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WHO WILL I BE:
YOUNG ADULT DYSTOPIAN NOVELS, INTERPELLATION, AND RULING IDEOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

The young adult dystopian genre is, across the board, filled with mystery, intrigue, romance, and totalitarian governments bent on controlling every aspect of their citizen's lives. This has become something of a trope in the genre, setting up a predictable pattern: protagonist begins novel blind to the realities of her world, and after three books, all out war, and maybe a love triangle, the protagonist is allowed to explore the freedoms she was denied. Though this tried and true method may get tiresome to readers who want something new, this formulaic plot points to a common question: how does one negotiate imperatives for becoming an adult? My thesis focuses on the dystopian worlds in four young adult series, *The Hunger Games* trilogy, by Suzanne Collins, the *Divergent* trilogy, by Veronica Roth, the *Matched* trilogy, by Ally Condie, and the *Delirium* trilogy, by Lauren Oliver, all of which attempt to answer this question. I examine the ideologies of the oppressive societies in which the characters live, and how each female protagonist explores identities outside of the dominant ideology. By questioning the ideologies with which they were raised, the female protagonists fight for the right to choose their identities and ultimately show teenage readers they too can question the ideologies that govern them. In addition, I look at how the narratives of these teenage girls are shaped, particularly through the form of the series, and attempt to answer what it is about the identities of the girls and the narrative structure that allows them to enact large social change.

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Introduction

One of the biggest hurdles of young adulthood is trying to answer the questions “who am I?” and “who do I want to be?” School, religious organizations, parents, and loved ones influence the way young adults think about themselves, their futures, and their worlds. The possibilities for the future can seem terrifyingly vast, and yet, the choices young adults have are not necessarily limitless. There are rules, expectations, and beliefs in place in every society, ones most people barely consider because of how ingrained they are into cultural thought. For example, sexist behavior has roots in expectations or rules of dominance that one sex has over the other. This behavior is something often so ingrained that it can be difficult for the sexist to realize sexism unless it is specifically pointed out. Louis Althusser calls these rules, expectations, and beliefs ideologies, or “the system of ideas and representations which dominate the mind of man or a social group” (158). Althusser argues that ideology interpellates individuals as subjects, which is to say “there is no ideology except by the subject and for the subject (170). In other words, ideology cannot exist outside those subjected to it. To use the example from earlier, sexism would not exist without someone believing in it. There is nothing in nature that asserts that women, because their breasts produce milk to feed their young, must have the inherent function to cook for the family. It is an idea passed down through generations that says a woman’s place is in the kitchen, but take the person who believes that away and the idea no longer exists. So when the young adult asks “who am I?” or “who do I want to be?” he or she asks this within the context of the ideologies ingrained in his or her society. If people believe women are inferior to men, a young woman must ask “who am I?” within a context in which she has limitations.

That being said, asking these questions of identity becomes complicated when one is a character in a dystopia. He or she does this in worlds often ravaged by ecological or political disasters and under strict control from a government that promotes conformity above all else (Basu 3). Who he or she can become is limited by a totalitarian state in which he or she often lives. How can one choose whom to become in a world that offers no choice? This is the question posed by *The Hunger Games* trilogy by Suzanne Collins, the *Divergent* trilogy by Veronica Roth, the *Matched* trilogy by Ally Condie, and the *Delirium* trilogy by Lauren Oliver. Each of these trilogies takes place in totalitarian dystopian worlds with female protagonists on the cusp of adulthood.

Katniss, the protagonist of *The Hunger Games*, Tris of *Divergent*, Cassia from *Matched*, and Lena from *Delirium* have the same problems as every other girl: they go to school, they develop crushes, and they fight with friends. But instead of learning to drive or filling out college applications, these teenage girls are helping to dismantle the totalitarian systems that control their lives. Each of the girl protagonists in these trilogies, they questions their identities just as she is about to move from childhood to adulthood. At the beginning of all four trilogies, the girl's entrance into adulthood is marked by a sorting process of some kind, a process that determines how she will live and whom she will become. Whether it is the Reaping, the Choosing ceremony, the Match banquet, or the Procedure, teenagers of a certain age, all the sixteen or seventeen year olds, are put in a choosing pool and sorted into groups that determine their new identities. From there, you are what your government decides you are: you are a Tribute, you are part of a Faction you are Matched, or you are Cured. In essence, you are like everyone else. And Katniss, Tris, Cassia, and Lena, *are* these things. But each girl wants to be more. There is a sense of permanence that comes with the adult identities they must assume: Katniss is either going to

die a Tribute or live as a Victor, Cassia will be Matched, Lena will be Cured, and Tris will join a Faction. There is no alternative, or at least, none that are presented as viable options. To reject one's given identity means she is ostracized at best, and at worst, killed. The sorting processes each girl experiences in book one are the first step to the full-scale rebellions that culminate in book three. The necessity of categorization is the prevailing belief in each trilogy, and it takes getting their "adult" identity categories for them to realize that those are not the identities that best fit them, and that maybe instead of getting sorted into a category, they should be able to choose who they want to be. This realization impels the girls to rebel against their totalitarian governments in search of the ability to make their own choices.

The sorting process represents those who came before, and the girls reacting against this process showcase a power struggle between generations. Those in charge, parents and law makers who were once themselves sorted, uphold the status quo mostly because they are no longer in the transitional period between childhood and adulthood, so they are not trying to figure out how they fit in the world. In the quest to find their place in the established world, the teenage protagonists are the ones with the opportunity to challenge the rules. By questioning the ideologies with which they were raised, the female protagonists fight for the right to choose their identities and ultimately show teenage readers they too can question the ideologies that govern them.

Chapter 1 Where do I Belong?

As human beings, we form our identities in part on being sorted, and sorting ourselves into groups. I am a female—that is a group. I am a college student—that is a group. These are groups to which I self-identify and they are also groups into which others place me. Being female and a college student are both huge parts of my identity, and when I meet other female college students, we automatically have something in common because we belong to the same groups. There are some identities I have control over; I choose to enroll in college, and though I was born a woman, I also to some degree choose to accept my female identity. There are also some identities I have no control over; for instance, I can't control whether someone thinks I could be considered attractive or intelligent. But for the most part, I chose who I am, or at least, so it seems.

Like the characters in *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, *Matched*, and *Delirium*, I cannot escape the ideologies of the culture I was born into; according to Althusser, no one can. Katniss, Tris, Cassia, Lena, and I are subjects to the ideologies in our societies. If, as Althusser suggests, ideology interpellates the subject, it is important to understand what it means to be a subject. Luke Ferretter explains, "Ideology addresses me, as it were, before I am even born, as I grow up and throughout my life, as an 'I', as a subject, as a site of identity, thought and action. . . . Ideology calls me into being as a subject, as if it were calling me by name on the street" (Ferretter 89). For example, through sexism we are interpellated to believe, amongst other things, that little girls play with dolls while little boys play with cars, much like the totalitarian systems in these young adult dystopias interpellate their citizens into believing whatever they tell them. Children are not

born knowing whether to pick up a doll or a car, nor are they aware their toys are gendered.

Marketing, and the ideology of sexism, colors female products pink and male products blue, and we are taught from a young age with which color we are supposed to identify. These ideas are not forced on us by violence any more than they are forced on Katniss, Tris, Cassia, or Lena by violence. From childhood Katniss has accepted that she would enter the Reaping pool, just like Tris, Cassia, and Lena accepted they would enter their sorting processes one day. They accept these ideas willingly, without knowing they are doing so (89).

When confronted with the sorting process, an idea they have fully interpellated, these girls go through a kind of identity crisis. Coined by Erik Erikson, an identity crisis is when a person begins to question the person they have always been. Erikson writes in *Life History and the Historical Moment*: "...youth depends on the ideological coherence of the world it is meant to take over, and therefore is sensitively aware of whether the system is strong enough in its traditional form to 'confirm' and to be confirmed by the identity process, or so rigid or brittle as to suggest renovation, reformation, or revolution" (Erikson 20). The female protagonists are testing whether the systems in place are strong enough for them to build their identities upon, and they come to realize they are not. They don't have a choice whether or not to make the transition into their new identities because it is a government mandated transition. Each sixteen year old in Tris's world will make a choice to either stay in the Faction of their birth or join a new one. Either way, they are being asked publically, at the Choosing Ceremony, to define who they are. In Cassia's world, each seventeen year old gets Matched, and in Lena's world each eighteen year old gets Cured. The groups they are changing from are not only Faction to Faction, unmatched to Matched, and uncured to Cured, but more importantly, they are moving from childhood to adulthood. Naturally this is a time for reflection (Erikson 19).

Part of the reason Tris, Cassia, and Lena enter into some kind of identity crisis is because their sorting processes do not go according to plan. Through a failure of procedure in their sorting ceremonies, Tris and Cassia are accidentally given the chance to decide the outcomes of their fate. For Cassia, this happens when she sees two faces on her Microcard. For Tris, upon completion of her Aptitude test, her results are inconclusive--she has aptitude for more than one Faction. Mistakes are supposed to be impossible in both worlds, causing both girls to wonder: If a mistake can be made in something that important, who is to say the system itself doesn't have flaws? In both cases, the girls are afraid to make a decision because they have been led to believe their lives can only go one way. They were never supposed to be in this situation to begin with because the systems in place should prevent any type of choice being made--to have a choice was a mistake of the system. Cassia and Tris are woefully unprepared to make a decision, just as they are unprepared for their society to "fail". Balaka Basu writes in "What Faction Are You In?" from *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction For Young Adults: Brave New Teenagers*, "...the threats to [Tris's] safety concerns her less than the uncertainty about her identity, which she expected the aptitude test to end. ...She wants the choice to have been made for her by the aptitude test, so she can finally know who she is and where she belongs" (24).

Tris's aptitude test is inconclusive, so she cannot rely on it to decide in which Faction she truly belongs. In both cases, the girls are afraid to make the wrong decision because they have been led to believe their lives can only go one way. She chooses Dauntless, but it becomes clear to her that even though she made the choice, Dauntless is not where she belongs. She belongs to another group: Divergents. Tris says, "Every faction conditions its members to think and act a certain way. And most people do it. For most people, it's not hard to learn, to find a pattern of thought that works and stay that way. But our minds move in a dozen different directions. We

can't be confined to one way of thinking and that terrifies our leaders. It means we can't be controlled. And it means no matter what they do, we will always cause trouble for them" (Roth, *Divergent* 442).

As Cassia finds out at the end of the first book, Society was well aware of the "mistake" they made. They "allowed" the mistake because they wanted to see how she would react. The mistake was part of the plan all along, or so they say. But what was not part of the plan is Cassia's reaction. Cassia is originally Matched with her best friend, Xander, someone she has grown up with her entire life. Objectively, he is like the perfect Match, but being Matched with him means living in the same neighborhood, with someone she sees more as a brother than a lover. She accepts that, and she knows she is lucky to be Matched with someone she cares for. That is until she goes to look at her Microcard and instead of Xander's face, she sees Ky, a mysterious boy who keeps to himself. Though Cassia saw her Match on the screen at the ceremony, she knows there has been a mistake. This is impossible; Society doesn't make mistakes. The proof of its mistake is in her hands, though, and she begins to doubt the life that lies before her. *If* she had the choice, would she have picked someone else? Would she have picked Ky? It is pointless to question because this is the life she is supposed to have—Society has picked Xander to be her perfect partner, someone with whom she can live well and raise a family. But just because he is perfect does not mean she loves him.

She and Xander might be Matched, but they aren't married yet. They both still straddle the line between childhood and adulthood, and because they both exist in that in between, Cassia has an opportunity none of the other Matched experience. Through the failure of the very system that controls her, Cassia has the ability to ask questions, to experience something outside what her life is supposed to be. When she takes this chance and gets to know Ky, she finds she does

not desire the life planned out for her and instead wants to live the life dictated by her own choices. One choice, even if it was only originally the illusion of a choice, makes Cassia question everything she has ever known, leading to the rebellion in *Crossed* and *Reached*.

Lena's sorting process also experiences a glitch on Evaluation Day, when her preliminary interview is interrupted by a stampede of cows rushing into the evaluating room. Of course, Lena does not live in a world where an indoor stampede of cattle is normal; instead, the stampede is part of a demonstration by the Invalids, people who have not been Cured. From this experience she meets Alex, and after a little prodding from her best friend, Lena begins to explore what a romantic relationship would be like. After being told her entire life that love was the worst thing that could occur, she is confused when it magnifies her life in ways she never would have thought. Alex is an Invalid, and by talking with him, she begins to question everything she has ever believed.

By critically thinking about the sorting processes, these female protagonists are offered a different way to look at their lives. Cassia finds out Ky is an Aberration, which her culture has told her is someone dangerous, someone who has gone against Society in some way that they no longer have the rights of a normal citizen. Society sees him as an Aberration: he is not Ky, the individual, but Ky, a second-class citizen. For both Ky and Alex, from *Delirium*, don't belong. They don't accept given attitudes because society has told them they are worthless. To accept how society sees people like them, the Aberrations and Invalids, means internalizing their worthlessness. Because of the people they grew up around, Ky and Alex are able to realize that despite how broader society sees them, they have worth and that worth helps them see through the government line. Cassia and Lena can blindly follow ideologies that say Aberrations and Invalids are bad, but Ky and Alex can't believe that and still keep their sense of self-worth.

When Cassia and Lena get to know Ky and Alex the biases they have internalized from their cultures come into question. The question becomes how can this boy be bad when he makes me feel so good?

At first glance, Katniss and her sorting process seem to turn my theory on its head. Unlike Tris, Cassia, or Lena, Katniss's sorting process could be deadly. In Panem, every year two children are chosen from every District to represent their home in a televised fight to the death. The choosing ceremony in *The Hunger Games* is called the Reaping, and an official from the Capital arrives at each District to pull one boy and one girl name out of a pool of all children from eleven to eighteen. Each child has their name entered one time the first year, and one additional time until they are eighteen. At eighteen, each child has their name entered seven times, unless they choose to enter more often in exchange for food for their families. Katniss, by the age of sixteen, has her name entered into the Reaping pool twenty times, while her close friend Gale, at eighteen, has his name entered forty-two times (Collins, *Hunger Games* 12). The common saying in Panem is "May the Odds be Ever in Your Favor" because the odds are rarely in your favor. Even if a child does not get picked one year, the process repeats every year until adulthood, creating a constant fear that the Capital uses to keep the Districts compliant. As Susan Shau Ming Tan writes in "Burn with Us: Sacrificing Childhood in The Hunger Games, "the journey to adulthood is less a process of coming-of-age than it is the results of odds and luck" (56).

And yet, the odds are in Katniss's favor: her name does not get called. Her younger sister, who has her name entered once, is not so lucky, and her name is chosen instead. Like Tris, Cassia, and Lena, Katniss could not opt out of her sorting process, and like the others, she also has a say in how she will react to it. She chooses, and has the ability to choose, to enter the

Games in her sister's place, sacrificing herself so her sister can grow up. This is the first step to Katniss's evolution into the Mockingjay. Katniss suffers no illusion that the Hunger Games benefit her in any way; she recognizes it is merely an oppressive tool. In that respect, she is ahead of Tris, Cassia, and Lena. Her identity crisis does not occur because her opinion on the Games changes. Her identity crisis is a result of the fear of being chosen becoming her reality. Before the Games, Katniss never had to kill anyone, but as a Tribute, the new group she is sorted into, she will have to fight to the death.

Unlike Tris, Cassia, and Lena, I would argue that Katniss goes through three rounds of her sorting process. The first round is when she is chosen, or sorted into the Tribute identity. As a Tribute, she has to train knowing that her efforts are fruitless and compete knowing any day could be her last. Her second identity is her Victor identity. This one is thrown upon Katniss in the second book, *Catching Fire*. As a Victor she lives in luxury in a fancy new house with plenty of food. After surviving the Arena, the horrors of her actions haunt her in her sleeping and waking moments. She sees the faces of the children she was forced to kill everywhere, and it only gets worse when she and Peeta must go on a Victory Tour through the other Districts and confront the dead Tributes' parents. Neither of these is an identity she has chosen, and in fact, they destroy all sense of self she once might have had. With her final identity, as the Mockingjay, which she experiences in *Mockingjay*, Katniss finally starts to accept how her life has changed and who she is because of that. The identity of the Mockingjay comes from the pin Katniss wore in the first games, and also references a bird the Capitol bred. "A mockingjay is a creature the Capitol never intended to exist. They hadn't counted on the highly controlled jabberjay having the brains to adapt to the wild, to pass on its genetic code, to thrive in a new form. They hadn't anticipated its will to live" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 92). Katniss never fully

accepts any of these identities provided for her, and when the rebellion is over she is left to figure out who she is now that she is without her mother, sister, friends, or government to overthrow.

It is safe to say that no one is free from his or her social context, both in the real world and the make believe dystopias populated by Katniss, Tris, Cassia and Lena. Plop Katniss in Tris's world and would Katniss still be Katniss? So much of what makes Katniss herself is her response to the "the things that make us who we are are found in the context of where we live, where we've come from, and where we're heading" (Nealon 40). Katniss, Tris, Cassia, and Lena grew up believing that what they were told was the way the world worked. Tris, Cassia, and Lena grew up dreaming of the day of their sorting ceremonies—the day their adult lives would begin. Katniss grew up fearing the Reaping, but for all of these girls, the inevitability of the event marked them. The moment of sorting is a moment of interpellation. Each teenager is being hailed as a member of the society they belong to, and it is only through the sorting ceremony that they truly understand they are being hailed.

Chapter 2 Give Me Love!

In *Mockingjay*, Katniss says “The very notion that I am devoting any thought to who I want presented as my lover, given our current circumstances, is demeaning” (40). And she is completely right. She has more to focus on than whether she has stronger feelings for Peeta or Gale—she is the face of a rebellion after all. But that doesn’t mean she doesn’t spend a considerable amount of time trying to figure out who she “can’t survive without” (329). Similarly, in *Reached* Cassia’s world has been turned upside down by a deadly plague, and yet throughout the entire series she struggles with the love triangle between herself, Xander, and Ky. Tris has a price on her head because of her Divergence, but she still manages to fall in love with Four. And Lena’s world sees love as a disease, so falling for Alex is the worst thing she could do. If these teenagers have plenty to worry about besides their love lives, why is romance such a defining aspect of the young adult dystopian novel? What roles do these love interests play in the formation of our protagonists’ identities? What each girl wants more than anything is the chance to choose the direction of her life—whether that means romantically or otherwise. And she will fight for this chance, even if that means leaving behind everything she has ever known. The presence of love interests help cement the identities of our female protagonists by providing the possibility of an alternative future, a reason to ask questions, and a partner with whom to join forces.

Cassia, Lena, Katniss, and Tris each meet their love interests as a result of the sorting process to which they are subjected. Through their respective sorting processes, each girl

experiences a change in how they see themselves. They are all being asked to be someone new, but none of them have any say in the construction of that new person. The love interests, Ky, Xander, Alex, Peeta, and Four, are at similar, if not the same, stages in their lives. Navigating this new stage in their lives brings the couples together and each couple is presented with the problem of how to be together when they barely know who they are apart. This is not a frequent occurrence in any of their societies. None of the other Tributes fall in “love,” no one but Lena runs into an Invalid during her Cure interview, Cassia is the only one “offered” a choice for her Match, and Tris and Four are the only Divergents who pair up in the series.

For Cassia, the choice should be easy. Xander is her Match, which means, according to Society's sorting process, she and Xander are best suited to share their lives and have children together. The Matching process puts common traits together in a mechanical way; it is completely devoid of emotion because romantic love is inefficient. Just because two people love each other does not mean their offspring will be smart, healthy, or mentally sound enough to benefit Society. Through the system in place, Society constantly monitors each family and each child—they know everything from what Cassia eats and the types of activities she enjoys to her interactions with her family and peers. They *know* her because they, Society, have made her. And they know Xander because they have made him as well. And if she and Xander follow the rules, there is no reason that the two of them won't have a happy, productive life.

But then there is Ky and he complicates everything. Cassia sees his picture on her microcard instead of Xander's and she knows there was mistake. Mistakes *don't* happen in Society, so Cassia starts to wonder if Society can make one mistake, can they make more? Have they made more? What if Ky is her true Match? Little does Cassia know that Ky could never be her Match—he is an Aberration masquerading as a regular member of Society. He calculates

every aspect of his life so no one will know what he truly is. Ky knows how to act because he needs to protect himself, because if anyone found out he is an Aberration, he would face insurmountable discrimination. As Cassia gets to know him she can tell that he is pretending to be something he is not. She does not originally know he is an Aberration, so she thinks of him as someone on the same level or social class as herself, assuming he is just like her, and thinks just like her. Society has defined for Ky what it means to be an Aberration as part of the ideological social structure of their world. It is an identity that Ky is “encouraged to accept” and outwardly he does. But he shows Cassia that though he accepts his identity on the outside, he does not accept the identity on the inside. By getting to know Ky better, Cassia begins to question the assumptions she has on what it means to be an Aberration.

Like Ky, Alex has been “encouraged to accept” the identity his society has made for him. He is an Invalid living in normal society and has taken medical precautions to see like he fits right in. Outwardly he has the marks of a Cured, but inwardly he maintains the ability to feel. Just as Ky teaches Cassia to live her own life, Alex teaches Lena to take control of her emotions. Lena and the other “normal” people—those who are not Invalid, have been taught that the symptoms of amor delirium nervosa are bad because it means loss of control. What makes the disease so terrible is the loss of control; any world so completely controlled is destined to fall to pieces once its citizens start to want to make their own choices. When one starts to put her own needs before the common good of the community—or what is said to be the common good, the government loses some of its power. When someone contracts amor delirium nervosa, the government can no longer control her because she no longer has something to fear. The government makes a big deal about the negative aspects of the disease because fear is its motivator, turning all of the positive associations one could have with being in love and making

them something feared. Not only does Alex introduce her to a new world in the Wilds, but he also reintroduces Lena to her own world. With Alex, Lena experiences happiness and laughter for the first time since her mother's death from amor delirium nervosa.

Alex shows her what life can be like without the cure. He is dangerous, mysterious, a risk taker. He lives while most others only exist. And with him, Lena discovers she *wants* to live too. She has seen the alternative waiting for her; she is matched to another man who has already had the Cure, someone to grow old with but never to love. She has seen the conventional relationship her sister Rachel has with her husband and she has seen the unconventional all consuming love her mother felt for her father. After being afraid of this feeling for so long, afraid of contracting the disease, Alex helps her understand it isn't a disease at all. Lena chooses to fight back not just because of Alex but also because of her mother.

Unlike Lena's Portland and Cassia's Society, Panem and Factioned Chicago are not structured to prevent love. But Katniss's relationship with Peeta and Tris's relationship with Four help shape each girl's identities even though they do not have to hide their relationship. Whereas Cassia and Ky and Lena and Alex fight for the right to be together at all, Katniss and Tris fight for the right to build their lives as couples on their own terms. Katniss and Peeta's relationship began as a lie to help the two survive in the Arena, not because Katniss felt anything real for Peeta. But after they win the Games and have the chance to go home, it becomes clear that the two of them will have to keep up appearances as a romantic couple (*Catching Fire*). Their relationship in the Games demonstrates a resistance to the way the Games work—only one Victor is supposed to survive. They were more willing to die for each other than battle to the death, and their resistance sends a clear message to the Districts. The Hunger Games were created to prevent another uprising, but when the Districts see defiance in the Arena, an area that

represents their total subservience to the Capital, the vehicle that was supposed to prevent an uprising create one.

Katniss and Peeta's relationship starts out as a ploy planned by Haymitch to make them more marketable to investors that could send them supplies in the Arena, but Peeta is not aware of the plan. He truly loves Katniss and in the first book, he believes she truly loves him back. For Katniss Peeta represents hope, but she is too busy trying to keep them alive to worry about the depth of her romantic feelings. When it becomes clear that they will have a life outside of the Games, and that that life will have to be together, Katniss feels trapped. But Peeta never wavers. He doesn't push her into acting on their fake relationship, but he also doesn't completely let her go. He fights for her, in his own way. Their relationship serves a different purpose than Cassia and Ky's or Lena and Alex's. They don't need to fight for the right to love, but the right not to love.

Like Ky, Four helps Tris gain the skills she needs to take control over her life. Tris makes the decision to join Dauntless and the first person she meets after she takes the jump (quite literally) is Four. He becomes her teacher and he pushes her harder than he pushes anyone else. Tris learns to be Dauntless from Four's teachings, but she also learns how to accept herself as a Divergent. Four is also Divergent and he makes sure her Divergence is not discovered during her simulation testing. He gives her the skills to pass the test without suspicion. He also is the only person who consistently values Tris's life. Tris is very self-sacrificing and her first impulse in many of the situations in *Insurgent* and *Allegiant* involves her sacrificing her life for others. Four is the person who pulls her back from that, but in the end, she realizes that sacrificing herself is more important than her love for Four and dies saving her brother.

Once Cassia and Lena decide choosing whom they love is worth the risk, they cannot

help but want to choose other things in their lives. Part of Cassia's draw toward Ky comes from his ability to write. Writing, drawing, and creating are forbidden by Society. Cassia can type, but she does not know how to form the letters by hand, nor does she know how to create original ideas. He teaches her to write her name first "because even if that's all you learn, you'll still have something" (*Matched* 174). With learning to write, Cassia takes a step toward independent thinking, and by writing her name, she takes her first step toward writing her own story. While he is teaching, Ky gives her his story—using words Society doesn't want its citizens to know, written and told his way. It is a story Ky can't tell out loud because it is a story that condemns Society; instead, he uses an "outlawed" form of communication to tell a story Society does not want told. He takes back control of his story through writing it down because he is choosing what to write, how to write it, and the illustrations to go along with it. He teaches Cassia and by doing so, he gives her the means to take back control of her story, her life. Not only does she fight against who she is supposed to be, but also because she wants to be able to love Ky freely, and desires the opportunities to learn how to write, to read more than just the 100 poems and see more than just the 100 paintings. Ky gives her a taste of that and it is her desire for more that drives her forward in the trilogy. Lena wants to be able to listen to whatever music she wants and explore the Wilds. She is no longer content to live out the life planned for her. She wants to be in control. She chooses to love Alex in *Delirium*, but then she meets Julian in *Pandemonium*. Suddenly it is not a question whether to love or not, but who to love.

Tris and Katniss experience something similar. Once they have some control over their lives, they rightly want more. What does falling in love mean if nothing else changes? The boys in their lives help them realize why they are fighting. Four sees more to her than her Dauntless courage or her Abnegation selflessness. He understands she is a complicated individual that can't

be defined by an adjective or two. And because Four sees this side of her and loves her anyway, she doesn't feel as much of a freak. She is Divergent and so is Four, and together they decide to reclaim what that means.

Interestingly enough, in each trilogy the girl protagonist is the person who gets the final say about whether or not she and the object of her affection get together. None of the girls pine after the boys; if anything, the boys are pining after them. By falling in love none of the girls lose the agency they are fighting so hard to get. Their love interests enhance their lives but they do not *become* their lives.

Each girl finds a true partner in her lover. Trying to save the world is a lonely business and having a loved one to trust and steady you goes a long way. By fighting for love they are fighting for the future. It is not just about having someone to love; it is also about accessing another part of themselves. For Lena and Alex, being part of a couple allows them to feel a sense of belonging for the first time in their lives. With Four, Tris is free to be Divergent—she is free to show the selflessness of Abnegation, the courage of Dauntless, and the intelligence of Erudite without risking her life. Four understands that she is more than one trait because so is he. They have a mutual understanding of what it is like to be different and that forms the basis of their relationship. Katniss and Peeta's relationship is based on their shared experience in the Hunger Games. Their bond was formed in a literal life or death situation and though they are not actually a romantic couple for much of the trilogy, the closeness they share is very real and motivates both of them to protect the other. Each character changes because of her experience loving and being loved. Each girl has someone they can be completely themselves with, and by having that, they realize that they are no longer able to follow the rules by which they have always lived. Lena is not about to give up the chance for love now that she has it, and neither is Cassia. Tris

would rather be Factionless than leave Four, and Peeta is the humanity Katniss is so close to losing. Tris, Cassia, and Lena are no longer concerned for their individual well-being; they need to be with their lovers because their lovers are part of them now. The boys have changed the way the girls think and they are willing to risk everything for love. Katniss risks a hijacked Peeta killing her because it is so important that he comes back to her (Collins, *Mockingjay*, 314). Even when Four has a gun pointed at Tris's head, she can't bring herself to hurt him; she is willing to risk her life in order to save the man she loves (Roth, *Divergent*, 486). Cassia leaves her family to find Ky after he is taken away (Condie, *Matched*, 361). Lena decides to leave her entire family behind to be with Alex (Oliver, *Delirium*, 380). By being with their lovers and deciding they want a different future, one where they are free to make choices about who to love and what to be, these girls are able to see who they truly are: they all are strong women willing to do whatever it takes to get what they want.

Chapter 3 Let's Start A Revolution

Though Katniss, Tris, Cassia, and Lena understand things in their world need to change, none of these girls are advocating for anarchy.. They want to use their brains instead of mindlessly following what the ideological state apparatuses/repressive state apparatuses say. But they aren't really reacting against the need for ideological/repressive state apparatuses. They aren't saying school is bad or religion is bad or government is bad. They are saying total control of these is bad. Not allowing room for other opinions is bad. They are saying there has to be another way, one where society can still prosper, but where its citizens are not cookie cutters of each other. Basu writes, "In Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies* series, Veronica Roth's *Divergent*, and Ally Condie's *Matched*, government authorities have initiated strict policies to manage personalities, choices, and appearances, ostensibly eliminating the discord said to threaten communal well-being. As they depict the struggle between adolescent protagonists and oppressive governments, these novels attempt to tease out the appropriate balance between personal freedom and social harmony" (*Contemporary* 4).

The policies Basu mentions are based on the common ideology seen through the four series that involves sorting citizens as the most effective way of maintaining control. Removing individuality makes people easier to control because they are easy to predict (Roth, *Divergent*, 442). By telling citizens who to be, the citizens have a place to belong without ever getting the chance to choose where/ to what to belong. The adults Tris, Cassia, and Lena see the girls' sorting process through the filter of their own experience being sorted. Tris and Cassia's parents

and Lena's aunt are products of the sorting process, and to question the need for sorting would cast doubt on their lives and the families they created. Cassia wonders in *Matched*, "How can I explain to my perfectly Matched mother everything that has happened? Everything I risked? How can I explain to her that I'd do it again? How can I tell her I hate the system that created her life, her love, her family? That created me?" (294) Tris, Cassia, and Lena's relatives do not exist in the inbetween space of teenagers; if they were to enact change, they would lose too much. Tris, Cassia, and Lena don't have jobs or families of their own, so there is less that could be taken away from them. The girls are in the position to ask questions, especially in the first book, because they have yet to undergo sorting. Once sorting is complete, identity categories are in place and to go against the identity already accepted would be nearly impossible.

Each of the girls is at the point where she is getting ready to leave, or has already left her family—the sorting process doesn't just put girls in groups with their peers, but it also takes them out of the safety of their families. This is when they become who they are supposed to be, only none of these societies expect anyone to become anything other than what has strictly been laid out for them. Because they have left or are leaving the comfort of their families, Katniss, Tris, Cassia, and Lena search to find a new family, and each of them finds this through groups that are inciting rebellion. Their old families can't exist in a revolutionary community, so it becomes necessary to replace them. Katniss's mother, Tris's parents, Cassia's parents, and Lena's aunt have lived their entire lives interpellated by ideologies. To rid themselves of their identities at this point in their lives would be very difficult. Discussing *The Hunger Games*, Susan Shau Ming Tan says, in her article "Burn with Us: Sacrificing Childhood in The Hunger Games," "Indeed, as children are forced into adulthood by the mechanisms of the Games, we see adults conversely infantilized as adult disempowerment emerges as the result of its own

childhood traumas” (58). The teenagers are the only ones with the chance to change cultural thinking because they exist in the inbetween state of childhood and adulthood.

In each series, the rebel community is just that—a community. They are not a part of the government, but that does not mean that the rebel communities are necessarily going to support the kind of change the girls want to see. In *Mockingjay*, President Coin, the leader of District 13, usurps President Snow, the leader of Panem. Coin needs Katniss because Katniss has sway with the rest of Panem—she is a beloved celebrity after completing the Games. Coin has no love for Katniss and is reluctant to meet Katniss’s demands for Peeta’s freedom. Just like the governments the girls are trying to outrun, the rebel communities have their own agendas.. Adults lead the rebel communities, but the girls become major players, especially Katniss. Often, as in the case of Tris, Cassia, and Katniss, the major conflict in the series, the girls are the only ones that can resolve the final event stopping the rebellion from winning. Tris must sacrifice herself by using the Death Serum in order to save her brother and fix remove the Faction system (Roth, *Allegiant* 473). Cassia delivers the cure for a deadly illness killing everyone in Society (Condie, *Reached*), while Katniss drums up support for District 13 by filming propos as the Mockingjay (Collins, *Mockingjay*, 106). Tris, Cassia, and Katniss are all in positions that are unusual if not unique to them; Tris is Divergent, and while there are other Divergents, she has traits of Abegnation—selflessness the trait that leads her to sacrifice her life for others, and Dauntless—bravery to confront the guards and Death serum blocking her from meeting her goal. Cassia is a master Sorter and infects Society’s computers with a Rising virus (Condie, *Reached*, 7), and Katniss’s celebrity status from the Games allows her to influence her fans.

By becoming the Mockingjay and being the figurehead for District 13’s take over of Panem, Katniss comes to learn even District 13 is not willing to give the people more power.

Living in District 13 means being under more surveillance than she ever was in District 12.

District 13 monitors the amount of food each citizen receives and dictates how they spend their time. Coin uses tactics similar to President Snow's, and her tactics get Katniss's little sister Prim killed. After Prim's death, Katniss says,

“I no longer feel allegiance to these monsters called human beings, despise being one myself. I think that Peeta was onto something about us destroying one another and letting some decent species take over. Because something is significantly wrong with a creature that sacrifices its children's lives to settle its differences. You can spin it any way you like. Snow thought the Hunger Games were an efficient means of control. Coin thought the parachutes would expedite the war. But in the end, who does it benefit? No one. The truth is, it benefits no one to live in a world where these things happen” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 377).

Instead of doing what she is told and shooting President Snow, Katniss chooses to kill President Coin in an effort to stop the Hunger Games from happening again. In *The Hunger Games*, Peeta tells Katniss he “wants to show the Capitol they don't own me. That I'm more than just a piece in their games” (142). Katniss dismisses this because of course they are just pieces in a larger game, what can they possibly do about it? But in *Mockingjay*, she realizes that as a pawn in the game, she can manipulate the situation—because no one can play a game without the pieces. Katniss sees that President Coin was no better a leader than President Snow; she kills President Coin so history does not repeat itself. Cassia says something in *Crossed* that each protagonist in these series comes to realize is true: “They're no rebellion. They're Society, with a different name” (Condie, *Crossed*).

Loving Ky is Cassia's act of rebellion, even before she gets involved with the Rising. She says, "I realize now how much courage it takes to choose the life you want, whatever that might be" (*Crossed*). To earn the life she wants, Cassia works from inside Society to take it down, while Ky works from the outside. Cassia is the only one able to deliver the cure for the government-made disease ravaging Society, as she remains healthy and keeps her revolutionary convictions throughout the epidemic. Cassia says, "But I also know we can't plan on anyone else rescuing us. We have to do it ourselves" (Condie, *Crossed*).

Lena joins the rebellion in *Pandemonium* and becomes a member of the full-scale revolution in *Requiem*. Oliver contrasts Lena's life as a revolutionary with her best friend, Hana's life as the fiancée to the man with whom society matched her. They live such different lives, all because Lena chose to fight for love while Hana accepted the ideology that love is bad. Lena says, "Who knows? Maybe they're right. Maybe we are driven crazy by our feelings. Maybe love is a disease, and we would be better off without it. But we have chosen a different road. And in the end that is the point of escaping the cure: We are free to choose. We are even free to choose the wrong thing" (Oliver, *Requiem* 23).

At the end of *Allegiant*, Tris dies. She is the only one who can get through the Death Serum and destroy the Memory Serum. She manages to survive the Death Serum because of the Divergent characteristic of not being susceptible to Serums, but she dies from a bullet wound just as she destroys the Memory Serum, saving the memories of everyone in Chicago. When *Allegiant* was released in October 2013, the ending and specifically Tris's death, caused uproar with Roth's fans. Part of this was a reaction to the end of Tris and Four's relationship; it is hard for a couple to live happily ever after when one of them is dead. Apart from the lack of happily ever after, why choose to end it this way? Surely she deserved to live after she sacrificed so

much? But Tris's role in the series never was to live happily ever after, and neither are Katniss, Cassia, or Lena's roles. These girls don't get to ride off into the sunset with the love of their lives. They participated in revolution so others get that happy ending. They want to change their worlds, not just their individual futures. They took the step to create their own identities by questioning ideologies, finding something or someone to fight for, and having the courage to fight. The aftermath of the revolutions allows Katniss, Cassia, and Lena to look at their futures without knowing exactly what they will see—they no longer are living in the same cycle as their parents. Their identities are still forming, even after the revolutions are finished, and now they get to live in a world where they are free to make at least a few more choices.

Conclusion

The totalitarian worlds Katniss, Tris, Cassia, and Lena live in at the beginning of each series disallow choices toward their own paths in life. When confronted with the opportunity to choose a different life, these girls fight for that right, and in doing so, kickstart a rebellion that changes their worlds. Katniss, Tris, Cassia, and Lena are only teenagers, girls on the cusp of adulthood with very little power. Yet they manage to use the space of adolescence to their advantage. They don't have their own families or status that can be taken away from them for interfering. They are expected to act a certain way, and to some extent this helps them because they know how they are supposed to act and how to play off of those expectations.

The teenage years are a time for experimentation—a time to embrace and discard personalities, a time in which one starts to develop what she believes. Pressures from parents, friends, and school combine to create a sink or swim atmosphere where the stakes are high as she navigates this intersection of childhood and adulthood. But while the years from thirteen to eighteen are undoubtedly a time of extreme change, popular perception tends to remain fixed on its ideas of teenagerdom—teenagers as reckless, selfish, highly sexed, and disengaged with the world around them. Because teenagers occupy the middle zone between children and adults, it is often difficult for society to take them seriously. They have more responsibilities than a younger child, but they also lack the rights and freedoms of an adult, making it easy for many to feel powerless, especially with regards to the future.

The feeling of powerlessness, the need to negotiate the world of both childhood and adulthood, and the discovery of one's identity are all themes commonly found in young adult novels, particularly those set in dystopian worlds. Dystopian young adult novels have exploded in popularity over the past few years, especially after the 2008 publication of Susanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*. Due to the popularity of *The Hunger Games* trilogy, publishing houses flooded the market with similar stories, such as Veronica Roth's *Divergent* trilogy, Ally Condie's *Matched* trilogy, and Lauren Oliver's *Delirium* series.

For the readers of these popular young adult dystopian novels, it is very powerful to see representations of strong female characters that are changing their world. Even if we do not live in a world where our every move is dictated by the powers that be, it is very easy, especially for teenagers, to feel like they don't matter. The millennial generation, defined by most to be those born between 1983 and the early 2000s, is stereotyped as being obsessed with themselves and not concerned for the world around them, but the popularity of dystopian novels suggest otherwise (Sarner 1). Millennials face high unemployment, an economy that was destroyed by those before them, and terrifying ecological issues. Especially now, when Millennials are starting to come of age, many young people are able to relate to feelings of helplessness, lack of control over their lives, and uncertainty for the future. Part of growing up is realizing that your parents are not exactly the people you always thought them to be, as well as developing your own opinions on how the world should be run. As Basu writes, "Uncovering the failures of the dystopia often means leaving aside childhood and confronting the harsh truths of the adult world. ... This awakening often includes a realization of how ruined the adult world has become: kids learn adults are lying, their parents have problems, the system can't protect them, they have to take care of themselves, and so on. The confrontation with the realities of the adult world may

lead to a standoff between adolescents and adults that empowers young people to turn against the system as it stands and change the world in ways adults cannot, locating the utopian potential of dystopian scenarios within the YA protagonists themselves” (Basu 7). Is this not what happens in real life? Reading young adult dystopian novels gives teenagers a way to lead a revolution without having to leave their bedrooms. And while they may not be able to take the skills they learn from these novels to lead a one man revolt against established ideologies, they are learning to question them.

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