District without him when it was possible for them both to survive, so she is forced back into their "relationship" in order to obtain sponsors and ensure their survival.

Shortly after he asks for a kiss a second time to break the tension, Katniss is faced with the decision of whether or not to disrobe him in order to provide medical treatment. Her inner conflict manifests in the form of a very uncharacteristic discomfort with nudity that even Peeta notices: "You know, you're kind of squeamish for such a lethal person" (258). Since Katniss acknowledges the fact that her younger sister Prim would be of greater assistance in this situation, her "squeamishness" can only be a reflection of late nineteenth century cultural values that, as Patricia J. Campbell noted in *Sex Education for Young Adults 1892-1979*, were "obsessed with protecting the sexual purity of young people . . . [since] [y]oung women . . . continued to be regarded as children until well into the twentieth century, defined as such until they earned the status of adulthood by entering either into the world of work or matrimony" (qtd. in Brown and St. Clair 7). Joanne Frye asserts that "[t]o be female is to be defined biologically, to be passive and dependent, to be sexual at the expense of autonomy" (qtd. in Wyatt 130). As long as Katniss is constrained by the necessity of her partnership with Peeta and the physical

affection that their ruse demands, she sacrifices any pretense of autonomy because her decisions are dependent on constructs that leverage her survival against her performative abilities.

As one significant example of Katniss's limited autonomy, the survival of any tribute in the Games is predicated on the inevitability of killing one's fellow tributes, but Collins never actually allows Katniss to murder another character. On the contrary, the death of each tribute that she meets in combat is constructed to *appear* as though she is not ultimately responsible. From the moment Katniss flees the area of the Cornucopia, her intention is to get as far away as possible as fast as she can to avoid confrontation. This effort is thwarted by the Gamekeepers, who release targeted fire balls to guide her back to the field of combat. If Katniss were as agentic as the media claims, she would have the ability to hunt down her fellow tributes to increase her odds of survival as she so chooses. Katniss rejects this strategy, arguably only because Collins acknowledges the fact that readers would have difficulty empathizing with a female killer, regardless of her motivations for committing murder. If she is not responsible for the deaths of her opponents, however, she is merely acting in self-defense and cannot be held solely culpable. Since Katniss is never even given this option for fear of alienating readers and failing to fulfill the norms established by popular culture and its social constructs, she is not truly as agentic as many believe her to be. Of the twenty-three tributes against which she competes, Katniss is only responsible (this term is used loosely) for the deaths of three: Glimmer (whose death is an unintended result of Katniss's attempt to save herself from the Careers), Marvel (who commits suicide by hemorrhaging before he can die as

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the result of his primary injury), and Cato (who is killed out of compassion as he is being torn to pieces by muttations).

When Katniss is treed by a pack composed of the girl from District 4 and the "Career Tributes,"[10] (Cato, Glimmer, Marvel, and Clove) with whom Peeta has allied, she is awaiting certain death. The District 11 tribute, Rue, alerts her to a nest of "tracker jackers" that Katniss lets loose by sawing off the limb of the tree from which it hangs. [11] The fact that she is merely the catalyst for the attack manages to separate her intention (to escape) from its results (the death of two girls). This example, like her skill as an archer, creates a distance between her and her victim, which enables her to partially abdicate responsibility for their deaths.

Collins goes to great lengths to describe how lethal the tracker-jackers truly are, and here Katniss's intentionality is first called into question. The tracker-jackers are almost described as a murder weapon, and in this scene, Katniss faces the first transformative challenge that marks her initial breach of the performativity paradigm: the sheath of arrows from the cornucopia that was "*meant for* [*her*]" (Collins 149) is trapped under Glimmer's putrid, decaying body, and Katniss must fulfill her role as an empowered protagonist in a mockery of King Arthur's legend that demands she free her "sword" (the bow and sheath) from the "stone" (Glimmer's body) to gain the upper hand that will turn the tide of her performance. She does so without vomiting, signifying her initial success in traversing the gender binary, but her efforts are immediately

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[10] Career Tributes are from Districts where it is considered an honor to volunteer once they reach an optimal age.
[11] Wasp-like creatures whose stings cause powerful hallucinations, intense pain, and almost certain death.

undermined by the hallucinogenic effects of the stings that serve as her punishment for challenging the paradigm. Like Lena, who is saved from certain capture by Alex, Katniss is relegated to the role of a "damsel in distress" when Peeta arrives and urges her to flee before the Careers return. Her last thought before losing consciousness is "*Peeta Mellark just saved my life*" (Collins 194). Katniss wakes up two days later to find Rue, who has nursed her back to health (Collins 200). Both events suggest her subordinate role in her struggle to remain alive and demonstrate her inability to ensure her own survival despite the skills and capabilities that she has been granted by the author.

A pivotal scene occurs during Rue's death as the result of a spear thrown by the Career Tribute Marvel; Katniss's arrow arrives a split second too late to save Rue, but grievously wounds Marvel. At this point, her potential failure in her role as Rue's protector enabled her to traverse the gender binary so that she could absolve herself of secondary culpability in Rue's death, and without thinking she had launched an arrow into Marvel's neck. The reflexive action of this violence and the fact that it occurred in defense of another person prevents her from experiencing the conventions which would typically force her to lose consciousness, but no violent act committed by female protagonists is completely without consequence. Because she sacrificed herself for Prim in the beginning of the novel, she must now endure her penance via the horrific loss of an ally who has virtually been a surrogate younger sister. In spite of this consequence, the novel's conventions do allow her to assume sole or final responsibility for Marvel's death. She begins the process, after which Marvel could arguably have been spared by a sponsor's gift or a *deus ex machina*, but the text states that "he halves the brief remainder

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of his life by yanking out the arrow and drowning in his own blood" (Collins 233). *He takes responsibility for his own death and ends his life on his own terms.* In this way, his death is engineered by Collins to spare his blood from reaching Katniss's hands both literally and symbolically.

The novel does not even allow Katniss the satisfaction of earning her victory in the Games on her own terms. She attempts to kill Cato twice in the Games' final moments and fails. After Cato falls into the clutches of the muttations, she waits, like a child, for the mutts to "just kill him" (339). As the protagonist, she must exhaust every possibility that would estrange her from culpability for his death. Although Cato has killed many other tributes in cold blood, his suffering at the hands of the tribute dogs humanizes him in Katniss's eyes[12]. When she does pierce him with her final arrow, it is *at his own request.* As she explains, "it would be an *act of mercy* at this point" (340, italics added), and "[p]ity, not vengeance, sends [her] arrow flying into his skull" (Collins 341). After the announcement is made reversing the earlier two-tribute rule change, Katniss decides that she and Peeta must commit suicide rather than kill one another. At this point, the Capitol's original announcement is reinstated to allow for the victory of two tributes who hail from the same district. In short, the novel's conventions

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[12] This compassion, while humanizing for Katniss herself, seems unrealistic. Unlike Thresh, who acknowledges the necessity of violence in the Games but does not take lives with the nonchalance of the Career Tributes, Cato not only actively participates in the Hunger Games—he seems to *relish* the experience. Most of the tributes participate for the sake of sheer survival, but the Career Tributes immerse themselves in the Games and appear eager to utilize their training. The role that he plays is one he's been groomed for his entire life; while his lack of remorse after murdering other tributes may partially be attributed to the structures that influenced his upbringing, his death—even a violent death—does not warrant Katniss's sudden pardoning of his heinous crimes when the dogs doling out his final sentence are merely taking advantage of his compromised situation just like he did to them.

continuously allow Katniss (and her readers) to *believe* that she possesses the agency to make choices with mortal consequences but retract this agency so that she never has to fully exercise it. Like the female protagonists in the other four novels under discussion, Katniss's agency exists within strict limitations. These boundaries problematize the conflict between her role as an empowered protagonist and the gender norms that require her to perform "communal traits" in order to survive. Without the freedom to make choices that have lasting consequences, Katniss is ultimately trapped by her status on the gender binary that coddles female protagonists by providing a figurative safety net to shield them from enduring the full weight of the consequences of their actions.

Collins seems to suggest that although Katniss's actions in defense of others would be excused on moral grounds, they would not be excused on gender grounds. Thus she provides a distance between Katniss and her actions which greatly reduces Katniss's moral culpability but at the same time curtails her agency. Since the secondary modes of socialization (like the media, literature, and popular culture) that are consumed by adolescent girls play a pivotal role in the formation of their identities and private selves, girls develop an understanding of agency that is noticeably influenced by the protagonists they look to as role models. Protagonists who do not conform to traditional gender roles struggle with conventions that alienate them from their own stories by compromising their relatability with their intended audiences. As the next novel demonstrates, empowered female protagonists may achieve *notoriety*, but authors may end their journeys prematurely if they feel that the protagonists have served their intended purpose and "grown up" (as though their primary role is ultimately sacrificial in nature).

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Divergent

As demonstrated in the second chapter of this project, the validity of a female

protagonist's gender displays can be measured in part by whether she conforms to the

prescriptive norms of femininity as evidenced by her performance of "feminine" traits.

For this reason, the implicitly gendered personality traits that are exhibited by

Divergent's various faction members make the novel and its social order a unique study

of the way that agency is expanded or constrained by gender. Set in dystopian Chicago,[13]

Divergent features a society in which members are taught to believe that city-wide peace

is only maintained by the maintenance of the "faction system." This system separates

members into five factions named after corresponding personality traits for which they

demonstrate aptitude: Abnegation, Amity, Candor, Dauntless, and Erudite.[14]

"Dependents" of faction members are raised in nuclear families in the factions

into which they are born. At sixteen, dependents undergo an aptitude test that is intended

to determine the faction to which they actually "belong." Once they have received their

results and made their decisions, they participate in the "Choosing Ceremony," where

they can either elect to remain in their faction or transfer to another faction as a "faction

transfer." Since the phrase "faction before blood" is taught as a mantra from the time that

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[13] Readers will recognize all of the landmarks of dystopian Chicago, but Tris never expresses any knowledge of the fact that her city has—or has ever had—a name. The city is only referred to as Chicago in later installments.

[14] The political philosophy as it is presented in the novel states that the ancestors of the faction members believed that humankind's "inclination toward evil" by virtue of evil's manifestation through certain personality traits was to blame for a warring world. The factions were established as a way to "eradicate the qualities they [their ancestors] believed responsible for the world's disarray. . . . Those who blamed aggression formed Amity . . . Those who blamed ignorance became the Erudite . . . Those who blamed duplicity created Candor . . . Those who blamed selfishness made Abnegation . . . And those who blamed cowardice were the Dauntless" (42-43).

members are very young, this transfer is not to be made lightly. Dependents who transfer

are expected to cut ties with (and loyalties to) their biological families and adopt a role

within their chosen faction, whose members then become their new family. The Choosing

Ceremony incorporates salient themes from Michel Foucault's philosophy of "docile

bodies" in *Discipline and Punish* by establishing a social context of discipline that is

ceremonial. The faction-choosing ritual emphasizes the importance of the audience (in

this case, the non-Divergent faction members) and juxtaposes it with the implied

knowledge that any deviation from or refusal to participate in the ceremony will leave an

individual factionless, which the society's members consider to be a fate worse than

death.

This "perfect" system is problematic, however, as it fails to account for human

variants; not all members fit squarely into any one "box." Members with an aptitude for

more than one faction are labeled "Divergent." Supposedly, "Divergents" are a threat

because the possession of multiple traits is considered to be dangerous and subversive.

Some members even believe that Divergence actually compromises the integrity of the

faction system because Divergents are more difficult to understand, and therefore, to

control. Thus, Divergents often meet inexplicably mysterious ends that seem to be in

some way caused by those in power.

Beatrice "Tris" Prior, a Divergent herself, is arguably the most empowered and

agentic protagonist discussed in this project. Tris's role in *Divergent* is a prime example

of the way in which female protagonists in young adult dystopian fiction represent a

modern manifestation of the growing tension over women's power. According to Judith

Lowder Newton, "[i]n these novels growing resistance produces growing tension. . . . The heroine's, and the author's, rebellion is not abandoned, but it is directed into fantasies of power which are increasingly apparent as fantasies and increasingly difficult to sustain." Although Newton claims that authors of young adult dystopian fiction challenge the status quo by writing these novels and "defusing the desire for power by satisfying the longing for it," she is only partially accurate when she states that subversive writing is a form of power. Authors of young adult dystopian novels are finally beginning to construct female protagonists whose struggle against patriarchal hierarchies is indeed an "action upon one's readers and one's world" (22). However, their rudimentary representations of hegemonic femininity confine the protagonists within heteronormative frameworks that punish them for using physical violence to mitigate interpersonal conflicts or engage in altercations that will damage their reputations as "good" or "pretty" girls. By limiting female protagonists in this way, authors undermine their own protagonists' agency and, by extension, their empowerment.

The characterization of Tris's parents may partially explain the reason that such tensions initially manifest in *Divergent*. As Tris will learn close to the end of the novel, her father, Andrew, was a faction transfer from Erudite, and her mother, from Dauntless. Tris describes her father as being "too opinionated, but also loving." These traits are agentic and communal, respectively, and they suggest on the surface that Andrew Prior possesses the capacity to subvert gender norms by virtue of his performance of marginalized masculinity. Tris respects her father and allows his opinion to impact her identity, which is demonstrated by her response to his warning about overvaluing

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knowledge and developing a lust for power: "I know I will not choose Erudite, even though my test results suggested that I could. I am my father's daughter" (35-36). However, not long after this pronouncement, Tris demonstrates the way that she is also her *mother's* daughter—a decision that will simultaneously separate her from her father and draw her closer to her mother.

According to Chodorow, fathers are most crucial to their daughters' development during the oedipal period and early adolescence—times when a girl is supposed to be "negotiating her transition to heterosexuality" (139). Juliet Mitchell uses a psychoanalytic model of development to posit that the father—who intervenes in the nonsocial or presocial mother/child relationship—unambiguously represents culture and society (Chodorow 129). Fathers socialize and enculturate their children in nuclear families of which the father is the head, and children carry their fathers' surnames; therefore, Andrew Prior's distance from his family and ideological authority as a leader of Abnegation has led Tris to deny the limitations of her father as well as the other faction leaders because she does not actually know them as *people* so much as *figureheads*, so she conceives of their identities in abstraction (Chodorow 195). Because her ideas of culture and society are informed by the selfless Abnegation modes of production that other factions openly mock with derisive comments and crude slang terms, Tris's upbringing has ensured her difficulty in relating to adolescents from different factions—a stumbling block which her mother seems to hope Tris mitigates by transferring to another faction at the Choosing Ceremony.

As an Abnegation member who is also a faction transfer from Dauntless, Natalie

Prior would have unintentionally (or otherwise) imposed certain agentic traits on her daughter but also modeled communal traits by virtue of the faction into which she chose to transfer and raise her children. The trait that Tris admires most in her mother—being "well-practiced in the art of losing herself"—is integral to her own identity formation and will ensure her survival if she can successfully reproduce her mother's selflessness (Roth 1). This pattern of practice disrupts the male gaze that permeates the dystopia's heteronormative constructs by allowing Tris's mother to "watch herself being looked at" since "the surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed [is] female. Thus she turns herself into an object—and most particularly an object of vision: a sight" (Berger 47). Unbeknownst to Tris, her mother's ability to sacrifice her principal identity and construct a new one that reflects communal values actually enables her to hide her own and her daughter's Divergence in plain sight while teaching Tris to temper her more agentic qualities within the confines of a fundamentally communal faction. Abnegation's defining trait is inherently feminine within the gender binary, and the "role conflict" that Tris experiences before her aptitude test provokes the narrative tension that forces her to reconsider her identity.[15]

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[15] Though she has no idea that she is replacing her mother in Dauntless as a faction transfer and reproducing the traits that her mother has suppressed as a member of Abnegation, Tris admires the Dauntless "hellions" despite not comprehending what courage "has to do with a metal ring in your nostril" (7). Her appreciation for agentic traits complicates her identity, but her lack of understanding foreshadows the nature of the challenges that she will inevitably face along her journey for self-actualization. Caleb's ongoing advice to Tris before the aptitude test is ambiguous: "'Just do what you're *supposed* to,' he always says. It is that easy for him. It should be that easy for me" (emphasis added;10). As a faction transfer to Erudite, Caleb's ascendancy (which, in his case, means his successful performance as the dutiful Abnegation son who inexplicably and unexpectedly switches factions) occurs as the result of his logical insight into the structures that govern social norms, so his advice is well-intentioned—albeit ambiguous. His awareness of these structures means that he can see very clearly what he is "supposed" to do in order to behave in a normative way so as not to raise suspicion, but the fact that he has to impart the advice to his sister at all suggests her troubling lack of social cognizance.

Natalie Prior, like Katniss's mother, also exemplifies the woman in Wollstonecraft's illustrations:

> Let fancy now present a woman with a tolerable understanding, for I do not wish to leave the line of mediocrity, whose constitution, strengthened by exercise, has allowed her body to acquire its full vigour; her mind, at the same time, gradually expanding itself to comprehend the moral duties of life, and in what human virtue and dignity consist . . . Formed thus by the discharge of the relative duties of her station, she marries from affection, without losing sight of prudence, and looking beyond matrimonial felicity, *she secures her husband's respect before it is necessary to exert mean arts to please him and feed a dying flame . . .* I also suppose the husband to be virtuous; or she is still more in want of independent principles. (emphasis added; 283)

To be fair, Katniss's mother's situation is different than that of Natalie Prior's since Andrew Prior is still part of the family unit when the narrative begins. Their family unit is grounded in mutual respect, affection, and pragmatism. If Wollstonecraft's depiction is any indication, part of Tris's empowerment can be attributed to her mother's stability as a caregiver as well as her role as a moral compass.

Natalie's performative acts of caregiving are crucial to Tris's empowerment as well as her identity formation. According to the *Handbook of Behavioral and Emotional Problems in Girls,* "[c]hildren must direct energy typically used for developmental growth into protection from abusive parents and for basic survival with neglectful ones,

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resulting in *multiple lags in cognitive, social,* and *emotional development. . . .* Neglect is

more strongly associated with poor achievement than is abuse" (341). In *Delirium,*

Lena's aunt's criticism of her appearance and demeanor negatively impacts Lena's sense

of self and leads her to rely on her love interest for approval and affirmation. Similarly, in

The Hunger Games, Katniss's mother's psychological absence following her husband's

death forces Katniss to develop skills that would ensure her family's survival but also to

cut herself off from emotions that would help her form interpersonal relationships.

Natalie Prior's compassion, however, empowers Tris by reaffirming her daughter's worth

as an individual and positively influencing her emotional development. Natalie Prior not

only *acknowledges* her children's autonomy but actively encourages them to exercise it

by choosing their own paths. Even if the decisions they make do not align with her

expectations, she respects her children's right to make their own choices so long as those

choices result in their happiness.

How, then, does the choice to assimilate with another faction and leave one's

family forever result in happiness? By splitting the human condition into five traits, Roth

forces her characters to suppress four-fifth(s) of their performative abilities in order to

bask in utopian harmony with their remaining—albeit "chosen"—trait. When individuals

are forced to ignore or repress parts of themselves, however, they may experience severe

emotional stress. Larson and Richards argue that "experiencing multiple life changes and

personal transitions during adolescence . . . contributes to adolescents' emotional

volatility" (qtd. in Arnett 158). If adolescents are unable to obtain emotional support to

help with the transition from a caregiver or trusted individual, they may fall victim to

lowered self-esteem, depression, harmful or risky behaviors, or even psychosis in an attempt to either reconcile or reclaim their lost identities. Roth chose five traits that she believed to be foundational to establishing one's identity, thus reinforcing the paradigm that protects those who reproduce social constructs and ostracizes or eliminates those who do not. Natalie Prior's Dauntless origins give her a conscious awareness of these conflicting perspectives and the consequences for actively subverting patriarchal structures the way a female protagonist in a *Bildungsroman* naturally would. As such, Natalie Prior's support of her daughter's growth helps Tris construct an autonomous identity that comprises the multiple roles demanded by her gender; in this way, Tris can remain hidden from those who hunt for Divergence.

Admittedly, Tris's empowerment is truncated in the beginning of the novel due to her ignorance of the existence and meaning of Divergence. Her ignorance actually places her in danger. Like the other female protagonists under discussion, Tris continuously meets challenges that *should* present her with the potential to experience negative, lasting consequences but somehow always enable her to avoid them. When the aptitude test's simulation confronts her with a ferocious dog, Tris's decision to prostrate herself before it saves her from the threat of violence; her *submission* guarantees her safety (14). Tris is therefore given the freedom to make choices (however limited), but she is also free from the *consequences* of those choices because her responses to those consequences are exactly what would enable her to begin defining herself by her degree of empowerment. This convention seems to be both a staple of the genre and a construct reinforced by the authors of young adult dystopian novels: Cassia is sent to work in the perilous Outer

Provinces (and survives), Lena escapes to the fearsome Wilds (and somehow survives), Tally is "rescued" from the primitive Smoke (and survives to receive her desired operation), and Katniss is "rescued" by the malevolent Gamemakers' final rule change in the face of her and Peeta's impending dual suicide (and, again… she survives). The question for determining empowerment becomes, then, not whether a particular protagonist is given a *choice*, but whether she has the agency and autonomy to handle the *consequences* of that choice—and whether those consequences really exist.

As if to help mitigate the potential blow of the consequences Tris will face after the Choosing Ceremony—since, admittedly, Natalie Prior seems to know her daughter's decision before she makes it—Natalie goes out of her way to demonstrate support for her daughter's autonomy by reminding Tris, "I love you. No matter what" (Roth 41). These words of comfort prove to be necessary in providing Tris with the strength that she needs to make her impending decision.

In response to a question an interviewer asked author Veronica Roth about which faction she'd join if she "had to choose," Roth states, "I've decided there's a difference between figuring out which faction you have an *aptitude* for and *choosing* which one you'd like to be in. No one fits into a faction perfectly, so determining your aptitude is extremely difficult. But as for *choosing* a faction, it's all about *priorities"* (emphasis added; "Bonus Materials" 8-9). By including the choice to transfer between factions, Roth acknowledges the relationship between power and knowledge that is central to Foucault's philosophy of discipline. The disciplinary society can only maintain the status quo if members feel that they have some element of choice, no matter how limited.

Otherwise, the underlying power structures that dictate societal organization and utilitarianism are visible and the entire purpose of the Panopticon is undermined.

Marcus Eaton, a leading member of Abnegation, begins the Ceremony with the following address: "Welcome to the Choosing Ceremony. Welcome to the day we honor the democratic philosophy of our ancestors, which tells us that every *man* has the right to choose his own way in this world" (emphasis added; 41-42). Though she glosses over the gendered implications of Marcus's words, Tris notes almost instantly, "Or, it occurs to me, one of five predetermined ways" (42). The difference between what is *said* here and what is *meant* will become essential when Tris mounts a rebellion against the social order and the gender binary, but for now, it stands as a testament to her awareness of the limited nature of choice that seems to be lacking in the other four protagonists until someone else leads them to such a realization. The faction system-promoting propaganda continues with Marcus's claim that "[i]n our factions, we find meaning, we find purpose, we find life . . . Apart from them, we would not survive" (43). Neither Tris nor Marcus acknowledges the sixth "choice"—to choose to be factionless. To members of the faction system, joining Foucault's "theater of punishment" and becoming one of the "delinquents" is best summarized by Tris herself: "The silence that follows his words is heavier than other silences. It is heavy with our worst fear, greater even than the fear of death: to be factionless" (43-44). Therefore, this sixth "choice" is not a choice at all— even Tris admits that she "would rather be dead than empty, like the factionless" (54). What she does not anticipate, however, is how empty she will feel transferring to Dauntless after her brother has announced his transfer to Erudite. When she looks to her

parents after she makes her choice, she sees that "[m]y father's eyes burn into mine with a look of accusation . . . Beside him, my mother is smiling" (49).

Tris calls herself "selfish . . . [and] brave" for making the decision to transfer (47). At this point, Tris only has a superficial understanding of the term "selflessness."[16] Her self-assessment exemplifies the inner conflict between the validation of her agency and autonomy that she receives from her mother and the rejection she experiences by her father, whose participation in Abnegation leadership has required that he valorize selflessness and sacrifice as essential traits. Her father's reaction seems to reflect his belief that she is not only rejecting him and her upbringing, but the values of Abnegation that should have cultivated in her a desire to be selfless and self-sacrificing. By choosing to transfer, she is not only renouncing her family, but her faction. By choosing to transfer and satisfy her own happiness rather than sacrificing it for her father's sake, she is also renouncing constructs that validate her performance of gender.

Like Katniss's uncommonly high rating of eleven in *The Hunger Games* and Tally's desire to be "bubbly" in *Uglies*, Tris's Divergence is paradoxical because it protects her from the disciplinary mechanisms but also endangers her by increasing the possibility of her exposure and subsequent murder. In short, her ability to perform both stereotypically "masculine" and "feminine" traits paints a proverbial target on her back

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[16] Tris is envious of what she considers her older brother Caleb's "talent" for selflessness, but the example she gives indicates a fundamental misunderstanding of the term: "He [Caleb] gave his seat to a surly Candor man on the bus without a second thought" (3). If the man that Caleb gave up his seat for were elderly, disabled, or otherwise in greater need of seating than he was, then his actions could indeed be considered selfless. The fact that the man was merely "surly" suggests that Caleb may merely be eager to avoid confrontation, which is not so much "selfless" as it is conflict-avoidant. This marginalizes his performance of masculinity in comparison to the Candor man, whose hegemony forces Caleb out of his seat and enables the man to occupy the space that both Caleb and his masculinity vacated.

that might have grown larger if she had stayed in Abnegation where communal traits, not agentic ones, are the norm. If she had not transferred, she would have been forever trapped in a "damned if she does, damned if she doesn't" framework that would punish her for utilizing traits atypical of both her faction and her gender that consequently reveal her to be Divergent, a condition that becomes increasingly perilous as the novel proceeds.

According to Tris, the primary purpose of the Dauntless faction is "to guard the fence that surrounds our city. From what, I don't know" (6). Later in the text, she attempts to find out what exactly the Dauntless are guarding the city *from*—which suggests that this fence, like all other fences in these narratives, represent the Panoptic "discipline blockade." One character notes that the guards at the fence are a fairly recent addition—only in the last five years have the Dauntless been stationed there. When Tris encounters one of her old Abnegation friends, Robert, they have a brief conversation about whether she should return to Abnegation "to be happy." Tris responds that the goal of her life isn't just "to be happy"—a Divergent proclamation if there ever was one, since it suggests that her goals for her life are not the same as those in power who wish to keep faction members happy and complacent. After their conversation, Tris notices the very aspect of the gate that cements its status as the discipline blockade: "[t]he Dauntless guards close the gate and lock it behind them. The lock is on the outside. I bite my lip. Why would they lock the gate from the outside and not the inside? It almost seems like they don't want to keep something out; they want to keep us in" (128). If Tris hopes to escape the consequences that accompany these kinds of observations, however, she must not only prove her Dauntlessness to Robert—she must prove her Dauntlessness to her

new faction and herself as well.

As a female transfer from Abnegation, a "Stiff," Tris is required to "prove" herself to be a worthy Dauntless initiate—which supports Spence and Buckner's findings that women are now "encouraged to become more assertive . . . to face life's challenges rather than being helpless or dependent" but are still "discouraged from advancing their interests at the expense of others" (49). In order to prove her bravery to the Dauntless members and other initiates, Tris is the first to leap suicidally into a chasm (an induction ritual that smacks of institutional violence in the form of hazing) which bears a safety net that Roth has engineered to catch her fall. Tris is never in any real danger, so the Dauntless' definition of "bravery" is arguably as questionable as Tris's understanding of "selflessness"; the net reinforces the construct that supports action without fatal consequence. As though emerging from a baptism by fire, when given the option to re-name herself, she calls herself "Tris" instead of "Beatrice." She muses, "A new place, a new name. I can be remade here" (60)—and she is.

Typically, females, unlike males, are both prevented and discouraged from advancing at the expense of others, but in Dauntless, failing to demonstrate the prescribed "masculine" traits generates a backlash that is experienced by *both* genders. In Dauntless, hegemonic masculinity is practically mandated by the Dauntless manifesto; any individual who fails to demonstrate the prescribed gender traits endures merciless treatment. While Tris attempts to fall asleep during her first night in the Dauntless compound, she overhears the most physically imposing male initiate, Al, sobbing in the bunk next to her. Although her first inclination is to provide comfort, her reaction

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immediately shifts to disgust: "Someone who looks so strong shouldn't act so weak. Why can't he just keep his crying quiet like the rest of us?" (Roth 74). Al's lapse signals a bifurcation between the Dauntless qualities that are suggested by his appearance and the reality of his identity. In essence, the conflict between the way in which his physical demeanor is perceived and his subsequent loss of control is unforgivable, not the act of sobbing itself. As the reader discovers later, the consequences for this kind of deviance can be fatal.

At the Dauntless training, Tris finally begins to break out of her shell and is given tacit permission by the conventions of the novel and the constructs of Dauntless to perform the agentic traits she possesses and eventually reap the rewards in ranking. Since Dauntless mandates physical combat for military training purposes regardless of size or weight disparities between combatants, women in Dauntless are *less* likely to experience backlash if they are dominant instead of incompetent. Their mental and physical strengths are the predominant standards by which they are judged, at least overtly. Tris is bullied numerous times throughout her training—first, because she is an incompetent fighter, and later, because she lacks the feminine attributes that would excuse her incompetence—she is built like a boy. Her agency is not called into question.

One of the first manifestations of Tris's consciousness of self appears in her combat training, where she notes that "[m]y family would never approve of me firing a gun. They would say that guns are used for self-defense, if not violence, and therefore they are self-serving" (78). To members of the "feminine" Abnegation faction, acting in self-*defense* and not *offense* is self-seeking and therefore unacceptable. Paradoxically, to

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act in *offense* would not be an option to the Abnegation at all, so using the gun is a narrative acknowledgement of her incongruity with her former faction in and of itself. Tris herself acknowledges this construct, stating, "There is power in controlling something that can do so much damage—in controlling something, period. Maybe I do belong here" (79). Not only are Tris's actions incompatible with her former faction, she stands in opposition with the constructs that require females to be "helpless, passive, and dependent" and is thus moved further along the spectrum of empowerment than any of the other female protagonists discussed in this project. This thirst for power, for control, is not echoed by any of the other female protagonists under discussion because their claims to empowerment stem from their desires for love, aesthetic appeal, or survival— not empowerment for its own sake.

This is not to say that Tris is a power-seeking testament to hegemonic masculinity. Her empowerment is tempered by very real, "feminine" traits that give her a sense of modesty and vulnerability without over-emphasizing her virginity. When two of their fellow initiates share a chaste peck on the lips, Tris recalls her parents' lack of public affection and their warning about the significance of physical touch. She remarks, in a fashion that another initiate describes as "frigid," that "A kiss is not something you do in public." Her friends laugh, and rather than blaming it solely on her gender, respond, "Your Abnegation is showing . . . The rest of us are fine with a little affection in public" (82). Despite Abnegation's implications of femininity, the fact that the initiates cite her faction as her "tell" suggests that this society—or at least the Dauntless faction—is more post-gender than the other societies under discussion in this project. Later in the text, Tris

again proves her aptitude for feminine gender displays when her friend and fellow initiate Christina asks,

> "Can you be a girl for a few seconds?"
>
> "I'm always a girl." I frown.
>
> "You know what I mean. Like a silly, annoying girl."
>
> I twirl my hair around my finger. "Kay."
>
> She grins so wide I can see her back row of teeth. "Will kissed me."
>
> "What?" I demand. "When? How? What happened?"
>
> "You *can* be a girl!" (369)

By qualifying her expectations of Tris's response under the umbrella of emphasized femininity—Christina gives Tris the opportunity to prove to herself and readers that, no matter how much agency Tris acquires along her journey to empowerment, she is still capable of retaining her claim to "girlhood." Readers therefore remain sympathetic to Tris's character and are assured, should they decide to cultivate their own independent identities and claims to empowerment as Tris does, that they are still free to be "feminine" without being invalidated as strong female individuals.

Tris's reluctance to display her "girlhood" suggests that *Divergent* is not completely post-gender. Throughout the narrative, Tris becomes increasingly enamored with the Dauntless leader called Four. Her attraction initially develops as the result of their shared values—which is, admittedly, a stable foundation for a romantic relationship. The first time that Four and Tris are truly alone is during a capture the flag exercise,

where she answers his question about its "purpose" by responding that it is supposed to teach strategy and teamwork. Although teamwork does not appear to be a Dauntless priority, Four states that it "used to be" (143). Teamwork implies an equal partnership, and equality is impossible to sustain in a disciplinary society that is stratified on a hierarchy of power. As a male, her instructor, and the top of his own initiate class who was scouted for Dauntless leadership, Four appears to be superior to Tris—who is female, a faction transfer from a community of selfless pacifists, and physically unimposing.

To mitigate the inherent inequality of these characterizations, Roth ascribes certain strengths to Tris that balance Four's shortcomings. For example, unlike Four, Tris is not afraid of heights, which allows her to climb a giant Ferris wheel as a vantage point from which she can identify the location of the other team's flag. When she slips during their descent, Four saves her from a potentially fatal fall and ensures that she reaches the ground safely. In this savior-like precedent, Four establishes the baseline for their relationship: a mutually beneficial arrangement characterized by a power imbalance which facilitates and perpetuates Tris's reliance on others to mitigate conflict and danger.[17] While Tris's fight-or-flight response may not be as finely honed as Four's, she cannot be a truly empowered protagonist if she does not learn to trust her own judgment.

Their mutual attraction, featured so prominently from the beginning of their interactions, is harmful to Tris's progress as a Dauntless initiate. After Christina relates

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[17] One could also make the argument that Tris's peril was the catalyst for Four's ability to overcome his own fear of heights—suggesting that her danger enabled his dynamic growth as a character.

the details of her relationship with Will, Tris states, "I laugh. Suddenly I want to tell her about Tobias [Four] and everything that has happened between us. But the same reasons Tobias gave for pretending we aren't together hold me back. I don't want her to think that my rank has anything to do with my relationship with him" (370). Since her survival within the faction system depends on her successful completion of initiation, distracting herself with romantic thoughts of her superiors seems counterproductive (adolescent hormones notwithstanding). Rudman and Glick found that "[a]gentic women can avoid the backlash effect by exhibiting only those agentic traits associated with competence (e.g. independent, ambitious) and none associated with social dominance [e.g. competitiveness, aggressiveness], provided they also display communality" (758). Tris's unprofessional preoccupation with romance in lieu of her training therefore threatens the perception of her competence that would otherwise shield her from the "backlash effect"—a point she herself acknowledges after her conversation with Christina. If they should discover it, some female initiates might actually consider Tris's burgeoning romance with Four to be an act of competition rather than a demonstration of infatuation. Any communality that Tris might display to temper this perception would only further undermine her performance of gender and her credibility. If her relationship with Four were discovered—despite any competence she might have previously demonstrated—her priorities would appear to be at odds with her goals, and her reliance on Four would ultimately be perceived as a savior figure who fights her battles for her.

Despite her Foucauldian revelation that "[t]here is power . . . in controlling something, period," Tris's agency and hard-won control are stripped from her when three

Dauntless initiates corner her in their coed lodgings and snatch her towel from her naked body, forcing her to flee in tears. After this encounter, she resolves, "I want to hurt them . . . I want to, so I will" (170). Selflessness, the defining quality of Abnegation, becomes victimhood when taken to the extreme—especially when selflessness requires a loss of agency. Roth's decision to make Tris's body a predefined "rape space" that ties her agency to her identity as a victim may be a standard convention for female protagonists, but it reinforces the tension that exists between the identity Tris constructs in her chosen faction and the identity she maintained in Abnegation.

Foucault's theory of punishment is a useful tool for analyzing the discourses of power that comprise the initiation rituals of Dauntless. Eric is one of the leaders within the Dauntless hierarchy who reestablishes order using one-on-one combat in front of an audience as a means of control and regulation. Watching violence transpire before their eyes, the audience of Dauntless initiates becomes complicit in its execution: they legitimate the ritual which carries out the process of punishment. The day after the towel incident, Tris is matched against one of her aggressors, Molly, in a combat exercise that affects her ranking and could eventually render her factionless should she be unsuccessful. Without the qualms that a "good girl" would have, Tris beats Molly to a bloody pulp far past the point where Molly might have wished to concede the way Christina did when the two of them fought earlier. In this case, however, Tris faces a patriarchal intrusion: Four intervenes and physically prevents her from causing further harm. He then orders her to "take a walk." Despite the fact that Four watched while Eric allowed Molly to beat Christina senseless even after the latter had conceded—and then

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punished her for conceding, calling it a sign of weakness—Four stepped in to stop Tris from avenging herself on one of her tormentors. This act is all the more troubling considering it was Four himself who gave Tris the advice on how to defeat Molly: "You know, if you could just attack first, you might do better" (129).

Unlike Katniss Everdeen, Tris is allowed to use physical aggression as a means of reestablishing the power dynamic. Like Katniss, however, she is prevented by the genre's conventions from achieving the true extent of this agency because she cannot become a killer lest she lose the reader's sympathy as a protagonist—especially when her love interest is close enough to monitor and mitigate the extent of the conflict. Tris seems ignorant of this convention when she states, "I wish I could say I felt guilty for what I did. I don't" (174). Unfortunately, this absence of guilt is tempered by punishment that constitutes the very consequences Tris seems so adept at dodging. After Tris is ranked higher than the ruthless initiate named Peter, she is kidnapped in the middle of the night by Dauntless initiates who sexually harass her, make snide comments about her secondary sex organs, and bend her back over the railing of a chasm, suggesting they intended to drop her to her death (278-279). When Four arrives and beats her attackers into submission, he establishes himself again as a savior figure, fortifying the paradigm that does not allow Tris to experience consequences and save herself as an act of empowerment. And, like other female protagonists who inexplicably fall unconscious when they are being saved from the consequences of their actions (in Tris's case, her consequences for her being a successful initiate), she "presses [her] face into his shoulder, and there is a sudden, hollow silence" (281).

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Over the course of the novel, it is heavily implied (and later explicitly demonstrated) that Four was physically abused by his father, the Abnegation leader Marcus Eaton, throughout his childhood. By transferring to Dauntless and freeing himself from Marcus's power, Four renounces the place he once called "home" to live in a faction predicated on aggression, competition, and heteronormativity. Despite his efforts to escape, the effects of the abuse he endured followed him to Dauntless. Psychologists explain the following multidimensional impacts of physical abuse on a child's development:

> . . . physically abused youth are more likely to have affective and behavioral difficulties including anxiety, depression, self-destructive behavior, low self-esteem, social detachment, hyperactivity, excessive aggression, and noncompliance. . . . While the most frequently cited behavioral sequelae following physical abuse is the prevalence of externalizing behavior problems, physically abused youth also show high rates of internalizing behavior problems as well. (334-335)

Four's household seems to have been characterized by high levels of conflict and (presumably) low levels of parental emotional support. For this reason, he likely did not "cure" himself of his trauma so much as suppress it, which would indicate his potential for remaining detached in social situations and internalizing behavior problems. Both of these character traits could severely destabilize Tris's sense of empowerment if his trust or level of intimacy towards her shifts after they become physically intimate. Since Tris stays overnight with Four after she is saved from her assault at the chasm, her friends

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become aware of the very relationship she was previously so desperate to hide. Her perceived relationship with Four spawns accusations of favoritism and ultimately results in social ostracism. An unintended benefit of this ostracism is that she has the opportunity to prepare for the final hurdle before initiation: Four allows her to experience his innermost fears in a simulated "fear landscape" that she must overcome—while avoiding detection as a Divergent—in order to be initiated.

Before she follows Four into his fear landscape, Tris states, "I follow him into the dark" (Roth 321). This statement destabilizes her claim to empowerment by emphasizing her dependence on Four to shield her from anything she might encounter in "the dark"— the unknown. In the other novels under discussion, "the dark" overtakes citizens in Cassia's society who swallow the red pill, adolescents in Lena's society who experience the cure, uglies in Tally's society who undergo the operation, and survivors of the Hunger Games like Katniss who live with the memories of those they killed for the sake of their own survival. Although he is teaching her to avoid detection as a Divergent using his own fear landscape as a tool, Tris "follows [Four] into the dark" and watches him battle his fears, modeling the Dauntless thought processes and actions that will allow her to survive. This scene raises the question of why Tris couldn't use her own fear landscape to train—especially since she and Four do not share the same fears. Although she helps him through his fear landscape to cultivate strategies that will hopefully enhance her success, the primary purpose of this exercise is to allow Tris to know Four better and bolster their relationship; if he were truly trying to help her with initiation, this goal would be secondary; the fears they would battle would be *hers*. Rather than following *Tris* into the

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dark to develop viable tactics within the context of an equal partnership, Four continues to reproduce behaviors that will strengthen their relationship first and her odds of survival second. The vast majority of the book seems devoted to demonstrating to the reader that Tris has the capacity to acquire and demonstrate the characteristics validated by Dauntless as well as to retain her own individuality.

However, the direction that Roth takes the novel after the initiation process is completed further imperils Tris, her family, and those in her former faction. It tests whether her successful initiation into Dauntless is sufficient to ensure her own survival and assist in saving the lives of those she knows to be innocent. Hours after the Dauntless initiation, Jeanine Matthews, the head of Erudite, with the assistance of Dauntless leadership, has initiated a plan designed to reorganize the faction system and change it from a communal organization in which each faction member is treated equally to a society in which the factions are organized hierarchically. The hierarchy is structured according to Jeanine's perception of each faction's relative value with Erudite and Dauntless at the top and Jeanine in charge of the entire system. Jeanine's attempt to restructure the faction system requires the elimination of Tris's former faction since, historically, the leadership of the society has been in the hands of Abnegation. The beliefs of the members of Abnegation—and the rest of the society's belief in their leadership abilities—constitute the greatest threat to the success of her plan. Her "hit list" extends beyond Abnegation to include any and all Divergents that she can identify.

Her willingness to dominate the other factions and hunt down Divergents arises from her desire to create a more controllable, disciplined society. Ultimately, Jeanine's

vision of society is more concerned with the efficient and logical operation of power and what she thinks is the "just" distribution of wealth than with the welfare of the five factions or the factionless. To achieve the control necessary to accomplish her plan, Jeanine has utilized her Erudite capabilities to create an injectable agency-robbing simulation serum to force all the rank-and-file Dauntless to do her bidding. This new serum acts as the Panoptic "disciplinary mechanism" which turns the Dauntless into ruthless, mindless killers. Tris, as a Divergent, is unaffected by the serum, and she watches helplessly while her fellow Dauntless members move in drone-like concert through the Dauntless compound into the streets and toward the Abnegation sector. Horrified, she watches them begin to shoot helpless Abnegation men, women, and children.

Half of the work required for Jeanine to accomplish her goal is done for her since the factions have already been physically partitioned and enclosed by the Foucauldian discipline blockade of the border fence. The control tower is then transformed into a means by which the targets that Jeanine has defined—the faction of Abnegation and Divergents—can be identified and their location transmitted to Dauntless execution squads. Bentham's Panopticon demands that power be invisible and that its source be unverifiable. This is significant because these qualities codify the way power operates. By employing Dauntless first as a source of surveillance and second as unwitting killing squads, Jeanine minimizes the resources necessary to achieve her desired level of power.

Divergence poses a threat to the workings of the state because it operates in opposition to the foundational tenets of Foucault's structure of discipline. Foucault argues

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that it is not individuals which make up the mass, but the mass which creates individuals through discipline that works by coercing and ordering an individual's movements and spatial or temporal perception. Since the thought patterns of the Divergent defy norms, they cannot be coerced into processing time or space in the same way as those who are not Divergent. They constitute a danger to the dominant power and are therefore subject to examination and punishment. When Tris realizes the significance of her immunity to the first serum, she states definitively, "I am not Abnegation. I am not Dauntless. I *am* Divergent. And I *can't* be controlled" (emphasis added; 442). Again, as if to punish her for coming to this realization, Roth engineers circumstances which give Tris the opportunity to exert agency as a Divergent. Like Tris, Natalie is revealed to the reader to be Divergent. Natalie later sacrifices herself and delays the necessity for Tris to act, thus preventing her from experiencing whatever consequence might have resulted from making the choice to commit violence.

While Tris *herself* cannot experience the consequences of her agentic actions, she experiences them *secondhand* through the loss of her mother. Before her mother makes her final selfless act, she repeats a variation of the words she had spoken to Tris before the Choosing Ceremony, on Visiting Day when Tris first realized her mother was formerly Dauntless, and then, before her death: "Be brave, Beatrice. I love you" (443). To signal her distraction, Natalie fires three shots into the air and runs so that Tris has a chance of finding the safe house where Andrew and Caleb are waiting for her. As she runs, Tris watches her mother get shot before her eyes and die on the pavement. She draws strength from Tobias telling her to be brave, and her mother telling her to be brave,

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and she states, "Somehow I get up and start running. I am brave" (444). When she has

almost reached the safe house, she hears footsteps close behind her. Will, her friend and

fellow initiate, still under the influence of the simulation serum, points his gun at her.

Because he is a threat to the nearby safe house as well as her own survival, Tris models

the strength her mother demonstrated only minutes before. Tris kills the empty shell of

her friend in self-defense because she literally has no other choice (and neither Natalie

nor Four is not available to rescue her). Before she shoots, she thinks, "Will. Dull-eyed

and mindless, but still Will . . . And I fire . . . The bullet hit him in the head. I know

because that's where I aimed it" (Roth 446). However, because her use of violence does

not conform to prescribed gender norms, she reaffirms her role as a sympathetic female

protagonist by taking a moment during the middle of the battle to loudly express her

anguish for the boy she killed and the innocence she sacrificed in doing so.

Before she speaks, Tris mentions that any noise could attract Dauntless soldiers

who would surely kill her upon discovering her, but she proceeds to scream out her

distress at Will's death (Roth 446). Somehow, none of the countless, murderous soldiers

roaming the streets in packs are drawn to her location, which frees her from the necessity

of again resorting to violence; instead, the novel skips the span of time between her

escape and her miraculous arrival at a safe house. Again, like Katniss, Tris is given the

appearance of agency and denied the opportunity of ever actually *using* it since her

distance from violent conflict coddles her development. Roth perpetually constructs

situations that make it seem as though Tris is capable of making irreversible decisions or

performing willful actions, when in fact her violent interactions are engineered to

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guarantee that she is never in any real danger.

Driven by her desire to protect more innocents from this fate, the Abnegation in Tris is reinforced immediately upon reuniting with her father and brother in the safe house where she concocts a plan to end the carnage by discovering the location of the computers controlling the simulation. Tris demonstrates her consciousness of self when she meets Peter. Since she has known Peter, he (or one of his lackeys, on his command) stabbed the formerly top-ranked initiate in the eye, participated in her humiliation by disrobing her, grabbed her breast, attempted to drop her over the side of a chasm, and has now been spared from experiencing the agency-robbing effects of the disciplinary mechanism. When she finds Peter, he tells his soon-to-be captor to surrender her weapons and place her hands in the air. She does, thrusting the heel of her hand into his nose. Once she has him under her submission so that she can find out where the computers are being kept, he claims that she won't shoot him:

> "People tend to overestimate my character," I say quietly. "They think that because I'm small, or a girl, or a Stiff, I can't possibly be cruel. But they're wrong."
>
> I shift the gun three inches to the left and fire at his arm.
>
> His screams fill the hallway. Blood spurts from his wound, and he screams again, pressing his forehead to the ground. I shift the gun back to his head, *ignoring the pang of guilt in my chest.*
>
> "Now that you realize your mistake," I say, "I will give you another chance to tell me what I need to know before I shoot you somewhere

worse." (emphasis added; 463-464)

The fact that she feels a pang of guilt at wounding Peter is yet another affirmation of Milgram's construct that requires female protagonists to have an "autonomous" disposition toward violence despite any wrongs they have endured at the hands of others. Despite Peter's vicious character and crimes, if Tris does not feel guilty for shooting him, she runs the risk of losing sympathy from her readership—and possibly losing her own sense of self-respect—because she did not react "appropriately" by demonstrating female gender displays in the midst of an agentic, empowering act when she already has the upper hand.

Once they identify where the simulation is controlled, the Dauntless control tower, Tris's father—who has accompanied her along with Caleb and Marcus—runs down a dead-end hallway while firing his gun as a distraction and sacrifices his own life so that she can achieve her goal. Again, she is prevented from experiencing combat. Her father literally takes that bullet for her. The final test of Tris's agency appears after Four has been sent to the control room under the influence of the new simulation serum. When she re-encounters him, she realizes that he has not been able to resist the serum. He nearly murders her when she attempts to bring him out of the simulation because he does not recognize her. When he presses the barrel of his gun to her head, rather than fight him, she acquiesces to his strength. She resolves, this time, to honor her late father's words: that "there is power in self-sacrifice" (476).

She takes this power by accepting her fate and allowing him to murder her. But he never does; he successfully breaks the simulation and she cries into his shirt when she

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realizes that she has escaped certain death by his strength of will; however, the strength is not his to claim. When she asks how he broke the simulation, he states, "I don't know . . . I just heard your voice" (478). The suggestion is that love saved him from succumbing to the serum's commands and killing her means that the convention of the relationship—not her empowerment as an individual—saved her life. After the threat is mitigated, Four asks why Tris was unable to shoot him; she responds that "it would have been like shooting myself" (486). Although her lack of action ironically secured her survival, her inability to separate her identity from Four's suggests that her empowerment—however hard-won—is still incomplete by virtue of the convention that ties her identity to his through their love. Arguably, their romance is the most empowering of any of those of the protagonists under discussion because their survival does not necessarily depend on their romance so much as their romance depends on their survival. For this reason, Tris's capacity to love her family, her male "partner," and herself are the three prongs that secure her place as the most empowered female protagonist within this project. Unfortunately, she will never be fully empowered if the consequences of her actions are mitigated by her reliance on a relationship that dooms her through sacrifice as much as saves her through her hope for a better future.

Tris's actions in the last section of the novel demonstrate her agency. Through her strength of will, albeit with the assistance of others, Tris ends the simulation and frees her fellow Dauntless from their mindless killing spree. As a result, the Abnegation are saved from certain death. In this first novel of the *Divergent* trilogy, Tris Prior has had the most significant impact on the society of which she is a part—a more significant impact,

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arguably, than any of the other female protagonists under discussion.

CHAPTER IV

"I DO NOT WISH THEM TO HAVE POWER OVER MEN. . ."

As evidenced by the female protagonists discussed in this project, women's

empowerment in young adult dystopian novels leaves much to be desired. This situation

leads the critic to question whether the empowerment and agency of *male* protagonists is

currently expanded or constrained by the limitations of the same genre. A vacuum of

empowerment currently exists among female protagonists, so their male counterparts

must be evaluated to determine whether or not a similar absence exists for them. Is the

playing field not actually as level as the media has led readers to believe? The

conventions that pervade young adult dystopian novels with female protagonists—

namely, the necessity of heterosexual love interests and the gendered limitations of

violence—do not seem as though they would be as prevalent in literature whose *primary*

demographic is adolescent males. This is *not* to say that females do not read novels with

male protagonists, but rather that research shows that boys are statistically less likely to

read novels written by female authors regardless of the gender of the protagonist, and

very few recent young adult dystopian novels with male protagonists have been written

by female authors. Adolescent males are even less likely to read dystopian novels written

by authors of any gender whose protagonists spend half of the novel obsessing over *de

facto* love interests or failing to act in life-threatening situations when, in the immediate

political climate, their primary concern *should* be fighting and overthrowing corrupt

totalitarian regimes.

Since part of this argument concerns the nature of authorial intent and the

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implicitly gendered attitudes that authors seem to impose upon their characters, it stands to reason that *male* protagonists written by *male* authors would not experience the same limitations as female protagonists if the hierarchical structure of the gender binary is taken into account. Put simply, the arbitrary, socially constructed privileges experienced by male authors affect the characterizations and thought processes of their protagonists as surely as the privileges of white, heterosexual authors ensure that most racially diverse or homosexual characters are murdered or otherwise killed off by the end of their respective narratives (as they have been in some of the trilogies mentioned within this project). Although many young adult dystopian novels with male protagonists have been recently published, the two selected for this chapter are *The Maze Runner* by James Dashner and *The Knife of Never Letting Go* by Patrick Ness. These novels were chosen specifically for their inclusion of conventions that allow for comparisons between their protagonists and the female protagonists in the novels covered in the previous chapter.

First, both novels include elements of Panopticism, though their manifestations are vastly different from the full-fledged Panopticons described in the previous chapter. The theater of punishment, for example, is curiously absent from both narratives—not necessarily because "delinquents" do not exist, but because (a) either the society in question is newly established and any potential "delinquents" are swiftly disposed of rather than used as examples for indoctrinating the remaining citizens, or (b) circumstances took place before the beginning of the narrative that removed them from the society entirely. Unlike those in the novels featuring female protagonists, the discipline blockade exists tangibly in one narrative and symbolically in the other;

however, the former blockade opens on a timed schedule that allows citizens to come and go as they please but closes at night to ensure their safety. Finally, the discipline mechanism in one novel actually manifests itself as robotic sentries which prove potentially lethal should any character choose to traverse the blockade. In the other, it appears as a bastardized doctrine of Christianity that is coupled with forced illiteracy—a mechanism reminiscent of those which appear in slave narratives. While both novels include varying degrees and types of surveillance, the methods by which citizens are surveilled do not inspire the same culture of fear and self-policing as those in more fully realized Panopticons. Without the presence of Panoptic governments to ensure that power operates efficiently, citizens are left to their own devices to determine how power is to be distributed. In the beginning of both of the novels discussed in this chapter, the societies are entirely comprised of male citizens; the validity of various leaders' claims to power must therefore be supported not just by their gender, but by their *performance* of gender. In young adult literature as a whole, gender is one of the most prevalent constructs that leaders initially employ to establish their legitimacy since gender is intrinsically linked to the structures that reproduce and legitimate gender inequality.

As discussed in prior chapters, gender norms are deeply entrenched in the socialization processes by which individuals construct their identities and reaffirm cultural values and expectations. The current representation of masculinity in young adult dystopian novels must be problematized to prevent "the idea that the gender system of oppression is hopelessly impervious to real change" by "ignoring the links between social interaction and structural change" (Deutsch 107). In "Undoing Gender," Francine M.

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Deutsch questions the argument first presented by Judith Butler that gender is not something we are, but something we "do" (106). Deutsch posits that "the doing gender approach implies that if gender is constructed, then it can be deconstructed. Gendered institutions can be changed, and the social interactions that support them can be undone" (108). This theory undermines the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which has seemingly become the archetype against which "normative" representations of male characters in literature are measured.

Although Connell and Messerschmidt claim that hegemonic masculinity is not assumed to be "normal" in the statistical sense because the majority of men might not actively perform it, it is "normative" in the sense that it reflects the "*most honored* way of being a man. . . . [I]t require[s] all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimate[s] the global subordination of women to men" (emphasis added; 832). Some theorists consider the concept of masculinity itself to be flawed because it "essentializes the character of men or imposes a false unit on a fluid or contradictory reality" (832). Regardless of whether the concept is flawed, some theorists argue that hegemonic masculinity has nonetheless become a configuration of practice that supports "the ways in which 'approved' modes of being male are produced, supported, contested, and resisted" (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman 3). According to "The Masculinity of Mr. Right" by James Mahalik, "[c]onformity to masculine gender norms refers to the extent to which a man follows societal prescriptions of what is considered to be normative 'masculine' behavior in the mainstream culture of the United States" (qtd. in Backus and Mahalik 319). Because literature represents "one piece of a socialization and identity

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formation process that is colored by children's prior understanding of gender, or gender schemas," the presentation and construction of heroes in young adult novels significantly impacts the way that young adults understand their roles in society and conceive of certain gender displays or social interactions as "normative" (McCabe 199).

In the young adult dystopian novels with male protagonists under discussion, the patriarchal (and sometimes violently misogynistic) societies are almost entirely devoid of females. This does not mean that the balance of power is equal. Nature abhors a vacuum, and the relational nature of gender vis-à-vis the gender binary creates a hierarchical division of labor that privileges men who perform hegemonic masculinity in positions of power or influence over men who perform acts indicative of subordinate masculinity or traits more associated with femininity. Subordinate masculinities, according to Connell, "represent those [gender displays] that undermine the goals of a dominative hegemonic masculinity, with gay and academically inclined men as examples due to their associations with femininity" (qtd. in Lusher and Robins 23). The balance of power in male-dominated dystopian societies is therefore subject to the laws of utilitarianism. Men who are not hegemonic are generally charged with traditionally "female" tasks such as cooking or child-rearing.

In some cases, subordinated males are subjected to bullying that "is . . . systemic and challenging, as it concerns core democratic values that are inconsistent with harmful acts such as stereotyping, oppression, intolerance, or discrimination" (Lopez-Romero 155). Although the "bullying" of one character is occasionally justified by the other characters as mere "joking" intended to be good-natured, Lopez-Romero maintains that ".

. . underlying all these novels is the belief that this behavior [bullying] is not just a developmental condition related to adolescence, but a symptom of a bigoted society which does not allow deviations from its accepted norms, be they related to race, class, sexual orientation, or personality traits" (155). In some cases—especially where a character's sexual orientation is concerned, whether or not it is explicitly stated—these deviations are fatal.

Therefore, Dudley Jones and Tony Watkins may be inaccurate in their assertion that

> We live, after all, in a post-heroic age: Heroes are for debunking and deconstructing. The gendered associations of the terms "hero" and "heroism"—macho posturing, manliness, celebrations of physical bravery (often in a context of imperial conquest), and a consequent devaluing of what are often seen as feminine qualities—have been analysed and condemned. (1)

Since most adolescents do not read literary criticism, the gendered associations of masculinity have not been "analysed and condemned" by adolescent readers. Adolescents do, however, read young adult fiction, and for this reason, the authors of "Gender in Twentieth Century Children's Books" are justified in their assertion that "[t]he disproportionate numbers of males in central roles may encourage children to accept the invisibility of women and girls and to believe they are less important than men and boys, thereby reinforcing the gender system" (McCabe et al. 199). Pervasive patterns of gender inequality have upheld the traditional heteronormative behaviors that frequently appear in

young adult dystopian novels.

The implications of these patterns and their effects are disturbing. Mandel and Shakeshaft argue that conceptualizations of masculinity and femininity that intersect with notions of heterosexuality and male dominance—and the subsequent "appropriate" roles which young adults adopt—are "harmful" for young people because they perpetuate homophobic and misogynistic ideologies (McCarry 19). According to Mahalik et al., masculine norms endorsed by the dominant culture in American society include "Winning, Emotional Control, Risk-Taking, Violence, Power Over Women, Dominance, Playboy (lack of emotional involvement in sexual relationships), Self-Reliance, Primacy of Work, Disdain for Homosexuals, and Pursuit of Status" (qtd in. Backus and Mahalik 319). Although "Disdain for Homosexuals" is the term originally used by Mahalik, he later attempts to soften the clearly negative connotation of the phrase by re-naming it "Heterosexual Self-representation," supposedly to more accurately reflect the motivations behind the behavior; however, he only succeeds in obfuscating the reality of the prejudice (323). In this way, he enforces rather than mitigates the purported superiority of heterosexuality over homosexuality. Since male protagonists in young adult dystopian literature tend to perform traits that comply with hegemonic masculinity, they are given fewer constraints on their agency. The genre presupposes and accepts their abilities to enact social change within frameworks that already assume and support their dominance.

While this is not to say that male protagonists meet fewer challenges along the course of their journeys, the gendered constructs that limit female protagonists on the

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basis of their gender are noticeably absent. The first of these gendered constructs, the convention of romance—particularly, the heterosexual love interest—is substantially minimized. If romance is included as a plot element, the female love interest is generally introduced after the central conflict has been established. She reappears only when her presence is central to the progression of the plot. The male protagonist does not "swoon" obsessively over her. Her importance is not legitimated until she is proven to exhibit some trait that demonstrates her "worth" as a secondary character, and thus deserving of more "air time." Only in very rare cases do female love interests prove their centrality to the point of demonstrating their worthiness as equal partners in their own right and not just catalysts for the sexual awakening of the protagonists.

The second and most important gendered construct is that male protagonists possess the unquestioned agency to enact social change, which is supported by Weber's perceptions of authority. These perceptions of authority are divided into three categories: the "very old and institutionalized faith-based authority . . . legal-rational authority based on the legality of the rules and rights of the rulers to give orders. . . . [and] charismatic authority based on sanctity and heroic strength of the individual" (qtd. in Mora 134). The way in which Mora examines the voice of "patriarchy and power concepts represented by male dominance" and describes "how power relations are established and reproduced as communicative action" is useful for unpacking the relationships between power and agency in young adult dystopian literature (131). As "heroes," male protagonists are *assumed* to possess charismatic authority. They usually rely on their own power and agency to escape from life-threatening situations rather than waiting passively to be

rescued. If they collaborate with other characters—who are usually but not always male—against the tyranny of faith-based or legal-rational authorities, decisions are equitably made. Male protagonists typically play a pivotal role in the conflicts' resolutions. If for some reason they encounter circumstances from which they must be saved by a female character, male protagonists are hardly "damsels in distress;" rather, they are acutely aware of the effects their actions have on others' perceptions of their masculinity, and they take active steps to mitigate the gendered consequences that would arise should their hegemony be supplanted.

In this chapter, male protagonists and their female love interests are linked through the presence of two different forms of telepathy, which convey the nature of the power dynamics that exists between them. Ironically, as though to purposely invert the constructs that silence females in accordance with Muted Group Theory, the female love interests wield the power to intrude on the thoughts of male protagonists at their discretion and can sever the telepathic link that connects them at will. Male protagonists are either terrified or comforted by the silence because it provides an escape from the cacophony of "Noise" that surrounds them or because it alleviates the headache that telepathic communication induces. If they are unable to open the telepathic link when they feel it to be necessary or desirable, they dissolve in a fit of rage.

In these novels, scenes that depict violence against women are rarer than they are in novels featuring female protagonists, but, as Patricia Hill Collins argues, "the ability to demonstrate control over violence, especially interpersonal violence, is not only a struggle for manhood and respect but also a demonstration of strength that is 'coupled'

with dominance especially 'physical dominance, namely, muscular might, aggressiveness, and violence'" (210). Male protagonists are required to maintain the hegemony that preserves their dominance in order to legitimate their performances of gender. Their use of physical aggression or violence is permitted because "what is often perceived to be on the line is not only the outcome of the fight but also manhood itself" (N. Jones 73-74). When it comes to the telepathic link that binds male protagonists and their female love interests, the males view unwelcome mental intrusions as a kind of victimization that poses a threat to their manhood. The "profound psychological consequences" cited by psychologists permit them to protect their claims to hegemonic masculinity by whatever means necessary (Macmillan 2). While they may later regret the verbal or physical abuse that takes place during the heat of the moment, the "means" they use to preserve their dominance is justified by the "end," and the females they victimize generally gloss over their incidents by changing the subject or making an effort to fulfill whatever failed expectation led to the violence in the first place.

If female protagonists are placed on a spectrum of empowerment that is intrinsically linked to their performances of gender, then the male protagonists must be considered in terms of their performances of masculinity and whether or not they use agency in a way that enables them to grow dynamically throughout the course of the narrative. In short, like female protagonists, they must be considered not simply in terms of the consequences that they face for their actions but in terms of their responses to those consequences or whether they are actually forced to face any in the first place.

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The Maze Runner

In *The Maze Runner* by James Dashner, knowledge and survival are the two key

elements that determine whether or not an individual will ultimately meet his or her death

in the mysterious Maze. The narrative begins when the protagonist, Thomas, awakens in

an enclosed, moving box. After what feels like half an hour, doors open into bright light

and he finds himself looking up at a group of boys who surround the periphery of the

opening. These are the "Gladers," who share with him a peculiar brand of amnesia—the

only memory each has is of his own first name. They cannot remember anything from

their lives before they arrived. The society Thomas has entered into is composed of "fifty

to sixty" other adolescent males who have created a utilitarian, agrarian society in a

living space they call the "Glade." The Glade only functions properly if order is kept and

every person contributes his fair share by taking on one or more jobs. Each newcomer

spends a day working in every occupation before he is eventually assigned a permanent

position by a Keeper, who manages that particular task.

Like many of the other novels under discussion, *The Maze Runner* embeds a

microcosm of society within a larger post-apocalyptic setting.[1] The Glade is a Panoptic

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[1] Outside the Maze itself, the text easily lends itself to a Marxist analysis. As a scientist explains much later in the text, the world from which the Gladers were taken has recently been ravaged by enormous, unprecedented sun flares. Millions of the Earth's inhabitants have died, miles of land have become wastelands, and the world's ecosystem has dissolved into ruin. In addition to the natural disasters, a lethal virus called the Flare was unleashed upon the Earth. The Flare dwells in its victims' brains, causes delusions, and then finally forces sufferers to surrender to their animal instincts. In essence, it strips them of their humanity, and many believe that death is a preferable alternative to catching it. From a Marxist perspective, there is a clear significance in the fact that only the richest can be *treated* for the Flare, though no one can be *cured*—which seems to be a fairly clear parallel between the Flare in *The Maze Runner* and current social issues like the modern health care crisis, specifically for patients with diagnoses like HIV/AIDS or cancer in third world countries (and even in some first-world countries, given the crisis in the United States before the Affordable Care Act was passed).

society with one key difference. Having been robbed of their memories, the Gladers distrust "the Creators" of their world. However, they also rely on the Creators to fill their needs and provide them with resources such as food, clothing, and weaponry. Shipments arrive daily by means of the same box in which Thomas arrived, which readers will recognize as a kind of dumbwaiter. Like the arena in *The Hunger Games,* the Glade is surrounded by four enormous stone walls that are the first discipline blockade of this dystopia. Unlike the other novels under discussion, the inhabitants *want* to stay within the bounds of the Glade because part of their initial tour includes glimpses of the horrors that await them if they dare to venture outside the walls that close every night to protect them from tangible and intangible threats. An opening in each of the walls leads to what the Gladers refer to as a "Maze," and like the arena in *The Hunger Games*, the Gladers come to recognize the Maze as a test. The Gladers have even gone so far as to establish leaving the Glade as the "Number One Rule" that can never be broken for the sake of order as well as their own survival. Thomas is told specifically that the rule is "the only one you'll never be forgiven for breaking. Ain't nobody—nobody—allowed in the Maze except the Runners" (46). This blockade exists alongside the "disciplinary mechanism" which regularly surveils the Gladers in the form of "beetle blades" that look like lizards with six legs and are embedded with tiny cameras. On the back of each of the "beetle blades," the word "WICKED" is stamped in green ink.

Unlike the female protagonists under discussion, Thomas actually wants to discover *why* he and the Gladers are being surveilled and by whom; however, this curiosity may be the result of the fact that he has no memory of this technology; rather,

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he was thrust as an adolescent into the middle of a society where the beetle blades's existence is taken for granted. This Panopticon, like others under discussion, is both sinister and disturbing because of the way it lulls its inhabitants into a false sense of security. This is demonstrated by Thomas's thought that ". . . [s]uddenly the Glade, the walls, the Maze—it all seemed . . . familiar. Comfortable. A warmth of calmness spread through his chest, and for the first time since he'd found himself there, he didn't feel like the Glade was the worst place in the universe" (34).

Despite Thomas's initial feelings of comfort, the first Panoptic "theater of punishment" that appears in the Glade is the most morbid of any that have appeared in the dystopian novels thus far. Early in the text when Thomas receives his first tour, he learns that one of the sections of the Glade is home to the "Deadheads." The section turns out to be a graveyard where the Gladers have buried their fallen friends among a thick layer of leafy weeds. Over a dozen graves fill the graveyard, but Thomas finally reaches one that houses one of the theater's "delinquents." This particular grave shows how Gladers are punished when they attempt to escape the Glade by any other means than through the Maze:

It was a window into another grave—one that had the dusty remnants of a rotting body.

Completely creeped out, Thomas leaned closer to get a better look anyway, curious. The tomb was smaller than usual—only the top half of the deceased person lay inside. He remembered Chuck's story about the boy who'd tried to rappel down the dark hole of the Box after it had

descended, only to be cut in two by something slicing through the air.

Words were etched on the glass; Thomas could barely read them:

Let this half-shank be a *warning to all:*

You can't escape through the Box Hole. (emphasis added; 69- 70)

The second "theater" is the Banishment ceremony that takes place just after a boy named Ben has been stung by the second discipline blockade known as the Grievers. According to Thomas's first encounter with the Grievers in the Maze, a Griever is "part animal, part machine." It resembles a gigantic slug that has weaponized attachments which can sting any individual who is unlucky enough to cross its path. The randomness of their attacks invoke an additional fear of entering and exploring the Maze, especially since no one knows whether an individual will simply be stung and undergo what is called "The Changing," or whether he will be killed outright.

As Bentham and Foucault suggest, if the theater of punishment does its job, then the members of the society become self-policing. An example of this in *The Maze Runner* occurs when one of the Gladers named Ben is stung by a Griever and undergoes the Changing. Once he recovers memories of his life before he lived in the Glade, he recognizes Thomas and attempts to kill him, at which point he is subdued. The rules of the Glade demand that Ben fall victim to the "theater of punishment." He is sentenced to "Banishment" for his attempted murder of "Thomas the Newbie." Despite his attempts to justify his actions by blaming them on the temporary insanity induced by the Changing, one of the most disturbing scenes in any of the novels takes place. Ben has a leather collar placed around his neck that is attached to a long pole, and ten Keepers maneuver

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him into the Maze right before the doors are set to be closed. As they push Ben inside, he screams for mercy, and Thomas's feelings change again. Thomas thinks, "Something was obviously wrong with Ben. Why did he deserve this fate? Couldn't something be done for him? Would Thomas spend the rest of his days feeling responsible? *Just end*, he screamed in his head. *Just be over! . . ."* (95).

Ben continues to scream in protest and plead for help, and when the doors of the Maze shut behind him, Thomas is "surprised to find tears trickling down his cheeks" (95). Notably, the empathy that Thomas feels does not lead him to speak out on Ben's behalf because the theater of punishment has performed its function; however, he spends the next chapter using manual labor to distract himself from the guilt and responsibility he feels for Ben's Banishment and assumed death.

Unlike any of the other dystopic worlds reflected in the novels, this one is male-only until the arrival of Teresa, the only girl. As a male-dominated society, hegemonic masculinity and the gender displays it presupposes are the predominant performance of masculinity validated and respected by the adolescents in the Glade. When Thomas speaks later with an adolescent named Newt, Newt reassures him that his reaction to the Glade is normal while simultaneously establishing the presence of the Glade's heteronormative gender binary by saying, "Greenie [i.e. "new kid"], what you're feelin', we've all felt it. We've all had First Day, come out of that dark box. Things are bad, they are, and they'll get much worse for ya soon, that's the truth. But down the road a piece, you'll be fightin' true and good. I can tell you're not a bloody sissy" (11). By using stereotypically misogynistic terms to suggest that anyone who does not "fight" is a

"sissy," Newt establishes that if boys enact gender displays that are considered to be stereotypically "feminine," whether or not those displays correspond with their assigned roles, they are devalued in the eyes of the others no matter how well they happen to perform.

Although the Council that the Gladers have convened to make decisions is supposed to share power equitably among Keepers, some Council members have more power and respect than others depending on whether their jobs are more "masculine" or "feminine." The gender binary is just as pervasive in the Gladers' hierarchy of jobs as it is in the perception of a Keeper's leadership. Since no females live in the Glade until Teresa arrives, males are forced to perform "female" tasks like cooking and cleaning. Hegemonic males who are considered to be intelligent, strong, and brave are validated by other Gladers, even or despite the fact that the leadership of the Glade consists of the Keepers, whether or not their particular roles would mark their performance of gender as hegemonic. However, the response of the Gladers as a collective to the members of the Council is based on the gender displays of each individual Keeper. Despite the Gladers' affection for him, Frypan's "feminine" role in the Glade ensures that he is treated differently than someone like Minho, the brave Keeper of the Runners.

Although not biologically female, the person in charge of cooking for the rest of the Gladers, Frypan, is subject to disparaging remarks that accompany his subordinated role. If hair is a gender marker for males, then Frypan should be as hegemonic as they come. As he is described, "[h]e couldn't have been more than sixteen years old, but he had a full beard and hair sticking out all over the rest of his body, as if each follicle were

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trying to escape the confines of his food-smeared clothes" (102). Like Al in *Divergent,*

Frypan's appearance contradicts his performance of gender. Frypan is not only a cook,

but a proficient one. The running joke in the novel is that his food is inedible, despite the

fact that the rest of the Gladers privately acknowledge his culinary skills. Even Thomas

realizes that "jokes about Frypan's cooking were just that—jokes," though Frypan

himself may not necessarily have found them funny (108). The Gladers' "jokes" suggest

a widespread acknowledgement of the constructs that require hegemonic males to

undermine alternative performances of masculinity even if they do not personally have

any negative feelings toward the object of their ridicule.

Although Frypan may be fully aware of the social constructs that position some

forms of teasing as a masculine ritual denoting affirmation and validation, the presence of

these comments undermines the importance of his role. When the Gladers need Frypan's

supply of wax paper much later in the text for a project that will ensure their survival, it

turns out that "Frypan wasn't too happy having a whole box of his wax paper rolls taken

away from him, especially with their supplies being cut off. He argued that it was one of

the things he always requested, that he used it for baking. They finally had to tell him

what they needed it for to convince him to give it up" (274). The Gladers acknowledge

Frypan's dominion over the domestic sector by requesting that he allow them to

appropriate his supplies after explaining their rationale. Frypan initially refuses to give

them the supplies because he needs them for baking—a more traditionally "female"

pursuit than cooking itself.

The Gladers' validation of hegemonic masculinity is a double-edged sword. On

one hand, it enables them to justify their perception of women's bodies as "predefined rape spaces," which was explained in the previous chapter. On the other hand, the Gladers' validation of hegemonic masculinity is demonstrated by the elevation of Runners to the top of the occupational ladder; to be a Runner is to be able to think autonomously, move swiftly, and demonstrate bravery in the face of imminent danger.

In a society where men are forced to perform women's roles, the desire to be perceived as hegemonically masculine is apparent upon their first encounter with a girl. The issue of the Gladers viewing women's bodies as "predefined rape spaces" is broached as soon as a female enters the Glade. Unlike almost every young adult dystopian novel featuring a female protagonist, the female love interest in *The Maze Runner* does not even enter the narrative until the seventh chapter—long after the plot, conflict, and primary characters have been established. When Newt "gravely" informs the rest of the group that the "Newbie" is female, the first comments made about her presence reflect the masculine norms of "Power Over Women, Heterosexual Self-representation, and Pursuit of Status" posited by Backus and Mahalik: "A girl?!" . . . "I got dibs!" . . . "What's she look like?" . . . "How old is she?" (54). The incredulity embedded in the first question arguably suggests the individual's surprise, if not his acknowledgment that the balance of power may shift in relation to the sudden presence of a female in their midst. The first statement regarding "dibs" obviously indicates that the speaker conceives of the girl as a "prize" to be "won," and affirms his power as a male by suggesting his authority to "claim" her as his own through his Pursuit of Status. The third comment prioritizes the girl's appearance over any other substantive traits that she might

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possess and covertly communicates a desire to determine her sexual availability based on her looks, which is one extension of Heterosexual Self-representation (i.e. Disdain for Homosexuals). The fourth could potentially be considered to denote the speaker's desire to determine whether he can feasibly exert Power Over Women based on whether she is older or younger than he is or otherwise rule her out as a viable sexual candidate if she turns out to be too young for him. Each of these novels is reflective of the Glade's culture as much as it is reflective of today's society, which calculates a female's worth based on her appearance, age, and sexual availability.

Apparently, even in young adult dystopian novels with male protagonists, the "whiteness" of love interests remains predominant no matter how diverse the rest of the characters may be. As if in accordance with normative prescriptions of female beauty, the girl is described in the following way. Thomas states,

> She was thin, but not too small. Maybe five and a half feet tall, from what he [Thomas] could tell. She looked like she could be fifteen or sixteen years old, and her hair was tar black. But the thing that had really stood out to him was her skin: pale, white as pearls. . . . despite her paleness, she was really pretty. More than pretty. Beautiful. Silky hair, flawless skin, perfect lips, long legs. . . . Burning blue eyes darted back and forth as she took deep breaths. Her pink lips trembled as she mumbled something over and over. (57)

As it turns out, the girl is the catalyst for the rising action of the plot. She proclaims that "Everything is going to change," and the Gladers discover that she is holding a piece of

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paper which reads, "She's the last one. Ever" (57). Unfortunately, it appears that the

constructs which render females victim to the "paternalistic rescue or violent rape"

posited by Baecker are just as prevalent within male-centric narratives predicated upon

the performance of hegemonic masculinity. Although humor is often used to relieve

tension in socially awkward situations, the comments made about her presence are

sexually violent in nature: "'Who said Clint had first shot at her?' someone yelled from

the crowd. There were several barks of laughter. 'I'm next!'" (59). Thankfully, Alby

immediately intercedes by promising Banishment to anyone who touches her. The girl

clearly cannot speak on her own behalf due to her semi-comatose state. The implications

of what might have taken place had Alby not intervened are unsettling. Despite his focus

on diversity and his questions about gender performance by male and female roles,

Dashner falls victim to the convention that requires female love interests to be dainty,

small, beautiful, and sexually alluring.

    The Maze Runner signals its departure from a preoccupation with the convention

of romance since Teresa appears infrequently in the text. When he first sees her, Thomas

feels a connection to Teresa that he cannot explain, but her presence is not even

mentioned for another *seven* chapters until Thomas is called "Greenie" instead of his

name, reinforcing his status as the newest member of the Glade. He bristles in response,

stating,

> . . . I'm not really the newest Newbie anymore [sic], right? The girl in the
>
> coma is. Call *her* Greenie—my name's Thomas." Thoughts of the girl
>
> crashed around his mind, made him remember the connection he felt. A

sadness washed over him, as if he missed her, wanted to see her. *That*

doesn't make sense, he thought. *I don't even know her name.*

Newt leaned back, eyebrows raised. "Burn me—you grew some right

nice-sized eggs over night [sic], now didn't ya?" (97)

Despite the fact that they do not yet have a relationship, Thomas feels as though he

"misses" her but uses her presence to assert and seek legitimacy for his identity. Later,

when another character refers to the uncertain state of the girl's health, Thomas does not

suggest a romantic connection, but instead a personal response. He realizes that ". . . he

was worried about the girl. Concerned for her welfare. As if he knew her" (107).

Unlike narratives with female protagonists where the primary plot revolves

around the burgeoning love affair, the primary plot of *The Maze Runner* addresses the

Gladers' rebellion against the dystopia itself. The reader does not discover the connection

between Thomas and Teresa until ten chapters later. The girl apparently has repeated

Thomas's name in her sleep, so he is summoned to observe her and determine whether he

can remember anything about her. While he watches her, he remembers the first time he

saw her, and his physical attraction to her is re-established:

He thought back to those brief moments when she'd opened her eyes

right after being pulled out of the Box.

They'd been blue, richer in color than the eyes of any other person he

could remember seeing before. He tried to picture those eyes on her now

as he looked at her slumbering face, melding the two images in his mind.

Her black hair, her perfect white skin, her full lips. . . . As he stared at her,

he realized once more how truly beautiful she was. Stronger recognition briefly tickled the back of his mind—a flutter of wings in a dark corner, unseen but there all the same. It lasted only an instant before vanishing into the abyss of his other captured memories. But he had *felt* something.

"I do know her," he whispered, leaning back in his chair. (182)

Were the pronouns and descriptors re-gendered, this could be the description of a female protagonist meeting her love interest for the first time because the emotional response and romanticized imagery are essentially the same. When Teresa first enters his mind telepathically, she introduces herself by name and proceeds to give him clues about his own identity before he entered the Glade. She says, "*Tom, we're the last ones. It'll end soon. It has to. . . . Tom, don't freak out on me. . . . My memory's fading already, Tom. I won't remember much when I wake up. We can pass the Trials. It has to end. They sent me as a trigger. . . . Everything is going to change. . . . It was you and me, Tom. We did this to them. To us*" (184). The familiarity of calling him Tom when everyone else calls him Thomas is a clue to their prior relationship. Days later, when Teresa finally awakens from her comatose state, Thomas hears "a voice . . . in his head, a pretty, feminine voice that sounded as if it came from a fairy goddess trapped in his skull. . . . But he heard it all the same, and remembered every word: *Tom, I just triggered the Ending*" (217).

Unlike female protagonists and their male love interests, Tom and Teresa share a telepathic link that allows her to speak into his mind at her discretion, a feat that he cannot initially reproduce. She reveals the first ambiguous clue to solving the Maze—that "it's a code"—and her consciousness "triggers" a new conflict that is discovered when

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the doors to the Maze remain open rather than closing at night to protect the Gladers from the Grievers (232).

Notably, Thomas is disturbed by the thought that ". . . she could maybe read his thoughts even when he wasn't trying to communicate" (284). Despite his discomfort, he continues to participate in their telepathic exchanges. A significant length of time passes before Thomas becomes comfortable with Teresa's mental intrusions. The fact that Teresa can choose when she wants to "invade" his thoughts is complicated by the fact that he can *respond* telepathically to her words but cannot enter her mind against her wishes. Although this unequal construct initially confuses and frustrates Thomas, he grows comfortable with the terms of their mental connection, signaling a departure from the traditional balance of power that subjugates women as objects of penetration. This is not to suggest that Teresa is validated in her "invasion" of Thomas's thoughts and therefore his privacy, but Thomas and Teresa had already communicated telepathically before he agreed to enter the Glade himself, which means that their connection was already technically established—Thomas just forgot that it had once existed after he lost his memories. Although she may have been *told* of the effects of Thomas's amnesia, Teresa clearly does not believe them to be completely accurate, as evidenced by her behavior in their first interaction:

> "Tom, do you really not remember me?" Her voice was soft, a contrast
> from the crazed, hard sound he'd heard from her after she first arrived,
> when she'd delivered the message that everything was going to change.
>
> "You mean … you remember *me*?" he asked, embarrassed at the

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squeak that escaped on the last word.

> "Yes. No. Maybe." She threw her arms up in disgust. "I can't explain it." . . . . "I know you're my friend." (233-234)

Were Teresa intent on treating Thomas's mind like her own "predefined rape space," she would likely have persisted with the mental intrusions even though he had told her that they were unwelcome. Later in the text when she surprises him by speaking into his mind while he is in the Maze, his "first instinct was to ignore her, to deny once again that someone had the ability to enter his mind, invade his privacy. But he *wanted* to talk to her" (282).

Teresa's character is more agentic than almost all of the female protagonists under discussion as evidenced by her behavior when Newt asks how she escaped from the room where she was watched by the Med-jacks (doctors). Teresa "surprises Thomas with her confidence" when she explains how she kicked the boy in the groin and climbed out the window. This subjects the boy in question to ridicule when Newt heckles him, saying, "You're officially the first guy here to get your butt beat by a girl." Immediately, Teresa responds, "Keep talking like that and you'll be next" (238). If there were a model of female empowerment from which female protagonists could obtain some guidance or direction, it would likely look very much like Dashner's Teresa.

Thomas's central preoccupation remains solving the Maze, even after Teresa is introduced; despite any physical attraction he may feel, his priority of becoming a Runner eclipses any thoughts of romance he might otherwise have for Teresa. His primary concern is achieving his place in the Glade. His concern for her welfare is secondary; this

is a significant difference in plot structure between this narrative and those with female

protagonists. Admittedly, the conventions that pervade Thomas's narrative do not require

him to rely on Teresa for survival. Nor does Teresa rely on Thomas to save her from peril

or protect her from the other Gladers, so the relationship that is established between them

is one of inherent equality and mutual respect.

One of the most striking testaments to Thomas's priorities and Teresa's

empowerment occurs after one of the antagonists, Gally, announces that the Grievers plan

to kill one Glader per night and Thomas realizes that he needs Teresa's help. Teresa is

locked in the Slammer (prison) because of the perception that she caused the Gladers'

current predicament which has led them to distrust her. When Thomas and Teresa discuss

the Maps and the possibility of a code embedded within the Maze, he allows his

commitment to the Gladers to supercede any personal connection he feels with Teresa:

> "I'll be back," Thomas said, turning to go. His stomach was full of
>
> acid. "I gotta find Newt, see if any of the Maps survived."
>
> "Wait!" Teresa yelled. "Get me out of here!"
>
> But there was no time, and Thomas felt awful about it. "I can't—I'll be
>
> back, I promise." (266)

Despite any danger that Teresa may face if she is cornered by a rogue Glader or a roving

Griever, Thomas holds fast to his commitment to the Gladers and brings two of the

Keepers back to the Slammer so they can come to an agreement about Teresa's fate.

Thomas argues for Teresa's release to Minho, the Keeper of the Runners, and Newt.

During their exchange, Teresa demonstrates the way that empowered females are

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constrained by the backlash effect as it is presented by Rudman and Glick:

> Newt and Minho exchanged a long look.
>
> "Come on," Thomas insisted. "What's she gonna do, run around and stab every Glader to death? Come on."
>
> Minho sighed. "Fine. Just let the stupid girl out."
>
> "I'm not stupid!" Teresa shouted, her voice muffled by the walls. "And I can hear every word you morons are saying!"
>
> Newt's eyes widened. "Real sweet girl you picked up, Tommy."
>
> . . . "All right, talk," said Minho. "What's so important?"
>
> Thomas looked at Teresa, wondering how to say it.
>
> "What?" she said. "You talk—they obviously think I'm a serial killer."
>
> "Yeah, you look so dangerous," Thomas muttered . . . (270)

Thomas's sarcasm emphasizes the discrepancy between Teresa's bold reaction to Minho's careless choice of words and further suggests the magnitude of the difference between her physical appearance and hegemonic gender displays. In this way, Teresa demonstrates a form of hegemonic femininity that could also be considered a performance of "pariah femininity,"[2] a performance which devalues her in the eyes of the Gladers when she presumes to position her performance of gender in opposition to—if not dominant over—their own.

As Thomas grows increasingly aware of his own priorities, both he and Teresa legitimate her gender displays even when they do not conform to constructs that require

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[2] As defined in the second chapter of this project.

her to constantly think about him and the state of their relationship in deference to her femininity. Thomas leaves Teresa to decipher the codes within the maps so that he and Minho can continue to search for a viable exit to the Maze. In response to his question about whether or not she feels safe without his protection, she replies, "If you're going to decipher a hidden code from a complex set of different mazes, I'm pretty sure you need a girl's brain running the show" (279). He leaves her in the Map Room to venture into the Maze "without even saying goodbye" and she does not protest; she acknowledges where his priorities lie (280). When he thinks of the fact that he may never see his friends again, he remembers his young friend Chuck *first* and Teresa *second*. When he returns to the Map Room, she barely glances at him, and Thomas admits to being saddened because he had hoped that she would be happy to see him (as most female love interests would demonstrate by abandoning their current task and running over in greeting). Immediately, he admits that he "felt really stupid for ever having the thought. She was obviously busy figuring out the code" (289). By respecting her performance of gender through her ability to take her role seriously and thus enabling her to surmount the backlash effect, Thomas reinforces the essentially equal nature of their partnership.

As they begin to escape from the Maze, Teresa responds to his command to stay close to him by joking, "Ah, my Knight in Shining Armor. What, you don't think I can fend for myself?" (329). Dashner's third-person omniscient narration and Thomas's subsequent dialogue provide the context for his response: "Actually, he thought quite the opposite—Teresa seemed as tough as anybody there. 'No, I'm just trying to be nice' [he replied]" (329). Young adult dystopian novels featuring female protagonists tend to be

written as first-person narratives, while many male-centric novels, oblivious to their privilege and the construct that assumes the male perspective, are written in third-person omniscient. Thomas can therefore "communicate" his chivalrous intentions to Teresa while the narrator informs the reader that he is not, in fact, the sexist savior-figure that his order might otherwise imply.

Unlike *Divergent* and as will be discussed later in *The Knife of Never Letting Go* in which the male assumes the lead into the unknown, *The Maze Runner* presents a male character following the female into the darkness. The Gladers encounter a slide beyond the Griever Hole[3] that shoots downward into pitch darkness. Despite not knowing what awaits them (which Thomas hopes does not lead to another pack of Grievers), "Teresa slipped down the slide with an almost cheerful shriek, and Thomas followed her before he could talk himself out of it—anything was better than the Maze" (349). Not only does *Thomas* follow *Teresa* into the dark, but she enters the darkness without any evidence of fear or foreboding. This narrative switch that signals a reversal of the genre's conventions. It further emphasizes Teresa's empowerment as a legitimately hegemonic female who does not require that her identity be subordinate to or reliant on Thomas's leadership. Because they share a vested interest in re-discovering their identities and solving the mystery of the Maze, any attraction they feel for one another is secondary to the global problems they will soon face in later installments of the trilogy.

The second manifestation of the double-edged sword posed by the Gladers'

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[3] The hole from which the Grievers that terrorize the Gladers seem to appear, and to which they appear to return.

validation of hegemonic masculinity. The way that it increases their odds of survival is complicated by two aspects of the narrative that become central to Thomas's identity formation: the agency he has to create lasting social change and the promise he makes his young friend, Chuck, to help him escape from the Maze alive. Thomas's power to subvert the natural order of the Glade is initially demonstrated by his request that the Gladers essentially ignore and uproot "the order of things" by making him a Runner before he has had the chance to prove himself worthy or capable of the position. Newt staunchly opposes this idea, stating, "You better stop this nonsense, before others hear about it. That's not how it works around here, and our whole existence depends on things *working"* (101). Upon reflection, however, Newt presents him with a wager:

> . . . Newt slapped him on the back. "Let's make a deal."
>
> "What?" Thomas felt his hopes rise.
>
> "You keep your mouth shut about it, and I'll put you on the list of potential trainees as soon as you show some clout. Don't keep your trap shut, and I'll bloody make sure ya never see it happen. Deal?" (101-102)

Although Thomas hates the idea of waiting, his character is presented with a rare opportunity that is not often (if ever) extended to female protagonists (with the possible exception of Cassia through her job as a Sorter). He is actually given the chance to prove himself through his gender displays. His success in doing so is recognized by hegemonic males higher within than he is in the social and gender hierarchy. As a result, he is perceived as an equal and not a subordinate.

The first opportunity Thomas has to demonstrate his hegemonic masculinity by

virtue of his agency occurs when it appears as though Minho and Alby are going to be caught inside the Maze when the doors close, promising certain death. All of the other Gladers have given up on any chance of survival. When Thomas sees Minho limping towards the doors supporting the unconscious Alby, Thomas rejects Newt's command that he stay and enters the Maze as the doors close. He thus breaks the Number One Rule in the Glade. Minho gives Thomas even more of a reason to avoid the Grievers with an explanation of their function that would almost certainly undermine Thomas's performance of hegemonic masculinity, stating, "'They don't freaking bite you. They prick you. And no, you can't see it. There could be dozens all over his body.' . . . For some reason, Thomas thought the word *prick* sounded a lot worse than *bite*" (116).[4] After Minho admits to being scared senseless, he runs off and leaves Thomas with Alby. At that moment, Thomas formulates a plan to tie his "friend"[5] into the ivy that covers the walls of the Maze in order to hide him from the roaming Grievers. When a Griever climbs the wall, Thomas attempts to divert it from Alby and go for him instead. When it works, rather than freezing or getting scared, Thomas thinks, "*Finally . . . something went right*" (131). Thomas evades the Griever and leads it away from Alby by diving laterally at the last moment when the Griever appears to be on a collision course with him. Minho grabs him from the shadows and they work together to trick the ensuing Grievers and send them over a cliff. Thomas is not *saved* by Minho; rather, their equal partnership as Runners gives Minho the opportunity to take a maneuver he has already seen Thomas use

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[4] And no wonder, considering the Gladers all seem to have been taken from England.
[5] Before this time, Alby and Thomas have had a relationship that was not friendly. For him to call Alby a "friend" suggests that their shared circumstances engendered a camaraderie that did not previously exist.

and adapt it to ensure all of their survival.

Thomas's continual assertion of hegemonic masculinity continues to promote his status within the Glade. When the doors of the Maze open the next morning and they re-enter the Glade, the Gladers are astonished; a Gathering is called purely to discuss how Thomas should be punished for breaking the "Number One Rule." The responses from most of the Council—particularly Minho—are a testament to the agency that Thomas has demonstrated which has secured his hegemony on the gender binary. Council members who are already distrustful or jealous of Thomas suggest that he be Banished or locked in the Slammer; Gally attempts to undermine Thomas's gender displays by attributing them to Minho, instead. However, one of the Keepers named Zart establishes Thomas's successful subversion of the social order by virtue of his agentic acts, stating, "'I don't know. He broke one of our most important rules. We can't just let people think that's okay.' He paused and looked down at his hands, rubbing them together. 'But then again, he's . . . changed things. Now we know we can survive out there, and that we can beat the Grievers" (153-154).

Frypan summarizes Thomas's exemplary performance for the rest of the Gladers and recommends that they "[p]ut him [Thomas] on the freaking Council and have him train us on everything he did out there" (154). Frypan's proposal is met with derision and confrontation because his performance of masculinity is not considered to be on par with the other Gladers. As a Council member, despite his performance of subordinate masculinity, Frypan has the right to speak; he initially validates his own leadership role with a concise, accurate summary of Thomas's achievements as a hegemonic male,

including the fact that Thomas "saves Alby's life [and] kills a couple of Grievers."

However, he nearly invalidates his own opinion by suggesting that Thomas be catapulted

to the top of the social hierarchy and ascribing a significant degree of power that is not

Frypan's to confer. Furthermore, by suggesting that Thomas has "guts" the rest of the

Gladers lack, Frypan demonstrates his ignorance of the social constructs that require the

fulfillment of hegemonic gender displays for upward mobility within the hierarchy. At

this point, an isolated incident is not enough to make the rest of the Gladers agree with

his assessment. They do not take him seriously despite his place on the Council.

Minho's suggestion is the most truly radical and demonstrates Thomas's success

in exhibiting sufficient agency to subvert the social order. When Gally interrupts to

denigrate Thomas and challenge Minho's position on the gender binary, Minho quickly

and violently dispatches him. He goes on to subordinate not only Gally's performance of

gender in relation to his own, but to Thomas's as well. When Minho is called on for his

proposal, he states, "I nominate this shank to replace me as Keeper of the Runners" (158).

Complete silence fills the room, which erupts into anarchy as Gladers speak both for and

against this proposition. When Minho defends his recommendation, he provides a

testament to Thomas's gender displays that is perhaps only matched by Viola's espousal

of Todd's in *The Knife of Never Letting Go* (to be discussed later in this chapter):

> "I've never seen anything like it. He didn't panic. He didn't whine and
>
> cry, never seemed scared. Dude, he'd been here for just a few days. Think
>
> about what we were all like in the beginning. Huddling in corners,
>
> disoriented, crying every hour, not trusting anybody, refusing to do

anything. We were all like that, for weeks or months, till we had no choice but to shuck it and live."

Minho stood back up, pointed at Thomas. "Just a few days after this guy shows up, he steps out in the Maze to save two shanks he hardly knows. All this klunk about him breaking a rule is just beyond stupid. He didn't get the rules yet. But plenty of people had told him what it's like in the Maze, especially at night. And he still stepped out there, just as the Door was closing, only caring that two people needed help." He took a deep breath, seeming to gain strength the more he spoke.

"But that was just the beginning. After that, he saw me give up on Alby, leave him for dead. And I was the veteran—the one with all the experience and knowledge. So when Thomas saw me give up, he shouldn't have questioned it. But he did. Think about the willpower and strength it took him to push Alby up that wall, inch by inch. It's psycho. It's freaking crazy.

"But that wasn't it. Then came the Grievers. I told Thomas we had to split up and I started the practiced evasive maneuvers, running in the patterns. Thomas, when he should've been wettin' his pants, took control, defied all laws of physics and gravity to get Alby up onto that wall, diverted the Grievers away from him, beat one off, found—" (160-161)

When Gally attempts to brush off Minho's praise, interrupting him to call Thomas a "lucky shank," Minho attacks Gally's own performance of gender by noting that Gally

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had never asked for a position as a Runner. This negates Gally's pretense of knowledge

about the trials that Minho and Thomas faced. Minho shoves Gally in the face and twice

threatens to break Gally's neck "after I'm done with your arms and legs" if Gally ever

threatens him again (162). Once Minho invalidates Gally's gender displays by

subjugating him with physical violence, Gally turns his rage on Thomas and says that he

plans to stop whatever Thomas came for—even if he has to kill Thomas to make that

happen (163). Though Thomas is never forced into a physical conflict with another

character which *would* validate his performance of gender as hegemonic, he is saved

from this convention by having been the *only* individual to engage in combat with a

Griever and live to tell the tale. Thomas's performance of masculinity is therefore not

undermined by the fact that he never engages in physical conflict, but instead supported

by his ability to achieve it through more perilous means than any other Glader.

     Thomas's second most radical use of agency to cement his performance of

masculinity takes place when he constructs a plan that requires he be "pricked" by a

Griever to undergo the Changing and get his memories back. Like many of the female

protagonists, Thomas decides to sacrifice himself for the good of the society, but unlike

female protagonists, he does so despite Teresa's protests while refusing to allow anyone

to constrain his agency. Though males are not traditionally presented as sacrificial

figures, Thomas's sacrifice is justified by the fact that he is the reason that the Gladers

are in the Maze in the first place—so he is given agency to help them escape from it.

Against Thomas's recommendation, Alby argues against leaving the Glade, citing

memories that returned to him when he was also "pricked" by a Griever. He responds to

Thomas's subsequent proclamation that they should leave the Glade by crying and claiming that it is better to die than go home. Minho succinctly summarizes the best possible elevation of the Gladers' performance of hegemonic masculinity: "If we're gonna die, let's freakin' do it fighting" (312).

After successfully surmounting the obstacles that prevent them from escaping, Gally mounts the sole challenge to Thomas's hegemonic masculinity occurs when he re-appears just before the Gladers escape. Intending to kill him, Gally approaches Thomas with a dagger, but ". . . inexplicably, Chuck was there, diving in front of him [Thomas]. Thomas felt as if his feet had been frozen in blocks of ice; he could only stare at the scene of horror unfolding before him, completely helpless. With a sickening, wet thunk, the dagger slammed into Chuck's chest, burying itself to the hilt" (356). Gally's penetration of Chuck with the dagger suggests the fragile nature of Chuck's already subordinated performance of masculinity on the gender binary, and no explanation for Chuck's inexplicable sacrifice is offered in the novel. Thomas is prevented from engaging in physical conflict with Gally by a needless, allegedly willing, sacrifice that sends him into a rage and causes him to "snap," completely and utterly:

> He rushed forward, threw himself on Gally, grasping with his fingers like
>
> claws. He found the boy's throat, squeezed, fell to the ground on top of
>
> him. He straddled the boy's torso, gripped him with his legs so he couldn't
>
> escape. Thomas started punching.
>
> He held Gally down with his left hand, pushing down on the boy's
>
> neck, as his right fist rained punches upon Gally's face, one after another.

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Down and down and down, slamming his balled knuckles into the boy's

cheek and nose. There was crunching, there was blood, there were horrible

screams. Thomas didn't know which were louder—Gally's or his own. He

beat him—beat him as he released every ounce of rage he'd ever owned.

And then he was being pulled away by Minho and Newt, his arms still

flailing even when they only hit air. They dragged him across the floor; he

fought them, squirmed, yelled to be left alone. His eyes remained on

Gally, lying there, still; Thomas could feel the hatred pouring out, as if a

visible line of flame connected them. (352)

By depriving Thomas of the right to defend the challenge to his masculinity, Chuck loses

his life—a consequence that Tris is not forced to face in her skirmish with Molly, but

later is punished for when she kills her friend Will. Like Tris, Thomas is subsequently

ripped from his quarrel with Gally (though it takes two other Gladers to subdue him as

opposed to the one person that it takes to pull Tris off of Molly). When the entire ordeal

is over, he weeps for the friend that he lost within a context of individuals who recognize

the connection they had. They do not allow this to change their opinions of his character.

Thomas's worth as a male protagonist and as a leader is not undermined by his tears,

usually considered the behavior of "sissies" by the Gladers. After Chuck sacrifices his

life in place of Thomas's, Thomas rightfully avenges his death, then grieves for a Glader

with whom they all felt a sense of kinship for having shared the same strange home.

Some might argue that Chuck's sacrifice undermines Thomas's performance of

masculinity because Thomas is saved from mortal danger, especially since Thomas had

no way of knowing whether or not he and Gally would be equally matched in a fist fight. Thomas's strength was vindicated by the fact that it took two other strong hegemonic males to prevent him from killing Gally in response. As such, Thomas demonstrates a multiplicity of equal partnerships that are denied to female protagonists, and retains his status on the gender binary in spite of conflicting gender displays. He is forced to experience the full weight of the consequences of his actions—even if those consequences happen to deprive another character of his life instead.

The Knife of Never Letting Go

In *The Knife of Never Letting Go,* the first volume of the Chaos Walking trilogy, Patrick Ness creates a protagonist that establishes the most equal partnership of any protagonist—female or male—in this project. Further, Todd's female partner is more empowered than any of the females under discussion. Ness blends post-colonialism, Marxism, and feminism into a work of social commentary that features a progressive male protagonist. Using colloquial language and stream of consciousness, Ness writes the coming-of-age story of twelve-year-old Todd Hewitt. Todd lives in a small settlement called Prentisstown on a recently colonized planet which is called New World by settlers. Todd is almost fifteen years old in Earth years, but the years on this planet are thirteen months long, so he considers himself to be almost thirteen. As Prentisstown's version of history goes, when the colonizers' ships landed, the planet was already inhabited by native beings they named "Spackle." The Spackle are humanoids who communicate using a form of telepathy which broadcasts each individual's thoughts in a constant stream of words and pictures that the settlers have termed "Noise." According to the men

of Prentisstown, the settlers initially attempted to extend the proverbial olive branch to the Spackle, but the Spackle refused to peacefully coexist with them. After fighting a bloody war that claimed the lives of hundreds of settlers and thousands of Spackle, the surviving settlers attempted to either enslave or eradicate the remaining Spackle in order to ensure their dominance of the planet in the years to come.

During the war, the Spackle allegedly released a biological weapon in the form of a "germ" that gave all of the animals on the planet the ability to communicate both orally and through Noise. Then, to perpetuate the myth that established their hegemony and justify their genocidal acts, the settlers told their children (and convinced themselves) that the Spackle had released another "germ" that killed half of the Prentisstown men and all of the women, leaving many children and infants to die. Later in the novel, however, the truth about the colonizers' bloody history is revealed: the Noise had already existed on the planet when the ships landed because the native Spackle used it to communicate. Within a day of arrival, all of the men developed Noise which they perceived as an invasion of their privacy because it could be heard by anyone of any species within its range. Significantly, none of the women of the matriarchal settlement they called New Elizabeth had any Noise at all, so it was impossible for the men to "know" them as intimately (or as invasively) as the women knew the men. Many of the men felt violated by what they perceived to be unwelcome intrusions on their private thoughts and were threatened by the inequality that emerged through this seemingly arbitrary distinction. Despite the fact that the women had *no choice* but to hear the Noise since the men were the only ones who could control it, the men murdered the women and girls as well as any

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men who defended them. Having led the extermination of the women and girls of New Elizabeth, Mayor Prentiss rose to power. Once word of their actions traveled to other settlements, Prentisstown was declared a prison, and its "inmates" were not allowed to leave its borders. New Elizabeth became Prentisstown, and Prentisstown boys thereafter were made complicit in the town's violent acts by murdering other Prentisstown men as a ceremonial representation of their coming of age.

The novel begins roughly twenty years after the Spackle war. Prentisstown is an agrarian settlement that is now on its last legs; as Todd describes it:

> One shop, used to be two. One bar, used to be two. One clinic, one jail, one nonworking gas stayshun, one big house for the Mayor, one police stayshun. The Church. One short bit of road running thru the center, paved back in the day, never upkept since, goes to gravel real quick. All the houses and such are out and about, outskirts like, farms, *meant* to be farms, some still are, some stand empty, some stand worse than empty.
>
> (19)

This is what remains of a town that is now home to "146 men and one almost-man" (19). The staunchly patriarchal Prentisstown is controlled by the powerful and manipulative Mayor Prentiss. Mayor Prentiss has appointed his ruthless teenaged son, Davy Prentiss Jr., as the town's sheriff, and a mad zealot, Aaron, as the resident preacher. Todd makes a point to state that "[t]he Church is why we're all here on New World in the first place" (26). The Church's purpose in the narrative both as a physical building and as a symbol of the town's "faith" is multi-faceted. First, it exposes the text to more thorough post-

colonial critique since the settlers are *presented* by Ness as righteous colonizers who simply intend to save the godless savages from their uncivilized ways, despite appearances to the contrary. Second, the "fire and brimstone" doctrine that Aaron espouses within the Church's walls represents a theological *regression* rather than *progression* that only magnifies the narrative's sociopolitical tensions. Namely, the citizens' indoctrination to the New World through a collective revision of their own horrific history. Even Todd seems to understand that Aaron's sermons about "why we left behind the corrupshun and sin of Old World and about how we'd aimed to start a new life of purity and *brotherhood* in a whole new Eden" are farcical since he states sarcastically, "That worked out well, huh?" (emphasis added; 26). Finally, the Church is one of the novel's Panoptic "disciplinary mechanisms" which indoctrinates its members (except for the Mayor, who seldom attends) through sermons filled with aphorisms about sacrifice and sainthood, including one of Aaron's favorites: ". . . if one of us falls, we all fall," the significance of which is lost on Todd until much later in the text (26).

A second discipline mechanism appears in the form of compulsory illiteracy imposed by the settlement's autocratic mayor. According to Todd, before he was born, boys were taught by their mothers in their own homes; when there were no women left, boys were "sat down in front of vids and learning modules until Mayor Prentiss outlawed such things as 'detrimental to the discipline of our minds'" (18). One day, Mayor Prentiss decided to burn every single book in the town, even the ones in men's homes, because "apparently books were detrimental as well and Mr. Royal, a soft man who made himself a hard man by drinking whisky in the classroom, gave up and took a gun and put an end

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to himself and that was it for my classroom teaching" (18). Ness does not waste any time in depicting the pervasiveness of the violence that has ravaged Prentisstown for over a decade. Todd dispassionately describes the alleged suicide of his former alcoholic teacher in response to the Mayor's enforced censorship in a tone that sounds as though he is reciting a grocery list. Despite what Aaron preaches, his emotive distance from Mr. Royal suggests that there is no *real* sense of brotherhood among the Prentisstown men. The fact that Todd is even aware of his teacher's former "soft" side and the fact that alcohol changed his temperament suggests that Todd was close enough to his teacher to notice the shift, but too desensitized to have been strongly affected by his death.

Once formal education was banned in Prentisstown, Ben, one of his adoptive parents, took responsibility to continue it at home. Unlike the tasks that are divided amongst the Gladers in *The Maze Runner*, which tend to define whomever performs them as more feminine or more masculine, Ben teaches Todd skills that are *required for survival by everyone*, such as "[m]echanics and food prep and clothes repair and farming basics and things like that. Also a lot of survival stuff like hunting and which fruits you can eat and how to follow the moons for direkshuns and how to use a knife and a gun and snakebite remedies and how to calm yer Noise as best you can" (18-19). Ben also attempted to teach Todd to read and write, but "Mayor Prentiss caught wind of it in my Noise one morning and locked Ben up for a week and that was the end of my booklearning . . . I never ended up reading too good" (19). Todd's illiteracy becomes a significant source of insecurity for him, especially later when his Noise reveals this shortcoming to those whom he would rather not be privy to the information.

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After the death of his parents in the Spackle war, Todd says that he was "counted among the lucky cuz it was only natural for Ben and Cillian to take me in and feed me and raise me and teach me and generally make it possible for me to go on being alive" (34). In the same way that the reproduction of mothering profoundly influences girls' identity formation, Todd's adoptive parents, Ben and Cillian, who were friends of his biological parents, provide the foundation for *his* gender role identification. The fact that Ben and Cillian are not Todd's *biological* parents is immaterial. Nancy Chodorow states,

> What matters is the extent to which a child of either gender can form a
> personal relationship with their object of identification, and the differences
> in modes of identification that can result from this. . . . Personal
> identification, according to Slater and Winch, consists of diffuse
> identification with someone else's general personality, behavioral traits,
> values, and attitudes. Positional identification consists, by contrast, in
> identification with specific aspects of another's role and does not
> necessarily lead to the internalization of the values or attitudes of the
> person identified with. According to Slater, children preferentially choose
> personal identification because this grows out of a positive affective
> relationship to a person who is there. They resort to positional
> identification residually and reactively, and identify with the perceived
> role or situation of another when possibilities for personal identification
> are not available. (175)

Although the nature of their relationship is never explicitly stated, Ness implies that Ben

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and Cillian are a homosexual couple. Through his sense of kinship with them, Todd finds the personal identification that he needs to develop his own identity. Granted, he is not as fond of Cillian as he is of Ben because the differences in their respective performances of masculinity affect their Noise, their personalities, and their styles of caregiving. Todd explains,

> . . . it's never been so good with Cillian, not never [sic], Ben's always been the kind one, Cillian's always been the other one . . . [Ben's Noise] ain't nothing like Cillian's. It's calmer and clearer and tho you can't see Noise, if Cillian's always seems reddish, then Ben's seems blue or sometimes green. They're different men from each other, different as fire and water, Ben and Cillian, my more or less parents. . . Ben's a different kind of man than Cillian, a *kind* kind of man that makes him not normal in Prentisstown. (33)

Todd's description suggests that his process of identity formation is closer to girls' than boys', since he identifies with Ben (who has taken on a more maternal role) and conceives of his identity in abstraction from or rejection of Cillian (who is more paternal). Through Ben, Ness succeeds in creating an empowered representation of masculinity that is neither hegemonic nor subordinate by virtue of his strength as an individual who risks his life to help Todd escape from Prentisstown; he does not need to look to Cillian for leadership or protection.

Unlike Ben and Cillian's Noise, the Noise of the residents of Prentisstown is mostly pornographic or violent in nature. This is not surprising considering the town's

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bloody history (of which Todd remains unaware until much later in the novel). Although Todd is ignorant to the truth about Noise, as well as Prentisstown as a whole, he is already keenly aware that Noise is intimately intertwined with identity. As he describes it, Noise is

> . . . words, the voices talking and moaning and singing and crying. There's pictures, too, pictures that come to yer mind in a rush, no matter how much you don't want 'em, pictures of memories and fantasies and secrets and plans and lies, lies, lies. . . . Men lie, and they lie to themselves worst of all. . . . So the thing to remember, the thing that's most important of all that I might say in this here telling of things is that Noise ain't truth, Noise is what men *want* to be true . . . (22-23).

He even goes so far as to say that the Noise is ". . . a man unfiltered, and without a filter, a man is just chaos walking" (42). By presenting Noise as an amorphous, public expression of thought that reaches and is reached by all within its range, Ness actually succeeds in creating a planet where identity is *literally* socially constructed. When Todd feels overwhelmed by the Noise, he remembers Ben's lessons: "You close yer eyes and as clearly and calmly as you can you tell yerself who you are, cuz that's what gets lost in all that Noise" (17). These lessons not only enable Todd to better understand his *own* identity, but also the identity of others based on the colors or emotions that seem to "bleed" from their Noise in a form of synesthesia.

In the beginning of the narrative, Todd is in the swamp with his talking dog, Manchee, when he detects what he describes as a "hole" in the noise. This hole engenders

feelings of sadness and longing—feelings which compel Todd to cry for reasons he cannot explain. He immediately runs home to his caregivers in the hope they will be able to help him make sense of it. What would have been the catalyst for Todd's escape from Prentisstown, his thirteenth birthday, is pre-empted by his discovery of the hole in the Noise. When Todd and his dog arrive home, Manchee reveals the "quiet" in the swamp to Cillian and then Ben. As Cillian runs to the house from the fields in reaction to Manchee's announcement, Ben reacts immediately and says, "Oh my God. . . . We have to get you outta here *right now*" (38). The urgency of Ben's pronouncement is validated as they are preparing for Todd's escape. Davy Prentiss Jr. arrives at the house and asks to have a word with Todd on the Mayor's behalf. Unknowingly, Todd's Noise had already revealed the hole in the Noise to the men of Prentisstown during his walk back through town. Cillian bars the door, holding a shotgun, and gives Todd time to escape.

Ben's integral role in Todd's identity formation strongly affects Todd's growth throughout the narrative. When Todd refuses to acquiesce, demanding an explanation for this unprecedented turn of events, Ben opens his Noise to give Todd a glimpse of what is supposed to happen in Prentisstown on the day a boy becomes a man. The ritual which requires boys to murder Prentisstown men ensures that "every last bit of boyhood is killed off" and enforces their complicity in the town's criminal past (52). In his struggle to assimilate this new information with his existing schemas, Todd reacts in ways that reflect his fledgling conception of masculinity. Despite his non-traditional parenting by Ben and Cillian, the influence of the gender binary is clear in his own repeated critiques of his performance of gender. Every time he describes his tone as "mewing" or acts in a

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way that he perceives as "feminine," he tells himself to "(shut up)" as though to prevent himself from acting in a way that conflicts with the idea of manhood that he has tried to perform in preparation for his thirteenth birthday (53).

In this moment, Todd learns that what he has been led to believe his entire life—that Prentisstown is the only settlement on the planet—is false. Contrary to Todd's prior beliefs, Ben later explains that Prentisstown is actually a "town-sized prison. Full of the ugliest Noise you ever heard before men started denying their own pasts, before the Mayor came up with his grand plans" (396). The fact that Prentisstown is actually a prison and not the free settlement that Todd believes it to be is this novel's manifestation of Foucault's discipline blockade. Despite Todd's protests about wanting to stay and fight, Ben escorts Todd out the back door. Before Todd and Ben part ways, Ben provides him with tools to resist or escape the limitations of Mayor Prentiss's dystopia. First, Ben gives Todd a pre-packed bag and a map hidden within his mother's journal, a book which tells Todd an alternative history of Prentisstown and a map that informs him there is somewhere else to which he can escape. Ben then orders him to escape to the swamp with Manchee. Understandably, Todd questions the reason that this plan was ever in place, asking, "How did you know to have a bag already packed . . . If this thing in the swamp is so unexpected, why are you so ready to chuck me out into the wilderness today?" When Ben responds that it was the plan "all along," ever since Todd was little, Todd states petulantly, "You were just gonna throw me out so the crocs could eat me" (52). Since Todd has just begun the journey that will eventually lead him to a greater understanding of true manhood, his perspective is limited. He balks at the idea of

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escaping from the only home he has ever known. His true coming-of-age begins when Ben holds out a knife and Todd takes it, accepting his destiny and leaving Ben and Cillian for what he thinks may be the last time.

Like the female protagonists under discussion as well and Thomas in *The Maze Runner*, Todd is ascribed "flaws" that pose significant challenges to his growth and limit his agency at pivotal points in the novel. Significantly, these attributes are only considered "flaws" because Todd is male; if he were female, these attributes would merely be considered "conventions." One such "flaw" is Todd's fundamental and understable lack of knowledge about women, coupled with his inability to hear their Noise. The next step in Todd's education and maturation comes with the revelation of the source of the hole in the Noise, a phenomenon that will encompass his positional identification and change his identity forever. Since, for Todd, Noise is omnipresent and becomes louder and more intense when more beings are in the surrounding area, the idea of a silent gap in the Noise is all but unfathomable. But when he follows the gap, he discovers, to his utter confusion, that the source of the silence is a girl. Initially, she refuses to respond to his questions about who she is and where she comes from, so Todd affirms his knowledge of her gender by classifying it in two ways: identification and exclusion. First, he cites the gendered stereotypes that he has witnessed in the Noise of dead girls' fathers in Prentisstown: "Girls are small and polite and smiley. They wear dresses and their hair is long and it's pulled into shapes behind their heads or on either side. They do all the inside-the-house chores, while boys do all the outside. They reach womanhood when they turn thirteen, just like boys reach manhood, and then they're

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women and they become wives" (68). The girl he encounters, however, has shorter hair, is roughly his own size, and seems to be wearing a "way newer" version of a uniform that looks like his own clothes. She is not "smiley" at all.

Since her gender displays differ from those that he has been led to believe are normative, he then asks rhetorically how he knows "it's" a girl and proceeds to cite constructs and appearances that would exclude her as a Spackle. According to Todd, "Spackle looked like men with everything a bit swelled up, everything a bit longer and weirder than on a man, their mouths a bit higher than they should be and their ears and eyes way, *way* different. And spacks grew clothes right on their bodies, like lichens. . . . she don't look like that and her clothes are normal and so there ain't no way she's a Spackle" (69). Now that Todd has determined what a girl *is* and *is not*, he is further able to define his own identity and gender performance in opposition to hers, stating, "And she ain't another boy. She just ain't. She ain't me. She ain't nothing like me at all. She's something completely other else altogether and I don't know how I know it but *I know who I am.* I am Todd Hewitt, and I know what I am not and I am not her" (emphasis added; 70). The most philosophically and theoretically significant difference between Todd and Thomas—and indeed between Todd and all of the female protagonists under discussion in the previous chapter—is that Todd has the most fully-formed concept of and confidence in his own identity. Even though he *continues* to develop his sense of self as the narrative progresses, he *begins* the narrative with the ability to define himself and his identity by who he is as an individual as well as in relation to others. Whereas all of the female protagonists seem to struggle with the fundamental question of who they are,

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Todd *knows* who he is—his challenge is to decide who he will *become.*

The first evidence of this inner conflict's effect on Todd is the way the girl's silence affects him; he laments that he does not know "why the quiet makes me ache so much I can barely stop from ruddy *weeping*, like I'm missing something so bad I can't even think straight, like the emptiness ain't in her, it's in *me* and there ain't nothing that's ever gonna fix it" (70-71). In a strict gender binary, his response would be labeled "feminine." Although Ness does not include the convention of romance typical in young adult dystopian novels with female protagonists, Todd seems to be experiencing the kind of absence that adolescent females are taught by society to believe they should feel if they have not cultivated romantic relationships at a young age. The absence that Todd feels is not the girl's desolation at having lost both of her parents in a crash landing on a foreign planet—an event which he soon discovers. Rather, the source of his dismay is his inability to access her private thoughts the way she can hear his through his Noise. This inequality represents one of the most significant barriers to Todd's ability to trust or know the girl, Viola, as thoroughly as she knows him.

Initially, Todd assumes the role of leader as they attempt to escape the swamp but surrenders responsibility for navigating their journey to Viola when it becomes clear that she is literate and can read the map. Viola quickly establishes herself as an equal partner in the process of their escape by saving his life and guaranteeing them additional time to flee when she destroys a bridge that separates them from their pursuers. At Farbranch, Todd and Viola are told that their only chance to escape Mayor Prentiss and the Prentisstown men is to take shelter at Haven, the largest settlement on New World. Soon

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after they are granted shelter, Viola reveals the effect that her inability to escape his

Noise has on her as well as her understanding of his frustration. In a "violent whisper,"

Viola states, "Just because my thoughts and feelings don't spill out into the world in a

shout that never stops doesn't mean I don't have them. . . . Every time you think *Oh,*

she's just emptiness, or, *There's nothing going on inside her,* or, *Maybe I can dump her*

with these two, I hear it, okay? . . . And I understand *way* more than I want to" (165).

This development is yet another example of the truly progressive nature of Ness's

narrative and the way in which Ness disrupts traditional gender norms. Though men in

young adult novels traditionally have the upper hand in their interactions with women by

virtue of their hierarchical positioning on the gender binary, Todd is disadvantaged in his

interactions with a female because she is privy to his most intimate thoughts while he is

unable to hear hers. For his entire life, Todd has relied on the information transmitted

through Noise to understand the fundamental nature of others. He responds to Viola's

outburst by asking, ". . . how am I sposed to know any effing thing about you, huh? How

am I sposed to know what's going on if you keep it secret?" (165). Viola responds that

she is simply being normal. In this way, Todd redefines Viola's concept of "normality" in

terms of the gender relations on New World through his response: "Not normal for here,

Vi" (165).

This concept of "knowing" someone based on their Noise is a recurring theme

that complicates Todd's understanding of identity—especially of women's identities—as

the novel progresses. While in Farbranch, Todd and Viola are reminded of their equality

by an older woman who notes that they have saved each other's lives. The fact that the

woman and her sister have shown them kindness and provided them with both shelter and protection should be enough for Todd to trust her, especially since she knows the dark history of the settlement from which he escaped and is still willing to help him. Ness again emphasizes Todd's reliance on Noise to understand identity when it later appears as though the woman's fellow townsmen intend to give Todd and Viola up to the quickly approaching Prentisstown men; Todd implores, "Don't give us to them. . . . They'll kill us" (204). She responds, "What kinda woman do ye think I am?" (204). Todd replies, "I don't know . . . that's the whole problem" (204).

Todd's perceived knowledge of Viola's character is tested when, much later in the novel, he is forced to choose between running away with her from Aaron's violent pursuit or saving his beloved dog, Manchee, from Aaron's clutches. Manchee, who has protected Todd from multiple threats and acted as his companion as well as the last vestige of his childhood, cries out in confusion when Todd makes his choice and abandons Manchee for Viola. Aaron follows through on his threat and kills Manchee, which reduces Todd to tears. His choice bears a consequence that no other protagonist in the novels under discussion is ever forced to make or live with.

Todd's understanding of traditional gender norms and his rejection of his hierarchical role on the gender binary is further demonstrated as their journey continues. Once they have safely escaped Prentisstown's attack on Farbranch, Todd and Viola reach another settlement called Carbonel Downs where Todd is briefly reunited with Ben. They are then confronted by men from Carbonel Downs, who debate whether to kill Todd or surrender him to Mayor Prentiss. Ben defends Todd, explaining that Todd has been

sheltered from the truth about the town's bloody history: Todd is, for all intents and purposes, still "innocent." During this conversation, the nature of Todd and Viola's relationship comes under discussion when one of the leaders, Doctor Snow, mistakenly calls Viola his "girl." Unlike any of the protagonists under discussion, whose identities become closely intertwined with those of their love interests, Todd gives Viola her own identity and her own agency when he exclaims definitively, "She ain't my girl . . . She's her own girl. . . She don't belong to anyone" (380). By allowing her to exist as separate from him—by giving her the *choice* to determine her own identity—Todd demonstrates a true understanding of manhood. His gender performance does not constrain others, but allows them to be their own persons.

The most interesting and progressive limitation of Todd's character (arguably his second "flaw") is Todd's interactions with violence. Todd is the product of a violent, misogynistic society; the gender constructs embedded within young adult dystopian novels permit Todd to use any violence he deems necessary to achieve his own ends. He is therefore given the freedom to assert his masculinity *without* suffering the limitations by which female protagonists are constrained. Still, Todd is unable to murder another human being regardless of the circumstances. While it seems as though Todd wishes he could be more violent in dire circumstances as he believes a man ought to be, his choice not to kill others is exactly that: a choice. Todd conceives of manhood, in part, as the ability to protect and defend himself and others. He protects himself from experiencing the consequences of murder because he knows that it would destroy an inherently good part of himself that he cannot afford to compromise. Viola, who comes to understand this

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side of Todd, actively works to disrupt the heteronormative frameworks in which he has

been raised so that he can continue to make his own choices in the same way that he has

continuously respected her freedom of choic. In this way, Todd and Viola demonstrate

the most equal partnership of any discussed within this project.

To some, the choice to refuse to commit murder would not be considered a

"flaw," but Todd experienced a non-traditional upbringing in a murderous settlement that

makes this characteristic dangerous if he wishes to increase his odds of survival. Ness

intends for Ben's knife to give Todd the means by which he can surmount this flaw if he

so chooses. Shortly after entering the swamp at the beginning of Todd's journey, the

significance of the knife is made clear; a croc attacks Todd from the rushes and he kills it,

successfully passing the first test of his bravery—and by extension, establishing his

manhood. However, he finds that his bravery does not extend to using the knife on

human beings, even those who wish him harm. Shortly after Todd dispatches the croc,

Aaron emerges from the rushes, intent on bringing Todd back to Prentisstown to

complete the ritual that will signify his entrance into manhood. Though Todd has not yet

technically come of age, Aaron forces Todd into conflict prematurely so that

Prentisstown's settlement-wide complicity in its criminal history will be complete. Todd,

however, separates himself from the rest of the men when he states, "I pull back my knife

hand and I wonder if I can *actually* stab him" (emphasis added; 62). When it seems as

though he will have no other choice than to be violent in order to save himself from

mortal peril, Todd is saved from having to choose violence by a croc that attacks and

drags Aaron away. This construct aligns Todd's behavior more closely with the female

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protagonists in the previous chapter, but also signifies the strength of his metacognition through the way he questions his own choices before he commits to them.

Another example of this reflection takes place after Viola and Todd first meet, and she hits him in the head with a stick because she has seen his knife and felt threatened. When Aaron appears and attempts to restrain her, Todd sees in Aaron's Noise that he intends to use Viola as a sacrifice, but Aaron either does not hear or ignores Todd's demands to leave the girl alone. At this point, Todd realizes that he is "gonna have to kill Aaron" (81). Todd raises the knife, which makes Aaron turn slowly and step toward him. Todd takes a step back, which he immediately recognizes as an act of cowardice, which undermines his own sense of manhood. He chides himself, thinking, "(shut up, please just shut up)," signifying that his gender displays conflict with his intended performance of masculinity (81). Aaron, who clearly has an advantage in both size and strength, gains the upper hand and attempts to drown Todd while Viola is tied up. In young adult dystopian novels with *female* protagonists, this is exactly the kind of situation where the love interest would somehow appear and save her from her untimely demise. Todd, however, saves himself just as he thinks that all is lost. He finds a rock in the water and uses it to bash Aaron repeatedly in the side of the head until Aaron falls unconscious and releases him.

When Todd regains awareness of his surroundings, he sees that Viola (whose hands are still tied) is holding the knife that had been sent flying when Aaron knocked it out of his hands. Todd cuts her free and shamefully realizes that she knows he was unable to stab and kill Aaron to save both of their lives. Simultaneously, they realize that Aaron

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is still alive. Viola, who at this point has not yet begun speaking, looks at the knife, then at Aaron, and then back at Todd. Todd comes to the obvious conclusion that she is suggesting he murder Aaron to ensure their safety. Todd raises the knife above Aaron and states, "One more time, I've got my chance. One more time, I've got my knife raised. I could do it. No one on New World would blame me. It'd be *my right"* (emphasis added; 83). The "right" of which Todd is speaking is unclear. Is he referring to the right to vigilante justice which allows him to commit murder in order to "right" Aaron's "wrong" in first attempting to murder him? Is he referring to his "right" to protect the girl by using a weapon to assert his masculinity and defend them both from a vicious assault? Is he referring to the Prentisstown coming-of-age ritual that gives him the "right" and the responsibility to commit murder and thus enter symbolically into manhood?

Regardless of which "right" Todd feels he has in this case, he demonstrates an acute awareness of maturity when he considers the difference between an object and the implications of using it for a violent purpose. He asks, rhetorically, "But a knife ain't just a thing, is it? It's a choice, it's something you *do*. A knife says yes or no, cut or not, die or don't. A knife takes the decision out of your hand and puts it in the world and it never goes back again. . . . And I can't bring the knife down to finish the job. Who am I? I am Todd Hewitt" (84). Although Todd's insight results from his conscious lack of action, he does not interpret his choice as strength because it flies in the face of what he has learned "manhood" to be through his positional identification with the men of Prentisstown. Rather, after affirming his identity, he redefines himself as "the biggest, effing waste of nothing known to man" (84). This pronouncement demonstrates that Todd is still

struggling with the gender binary and also signifies the potentially negative implications of personal identification as opposed to positional identification. If he could have asked Ben or Cillian their opinion of his actions, they likely would have understood if Todd had chosen to kill Aaron and respected his decision not to, however concerned they might be about his failure to end an immediate threat to his life. In defining himself by Prentisstown standards through his positional identification, however, his decision not to kill Aaron undermines his sense of his own manhood and reinforces his negative self-image. His positional identification with the men of Prentisstown cripples his sense of empowerment in his own eyes as well as the perception of his competence as a protector in Viola's eyes.

Constrained by his misperception of manhood, Todd's sense of self comes under fire again and again when he is given opportunities to kill those who mean to kill him and chooses not to. When he is later cornered in a violent scuffle by Davy Prentiss Jr., who brags about having shot Ben and Cillian "twixt the eyes," Todd hesitates to bring his knife down, which gives Davy the leverage that he needs to knock Todd's hand away (259). Davy taunts Todd's inability to use violence when he explains that there are "lots of things you can do with a knife . . . without killing a man," referring to his own coming-of-age ritual in which he tortured a man to death; he gloats, "you *ain't* a man, are ya? . . . And you never will be" (262). Davy's hegemonic masculinity subordinates Todd's performance of masculinity through his ability to overpower Todd, and he flaunts the fact that he has "become a man" while Todd still has not.

Significantly, Viola seems to understand Todd better than Todd understands

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himself. To resolve the impasse, Viola uses a contraption of her own making to electrocute Davy, giving her and Todd time to escape. Notably, Todd does not realize the significance of having won Viola's trust and respect to the degree that she would intervene on his behalf to save him at great risk to herself. In spite of the fact that Viola does not have Noise, Todd begins to understand her through their interactions; however, he still does not fully trust her. Shortly after incapacitating Davy, Viola infuriates Todd by proclaiming, "You're not a killer, Todd." He shouts, "Don't SAY THAT!! Don't you EVER SAY THAT!!" (264). Todd believes he is the reason that they are "in this mess." Despite his own inability to commit murder, the fact that he refutes her claim suggests that he feels a profound conflict between what his positional identification has taught him in terms of manhood and what his personal identification with Ben and Cillian has taught him to believe is the truth. Viola then asks Todd to listen to her words, since he cannot hear her Noise. She explains her reasoning:

> When you found me, back there in the swamp, I had been running from that man, from Aaron, for four days, and you were only the second person I'd ever seen on this planet and you came at me with that same knife and for all I knew you were exactly like him. . . .
>
> But before I even understood what was going on with Noise and with Prentisstown and with whatever your story was, I could tell about you. People can tell, Todd. We can see that you won't hurt us. That's not you. . . .
>
> And I was right. You bandaged my arm. You rescued me from Aaron

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when you didn't have to. You took me out of the swamp where I would

have been killed. You stood up for me to that man in the orchard. You

came with me when we needed to leave Farbranch. . . .

  I think I'm finally *understanding* the story, Todd. . . . Why are they

coming after you so fiercely? Why is a whole stupid army chasing you

across towns and rivers and plains and the whole stupid planet? . . . I heard

what he said. Don't you wonder why they want you so badly? (264-265)

The answer finally dawns on him. The positional identification that he has relied on to

construct his understanding of "manhood" is not, in fact, the kind of "manhood" that

actually makes someone a *man*. Todd finally redefines his own concept of manhood

based on his own experiences and forms a personal definition of masculinity in

opposition to that of the Prentisstown men. Todd subsequently comes to the realization

that Viola has already discovered and is attempting to help him understand: ". . . I'm the

one who don't fit" (265).

  After realizing this fundamental truth about masculinity, which separates him

from the hegemonic men of Prentisstown, Todd mistakenly diagnoses what the army

intends to do with him once they find him, stating that he "has an army who wants to kill

me cuz I'm not a killer" (265). Viola corrects his misperception and explains that, no,

"You have an army who wants to *make* you a killer. . . . If they can turn you into the *kind*

of man they want. . . If they can snuff out that part of you that's good, the part of you that

won't kill, then they win, don't you see? If they can do it to you, they can do it to *anyone*.

And *they win*" (emphasis added; 265). Todd attempts one last time to refute her

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interpretation and support his right to kill Davy by reminding her that Davy killed Ben and Cillian. Viola questions the truth of Davy's claim and suggests that she knows what "type of boy" Davy is: a liar. Todd in turn corrects *her*, stating that Davy is a man. Viola snaps and asks why he ascribes a direct relationship between an individual's birthday and his "manhood" when such a relationship is socially constructed rather than based on the strength or maturity of one's character. Todd's response is based on an appeal to tradition rather than logic when he states, "I'm from *here* and that's how it works here!" (266).

As evidenced by this conversation, Todd and Viola's friendship emphasizes yet another reason that this novel is so progressive. While many of the male love interests of female protagonists discussed in the previous chapter have asked them to question the social constructs of their societies as a whole, none of them have engaged in a dialogue that forced the female protagonists to question whether their own understanding of "womanhood" was in some way flawed based on the gendered constructs they were raised to accept as facts. Significantly, Viola does not offer Todd any answers about the true nature of "manhood" or tell him the kind of man that he is "supposed" to be; she merely provides the impetus for him to question his *own* values and beliefs in order to empower *himself* in the face of the social constructs that he seems to believe are integral to his own self-definition.

Now that Todd has begun to redefine masculinity and thus his identity, he is forced into a conflict that will decide how his re-definition will affect his subsequent actions and what their consequences might be. When Todd and Viola venture back into the woods, they stumble upon a being Todd has never personally encountered but

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recognizes instantly as a Spackle. The Spackle is camping in the woods and appears to be skinning a fish for dinner. To prove to himself that he *is* capable of killing something—anything—Todd prepares to murder the Spackle. Viola grabs his arm to stop him and begs him to reconsider since they are not under any threat. Against Viola's helpless cries, Todd leaps forward and stabs the Spackle in the chest with the knife.

Despite his indoctrination that the Spackle are vicious enemies and that the murder of the Spackle does not "count" by Prentisstown standards (because however humanoid they might be, they are not actually human beings), Todd's killing of the Spackle poses greater significance to his character's growth than if he had killed Aaron in self-defense. The Spackle posed no threat to them except in the context of Prentisstown history; by all accounts, it was minding its own business. Todd realizes that the Spackle is "weaker" than he is (physically), but he wastes no time in proving what he believes to be his manhood to himself. Since his only means of positional identification now is Viola, he ignores her pleas to leave the Spackle alone. Despite the fact that she is consistently more logical than he is, he does not want to position his definition of masculinity alongside what he perceives to be her femininity. After twisting the knife and completing the deed, he justifies his actions to Viola, explaining that the Spackle "killed his ma" in the war, then proceeds to vomit violently. Again, he attempts to defend his actions by claiming self-defense, stating, "He woulda killed us" (276). Viola cries that the Spackle was terrified—that the Spackle's attempt to go for his spear before Todd murdered him was the *true* act of self-defense, even after Todd continues to parrot the propaganda that he has been taught since birth, that the Spackle "killed everyone on New

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World" (276).

Viola refuses to back down, demanding that Todd remember all of the things he was raised to believe were true that turned out not to be—including the fact that the Spackle are supposedly extinct. When Viola forces Todd to question what he learned in Prentisstown about New World's history, the weight of his actions finally sinks in. He finally realizes, "One more time, I've ruined everything. One more time, I've done everything wrong. From a long way away I can hear Viola saying my name. But it's so far away. And I'm alone. Here and always, alone" (277). His selfish, violent act distances him from Viola and even from the men of Prentisstown because the murder he committed in cold blood was not of a being that was threatening him or even human by the standards of Prentisstown men. This act enables Todd to internalize a more concrete definition of manhood because he actually bears the weight of the *consequences* of his actions. As a result, he is forced to reconsider everything he knows about himself and the world around him.

The death of the Spackle has a profound effect on Todd. From that point on, as he repeatedly encounters Aaron, he is forced again and again to make choices about believing or disbelieving the world according to Mayor Prentiss and the nature of the relationship between violence and masculinity. When Aaron next appears, he kidnaps Viola, and Todd is thrown back into the conflict between the socially constructed definition of masculinity he believed prior to killing the Spackle and his personal definition of masculinity. After claiming that he "has no further use for you, boy," Aaron stabs Todd in the back with Todd's own knife (280). Todd pursues Aaron to rescue Viola

and, in the chase, loses enough blood that he starts to hallucinate; he is then thrust into one of the most vivid "man versus self" conflicts that appears in any of the novels under discussion. He hallucinates a manifestation of a boy, which he perceives to be a ghostly representation of himself, who shoves his insecurities back in his face. The specter taunts him by reminding him of his inability to kill Aaron "even if he deserves it" (332). The specter claims that it is "probably too late to save her [Viola]." When Todd makes a plan to save her, it responds, "*What if it don't work? . . . You can't make a fire. . . Her fire-making box is broken . . . Ben's dead . . . Yer not strong enough to make a fire*" (333-335).

To reaffirm his identity and fight these doubts that threaten to prevent him from taking his chosen course of action, Todd starts singing the song that Ben had sung to him, the same one his mother had sung to him before she died. Despite the fact that he has literally just been stabbed in the back and is suffering severe blood loss, Todd uses this song to provide the strength he needs to push on in spite of the specter's words. Finally, "I ruddy well stand. 'I am Todd Hewitt,' I say to the boy. 'And I am leaving you here'" (338). At last, Todd has realized the difference between his positional identification that linked his understanding of identity—including his own strength—to his performance of masculinity and the *reality* of what it truly means to be a man.

When Todd reaches a place of temporary safety and is briefly reunited with Ben, Ben offers his own definition of manhood in an attempt to fortify Todd's personal identification and Todd's realization of the difference between Prentisstown manhood and *true* manhood: one is a definition that men are given, and the other is a definition that

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men create for themselves. He tells Todd, "The only thing that makes me a man . . . is seeing you safely into becoming a man yerself" (399). When Todd reminds him that his birthday has not yet passed, Ben redefines manhood for Todd in a way that finally enables Todd's self-empowerment: ". . . you've been a man for a good while now. Don't let *no one* tell you otherwise" (400). By helping Todd see that there is a difference between his positional and personal identifications, Ben empowers Todd to finally come into his own and redefine both his masculinity and his identity for himself.

Todd's new self-definition is challenged one more time before he and Viola enter Haven. As they draw closer to the settlement, Todd finally realizes the nature of his feelings for Viola. He "sees" her for the first time in terms of physical attraction. More importantly, when she reads his ma's book aloud to him, he comes to the realization that he is able to "know" her despite his inability to hear her Noise. After enjoying the brief period of hope that they will "beat" the Prentisstown men to Haven, they are jolted by the reappearance of Aaron. They run for the settlement but quickly realize that they will not make it without being shot by Aaron. Viola wants to run all the way to Haven, but Todd realizes that this act would be futile because Aaron would catch up to them and they would have little or no chance of survival. When Todd finds a trail that leads to a ledge underneath the waterfall which might give them a hiding place, he urges Viola to follow him. Viola states, "We're so close [to Haven] . . . If he finds us, we're trapped." Todd replies, "And if we run for the city, he shoots us. . . . It's a chance. It gives us a *chance. . .* Come with me*"* (435). The strength of their bond is tested now that they are forced into the same dilemma as Tris and Four when Tris follows Four "into the dark" in Four's fear

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landscape. Viola is faced with the same situation as Tris—whether or not to follow her love interest and companion "into the dark." Whereas Tris's actions have no mortal consequences because Four's fear landscape has no fatal implications, Viola is given the choice to risk everything and rely on Todd for survival. As such, Viola risks *everything* to make the choice to follow Todd, whereas Tris risks virtually *nothing*. Reversing the roles established at the beginning of their journey, Viola makes her decision and follows Todd's lead, although still defining their partnership as one that is inherently equal.

Aaron finds them in their hiding place and traps them in a discipline blockade *within* a discipline mechanism, blocking the only way out. Todd realizes that Aaron has not pursued Todd to kill him. Rather, Aaron's intention is for *Todd* to murder *him* and complete the Prentisstown coming-of-age ritual because once "one of us" (Todd) falls, *all* of Prentisstown falls. Aaron and Todd engage in a final battle in which Todd punctures Aaron's eye and nearly beats him into submission. When it becomes clear that Todd will not actually kill him—that Todd is *unable* to kill him, despite his claims to the contrary— Aaron forces Todd to drop the knife and taunts him in an attempt to bring about his own death. Todd looks at the knife on the ground while Aaron repeats "Murder me . . . Become a man," and the knife says, "*Never let me go*" (459). In this moment, Todd believes that he is going to use it; however, Viola gets there first. She picks up the knife and kills Aaron herself to prevent Todd from being forced into sacrificing his humanity and his newfound identity, for an archaic, horrific social construct. She knows that Todd is already a man.

Viola goes further than any protagonist under discussion in her attempt to save

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Todd from himself and the ramifications of his actions. Viola does in effect save Todd from the consequences of killing Aaron. However, her decision not only demonstrates her agency but also the strength of her character. This is the price she pays for saving the boy she loves from having to live with a decision that he never in good conscience would have been able to—or should ever have had to—make. Todd has defined his manhood by his freedom to choose *not* to kill others in cold blood, so Viola's choice reaffirms rather than undermines his masculinity and further supports their equal partnership. Todd is already a man, as evidenced by his responses to the consequences of his actions and his unfailing devotion to the good in himself; he does not need to prove his manhood by killing another individual. Viola would rather sacrifice that part of herself than see Todd "become a man" in a ritual that has nothing whatsoever to do with manhood. The two empower each other to fully realize their positional identities in relation to one other's choices rather than society's constructs. They demonstrate the true meaning of empowerment absent from nearly all of the other novels under discussion in this projet.

CHAPTER V

". . . BUT OVER THEMSELVES"

Analyzing female protagonists of young adult dystopian novels is a necessary step in deconstructing the problematic, antiquated constructs in fiction that continue to subordinate and subjugate women on the basis of their gender. Such constructs are questionable if their presence remains undisputed in young adult fiction, especially in light of Hintz and Ostry's claim that "[d]ystopian narratives play well to teenage audiences because they serve as powerful metaphors for their current developmental stage" (6). Teenagers may not consider the actual *settings* or *events* that occur within dystopian narratives to be representative of their experiences, but they do see connections between the characters themselves and their relational attitudes toward one another. This is why such constructs are potentially harmful. Young adult narratives provide adolescents with the tools to recognize their world as increasingly dystopic or Panoptic, develop the capacity to understand the unequal nature of society in terms of race, wealth, sexual orientation, and traditional gender norms by empowering female protagonists. Problematically, each of these areas of social progress can be undermined to varying degrees by the convention of the *de facto* love interest that pervades the genre as thoroughly as Foucault's philosophy of discipline.

The harm posed by heteronormative constructs is related to the ways that adolescents apply what they learn from narratives to issues they face in their own lives. Angela E. Hubler challenges the assertion that picture books [or novels] socialize children into traditional roles because children do not merely mimic the gender constructs

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they see represented in these works (87). However, the problem faced by today's

adolescents is not their potential to reproduce heteronormative constructs, but their

inability to recognize and critique these constructs in complex texts which both "mirror

and criticize reality." Those texts "[force] readers to consider reality, ironically at the

same time that they are escaping from it" (Hintz and Ostry 6). Readers are the ones who

decide how they will approach the text—unless they are reading it as part of an English

curriculum. That means adolescents may choose to "escape" rather than "analyse" it and

therefore miss crucial aspects of social commentary that can be used to critique their own

societies, to recognize Panopticism in the world today, or to challenge the existence of

traditional gender norms.

Today's adolescents live in a world where citizens of a country that was founded

on freedom are eager to sacrifice their liberties on the altar of security, especially when

the word "terrorist" is included in the government's justification. After the terrorist attack

that took place on September 11th, 2001, the United States led what eventually amounted

to a witch hunt when it began its justified search for the responsible parties and ended up

scouring Afghanistan for weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). When political prisoners

were held at Guantanamo Bay detention camp during the Bush Administration under

suspicion of having knowledge regarding the WMDs' location, the government

suspended their right to *habeas corpus* because the suspects allegedly met the profiles of

terrorists. Even after the United Nations called unsuccessfully for the facility to be shut

down, the camp remained open after President Barack Obama signed the Defense

Authorization Bill in 2011 and Congress professed opposition to its closure in spite of

reports alleging cases of abuse in varying degrees of severity. Many of the suspects held in Guantanamo were detained under the pretense of fulfilling the Patriot Act's agenda, which enabled the United States government to install wiretapping devices so that government officials could listen in on phone conversations at will and subpoena library or cell phone records in the name of national security. The fact that citizens and other inhabitants of the United States alike had no idea when they were being surveilled, by whom, or for what purpose is merely one example of the growing body of evidence which suggests that the government is becoming increasingly Panoptic. More disturbingly, citizens are allowing it to happen because of the media's role in the fear-mongering that justifies the government's actions.

The media plagues society with advertisements that automatically customize themselves based on what users click in web browsers so that marketing teams can better sell their products to impressionable consumers. Readers therefore grow increasingly desensitized to the ways that they are "watched" by the same "disciplinary mechanisms" that observe their favorite characters in dystopian novels. Similarly, the internet has allowed many adolescents to bypass the discipline blockade that, in the past, would have prevented them from accessing a veritable mine of information, either because of their age or their socioeconomic status. They are often blind to the *true* blockades represented by the broken criminal justice system and the growing magnitude of income inequality that will soon drastically affect many of their lives. Most young people are aware of the disproportionate number of minorities incarcerated in modern prisons. These days, racial tensions grow to the point of explosion any time a white police officer shoots an unarmed

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black "suspect." The magnitude of these inequalities may be invisible to white readers who have never experienced marginalization on an individual level. The fact that most protagonists and characters in recent young adult dystopian fiction are white sets a significant, if not dangerous, precedent, especially considering the fact that most of their authors are white as well. The question must be asked: why does dystopian fiction continue to martyr, minimize, or exclude the role of racially diverse characters when their experiences are as valuable—and less frequently written about—than those of the homogeneous white females who overwhelmingly dominate the genre? This absence suggests that racially diverse characters, along with characters who perform alternative gender displays or sexualities to those that are heteronormative, constitute the "delinquents" who populate America's theater of punishment just as characters do in dystopian texts that do not uphold the dystopian society's prescriptive norms.

The society in which modern adolescents live has turned female sexuality into a heteronormative construct that portrays their bodies as offerings to males, which is demonstrated through the prevalence of sexuality in the media. Adolescents are either ignorant of this aspect of acculturation or untroubled by it, even though the media's manipulation of their social norms and contribution to their generation's obsession with conformity should bother them very much indeed. The potential for female adolescent readers to be victimized therefore significantly increases because their unquestioning adherence to traditional gender norms supports their potential to internalize unequal balances of power in relationships and interpersonal violence as normative, especially since it is supported by heteronormative discourses that appear in novels with female

protagonists. Novels have the potential to inspire social change. The fact that some

adolescents are reading at all suggests that they are interested in learning about or

becoming a part of progressive social action that could take place under the right

circumstances. Without cultivating critical thinking skills that are necessary for media

literacy, many readers may erroneously assume that their textual role models have the

right idea about life. They may believe that unless they follow their love interests "into

the dark," their lives will fundamentally lack purpose or direction.

   It is important that critics continue to elucidate the perils of this kind of

misrepresentation, and that heroines in young adult literature continue to evolve until

they are fully agentic; they need not sacrifice their humor, intelligence, assertiveness, nor

their careers for romance any more than their love interests should. Critics argue that

"[s]pecific critical literacy activities are necessary if readers are to become aware of how

texts construct their gender identities in stereotypical ways . . . These activities range

from recognizing sexist language; to noticing the inequitable representations of men and

women in books or movies; to seeking to break down the stereotypic positioning of men

and women; to determining whose version of reality is presented and whose is excluded"

(qtd. in Moje et al. 407).

   If they are not represented with greater frequency in these kinds of texts, readers

with diverse ethnic or cultural backgrounds or non-normative sexual orientations may be

alienated by the very kind of novels that promise to champion their rights and

experiences. When Paolo Bacigalupi, an author of young adult fiction, asserted in "The

Invisible Dystopia" that "LGBTQ youth do not belong in dystopias except as symbols of

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oppression because the majority of readers do not identify with gay characters," the sheer

number of outraged respondents forced him to write a retraction. This demonstrates the

power of readers to actively challenge an author's perception and change it. Clearly, a

number of readers found their voice and spoke up, recognizing the hypocrisy of an author

professing to believe in inclusion but marginalizing characters by contributing to their

invisibility within the genre that is supposed to reflect and empower their experiences. If

authors themselves seem to believe that certain groups are not in fact marginalized but

readers and critics disagree, then the question becomes which marginalized groups should

be represented in the kind of genre fiction under which narratives like young adult

dystopian fiction fall. In "The All-White World of Middle-School Genre Fiction,"

Agosto, Hughes-Hassell, and Gilmore-Clough argue that

> . . . since the central goal of multiculturalism is to bring recognition and
>
> respect to marginalized people, *all* marginalized groups should be
>
> included. . . . An example of a group not identifiable by racial background
>
> is people with disabilities. . . . Although the stories of historical
>
> discrimination against African Americans, for instance, and people with
>
> disabilities are not identical, they do share common characteristics, such as
>
> institutionalized employment barriers. Comparing these two histories of
>
> discrimination and identifying commonalties can open young people's
>
> eyes to the fact that nonracially defined groups have also suffered from,
>
> and continue to suffer from, societal antipathy. Discrimination against
>
> these types of marginalized groups is less commonly discussed and less

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> frequently recognized than discrimination against people of color, making
>
> an increase in awareness a crucial initial step toward solving the inequality
>
> problem. (261)

The adversity faced on a daily basis by marginalized groups is often invisible to adolescents who have white privilege themselves have not been subjected to historical discrimination. Including the narratives of marginalized groups—and portraying them in a culturally and socially responsible and accurate manner—is essential for starting the conversation that will engender a change in societal attitudes towards those groups. If authors of young adult dystopian fiction continue to write narratives with "token" minority characters who are either marginalized or martyred rather than empowered protagonists who are role models in their own right, young adults who identify with such characters may feel that they, like their literary representations, have no place in the future. Their marginalization speaks far louder than their inclusion.

Heteronormativity is currently a hallmark of young adult dystopian literature. The message of young adult dystopian novels with female protagonists is that being in a relationship is a prerequisite for achieving empowerment or validation during adolescence; as a result, young adult dystopian novels with female protagonists might more accurately be deemed dystopian "romances." This message is inherently harmful for teenagers who already battle peer pressure daily in terms of whether or not they choose to be sexually active, especially since they are surrounded by overwhelmingly sexualized messages from the media they consume. The presence of patriarchal discourses in young adult fiction undermines female empowerment and affirms negative

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messages that female readers may have learned from their primary agents of socialization, their parents and peers.

McKinley notes media literacy organizations that exist with the goal of "educating girls on how to critically analyze and differentiate between unhelpful stereotypes found in commercial messages and the truth that is in their own lives" (44). However, she fails to include the hype surrounding young adult novels as part of the "media" that is critically evaluated despite recent trends that indicate a growing need for "[y]oung adult advocates . . . to pave the way for these well-written stories to compete with the cloud of misinformation that 'skinny is beautiful and that girls have to be attractive to men. . .'" (44). Since the protagonists in most young adult novels are white, slim teenage girls of short or average stature, young adult advocates have their work cut out for them; the genre as a whole is already severely lacking in legitimate female role models who challenge corrupt governments, instead turning them into "damsels in distress"—victims in heroines' clothing—who wait for their Prince Charmings to save them when all hope appears lost.

Because so many authors of young adult fiction with female protagonists are female, one must ask why they do not consider their protagonists to be victims. One possibility is that they may simply have internalized the very social constructs that they are attempting to problematize through their own fiction. Charles Sarland claims that "[t]he research . . . uncovers a complex picture of the young seeking ways to take control over their own lives, and using the fiction that they enjoy as one element in that negotiation of cultural meaning and value" (44). As such, the constraints that bind female

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protagonists may be as invisible to the female authors of young adult dystopian novels as they are to young readers simply because the authors are products of the very societies that they are using their fiction to critique. Writers may be successful in critiquing some aspects of the society while remaining oblivious to the gendered constructs to which they may personally conform; the result is that they encourage their audiences to do so as well. This possibility may also explain why the female love interests of male protagonists in young adult dystopian novels written by men are arguably more empowered than the novels written by women which are supposed to portray female characters as the heroines of their own stories. If male authors are writing within a genre that assumes the dominance of their male protagonists, then female love interests can be empowered and agentic because the hegemony of the male protagonist is unquestioned. This poses a significant hurdle for authors of dystopian novels with female protagonists because in order to create female protagonists who are empowered and agentic, they must challenge their own internalized acceptance of normativity, both in their representations of women and their willingness to portray alternate performances of masculinity.

If authors want to help their readers develop agency but their protagonists are not truly agentic where romance or conflict is concerned, then their narratives simply do not accomplish their intended goals. Childhood and adolescence are stages of the life cycle in which the "personal and psychological resources that guide cognition and decision-making are developed," which means that "[v]iolence occurring during this period should have important developmental consequences" (Macmillan 6). Numerous studies have cited the damaging influences of early experiences with victimization on long-term

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trajectories of psychological well-being, including major depressive episodes, symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, early involvement in both violent and nonviolent crime and deviance, associations with delinquent peers that could lead to gang involvement, risky behaviors, lower high school graduation rates, lower educational and occupational attainment, and other developmental consequences that all but decimate an adolescent's developing sense of self (Macmillan 7-13). Because the male love interests of female protagonists tend to conform to traditional, prescriptive gender norms, female readers who use fiction as a secondary agent of socialization may develop erroneous beliefs about relationships and require their own love interests to conform to stereotypical performances of masculinity. Unfortunately, research finds that "traditional masculinity is associated with greater psychological distress, hostility, and substance abuse"—which means that women who are socialized to prefer "traditionally masculine men" may find themselves in relationships with partners who are "more likely to be distressed, hostile, and substance abusing" (qtd. in Backus and Mahalik 319). Further, Backus and Mahalik cite research which finds that "women who are intimately involved with traditionally masculine men report less relationship satisfaction and [a lower sense of] self-worth, greater levels of depression and anxiety, and greater duration and intensity of critical comments. . ." (319). In light of the potential consequences posed by unhealthy relationships formed with traditionally "masculine" men, authors of young adult dystopian fiction must be cognizant of the effects their novels have on readers and *should* construct male characters in ways that do not encourage readers to develop romantic relationships while wearing rose-colored glasses.

Sadly, the "hookup culture" in which most adolescents participate today is rife with relationship churning (a repeated cycle of breaking up and getting back together again), abuse or assault in various forms, sexually transmitted diseases, and teenage pregnancies. In a 2013 sample, researchers found that "approximately four in 10 unmarried young adults experienced relationship churning, four in 10 experienced physical violence, and five in 10 experienced verbal abuse in their present or most recent relationship" (Meekin et al. 9-10). Like Tris's experiences in *Divergent*, the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that "[i]n 2008, 57% of the rape and sexual assaults against females were committed by an offender whom they knew. . . . One in five rape or sexual assaults against females (20%) were committed by an intimate partner" (5).

In response to statistics disseminated by police departments across the country, some sociologists and researchers have suggested that these incidents are not as prevalent as they were in the past. However, in "How to Lie with Rape Statistics," an article published in 2014, Corey Rayburn Yung "contradicts and rebuts the conventional wisdom that crime data shows that America has been winning the battle against sexual violence" by exposing the corruption of police departments across the country. Yung demonstrates the departments' efforts to falsify rape statistics in order to hide the fact that "the United States is in the midst of a rape crisis" (1248). In light of the reality of America's rape culture, it is virtually unethical for authors of young adult dystopian fiction to cast brooding, sexy, hegemonic knights in shining armor in roles opposite victimized "damsels in distress" for the consumption of impressionable adolescent readers.

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The "predefined rape spaces" that are exemplified by the virginal bodies of female protagonists in young adult dystopian novels are routinely bound by constructs that conceive of their empowerment within the confines of unstable relationships with traditionally "masculine" partners. Cassia Reyes would rather endure a grueling sentence in a work camp that eventually sends her to the brink of death than live without Ky. Lena Haloway tries "to think of all the ways to kill [herself] on the way to the labs" if Alex doesn't save her before she is cured (424). Tally Youngblood ultimately ends her friendship with Shay in order to enter into a relationship with the boy Shay happens to have a crush on. Katniss Everdeen's only hope of survival is in captivating the attention of the Capitol's audience and securing a wealthy sponsor which requires her to assume the role of a "star crossed lover." Tris Prior's close call with paternalistic rape does not adequately reflect its impact on her sense of self or the reality of what might have happened had Four not miraculously arrived at just the right time. A veritable mountain of evidence exists that emphasizes the fluid, amorphous state of adolescent relationships from "hookups" to "friends with benefits" to long-term relationships to abusive "churning" experiences that destabilize female adolescents' totality of self. In spite of these trends, authors of young adult dystopian fiction to this day either misrepresent the current state of adolescent relationships in young adult dystopian novels as idyllic romances or minimize the emotional, physical, and psychological impact of the real-life trauma that would normally occur as the result of their agentic or autonomous choices. In these novels, female protagonists never experience the consequences of their own actions. In life, their readers do.

Like feminism as a whole, this new sub-genre of dystopian literature evolves in waves to reflect the ideals of its time. The question, then, is where the genre goes from here. Is the answer simply observing the evolution of female protagonists and pointing out where the genre still shackles "strong" young women with limitations and cloaks them in traditional gender displays? Is it requesting that authors level the dystopian playing field so that females are not unfairly matched against males in proving that hegemony is not a trait which can be claimed by either sex or any gender? Is it reading patiently through a plethora of political platitudes and paragraphs of post-pubescent pandering that encourage readers to be lovers, not fighters?

I submit that the answer to this particular quandary can be found by addressing elements common to all three. The dearth of young adult dystopian narratives that feature truly equal partnerships is concerning. If authors are afraid of losing readers over what they believe could be considered portrayals of "radical" feminists, they need only remember the words of Mary Wollstonecraft:

> It is true, they could not then with equal propriety be termed the sweet flowers that smile in the walk of man; but they would be more respectable members of society, and discharge the important duties of life by the light of their own reason. "Educate women like men," says Rousseau, "and the more they resemble our sex the less power will they have over us." This is the very point I aim at. I do not wish them to have power over men; but *over themselves*. (emphasis added; 63)

Power need not be held *over* partners when it can be given *to* them the way that Todd

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does to Viola when he asserts that she is not *his* girl. Examples of this have already been proven to be possible in narratives of male protagonists because their power is assumed by the genre and the gender binary; perhaps it is time that female protagonists be bold enough to accept the consequences of their actions and receive the power that comes with knowledge. This project does not argue for the subjugation of male love interests or the reversal of a power dynamic, merely the stabilization and expansion of gender roles within a sub-genre of dystopian literature that has grown increasingly more popular and influential among adolescents. As partnerships between male and female characters are established, readers will notice that other partnerships are unequal and demand diverse, inclusive narratives from authors who may not yet have received critical backlash like authors such as Paolo Bacigalupi.

While the narrative conventions of young adult dystopian novels that perpetuate the inequalities of the genre still exist, and the development of female protagonists is still stunted by formulaic conventions, the genre will not be as progressive as authors and critics portray it. Female adolescent readers will continue to wait until their Prince Charmings magically arrive so they can follow their love interests down the appropriate path because a partnership without romance seems more like a friendship that has not yet reached fruition. If authors do not deconstruct (and reconstruct) female protagonists' definitions of "empowerment," readers will continue to believe that narratives about victimized protagonists who return to their "proper sexual roles" are representative of adolescents' experiences. Until female protagonists' personal achievements and agency are emphasized over their beauty and adherence to prescriptive gender norms, readers

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will continue to be persuaded to envision their own roles within society accordingly. And that, more than Panoptic governments or disciplinary societies, is the *true* danger presented by the worlds created by the authors of young adults dystopian novels.

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